

COMPUTER GURU

By Don Benjamin

Left-Click/Right-Click

Computer mice (and many trackpads) have two buttons. Everyone knows the left button selects things on the screen, like menu items. But not everyone knows what to do with the right button—yet it’s a **really important button**. That’s because it reveals “context” menus.

Context menus are lists of actions that are related to the thing on the screen you select. It’s part of Windows and MacOS. For example, if I position the cursor anywhere on this in Microsoft Word article and click the right mouse button, up pops a menu of actions I can take. I can change the font, set the paragraph properties (line spacing, margins for the paragraph, etc.), look up words, insert a link to a web page, add a comment, take a photo of the page, insert a scanned document, or add an image.

If I select a word or phrase, I can cut or copy the word into the clipboard, paste it someplace else, or delete it. Or I can look it up in the dictionary or thesaurus. The list that pops up depends on what I select.



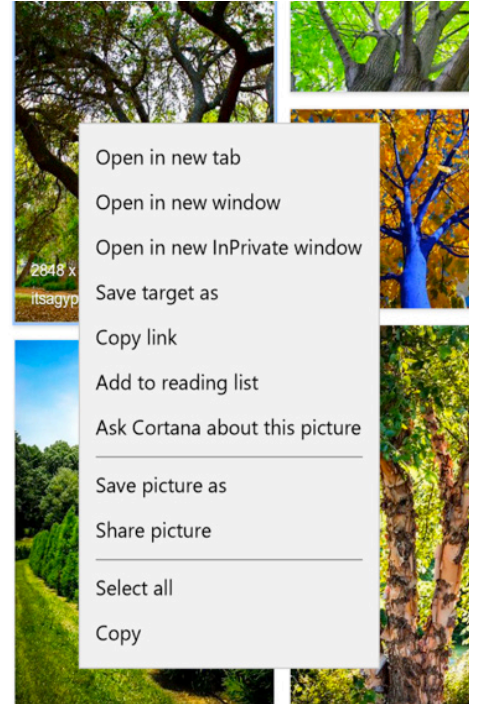
Context menu in Microsoft Word. It pops up when you click the right mouse button. (MacOS)

Web Images

Go to any web page and right-click a picture. Up pops a context menu with a list of the things you can do with that image.¹ If you want to copy the image into a document, select “Copy,” and it goes

into your clipboard. Or you can copy the link to send someone. Or save the image, or save the link to review it later, and so on.

Now you can see why these are called “context” menus—the list of actions depends on what you’re doing at the time.



Right-click on a Web image to list the options. (Windows 10)

Trackpads

Some trackpads also use left and right buttons, but newer Windows laptops (and all MacBooks) use “precision trackpads” that rely on gestures—special finger taps and movements—instead of buttons. For example, to invoke a context menu on a MacBook or newer Windows laptop, you tap with two fingers anywhere on the trackpad. This “two-finger” tap is the same as clicking the right mouse button.

If you need help using your mouse or trackpad, just stop by the Technology Lab on Tuesday or Wednesday from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., or Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Our volunteers have no fear of mice.

¹ If you use an image from the Web, make sure you cite the source.