**Application Software**

As we know, there are two kinds of software. **System software** works with end users, application software, and computer hardware to handle the majority of technical details. **Application software,** also known simply as **apps,** can be described as end-user software and is used to accomplish a variety of tasks.

Application software, in turn, can be divided into two categories. One category, **basic applications,** is the focus of this chapter. These programs are widely used in nearly every discipline and occupation. They include word processors, spreadsheets, database management systems, and presentation graphics. The other category, **specialized applications,** includes thousands of other programs that tend to be more narrowly focused and used in specific disciplines and occupations.

**Common Features**

A **user interface** is the portion of the application that allows you to control and to interact with the program. Most applications use a **graphical user interface (GUI)** that displays graphical elements called **icons** to represent familiar objects and a mouse. The mouse controls a **pointer** on the screen that is used to select items such as icons. Another feature is the use of windows to display information. A **window** is simply a rectangular area that can contain a document, program, or message. (Do not confuse the term *window* with the various versions of Microsoft’s Windows operating systems, which are programs.) More than one window can be opened and displayed on the computer screen at one time. Traditionally, most software programs, including those in Microsoft Office 2003, use a system of menus, toolbars, dialog boxes, and buttons. **Menus** present commands that are typically displayed in a **menu bar** at the top of the screen. When one of the menu items is selected, an additional list of menu options or a **dialog box** that provides additional information and requests user input may appear. **Toolbars** typically appear below the menu bar. They contain small graphic elements called **buttons** that provide shortcuts for quick access to commonly used commands.

Microsoft Office 2010 uses an interface introduced in Office 2007 that makes it easier for users to find and use all the features of an application. This new design introduces ribbons, tabs, galleries, and more.

• **Ribbons** replace menus and toolbars by organizing commonly used commands into a set of tabs. These tabs display command buttons that are the most relevant to the tasks being performed by the user.

• **Tabs** are used to divide the ribbon into major activity areas. Each tab is then organized into **groups** that contain related items. Some tabs, called **contextual tabs,** only appear when they are needed and anticipate the next operations to be performed by the user.

• **Galleries** simplify the process of making a selection from a list of alternatives. This is accomplished by displaying small graphic representations of the alternatives. This new interface is the first major change in over a decade and promises to greatly improve user functionality and efficiency. Many applications support **speech recognition,** the ability to accept voice input to select menu options and dictate text.

CONCEPT CHECK

1. What is the difference between basic and specialized applications?

2. List some common features of most programs including Microsoft Office 2003.

3. Describe some of the features introduced in Microsoft Office 2007 and 2010.