

How to do more with your mouse



Most people use their mouse as their primary Windows navigation tool. Spending a few minutes to learn how to do more with this essential two-button computing tool therefore is time well spent. This Tech Tip column looks at how you can make your mouse more speedy, use it to jump to context-sensitive features, and overall work more efficiently. Laptop users will learn how to make better use of their touch pad.

Making your mouse more sensitive

Few things are more annoying than having to move the mouse about two feet across the desk to get the cursor to move just a few inches across the screen (or having to pick the mouse up two or three times to do the same thing with shorter strokes). On a laptop, the equivalent is moving your finger across the touch pad several times to move the cursor completely across the desktop. Everything seems to be in slow motion. What's the cause?

By default, Windows seems to require a relatively large mouse or touch pad motion to move a cursor across a desktop. Fortunately, it is very easy to make your mouse more sensitive – that is, to make it so that a smaller mouse movement moves the cursor farther.

Assuming that your firm allows users to customise their settings, you can change your mouse configuration by clicking on Start; selecting Settings, then Control Panel; and then double-clicking on the Mouse icon. This opens the Mouse Properties dialog box.

Look for the Pointer Options or Motion tab. Within this tab, you will see a Motion or Movement slider, which goes from “slow” to “fast.” Moving this slider away from slow toward fast will make your mouse more sensitive. Try moving it to about three-quarters of the way to fast.

But be warned: Don't speed your mouse up too much at once. It takes some time to adjust to using a faster mouse. Initially, you will likely find that you can speed it up a fair bit. After getting used to working with it at that faster setting, you can then decide whether you want to speed it up a bit more.

I prefer to have a very sensitive mouse and touch pad. On my laptop about three-quarters of a stroke across the touch pad will move the cursor completely across my desktop. And just an inch or so on my mouse will do the same on my PC. The key is to find a speed that works for you.

Within the Mouse Properties dialog box, you can also change some other mouse settings, including your double-click speed and cursor size. Look around to see if there are any other mouse tweaks that will help you work more efficiently on your computer.

Using the remarkable right-click

If you are right-handed, your right-hand index finger will be able to execute left-clicks with virtually no effort or thought. A left-click, in case it isn't obvious, is a click on the left mouse button – unless you are left-handed, of course.

If you are left-handed, just swap right for left (and left for right) in the following comments.

We'll focus on the right-click (a click on your right mouse button) because few people use it to its full potential. You can do amazing things by right-clicking on almost everything on your screen.

A right-click is a really powerful little action because it gives you a way to instantly jump to various features, format options and configuration settings. And the key to it all: The options presented to you are “context-sensitive.” In other words,

the choices are going to be relevant to the item or text on which you are right-clicking.

Here some examples:

- In Outlook, right-clicking on an e-mail in your inbox presents you with Open, Print, Reply, Reply All, Forward and so forth.
- In your Outlook calendar, right-clicking on a blank spot on the calendar allows you to create new appointments and configure the calendar.
- In Word, right-clicking on text gives you font and paragraph formatting, bullets and numbering, the dictionary, synonyms from the thesaurus and more.
- And this is one of my all-time favorites: In Word, a right-click on a misspelled word gives you a list of correctly spelled alternatives, and the correct one is almost always at the top of the list.

Try right-clicking on the various things on your screen. Do it now. You will be amazed at what you find!

Practising your new skills

Now, should you need a bit of practice using your faster mouse, you can always try the built-in Windows mouse training tool: Solitaire. For those who don't know where it is, click on Start, Programs, Games, and then Solitaire.

To practise your double-clicks, remember that a double left-click will move a card from either the deck or a row stack to a suit stack. And the most amazing right-click of all: you can move all playable cards to their respective suit stacks by right-clicking. You can't do that with a real deck of cards.

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