

# Tips, Tricks, and Fun Stuff!!

## Enhancing the user/computer relationship

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*Who doesn't waste endless amounts of time downloading ringtones? And I'm sure we've all played a game or two on our cellphones. We've become experts at text-messaging, programming ringers, downloading wallpapers and screensavers, inputting contact info., and gaming. In turn, we have all grown to love our cellphones. How about if you could have that same great relationship with your computer?! Computers have gotten a bad reputation because they're so 'hard to use'. But really, with a little bit of guidance, they're no more difficult than a camera phone or an iPod. So, without further ado, let me share with you my wealth of tips, tricks, and fun stuff!*

### Media Players

*Everyone has a (legal, I hope!) music and movie library. In order to listen to/watch them, one has to have a media player. So, let's talk about those.*

#### WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER

- Windows Media Player (WMP) is a free download which you can find at [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)
- If you have Windows XP, chances are, your computer actually came with WMP
- The latest version, WMP 10, is VERY cool (if you don't have it, don't worry. You can upgrade for free from their website)
- This player supports both audio (mp3's, wma's, etc.) and video (mpeg's, avi's, wmv's, etc.)
- WMP comes with several visualizations that you can display while playing a song to make it a bit more interesting, and you can download additional visualizations from the Microsoft website
- WMP also comes with skins, or you can download more from Microsoft
  - What is a skin? A skin is different format of the actual player. For example, this is a heart skin for WMP:



- You can purchase music from the Microsoft online music store for \$0.99 for almost any song
- If you're bored with your music collection, you can stream music from the MSN radio stations, or you watch streaming video of news, sports, or entertainment
- You can easily use WMP to burn music CD's, which is very handy
- Overall, a very nice, all inclusive media player for Windows users

#### iTUNES

- iTunes is a free download that you can find at [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com), or if you have an iPod, it is on the CD it came with, and is the only way to put music on your iPod
- iTunes is compatible with both PC's and Mac's, and is strictly an audio player (mp3's, acc's, etc.)
- iTunes does NOT play wma files. However, it will automatically convert your wma files to aac format so that you can listen to them through iTunes
- The latest version, 4.7, is also very cool! It has new features such as Party Shuffle and Airtunes → this means you can stream music from your computer to your home stereo system wirelessly (if you have an Airport Express, a wireless router made by Apple)
- iTunes also comes with a lot of visualizations that respond to the music you are playing and make a pretty cool visual addition to your favorite songs
- Although iTunes does not have any skins, it does have a Mini Player option which makes iTunes really small so you can keep it on top of other programs without disturbing your viewing space



- You can purchase music through iTunes from the Apple music store for \$0.99 for almost any song, or you can purchase entire albums for much cheaper than a CD
- Like WMP, you can also listen to streaming music from one of several online radio stations
- With iTunes Party Shuffle feature, the player will play continuously a random sampling from your music library
- If you are on a network (which you are as soon as you connect to the internet at Barnard) you can even see and listen to other people's music libraries who are also online and using iTunes! No, you can't download their music...but you can listen to it on your computer as long as they are online and sharing their library
- Just like WMP, iTunes makes burning audio CD's a breeze
- To sum it up, a very easy to use and versatile player



## WALLPAPER

- Both Windows and Mac based computers come with a whole bunch of built-in wallpapers for your desktop
- You can set these wallpapers by:
  - On PC's: right-click on the desktop, go to properties, and then click on the desktop tab. You can pick which one you want from the list that pops up.
  - On Mac's: go to System Preferences, and under Personal, select Desktop and Screensaver. You can pick your wallpaper from there.
- On PC's, if you see a picture you like on the internet or somewhere else on your computer, you can also right-click on it and select "set as wallpaper"
- Of course, if you want to save these pictures for future use, you can right-click them and select "save-as". If you'd like them to show up in the wallpaper list in your Display properties, you can save them in the wallpaper folder. To get there, go to "My Computer". Then double-click on your harddrive (the C:\ drive), then Windows, then the Web folder, then the Wallpaper folder.
- There are also some website that are dedicated to providing cool wallpapers. A very cute, girly sort of website for that is [www.mcdeb.com](http://www.mcdeb.com). The desktop wallpapers are extremely cute, and every month there is a new calendar wallpaper which is pretty convenient

## DOCK FOR WINDOWS

- For Windows users who are totally obsessed with the coolness of the Dock in Mac OS X, there is hope.
- There are a lot of freeware programs out there that are pretty similar to the Mac dock. My personal favorite is the Mobydock (you can get it at [www.download.com](http://www.download.com)) because it can give you email alerts, show you the weather, and is very customizable

## Good Websites

*There is a whole bunch of safe, free stuff out there that isn't exactly advertised. I'm here to tell you about just a few of those things. Hopefully, this'll get you interested enough to do some more research!*

### [WWW.MGSHAREWARE.COM](http://WWW.MGSHAREWARE.COM)

- This website offers a whole bunch of free programs
- FreeRIP is a program that allows you to rip music from a CD onto your computer
- FreeNote is like Post-Its for your desktop. Very cool, and helps keep you organized.

### [WWW.HELPWITHPCS.COM](http://WWW.HELPWITHPCS.COM)

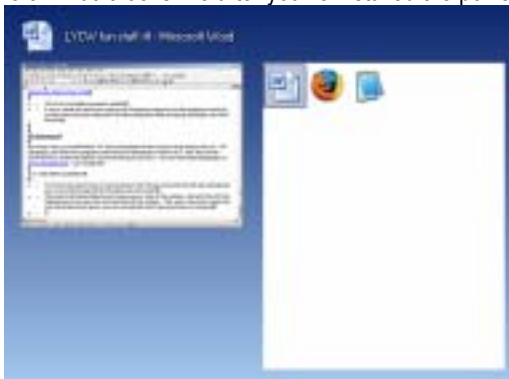
- This is an incredibly awesome website
- It has a whole tips and tricks section for Windows programs and for keyboard shortcuts, so that when you just really don't feel like using that really annoying touchpad, you don't have to!

## XP Powertoys

*For those of you using Windows XP, this will probably be the most exciting section for you. XP Powertoys are little extra programs that Microsoft developers write for fun. And they're free. Some are fun, some are helpful, and some are just very cool. You can find these Powertoys at [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com). Let's explore.*

## ALT-TAB REPLACEMENT

- For those who don't know, if you hold down the Alt key and press the tab key repeatedly, you can scroll through all the windows you have open
- The built-in Windows feature just shows you an icon of the window. But with the Alt-Tab Replacement, you can see a screenshot of the window. This way, if you have more than one Word document open, you can actually tell which document you're choosing
- Here's an example of what it looks like after you've installed the powertoy:



- Now, you can see a screenshot of the very document being written! Haha.

## TWEAK UI

- Just so you know, UI stands for user interface, which is basically what you see when you use Windows
- Anyway, Tweak UI enables you to access part of Windows that Microsoft doesn't make all that accessible
- For example, you can turn off those wildly annoying bubbles that pop up from the System Tray (bottom right of your screen on the taskbar)
- It also gives you a new tip about Windows XP and some of its hidden capabilities every time you open the program. It's a fun way to learn about your operating system and customize your computer

## POWER CALCULATOR

- For any of you who are math majors, or just enjoy calculating stuff, this power calculator could be very helpful
- You can make graphs, do conversions, and evaluate functions. Calc students, take notice.

## IMAGE RESIZER

- With this powertoy, you get an extra option when you right-click on any picture on your computer; resize!
- You get preset options of sizes that you can choose from, or you can specify your own size
- You can also save the picture, or save it as a new picture that you also have the original size saved

## WALLPAPER CHANGER

- This powertoy is definitely the most fun
- It is not listed with the rest of the powertoys, so the best way to find it is to go to [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com) and just search for it. It should be the first result.
- This powertoy will help you manage those wallpapers we talked about earlier.
- You can set it to change your wallpaper every 30 minutes, or however often you'd like it to change, set so that on certain dates, it will display a specific wallpaper, and other kinds of options
- In order for the wallpapers to show up in this toy, they must be put into the folder I told you about earlier (the Wallpaper folder)
- This really helps keep your desktop exciting...and it confuses people, too, which is pretty funny

## Games

*For all of you out there who like to play computer games in your spare time, you should be made aware of these two websites. They both offer an incredible number of games, and all different kinds of games. There is no way you can get bored with these two.*

[www.addictinggames.com](http://www.addictinggames.com)

[www.candystand.com](http://www.candystand.com)

## Dangerous Stuff That Looks Cool

*Some things look like they'd be really great add-ons for your computer. But be warned; some things can be really dangerous. My suggestion would be to research things before downloading them. You can Google them and see if anyone has written any reviews/opinions about the thing you're interested in. [www.cnet.com](http://www.cnet.com) is a trusted website that releases a lot of reviews about all kinds of products. You may want to check that out too. Here are some ones to look out for.*

## WEATHERBUG

- Certainly, having the weather on your desktop is convenient. But this is not the way to do it
- Weatherbug tends to get into your system and never get out. It can also come saddled with, or make your computer more vulnerable to, spyware, which we all know is not good at all
- Instead, set [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) as one of your favorites, so that you can check out the weather whenever you want
- Or, if you use Firefox (free web browser) instead of Internet Explorer, there's an add-in that you can download that keeps the weather in the lower right-hand corner of your browser and updates automatically

## SCREENSAVERS

- Anytime you see an ad for some cool, 3-D screensaver, I know you want to download it. Because so do I.
- However, screensavers are not as innocent as wallpapers. They are "programs" that have to be installed
- You never really know what you're getting when you install a program
- If you ever have to give any information, like an email address, DON'T DO IT. It's just an excuse for spyware, adware, and spam
- The only time I'd say "go for it" is when you are downloading a screensaver from a trusted source (for example, Mercedes-Benz has screensavers that you can download; I don't think Mercedes is going to give you spyware)

*Well guys, that's it! I hope this has made you a little more excited about using, customizing and getting along with your computer. These tips and tricks are meant to make using your computer a little more fun. And, if you ever have any questions, or are interested in learning more, the best bet is to Google it. There are always people out there coming up with new and exciting ways to love your computer!!*