

When photocopiers were new to the market they sold themselves because they were clearly a boon to offices. Operation was simple: you put the original into the machine and pressed a button and a copy came out. Still works that way.

Computers are a somewhat different proposition. At first it was useful to be a scientist or mathematician to understand what was happening and it was difficult to tell the machine what you wanted it to do. Languages were devised for the purpose and lengthy instructions were typed in as commands to the machine. (The command-line interface) A typing error would cause the whole thing to fail.

Not any longer. The machine “talks” back to you and guides you towards the correct thing to do. (“Are you sure?") It is bit disconcerting for beginners because they are not sure!

Using a mouse to click on an icon effectively sends a long string of instructions to the computer without the bother of typing. Isn't that nice? Even simply pressing a key on the keyboard pretty much does the same thing to display a letter on the screen. Easy really.

The instructions thus sent to the computer were worked out by programmers long ago. You only need to learn what key-press produces what result. The hard work has already been done.

Because everything is now so easy to do, we all have the option to do more if we wish. The trouble is that we are so used to the work being automated that we have lost track of what is happening inside the magic box to achieve the end result (if we ever knew it in the first place). It's not just beginners either: I recently read a supposedly authoritative newspaper article that made two fundamental errors about the basics.

Members have their own personal questions that they would like answered about the basics of what happens and the club has resolved to give them more opportunities to ask. A question and answer session (Brains Trust) will benefit everyone: the questions will generally be about the basics and the answers in plain English.

At the same time we will be keeping track of developments in related fields. We will be looking at e-book readers (Kindle) and having a sneak preview of Windows 8 which is on the way. E-Bay will be a topic on one evening and using computers to research your family tree on another. Two more evenings will be devoted to what can be done with writing letters, taking pictures and editing.

As the programme is devised in response to the wishes of club members, we will spend an evening reviewing how the year went to see if we can improve still further.

A detailed programme is now on our web site. www.penarthcomputerclub.co.uk

