

Comparing Computer Guides Revised

By CDickson

	Computer Mama Guide	Dummies	Teach Yourself Visually	Microsoft Certified Specialist Engineer Exam Prep	Plain & Simple Microsoft Guide	Step by Step Microsoft Guide	The Missing Manual
Screenshots	Almost every page	A few per chapter	On every page	A few per chapter	Almost every page	On almost every page, though many are just dialogue boxes	Almost every page
Color	Black and white	Black and white	Yes, all pages	Black and white	Full color	Black and white and blue	Black and White
Text per page	Short paragraphs. Most of the page is devoted to giving specific steps and screen shots.	Lots of text. Most pages have no pictures. Uses bullets or lists to break up text	Just step by step instructions and screen shots on each page	Lots of text per page. Some screen shots, text boxes, and sidebars break up the text.	Small paragraphs of explanation text, much of it in Tip or other sorts of boxes. Most of the page devoted to instruction and screenshots	Large amounts of text, and many paragraphs. Spaces between paragraphs, but the pages are full of information and explanation	Short paragraphs and numbered steps mainly on the page. Some text boxes for additional information

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Instructions	<p>Step by step, including screen shots to show where to access the command</p> <p>Explains every command</p> <p>Ex. Tools→Options→Save</p>	<p>Sometimes uses list and bullets to provide instructions.</p> <p>Uses the Tools→Options→Save format for instructions.</p> <p>Some instructions do not include where to start (just Options→Save) with the instruction to go to the Tools menu buried in text or appearing on a previous page</p>	<p>Short, step by step instructions. Includes screen shots for each step.</p> <p>Numbers instructions and includes icons to show if the option is a radio button or check box.</p>	<p>Uses some lists to give instructions. Many instructions were buried in paragraphs. Instructions were not always clear on where to start. (“Open the Control Panel, instead of Start→Control Panel)</p>	<p>Step by step with numbering, including screen shots with numbered arrows corresponding with instructions</p>	<p>Guided practice includes Step by step, number instructions with bolded words to guide users to what they’re looking for</p> <p>Does not use the Tools→Options→Save format for instructions</p> <p>Also a lot of information on what and where is put into the large paragraphs</p>	<p>Includes numbered, step by step instructions. Additional information related to the steps as included between steps.</p>
Finding Information	<p>Includes index and table of contents.</p> <p>Includes summary of section contents at start of section, with page numbers</p> <p>Information is divided into sections within the chapter, with each set of section focusing on one set of instructions or related information</p>	<p>Includes index and table of contents</p> <p>Limited information at start of chapter regarding chapter contents, but no page numbers.</p> <p>Information is divided into sections. Some sections have more than one set of instructions</p>	<p>Includes list of items in chapter with page numbers</p>	<p>Includes objectives at start of chapter. Has table of contents and index. Within the chapter, one can use the section titles to narrow down the search but information may be hidden under a section without any label to indicate it's presence</p>	<p>Includes list of items in chapter but no page numbers.</p> <p>Includes table of contents and index</p>	<p>Includes index, searchable CD with etext, Table of Contents. Each chapter has a list of topics covered, and facing page includes screenshots with page numbers for the topics.</p>	<p>Includes index and table of contents. Units list included chapters, but no page numbers</p>

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White Space	Lots of white space around text and edges of page. Short paragraphs and lines between paragraphs facilitates skimming for information	Text is dense, with long paragraphs. Bulleted lists do not skip lines. Only margins of page blank	Lots of white space per page. At least half of most pages are white space to facilitate the screen shots and short instructions	Limited white space. Some spaces between paragraphs. Doesn't facilitate skimming.	Lots of white space in book. Arrangement and steps facilitate easy skimming; however a lot of information can be crammed onto the page.	Little white space. Pages often feel crowded. Not good for skimming	Lots of white space. Wide margins (colored gray) and spaces between paragraphs and numbered steps
Exercises	Exercises built into the text via Step-by-step instructions used to explain with sample data to insert or work with. Includes questions and practice exercises at the end of the lessons.	No practice exercises (?) Step by step instructions generally generic and little guided practice within the text	Some guided practice within the text. Most instructions are fairly generic. No practice exercises included for later work.	Includes practice exercises in the text, at the end of each chapter. Guided practice includes some step-by-by step instructions.	No practice exercises. Instructions are generic. No guided practice	Includes guided practice in the text as well as activities on the CD	No practice exercises. Instructions are generic for any use.
Levels	Offers beginner, intermediate, and advanced skill levels with scaffolding of skills	Offers only beginning skill level instruction	Offers only beginning skill level instruction	Text includes beginning and advanced skill level, but without much scaffolding of tasks	Book starts with beginning tasks and moves through to include advanced tasks in one book. There is a huge amount of information in each section that at time it is overwhelming	Includes beginning and advanced levels in the book	Book includes beginning and advanced levels. Sorts by task, not skill level.

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Enjoyability	Includes funny anecdotes and useful tips with themed sections and non-computer related photos.	Includes some humor	Includes only required steps and tips for use. No personality.	Includes no humor, lots of information, no personality. Straightforward facts.	No persona. Just facts. Also the book moves fast, assuming that the reader will know or explore the options available in a certain step.	No personality or humor. Simply presentation of the information and where such information would be used. Large amounts of text.	No personality. Gives instructions and explanations only.
Supplements	Includes sample documents, spreadsheets, and databases for practice exercises, also includes complete online training on CD with full color.	Includes online support at website. No CD or sample documents.	No CD or sample documents	Includes CD with sample exercises similar to the format of the MCSE exam. Includes searchable text of book on CD. Includes website	No supplements for the book, however it is a Microsoft product and Microsoft has a large Knowledge base with tutorials and other information	Includes a searchable CD with the complete text, also skill building practice files	No CD, but includes access to the website for programs and shareware discussed in the text.
Binding	Spiral, lays flat on the desk	Perfect Bound book, soft cover	Perfect Bound book, soft cover	Hardcover	Soft cover with short long pages that lays open well on a desk.	Soft cover book. Thick. Doesn't lay open well on the desk.	Soft Cover Book, doesn't stay open very well on a desk
Shows what a command will result in	Yes, shows how it will look both before and after a command	No, the few screenshots don't allow for this	Yes, shows before and after screenshots to show changes	No, the few screenshots don't allow for this	Some. Book doesn't indicate they are before and after shots, just continues with the steps	Some after screen shots shown to illustrate results	Sometimes explains what a command will result in, but does not include screen shots to show results

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I Didn't Know that Existed!	<p>Great for learning new tools. Since the book is designed for reading through from start to finish, it introduces related features.</p> <p>Good for just looking up a procedure. Good for learning unknown features.</p>	<p>Good for learning new tools. Book combines related information and refers to other chapters for related features.</p> <p>Not ideal for looking up a procedure. Good for leaning unknown features.</p>	<p>Does not discuss applications of when and where a feature might be used. Does not refer to related features.</p> <p>Good for looking up a procedure. Not great for learning unknown procedures.</p>	<p>Walks through steps for many tasks. Includes information on where the user might need to know it. But some instructions are easy to find, others are not. Not ideal for looking up procedures.</p>	<p>Many tip boxes refer to related features. Does not discuss when and where a feature would be useful.</p> <p>Good for looking up procedures. Decent for looking up unknown features.</p>	<p>Includes information on what might be used when.</p> <p>Good for looking up procedures. Also decent for learning unknown features.</p>	<p>Step by step instruction is mixed with information on where a feature might be used as well as description of many of the features options.</p> <p>Not ideal for looking up a procedure. Decent for learning unknown features.</p>
Organization	Organized by related tasks and skill level. Walks the reader through the task, using sample data and sample documents.	Grouped by skill level and task. Starts with basics, and then moves into more advanced features.	Grouping by task. Each chapter is a task, usually a single task. Beginner tasks in the front of the book, though there is no clear labeling of skill level.	Grouped by task. Begins with installation and set up. No clear organization regarding skill level.	Grouped by task into a chapter. No grouping by skill level. Some sample groupings are Opening a New PowerPoint; Formatting Text, pictures, and graphics, Managing and Viewing Slides.	Organized by grouping related tasks into chapters. Chapters organized by skill level. Walks the reader through the tasks using sample documents.	Organized by grouping related tasks into chapters. Chapters organized by skill level. Walks the reader through tasks, but uses generic instructions.

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Read whole book?	Read the whole book.	Read the whole book or chapter.	Pick and choose	Read the whole book.	Pick and choose.	Read the whole book, or chapter.	Read the whole book, or chapter.
Overall Rating (Out of 5 stars)	★★★★½	★★	★★★	★★½	★★★★	★★★	★★★