

Mac 101: The Dock

The Dock is the bar of icons that sits at the bottom or side of your screen. It provides easy access to some of the Apple applications on your Mac (such as [Mail](#), [Safari](#), [iTunes](#), [Address Book](#), and [QuickTime Player](#)), displays which applications are currently running, and holds windows in their minimized state. It's also the place to find the Trash (its icon looks like a waste basket). For your convenience, you can add your own applications, files, and folders to the Dock too.



The Dock gives you quick access to commonly used applications and more; note the black triangle beneath the running applications (Finder and Dashboard).

To select an item in the Dock, just click its icon. For example, if you want to listen to some music, click the iTunes icon (the CD icon with music notes) to open iTunes. When an application is running, the Dock displays a small black triangle beneath or beside the application's icon. To make any currently running application the active one, click its icon in the Dock to switch to it (the active application's name appears in the menu bar to the right of the Apple logo).

As you open applications (or open files to launch applications), their respective icons appear in the Dock, even if they weren't there originally. That means if you've got a lot of applications open, your Dock will grow substantially. If you minimize a Finder or application window (click the round, yellow button in the upper-left corner of any window), the window gets sucked down into the Dock and waits in its small iconic state until you click this icon to bring up the window again.

The Dock keeps applications on its left side, while folders and windows are housed on its right. If you look closely, you'll see a vertical line that separates them. If you want to rearrange where the icons appear within their line limits, just drag a docked icon to another location on the Dock and drop it.



This line in the Dock separates the application icons from the file, folder, and minimized window.

When you quit an application whose icon resides in the Dock (such as Safari or Mail), the little black triangle disappears, but the icon remains. When you quit an application whose icon doesn't reside in the Dock (for example, you just finished playing Chess), its icon disappears from the Dock.

Adding and Removing Docked Items

If you want to add an application, file, or folder to the Dock, just drag its icon from any Finder window (or the desktop) and drop it on the Dock; the icons in the Dock will move aside to make room for their new neighbor. The resulting icon that appears in the Dock is actually an alias of the original item (it's kind of a bridge to your original item). If you drag an application or file onto the Dock, you'll be able to open it anytime by simply clicking its docked icon. If you drag a folder onto the Dock, a Finder window of the folder's contents will display when you click the folder icon in the Dock.



To get rid of any unwanted item, just drag its icon off the Dock.

Of course, you can also remove stuff from the Dock. To remove an item from the Dock, just drag its icon off the Dock onto the desktop; the icon will disappear in a poof of smoke. Don't worry, you didn't permanently remove the item from your computer; you simply got rid of its alias. If you want that item back, you can easily locate the application, file, or folder in the Finder, and drag its icon back into the Dock. Keep in mind that there are a couple things that you won't be able to remove; namely, the Trash and the Finder.

Tip: You can change where the Dock displays and customize its animated behavior in Dock Preferences. You can learn how to do both in "[Customize the Dock](#)."

Trash Talk

Sure, your Mac has a big enough hard drive to keep just about any pack rat happy, but you shouldn't get into the mindset of not throwing anything away. When you need to delete unwanted files, folders, or applications, move them to the Trash.



Here's what the Trash looks like when it's empty (left) and when it's got something in it (right).

The Trash functions somewhat like a folder in that you can drag things to it and then open it to see what's inside. However, when you command the Trash to empty itself, you can kiss its contents goodbye. To get rid of unwanted items, simply drag the item from the Finder and drop it onto the Trash icon in the Dock. The item will remain in the Trash folder (click the Trash icon to view its contents) until you either move it out of the Trash (if you decide to keep it) or empty it. From the **Finder** menu, choose **Empty Trash**.

If you're dumping sensitive files, such as electronic banking statements, documents that contain social security numbers or private passwords, or drunken photos of yourself at the company party, you can choose to have your Mac securely dump the Trash: From the **Finder** menu, choose **Secure Empty Trash**. This makes your Mac write over your deleted files with meaningless data, greatly reducing the chances it could ever be recovered. Keep in mind that this process can take some time, depending on what you're deleting. If you've got a lot of files to "shred," put it in motion and then go grab a snack, take a nap, or get some exercise and come back to it later.

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Keywords: klearn kmac kmac101

Article ID: 304728

Date Created: November 03, 2006

Date Modified: June 19, 2007

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