

Kindle

mini

the missing manual[®]



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Aaron Miller

Kindle: The Mini Missing Manual

by Aaron Miller

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Introduction

Kindle-in-hand, you've probably already been doing some reading. In fact, you may be reading *this* book on your Kindle. You might have even been through the official *Kindle User's Guide*, available as a free download from Amazon through the built-in Kindle bookstore. In spite of all of this, you have a nagging feeling that your Kindle is capable of so much more.

Kindle: the Mini Missing Manual is written to be the manual that should have come in the box. Whether you are a secret Luddite or an unrepentant technophile, you'll not only find information on the basics of using your Kindle, but you'll also learn all kinds of cool things like how to play games, share your favorite books and notes with your friends via Facebook and Twitter, and check your email with the services that work best on your Kindle.

This book assumes you have any version of the Kindle, except for the first-generation model. The book's instructions even work for the newest third-generation Kindle. You should also be running the most recent (at this writing) version of the Kindle firmware, version 2.5.

With all that said, feel free to skip the parts you already know and dig in to the parts you don't. Enjoying your Kindle is the most important thing, and hopefully this book will help you do that.

Meet the Kindle

Whether you're an avid or a casual reader, odds are you'll be spending a lot of time with your Kindle in hand. The device itself does a pretty good job of getting out of the way while you read (something that Amazon makes a big deal of in its marketing). That being the case, let's take a quick tour of the Kindle device before it fades to the background of that latest thriller.

The Screen

All versions of the Kindle use a screen technology called E Ink. It's quite unlike the screens on any computer you've used before, because an E Ink display looks just like a printed page. That brings with it many of the big advantages of print, namely:

- E Ink is easy to read in broad daylight, unlike the screen on your laptop.
 - It's also readable from any viewing angle (except when facing directly away from you, of course!). Tilt your screen around and you'll see it looks the same, not faded or, in the case of old LCD screens, like a film negative.
 - No electricity is necessary to keep the letters from disappearing.
-

If you stop to think about it, this last point is a big deal. Pretty much every electronic device you've ever used needs power to keep the screen going. (This is even true of old LCD wristwatches. Remember when those were cutting-edge?) E Ink displays, like the one in your Kindle, only need power to *change* the screen but not to keep it going. This is why your Kindle gets incredible battery life. It's also why it switches into one of those screensaver images and *just stays there* while it's asleep. The screensaver image doesn't take a single extra electron of power once it's put in place.

Another compelling advantage of E Ink is reduced eye strain. iPads, laptops, and anything else that uses modern LCD displays all require backlighting. That means that there are lights built into the screens and these lights shine out through the liquid crystals that make them visible. While this makes for bright, colorful displays, it's also roughly equivalent to someone shining a flashlight in your face. (Though new OLED displays don't use backlights, the flashlight-in-your-face problem is the same.) If you've ever sat in front of your computer for too long, this is one of the reasons it makes your eyes tired.

But E Ink isn't dancing on the graves of LCD screens yet, for some glaringly obvious drawbacks:

- It only shows shades of gray, which feels a bit 19th-century.
- BYOL: Bring your own light. No backlighting means you'll need to have your own light source, like a lamp, a book light, or, that old standby, the sun.
- The screen takes more than a nanosecond to refresh, enough time that page turns feel pretty slow for this nanosecond world of ours. (Plus, the ink capsules get reset between page turns, making your page look like it briefly dropped into "opposite world.") Let's just say you won't want to watch a movie on this thing.

POWER USERS' CLINIC

How E Ink Works

E Ink is even niftier when you know how it works. Basically, an E Ink display is made up of millions of itty-bitty capsules, each the thickness of a human hair. The capsules have even smaller white and black particles inside. The white particles and black particles get negative or positive electric charges that force them to repel or attract each other, producing capsules that look white, black, or shades of gray. (Color E Ink displays are in the works.)

These capsules get printed onto a piece of plastic backed by a circuit board filled with tiny circuits, each circuit representing each pixel of the display. The circuits control the electric charge of white and black particles in the capsules.

Because E Ink can be printed onto other surfaces, theoretically just about anything could be an E Ink display. Right now, flat surfaces work best because the underlying circuits tend to be on flat circuit boards. But the smart people behind all of this stuff have already designed bendable circuits, so the day isn't far off when you can roll up your E Ink paper and stick it in your bag.

Because the holy grail of display technology isn't here yet, you just have to accept the tradeoffs. The improved battery life and the easy readability of the E Ink display outweigh the drawbacks for quite a lot of people.

Buttons Galore

The Kindle has an awful lot of buttons for something that is meant to replace books (which are decidedly button-free). But when there aren't any pages to turn or margins to write in, buttons make up for it all. At this point, a button rundown is in order.

Next Page

Does what it says and takes you to the next page of your books, periodicals, documents, and book list.

Prev Page

Like Next Page but going backwards instead of forwards.

Home

Takes you to your book list, no matter where you are or what you're doing.

Menu

Shows you a list of options, which vary depending on what you're doing with your Kindle at the time. This button will be incredibly useful and will pop up a lot in the pages that follow.

Back

This button takes you back to where you were before, but don't confuse it with the Prev Page button. Instead of going back in the pages of a document, it goes back to the previous *activity*. For example, you might 1) view your book list, 2) select a book and read a few pages that bore you, and then 3) go to the built-in Kindle bookstore to browse for a new book. Pressing the Back button will take you from the Kindle bookstore back to the boring book you were reading. Press it again and you'll go back to your book list.

Tip: Jumping around in a book with anything other than the Next Page or Prev Page buttons counts as an activity that the Back button will take you to. This makes the Back button really useful if you go to a footnote or to the Table of Contents in your book and then want to return to the page you just left.

The Joystick (or 5-Way Controller)

This button is basically five buttons in one. (Amazon calls this the "5-way controller", which is a mouthful. Although the button takes different shapes on different Kindles, this book calls it the "joystick".) Push it up, down, left, or right and it will move either the

cursor (if you're reading a book) or the current selection (if you're in your book list) in the direction you push. Press the joystick just like any other button and you'll either start or end a text selection (if you're reading a book), or select the highlighted item (if you're in your book list).

Alphanumeric Keys

The letters, numbers, punctuation keys, and space bar are just like the ones on your computer keyboard with the exception that someone blasted them with a really powerful shrink ray.

Del

Deletes anything you're typing, one character at a time.



This works just like a Return or Enter key on a typical keyboard.

Alt

Hold this button down while pressing other buttons for shortcuts to certain actions. For example, Alt-B will create a bookmark on the page you're reading.



This works much like the Shift key on a typical keyboard. Hold it down to type letters in caps. Click it once and only the next letter you type will be capitalized.

Sym

To type colons, semicolons, or any other text symbols like @, press this key and use the joystick to choose the symbol you need.

Aa

This is the key for controlling font sizes, words per line, text-to-speech, and the screen rotation (all covered in [Chapter 4](#)).

The Battery

Make the most of your Kindle's battery by remembering the following:

- **The battery is not removable.** This means that you can't just buy a second battery and easily swap it out with one that has run out of juice. Lucky for you, the battery lasts a really long time.
- **The battery lasts a really long time.** Using one simple setting (discussed in the next section), you can get your Kindle battery to last for weeks, not mere hours or days. Not many high-end devices can brag about battery life that lasts longer than the World Series.
- **You can charge your battery with a standard outlet or via USB.** If outlets are scarce, but a computer (presumably a laptop) with USB is handy, you can connect your Kindle to most computers for charging. This works whether or not you leave your Kindle in disk mode. (Read more on disk mode in ["Approach 2b: Upload from Your Computer" on page 32](#))
- **You can leave your Kindle plugged in if you want.** Amazon uses the most advanced battery technology, so you won't fry your battery if it stays plugged in after being fully charged.

Maximizing Battery Life

The battery life in your Kindle will go from lasting a few days to a few weeks depending on one setting, namely the built-in wireless service called WhisperNet. The next section discusses WhisperNet at greater length, but right now you just need to know that it is the most battery-hungry part of your Kindle by a mile. To turn off WhisperNet and maximize your battery life, do the following:

1. **Press the Menu button.** A menu appears on the right side of your Kindle screen.

2. **With the joystick, click up until “Turn Wireless Off” is underlined.** Press the joystick to select this option and turn off your wireless.
3. **If you want to turn the wireless back on (for reasons that will be clear in the next section), just follow steps 1 and 2, but this time the menu will say “Turn Wireless On”.**

You should be aware that, over time, rechargeable batteries like the one in your Kindle will hold less power. If you’ve ever had to replace a laptop battery because it only gave 20 minutes of work after a “full” charge, you know how frustrating this can be.

According to Amazon, after recharging the Kindle battery 500 times, it should still hold 80% of its original charge. This means that if you recharge your battery an average of once a week, it will still hold most of its charge almost ten years later. That said, if for some reason your battery does go south prematurely, Amazon will replace it for free in the first year of purchase and for \$60 thereafter.

WhisperNet

It must be said that wireless networks aren’t exactly noisy, so WhisperNet is an odd name for the Kindle’s built-in wireless networking. Perhaps the name is meant to evoke the idea that WhisperNet quietly does its thing without expecting you to undertake any complicated setup or troubleshooting (or for that matter, any paying!). If that’s the idea, then WhisperNet pretty much lives up to its name.

What you need to know about WhisperNet is that 1) it’s free, and 2) it works pretty much anywhere you get cell phone reception. Amazon has worked out a deal with cell phone companies, like Sprint in the United States, to allow all Kindles unfettered access to their data networks. This means no contracts, no monthly bills, and no worries about going over your allotted data limits. It’s like an Internet service dream come true.