

The only thing you need to know to master Windows 8.1

Windows 8/8.1 is a dramatic departure from the traditional Windows Interface, and it can be overwhelming to find what you're looking for unless you know this one trick.

Windows has been pretty much the same for decades...until Windows 8. With Windows 8/8.1, there was a very dramatic overhaul of the Windows user interface. Most of the familiar tools and features still exist, but they're buried in places that are hard to find, which can make Windows 8 a very frustrating experience. However, you only need to know one tip - - a simple trick that you can learn in about five seconds - - to master getting around in Windows 8.

The Holy Grail of Windows 8 navigation is the Search function. Search is king. You don't need to know where anything is, and you don't have to struggle to figure out where Microsoft hid it. A simple search will find anything you need as fast as you can type the query.

When you want to know the capital of Romania, or whether or not the Chicago Cubs have ever won a World Series, that information is accessible almost instantly through a web search using tools like Google or Bing. The best part is that search has matured to the point where you don't need to phrase the query based on a specific syntax. You can simply type the question in natural language, and your results will magically appear.

The same power capability is built into Windows 8/8.1. The Charms bar appears if you swipe from the right on a touchscreen device or hover the mouse pointer at the upper right corner of display. At the top of the Charms bar is the Search charm. With Windows 8.1 Update 1, Microsoft added a Search icon direction on the Start Screen at the upper right corner so you don't even have to open the Charms bar. What many users don't realize is you don't need either of those. When you're on the Windows 8 Start Screen, you can simply start typing, and it will automatically initiate the Search function.

For example, if you want to uninstall an application from Windows, you can right-click the Windows icon to find the Control Panel, and locate the option the old-fashioned way. The easier way, however, is to simply type "remove program" from the Start Screen (or in a Search query if you choose to open Search first). The first two results that appear will take you directly to where you need to be to either remove Windows 8 apps or uninstall traditional Windows software from the system.

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What makes the Windows 8 Search functionality even better is that it's a universal search -- you aren't limited to Windows tools and features. You can type "What is the capital of Romania?" and Windows 8 Search will provide results that direct you to that information on the web. You can type the name of an Excel file or keywords from a Word document you know you saved, and those items will appear at the top of the results.

Search is the only tool you need to know to master Windows 8. Not only will it assist you when navigating Windows 8, but once you get comfortable using it as your default way of finding things, it will help you be more productive and work more efficiently.