

Accessibility Options

Control The Way You See, Hear & Use Your Computing Environment

If you've ever squinted at a computer screen because it wasn't readable, had trouble controlling the mouse, or strained your ears to understand your computer's electronic messages, you'll appreciate the improved accessibility features in Windows Me.


To those with impaired vision, hearing, or mobility, a multimedia graphical computing environment is not necessarily a good thing, and WinMe's accessibility tools can help. Accessibility options are even available for the rest of us who want to view the screen a little differently or hear a sound for certain keys that we press (such as accidentally pressing the dreaded CAPS LOCK key).

In 1995, Microsoft adopted its first accessibility policy (<http://www.microsoft.com/enable/microsoft/policy.htm>) and has continued to add extra accessibility options with each new Windows release. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act has been a further impetus to the improved accessibility of both software and peripheral hardware. And whether you like Microsoft, the company has set the accessibility standard for other software developers and raised the expectations of users as to how they access non-Microsoft software.

Even if you have no impairment, you'll still probably find some of these accessibility features useful. (NOTE: Some features may not work if your hardware does not support them.)

The Accessibility Wizard

You initially set the accessibility features by using the Accessibility Wizard (click the Start button, and then select Programs, Accessories, Accessibility, and Accessibility Wizard). The wizard helps you configure WinMe according to your visual, auditory, and mobility needs.



Magnify it. The first screen of settings offered by the wizard lets you specify the text size: the options are usual, large, and magnifier. Magnifier can be useful for people with extremely impaired vision, because it enlarges the area around your mouse pointer in a top pane on-screen for easier viewing. By doing this, it acts like an electronic magnifying glass with a magnification rate you can set from one to nine.

On display. The second screen presented by the wizard provides settings that let you configure your display options according to your needs. Such settings include adjustments regarding font size, screen resolution, magnifier, and personalized menus.

You're in control. Finally, by the time you reach the third screen of the wizard, you're ready to specify the type of impairment you have so you can set various administrative options. The remainder of the wizard's screens will vary according to the selections made on this third screen.

For those who select vision impairment, the next set of screens include options for the display of scroll bars, icons, Windows color settings, and mouse pointer sizes and colors. For the hearing impaired, the subsequent screens

include options for displaying captions for speech and sounds (including warning sounds).

And for those with mobility problems, you can fine-tune the "bounce rate" of keys (whether to ignore repeated keystrokes) and adjust the "stickiness" of keys, which lets you press a key combination (such as CTRL-ALT-DELETE) one key at a time rather than all at once. You can also specify whether you want your system to play a sound whenever you press the CAPS LOCK, NUM LOCK, or SCROLL LOCK keys, and you can get extra keyboard help displayed if you don't use a mouse.

Going mouseless. If you don't or can't use a mouse, you can use this portion of the wizard to define the numeric keypad keys so they work the same as a mouse. If you're left-handed, you can reset the primary and secondary mouse buttons, as well as the mouse pointer speed.

Administrative choices. Administrators can set whether to turn off the accessibility settings if the computer is idle for a specific period of time, and you can save your accessibility settings to a file. This allows you to apply these same settings to another computer without having to work through the wizard each time.

On-Screen Keyboard Tips

For any users who are unable to handle normal keyboards (including those who don't know how to type), WinMe includes a customizable On-Screen Keyboard that you can "type with" using a mouse, trackball, or joystick. To open the On-Screen Keyboard, click Start, select Programs, Accessories, Accessibility, and then On-Screen Keyboard.

Click or hover to type. While operating the On-Screen Keyboard, you can enter text in any running Windows application by clicking letters, or, for those who experience difficulty clicking, by hovering over a letter for a specified length of time. Simply designate the option most appropriate for your needs.

Other input methods. There is also a scan option where the On-Screen Keyboard continually scans the keyboard and highlights areas where you can type keyboard characters by pressing a hot key or using a switch-input device.

Sound it out. A variety of keyboard types are available, and you can set other options,

such as adding sound so you hear an audible "click" for every key selected.

From The Control Panel

There are a number of Control Panel settings that improve the user-friendliness of your computer. Here, we describe the options you can change via the Accessibility Properties dialog box. To open this dialog box, click Start, select Settings, choose Control Panel, and then double-click Accessibility Options.

StickyKeys or FilterKeys for keyboard clarity.

Choose the Keyboard tab to designate options for StickyKeys, which let you press a standard key combination one key at a time. Click the StickyKeys Settings button to adjust StickyKeys to suit your work habits and preferences.

Or, turn on FilterKeys if you want Windows to ignore repeated keystrokes or slow the repeat rate. Click the FilterKeys Settings button to set the keystroke repeat options.

Set a sound. If you want Windows to play a sound when you press the CAPS LOCK, NUM LOCK, and SCROLL LOCK keys, click the Use ToggleKeys checkbox on the Keyboard tab.

Sound tab settings. By accessing the Sound tab, you'll find settings that assist those with hearing difficulties. You can get Windows to display a visual warning (such as a blinking title bar or a flashing border) whenever a sound would usually be heard. And, where speech or sound is part of a program, you can choose to display the speech or sound as captions.

Display adjustments. The options available on the Display tab help those with eyesight difficulties. High contrast colors make the

screen easier to view. Click the Settings button to choose to display your screen as white text on a black background. Alternatively, you can select a custom color combination as defined here. Plus, this tab features options for changing the cursor width and blink rate.

Mousing around. The Mouse tab settings aid those who have problems using a mouse. You can emulate mouse movements by selecting to use the numeric keypad keys instead. Click the Settings button to further define the

use of the numeric keypad. You can also designate that the numeric keypad is only for "mousing" when the NUM LOCK key is turned off, which means you can still use the numeric keypad for number operations when NUM LOCK is turned on.

In general. To control how and when the accessibility options become active, access the General tab. For example, if a number of people use your computer, you can tell WinMe to automatically turn off the accessibility features if the computer is idle for a defined amount of time.

Other Options

The Control Panel also has numerous other settings you can modify for easier use. We'll cover those that specifically deal with accessibility options.

For better display. Double-click Display from the Control Panel to find a few more simple adjustments you can make. One, use the Appearance tab to

the Settings tab to alter the screen resolution. Users with vision difficulties might want a screen resolution of 640 x 480 pixels to display everything much bigger than usual.

Pick your speed. You've probably already noticed by now that the Control Panel also has a Keyboard icon you can double-click for various keystroke options. Just select the Speed tab to set the on-screen cursor blink rate, as well as change the repeat rate and repeat delay for keystrokes.

Mouse reliance. If you can't imagine computing without a mouse, double-click its icon from the Control Panel to make it behave the way you want it to. First of all, use the Buttons tab to define the left and right button actions, the double-click speed you want, and whether a single- or double-click should open files and folders.

Next, use the Pointers tab to define a pointer scheme. You can even change the symbol used as a pointer. Some of the large schemes are particularly useful for those with impaired vision.

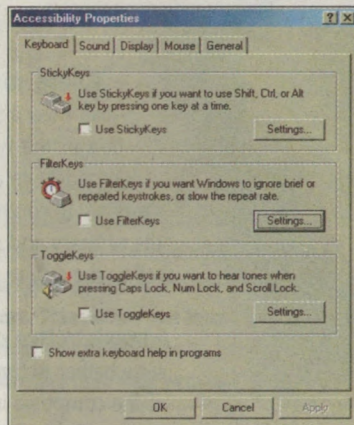
And finally, use the Motion tab to define how fast the pointer moves across the screen and whether you want it to automatically snap to the default button in a dialog box.

Turn up the volume. If you simply need to tweak your system's sound, double-click Sounds And Multimedia in the Control Panel. Right away, you can use the options found on the Sounds tab to define what sounds you want to hear for which events and to set the default volume.

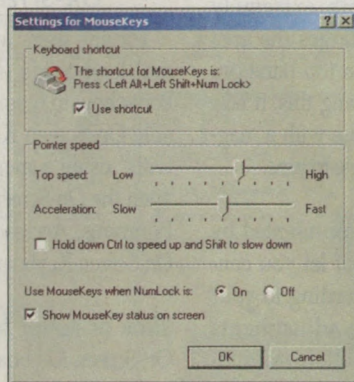
■ **Additional Tools.** Even though WinMe's built-in tools are helpful for users with a certain level of impairment, they may not be suitable for everyone. If you find they aren't robust enough for you, check out other available accessibility tools at the Microsoft Web site (<http://www.microsoft.com/enable>).

If you have a vision, hearing or mobility impairment, we strongly recommended that you configure your Windows environment to suit your needs. And if you are setting up your computer for a young child or an elderly person, these options can be just as suitable for them. Take a good look at the many accessibility options available in WinMe even if you don't have an impairment, because you'll probably find something to enhance your productivity and make your computing experience more enjoyable. **LS**

by Rhonda Bracey



Use the options available via the Keyboard tab in the Accessibility Properties dialog box to control how your keyboard behaves when you type.



When you use the numeric keypad to move the on-screen pointer instead of the mouse, you can set the speed of that movement, as well as other related options.

change the color scheme for your display or create a new color scheme. For some Windows elements, such as title bars, you can also change the font used and its size. Two, use the Effects tab to alter how certain Windows elements appear. For example, you can direct Windows to display large icons. And third, use