

Introduction to ArcMap

Recommendations for getting started:

1. Always store relative path names: File>Document Properties, then click on the button “Data Source Options.” Choose “Store Relative Path Names to Data Sources.” This should always be the first thing you do when you start a project in ArcMap.
 - This will save the location of your data sources (.shp) relative to the location of your display file (.mxd). This is extremely important since you will be working on different computers. I will explain this in more detail.
2. Always save multiple versions (copies) of your .mxd file as you are working (i.e. urban1.mxd, urban2.mxd, urban3.mxd, etc.), using the Save As command from the File menu. This way you can go back to earlier versions of your project.
3. Your file management is very important when working with ArcMap; by file management I mean the way you name and organize your files. Avoid using spaces in the names you choose for your files. Keep everything for this project in one folder and name it something intuitive, like “urbanSystems.” This is an example of one naming convention; instead of using spaces, capitalize the first letter of each word. Otherwise, you can use _ instead of spaces. With ArcMap, do not use spaces, dots (.) or dashes (-) in your file names.
4. Remember the data structure of ArcMap, the .mxd is simply a display file; it does not contain any data. The .mxd must be accompanied by data sources or in our case, shapefiles. Shapefiles are complex data structures that are made up of at least three individual files that have the same name but different file extensions (.shp, .dbf and .shx). If you ever move/copy the location of a shapefile, make sure you move/copy all of these files. The safest way is to use ArcCatalog, which can be thought of as the ArcGIS version of Windows Explorer (the window you see when you click on My Computer).
5. Make sure you always pay attention to where ArcMap is saving files. It usually defaults to a temporary folder which is buried in the C: directory. Always check the destination before you push OK. Next week, when you use the Export Data feature (Right click a data layer, then Data>Export Data), make sure you pay attention to where you are exporting new files to.

Some useful keyboard shortcuts for ArcMap:

Ctrl + S → Save; hold down Z to temporarily use Zoom tool; hold down P to temporarily use the Pan tool; Shift + 0 → view full extent; double click on a layer in the table of contents to open its properties window; hold Ctrl and double click on a layer in the table of contents to open its attribute table; double click a field name in an attribute table to sort that field ascending or double click again to sort descending.