

Mac 101: Dashboard



Not everything you do on your Mac requires a heavy-duty application. For those smaller tasks, Mac OS X features Dashboard, a semi-transparent layer that floats above your desktop at the press of a key, and provides access to several fun and functional, mini applications called widgets.



Dashboard even includes widgets for some of your Mac applications, including Address Book and iTunes, which allow you to access your contacts and music, respectively, without having to switch over to the full application. But it doesn't end there, you can add more widgets to Dashboard and, if you're feeling really ambitious, you can even create your own widgets.

By default, Dashboard starts up when you first turn on your Mac, but you won't actually see it until you open it by either clicking its icon in the Dock, pressing the F12 key or the Dashboard key (F4 on the aluminum keyboards). To hide Dashboard, click on any Dashboard area that doesn't contain a widget or press the F12 key again. Here's a quick start guide to Dashboard and the included widgets.

Products Affected

Mac OS X 10.0, Mac OS X 10.3, Mac OS X 10.2, Mac OS X 10.1, Mac OS X 10.4, Mac OS X 10.6, Mac OS X 10.5

Working with Dashboard

1. Make Dashboard active by clicking the icon in the Dock, or pressing F12.
2. A default set of widgets appears. You can move the widgets anywhere you want by simply dragging them, click and hold your mouse button on a widget and move your mouse—or finger, if you're using a trackpad.
3. To see all the widgets on your Mac, click the open (+) button in the lower-left corner of the screen.



4. The Widget Bar, which displays all widgets on your Mac, slides into view at the bottom of the screen. Click the arrow buttons on either side of the bar to display more widgets.
5. To add a widget to Dashboard, simply click an icon in the Widget Bar.
6. If you want to download more widgets, click the More Widgets button to go to the Apple Dashboard download webpage.
7. To remove a widget from Dashboard, be sure that the Widget Bar is displayed, then click the unwanted widget's close button (the round, black button with a white X).
8. To close the Widget Bar, click the close button on the lower-left part of the screen right above the Widget Bar.
9. To use a widget, just select it and do your thing. In other words, if you click the Dictionary widget, type a word in its search field. If you click the Stickies widget, type a note or two. If you click the Tile Game widget, start playing.

Widgets

Here's a closer look at the widgets you'll find preinstalled in Dashboard, and how to use them.



Many widgets feature user options on their backsides so you can select the information to display, such as the time in a chosen city in this World Clock widget.

Widget Manager—This widget manages other widgets. Uncheck Widgets that you don't want to use anymore and it will hide and disable them. You can keep check of all your available widgets from here.

Address Book—This widget feeds off Address Book proper, enabling you to look up a person's email address, phone number, and mailing address quickly. Just start typing a name in the search field, or click the arrow buttons to step through all entries.

Business—The Business widget is a great directory of local businesses and substitute for your yellow pages. Just type a business name or category (like "pizza") in the search field, and view your results in the expanded window. To change the local city, click the "i" button; enter a city, state, or zip code; and click Done.

Calculator—This electronic version works just like its real-world counterpart, letting you add, subtract, multiply, and divide numbers without thought. You can enter numbers by clicking the buttons or pressing the numeric keys on your keyboard.

Dictionary—Get word definitions, synonyms, and antonyms for any English language word you type in the search field. And because the dictionary is built into Leopard, you don't need an Internet connection to get this information.

ESPN—For sports fans, this widget displays the latest scores and news for your favorite baseball, basketball, football, and hockey teams. Just click the "i" button in the upper-right corner and choose a sport from the pop-up menu. When finished, click "News" to view the latest news feeds from ESPN or "Scores" to see how well your team is faring.

Flight Tracker—View the flight paths of practically any upcoming or in-progress flight around the world. Just choose an airline, departure city, and arrival city from the pop-up menus (or enter the information in the fields), click Find Flights, select the flight in the results, and click Track Flight.

Google—When you need information fast, just type what you're looking for into this widget to make Google scour the Internet on your command. Your default web browser will automatically open to display the search results.

iCal—This widget allows you to view the current day and date in a small calendar, as well as view days and dates in the future and past. Just click the up or down arrow buttons to jump through the calendar by month.

iTunes—This widget allows you to control iTunes playback (iTunes must be open for this to work). You can use the widget controls to play, pause, and skip forward and backward through songs in your iTunes Library or a playlist, or listen to Internet radio. You can even control volume with a twist of the outer dial.

Movies—Heading out to enjoy a movie? Use this widget to look up information about the latest releases and find show times at local theaters. Not sure if you would enjoy the movie? Watch movie trailers right in Dashboard, then click to buy tickets.

People—Feeling out of touch with friends and family? Don't use that old excuse of losing their phone numbers. Look them up with this widget, which can look up residential phone numbers by area. Just enter a first name, last name, and a city and state or zip code.

Ski Report—Find out the current weather and snow conditions at popular skiing locations across the country and head for the hills. Just click the "i" button in the bottom-right corner and type the name of a resort to get the current conditions, including the new snowfall, base depth, and temperature.

Stickies—Just like the paper version but for your Mac. Just type notes right on the Stickies pad. To change the paper color and font, click the "i" button in the bottom-right corner. Then select a paper color, choose a font from the **Font** pop-up menu, choose a font size from the other pop-up menu, and click Done.

Stocks—This widget lets you track your favorite stocks (with up to a 20-minute delay). To enter a company, click the "i" button in the bottom-right corner, type the company's name or ticker symbol in the field, and click Done. To get an overview of your stock's performance, click the company symbol to view a graph that shows the highs and lows over a user-selectable timeframe.

Tile Game—You probably remember this one as a kid; the goal of the game is to rearrange all the tiles so that they form a picture. Just click the widget to make it start scrambling the tiles. Click it again to make it stop. To rearrange tiles, click a tile that borders the empty space to move it in its place, and continue in this manner until you see the picture again.

Translation—For those times when you can't decipher a foreign language phrase, or you need to translate one of your own into another language, this widget comes in handy. Just choose the language that you want to translate from and to using the pop-up menus, and type the word or phrase in the text box below "Translate from." C'est facile!

Unit Converter—If you need to convert weights, measurements, temperatures, speeds, currency, volume, and other items, this widget will do the job. Just choose a unit category from the **Convert** pop-up menu, choose a unit that you want converted from the bottom-left pop-up menu, choose the unit that you want it converted to in the bottom-right pop-up menu, and enter a value in the left field to view the conversion to its right.

Weather—Be prepared wherever you may roam. The Weather widget displays the current weather conditions for the city of your choice in thermal terms (high, low, and current temperatures) and in current graphical conditions too. Click on the widget for a 5-day forecast. To change the city, click the "i" button; enter a city, state, or zip code; and click Done.

Web Clip—Say you check part of a particular website pretty often. Why not turn it into a widget? In Safari, click the Web Clip icon and select the part of the page you want to turn into a widget. Click Add and Safari launches your brand-new widget in Dashboard. From there you can customize it with a selection of themes. Your new web clip widget is always live, acting just like the website it was clipped from.

World Clock—The World Clock widget displays the local time for many cities around the world. Open multiple windows to keep track of different time zones. To change the city, click the "i" button, choose a continent from the **Continent** pop-up menu, choose a city from the **City** pop-up menu, and click Done.

Tip: Want to learn more about Dashboard? Check out the built-in Help guide on your Mac (in the Finder, choose **Mac Help** from the **Help** menu, and type dashboard in the search field).

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