**Max Learning's**

Software Basics

Terms, Tips, and Traps!

- Operating System

- Word Processing

- Spreadsheet

- Database
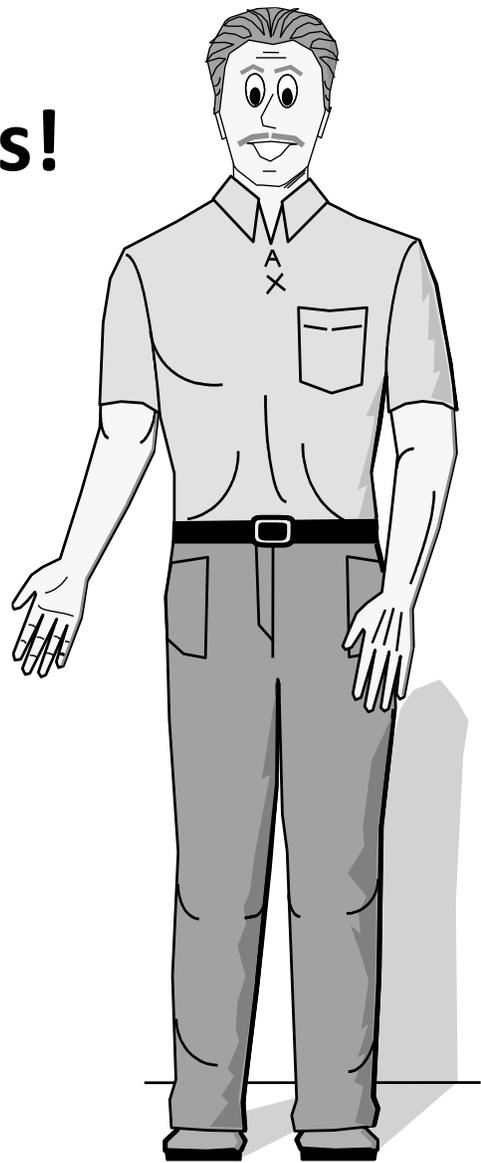
Let Max and his students help you master Software Basics!

K.N. (Know Nothing) claims to know absolutely nothing about computers. Highly competent in his own profession, he's perplexed by computers, fears them, and doubts his ability to learn what he needs to know about them.
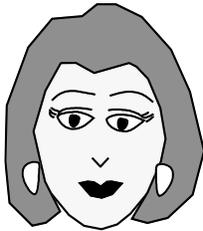
B.P. (Button-Pusher) has been using an office computer for years. Taught to press certain keys to make things happen, she's fine—until something goes wrong. Then she's lost and has to wait for someone to help.

T.E. (Trial & Error) taught himself to use computers and knows quite a bit about them. But he makes more mistakes than he'd like, and when someone shows him a time-saving feature, he exclaims, "If only I'd known that six months ago!"
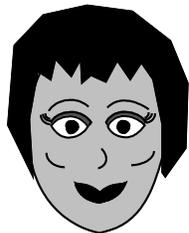
C.W. (Computer Whiz) has taken numerous hands-on classes and can perform wonders on the computer. Her co-workers rely on her for help, which she gladly gives. But deep down she feels that she doesn't really understand how it all works.

Pronunciation Guide

Sometimes it's not obvious how to pronounce terms you've never heard spoken, so I've added phonetic sound-a-likes as follows:

Vowels				Consonants	
Long	**Short**	**Other**		**Hard**	**Soft**
aa = ate	a = act	ai=air, ar=are, aw=paw		k = cat	s = ice
ee = eel	e/eh = end			g = go	j = gem
ii = hi	i/ih = hid			s/ss = hiss	z = his
oh = no	aw = on	oo = book, or = for		ch = chin	sh=shin; zh=vision
		ow = how, oy = boy		th = thin	thh = this
yu = use	u/uh = up	uu = too, ur = fur		**Accent on:** UP-ur-KAASS	

Common Abbreviations

aka = also known as   e.g. = for example (*eg*zample!)   i.e. = that is

The Software Roller Coaster

Once you get on, you can never get off!
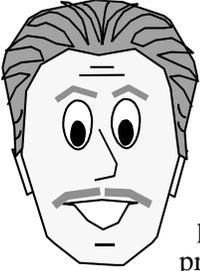
Digital Dozen: 12 Steps to Computer Literacy covered the terminology and operational principles you need to compute with confidence. Software Basics expands on the 5th term of the Digital Dozen: *Program.*

With the hundreds of features in today's programs, learning to use even one new program can be overwhelming. And it seems you barely penetrate its mysteries before the next version of the program appears. For instance, I've had to learn over twenty different brands or versions of word processing programs in my computing career. And I know it will never end.

Part of me rebels against this onslaught. Why can't software makers leave well enough alone?

Fortunately, once I start working with a new brand or version of a program, I usually find some exciting surprises. I'm able to do previously complex procedures in fewer steps, or I discover new features that make the relearning effort worthwhile. Once I've embraced a new program, I'm usually ready to forsake the old.

Transferable Skills

To survive the software roller coaster, you must develop *transferable* skills, so that no matter which program you train on, you'll be able to adapt to the next brand or version as needed.

Once you know the types of things a particular program can do, you can teach yourself a new brand or version by exploring its menus or using its help screens to find out which menus to access and buttons to push.

Of course, it helps to know software term definitions from memory. To help you, I've tried to define terms in this simple form: "A *term* is *definition.*"

But, to complicate matters, you'll face the following challenges:

<u>Different terms with the same meaning</u>
For example, one word processing program may use the term *alignment* to describe how text lines up on the margins. But a different brand might use the term *justification*. If you didn't know they meant the same thing, you might have a hard time finding the appropriate menu option or help screen to tell you how to align text.

<u>Different meanings for the same term</u>
For example, in an operating system, *format* is a command that realigns a disk's magnetic particles to prepare it to receive files. But in word processing, *format* is the layout and appearance of text on a page.

Teaching/Learning Aids

Since teaching takes more than telling, I've concocted BrainAids (make-believe memory hints) to help you learn basic concepts. For example, Word Processing becomes *Worm* Processing!

You'll see an asterisk* after features that are *super*-productivity boosters—these can supercharge your efforts and help you finish tasks in a flash. And look for the numerous **Tips** and **Traps!** throughout.

Since learning takes more than listening, I've created ToDo's for you to perform and TermMaps depicting the most common terms for you to memorize. After all, it's what you remember when this book is closed that counts.

Finally, we'll be joined again by my four students: K.N. (Know Nothing), B.P. (Button Pusher), T.E. (Trial & Error), and C.W. (Computer Whiz).

Let's get rolling!

Max

The Strategic Approach

Strategy: A plan for achieving a desired end.

When learning a new program, do you rush into it without a plan? Trial and error *is* one way to learn, and sometimes you get lucky and things work. But usually they don't, and you end up wasting time. You push keys in the hope that something will work, then when things go wrong, you don't have any idea what to do.

Below are some strategies for maximizing your learning and lab time.

Pre-Reading
The night before you attempt a new procedure, sit in an easy-chair, at a comfortable desk, or even lie in bed, and casually read through the instruction or user's manual. Think about your general approach to what you want to accomplish. Pay special attention to warnings and cautions.

Paper Simulation
Before you actually sit at the computer, simulate on paper what you plan to do. For example:

- Word Processing—Sketch a sample page layout of text, figures, tables, and graphics as needed.
- Spreadsheet—Sketch out and label columns and rows. Add sample numbers and formulas.
- Database—Write out several sample records. Determine field names, types, and widths.

Analyze Errors
When things go wrong, go through this checklist, so that you can avoid the same problem next time.

- ☐ Did I start in the wrong place? (e.g., inserting a page break with the cursor in the middle of a page.)
- ☐ Did I proceed in the wrong order? (e.g., applying 'bold' *before* selecting the desired text.)
- ☐ Did a previous step create a condition I need to cancel? (e.g., being in a dialog box that needs your response.)
- ☐ Did I tap the wrong key? (e.g., [Spacebar] instead of [↵] or a semicolon instead of a colon.)
- ☐ Did I *hold* when I should have *tapped?* (e.g., [End Home] instead of the sequence [End][Home].)
- ☐ Did I *tap* when I should have *held? (*e.g., [Ctrl][Delete] instead of the combination [Ctrl Delete].)
- ☐ Did I add keys that didn't belong? (e.g., tapping [↵] when it's not required.)
- ☐ Did I omit keys that belonged? (e.g., *not* tapping [↵] when it's required.)

If you've eliminated your actions as the problem, it's very possible the book or procedure you're following contains a mistake. Publishers often rush books to market before they are thoroughly tested, or the book software version differs from the version you're actually using.

Strategic Approach Advantages
- You don't waste computer time searching through help screens.
- You don't waste computer time devising sample data.
- You feel more relaxed and in control.
- You make fewer false moves.
- You have a better idea of what to do if something goes wrong.

Once you've absorbed the preceding advice, you'll be ready to learn about and tackle the listed programs topics—Operating System, Word Processing, Spreadsheet, Database—as well as any others you encounter!
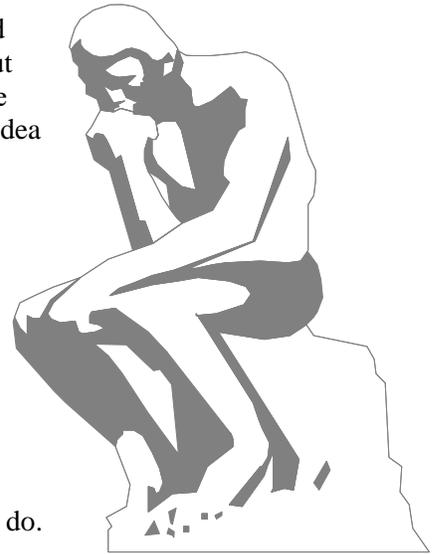
Max Learning Computing Reviews

Excerpted from anonymous written evaluations

- I liked the language and down-to-earth style of Max Learning Computing materials.

- It is humorous, which keeps it from being boring.

- It makes the computer much easier to understand, even for a complete beginner.

- It helped me to better understand some basics I knew of but was still fuzzy about.

- The BrainAids were the *key* to my learning. They really work!

- It was interesting, fun, and informative—an easy way to learn a complicated subject.

- I'm sure this wonderful material will enlighten many readers.

- I like the clear explanations of terms and how things interact to make up the item or topic.

- To be honest, I find computers frustrating and overwhelming, although this material gave thorough explanations and plenty of learning tools that I felt were useful in helping me absorb the information.

- I like the various human characters and the detailed explanations of the theory behind computer operations.

- It makes what would otherwise be a dry subject interesting and understandable.

- This is one of the best methods on learning computer theory and operation that I have seen. It is a lot more understandable than the books written for "Dummies."

- I can reread this material at any time and use it as a practical resource tool for future studies.

- Max Learning's Computer materials will be a long-time reference for my family and me.