Karlen Communications
Windows Virtual Desktop from the Keyboard

Karen McCall, M.Ed.

Table of Contents

Task View and Virtual Desktops

New to Windows 10 is the Virtual Desktop. If you've been tabbing through the Windows 10 user interface you may have noticed an icon on the Taskbar called "Task View." The Task View icon looks like several applications all sort of gathered together. When you press Enter or Spacebar on Task View, you can see the Virtual Desktops you have to work in. If you haven't added any Virtual Desktops, you c not see anything other than your own default desktop.

As you create Virtual Desktops, by default the Desktop you normally have is called Desktop 1. This Desktop will always be there for you.

Figure 1 Task View icon on the Taskbar.

The Task View icon is just after Cortana/Search and just before the first icon that runs in the background that you have on the Taskbar. In my case, it is Internet Explorer.

Figure 2 Two Virtual Desktops visible from the Task View icon on the Taskbar.

The keyboard command for showing the available Virtual Desktops is Windows key + Tab.

Pressing Alt + Tab cycles you through running applications on any Virtual Desktop and Windows key + Tab shows the available Virtual Desktops.

Why do you need Virtual Desktops?

In the following scenario, I have Word, Paint and PowerPoint open on one Virtual Desktop and Excel and OneNote on the other.

If I am working in several applications, I can group applications so that ones I glance at during the day are on one Virtual Desktop while the ones I am working in for most of the day are in another. This way, as I Alt + Tab through open applications, I am cycling through the ones that I am most focused on working in at any given time.
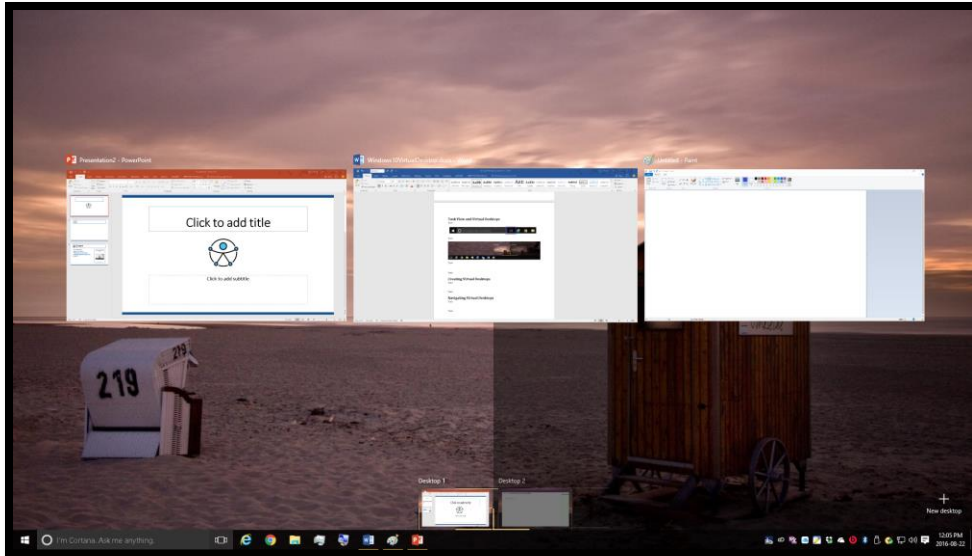
Figure 3 Desktop 1 with Word, Paint and PowerPoint open.

The preceding image shows Desktop 1 with Word, Paint and PowerPoint open. I can switch to Desktop 2 at any time. Desktop 2 has Excel and OneNote open.
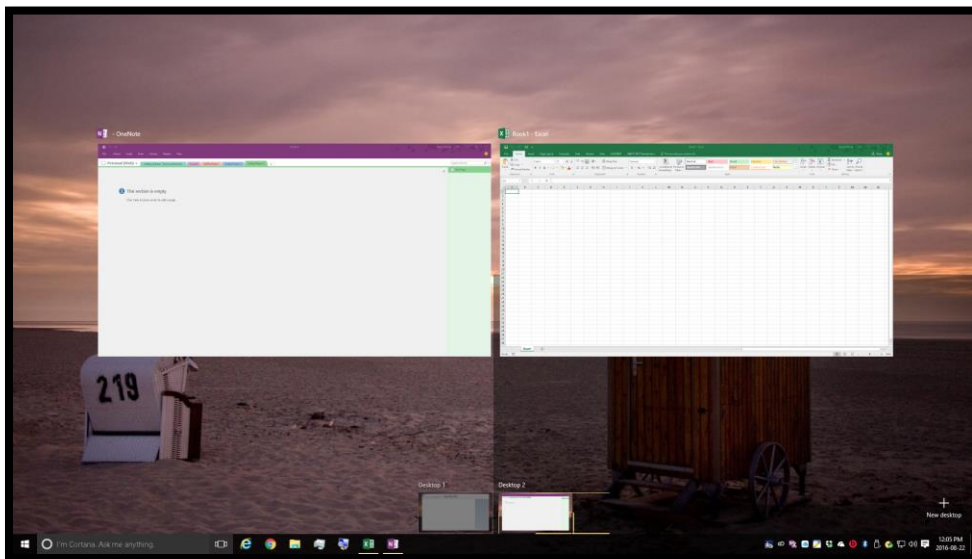

Figure 4 Desktop 2 with Excel and OneNote open.

The Virtual Desktop with focus is sort of underlined/selected using the colour theme of your desktop. In the preceding images, the Virtual Desktops have a thin orange/yellow line under them.

The Virtual Desktops remain even if you restart your computer, so they are a handy tool to have if you want to organize your open applications for your workflow.

Creating Virtual Desktops

There are two ways to create a Virtual Desktop:

- Press Windows key + Ctrl + D.

    o If you are using adaptive technology such as a screen reader or Text-to-Speech tool, you will not hear that a new Virtual Desktop has been created.

- Activate the Add Desktop icon to the right of the Task View/Virtual Desktops area of the screen.
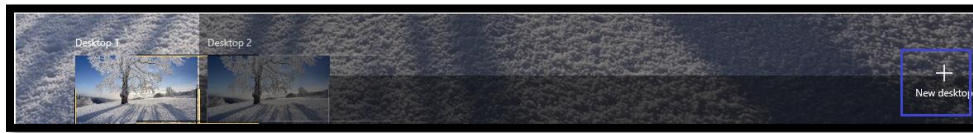

Figure 5 Add Desktop button on the Windows Desktop.

If you are using the keyboard and want to activate the "Add Desktop" button instead of using the keyboard command, keep pressing the Right Arrow once you are in Task View and you will find the Add Desktop button.

If you are adding a Virtual Desktop and don't have other Virtual Desktops, when you press Windows key + tab, focus is already on the Add Desktop button. Press Enter or Spacebar to add a Virtual Desktop.

Virtual Desktops are always added to the right of the main Desktop and will populate across the Task View area.

Navigating Virtual Desktops

There are keyboard commands for navigating Virtual Desktops.

Windows key + Tab shows all of the Virtual Desktops available.

Press Tab once the Virtual Desktop/Task View area is open.

You will move to the first Virtual Desktop which may be the main Desktop.

Use the Right Arrow key to move forward through other Virtual Desktops.

Use the Left Arrow key to move backward through the available Virtual Desktops.

On any Virtual Desktop, press Tab to move into the running/open applications for that Virtual Desktop.

Use the Left and Right Arrow keys to move through the open applications of any Virtual Desktop.

Press Enter on any open application in any Virtual Desktop to start working in that application.

The other way to cycle through any Virtual Desktops you might have is to press Windows key + Ctrl + Left or Right Arrow to move to the Previous or Next Virtual Desktop. Using these keyboard commands will keep cycling through the Virtual Desktops until you stop.

Since your adaptive technology should continue working through all of the Virtual Desktops, and since all of your applications are available to you in any of the Virtual Desktops, you can really customize your workflow on a daily basis.

Viewing Open Applications in a Different Virtual Desktop

Even if you open a lot of applications and then decide you want to use Virtual Desktops to organize your workflow, you can "send open applications" to other Virtual Desktops you have open or create new ones.
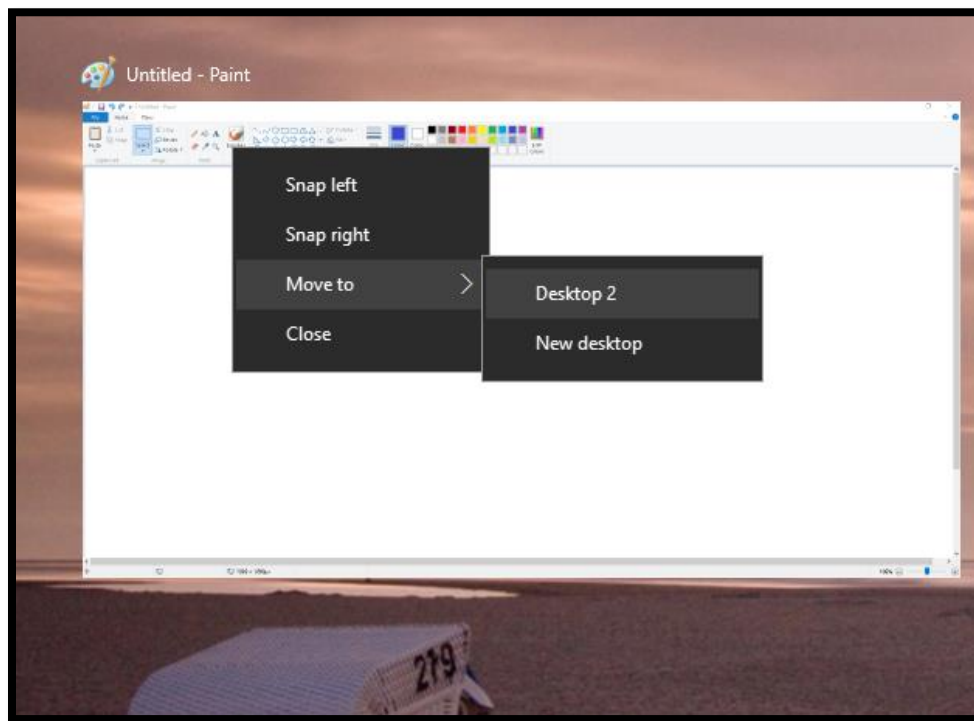

Figure 6 Context menu to move an open application to a Virtual Desktop.

This will save you time in closing documents and applications, switching to another Virtual Desktop or setting one up and then reopening applications and documents.

On any Virtual Desktop or the main Desktop, press Windows key + Tab to show the Task View of running applications.

Use the Left and Right Arrows to put focus on the application/document you want to move to another Virtual Desktop.

Press the AppKey or right-click with the mouse to show the context menu.

Use the Down Arrow or press M for Move to. A sub-menu opens with the option to either move the open application/document to existing Virtual Desktops or to add a new one.

Once your choice is made, the open application/document has been moved to the other Virtual Desktop.

Removing a Virtual Desktop

There may come a time when you want to delete or remove a Virtual Desktop.

Press Ctrl + F4 on the Virtual Desktop that has focus in the Task View.

This will remove/delete the current Virtual Desktop and consolidate all your open applications into the Virtual Desktop to its left. If you only have one Virtual Desktop remaining, then all open applications will be available as open applications on that Desktop.
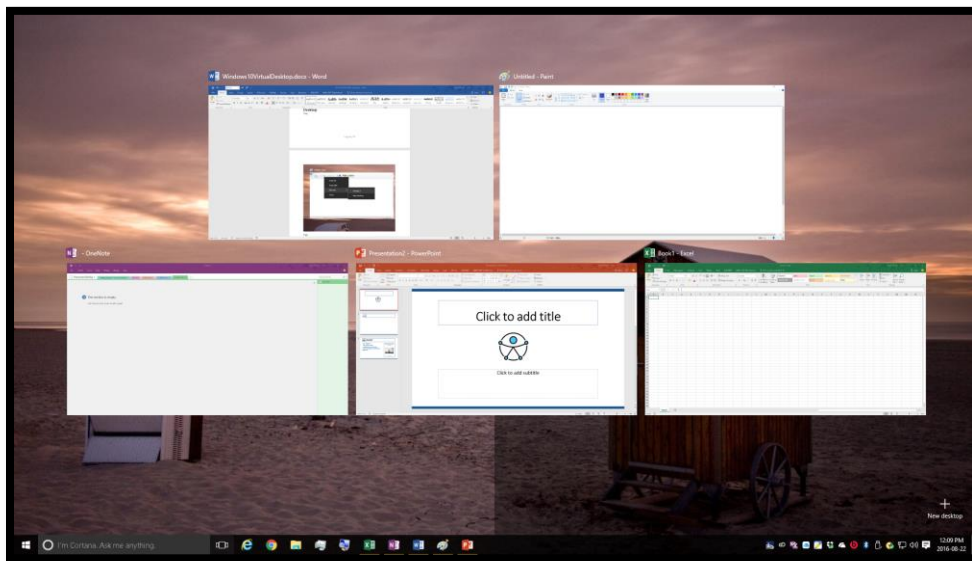
You can't delete the main Desktop!

Figure 7 Open applications form deleted Virtual Desktop consolidated on main Desktop.

As you remove/delete all Virtual Desktops, running applications/documents will be consolidated on your one main Desktop.

Summary

The ability to create Virtual Desktops helps those of us who don't have multiple monitors to have applications displayed on specific monitors. It helps keep a workspace footprint small

while providing a solution to help organize all of those applications we may have open on a daily basis that might bet in our way as we try to find that one of them application or document we were working on a minute ago. It is also an accessible solution for those of us who use adaptive technology.