Windows 8.1 is rife with features and behaviors that perplex even the most experienced PC users. Not all of them are bad but only a few of them are immediately intuitive. Initially designed for touch control, Windows 8.1 makes many mouse and keyboard commands seem like tacked-on afterthoughts.

This newsletter will guide you through several shortcuts, tricks, and workarounds to make your Windows experience much smoother.
1. Group applications

The Start screen apps are initially displayed in a fairly random order, but if you’d prefer a more organized life then it's easy to sort them into custom groups.

To make a new group, simply drag the icons around. Right click in the empty space near the relevant icons to give your group a name.

Click the 'minus' icon in the bottom right corner of the screen to zoom out and you'll now find you can drag and drop the groups around as a block (only while zoomed out).
2. Quick access menu

Right-click in the bottom-left corner (or hold down the Windows key and press X) for a text-based menu that provides easy access to lots of useful applets and features: Device Manager, Control Panel, Explorer, Search dialog, etc.
3. Find your applications

Press Ctrl+Tab, click the arrow button at the bottom left of the Start Screen, or swipe up from the bottom of the screen and a list of your installed programs will appear.
4. See what’s running

If an application is running in the background and its icon does not appear in the taskbar, use Alt+Tab to switch through all open applications.

Alternatively, you can always press Ctrl+Shift+Esc to see all your running apps in the Task Manager.
5. Hide the taskbar on tablets

Surface Taskbar helper is a neat tool that enables you to set the taskbar to auto hide based on the device’s current orientation.

For instance you can always show it in landscape view, but hide it in portrait, which is a very flexible way to get the most out of your display space.
6. Run two apps side by side

On Windows 8.1 tablets, swipe from the left and the last app you were using will turn into a thumbnail; drop this, and one app displays in a sidebar pane while your current app takes the rest of the screen. And you can then swap these by swiping again.

Windows 8.1 expands on this and can display up to four apps simultaneously, given enough screen space. Move your mouse cursor to the top of the screen, and when it changes to a hand icon, drag and drop your app to the left or right. Once you've moved it enough, a dividing line will appear, you can drop the app, and it'll appear in just that part of the screen. Use the bar between your apps to resize their window widths, or if you need to make one full-screen again.
7. Customize app privacy

By default, Windows apps can use your name, location, and account picture. If you wish to change these settings, Press Win+I, click More PC Settings, select Privacy.

The new Task Manager also includes a History feature that tracks the CPU time used by every application. If you wish to hide this, clicking App History > Delete Usage History will clear all the figures.
8. Search everywhere

The Windows 8.1 Search tool is integrated with Bing.

To give this a try, launch the Charms bar (Win+C), click Search, type 'Marilyn Monroe' and press Enter. As well as seeing any matches in your own documents, pictures or videos, you’ll get a picture, brief bio (birth date, husbands, siblings, date and place of death), and links to films, videos, albums and more. Scroll right to find additional information.

This extra search power can be very useful, but if you’d prefer to keep desktop searches to your own system then it can disabled. Launch the Charms bar, click Settings > Change PC Settings > Search, and set 'Use Bing to search online' to 'off'.
9. Use six apps at once

‘Toolbox for Windows 8’ is an app that enables bundling 12 common apps in a single package. You get a Facebook client, browser, calculator, weather app, clock and more. And instead of always appearing full-screen, you can run and interact with two, three, four, even six of these tools, all at the same time.
10. Smart screenshots

If a Windows 8 application is showing something interesting and you'd like to take a picture, then hold down the Windows key, press PrtSc, and the image won't just go to the clipboard: it'll also be automatically saved to your My Pictures folder with the name Screenshot.png
11. Smart search

Press Win+W to launch smart search.

**Example:** If you'd like to know what's new in the area of storage, type "drive", and the system will return a host of related options. That is, not just those with "drive" in the name, but anything storage-related: BitLocker, Device Manager, backup tools, disk cleanup, and interesting new features such as Storage Spaces.
12. Set a picture password

Windows 8 enables you to create a picture password, where you choose an image, then draw on it in a combination of taps, lines and circles.

Only someone who can reproduce this pattern will be able to log on. Select Win + I > More PC Settings > Users > Create a Picture Password to give this a try.
13. Open new file types

If you find a file type that none of your applications can handle, then right-click on the file in Windows Explorer and choose Open With. You'll see a 'Look for an app in the Store' option, which enables Windows 8 to use an automated search tool to find and highlight an app for you.

You can also click 'More Options' to see currently installed programs and apps that may be able to open the file.
14. Help and Tips

If you’re a newcomer to Windows 8 and have trouble getting a feature to work, then scanning the official Help files might prove useful. Open the Charms bar (Win+C), click Search, and type Help. ’Help+Tips’ is a Windows 8.1 app with some useful, but basic information, while ’Help and Support’ has more in-depth advice.
15. **Fix performance problems**

If your Windows 8 system seems sluggish, the revamped Task Manager may be able to offer some clues. Press Ctrl+Shift+Esc to take a look.

Click 'More Details'. The Processes tab then reveals what's currently using your CPU time, RAM, hard drive and network bandwidth.

The Performance tab gives you a graphical view of resource use over the last few seconds, while the App History dialog looks back over days or more to reveal which app is the most resource-hungry.