

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

JUST TELL ME HOW IT WORKS

Practical Help for Adults on All-Things-Digital

Lance, Paul

Grandview Press (596 pp.)

\$24.99 paperback, \$9.99 e-book

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BOOK REVIEW

No more relying on 12-year-old grandkids: This handy primer explains the workings of computers, cellphones, Facebook pages and other electronic doodads in simple language even a grownup could understand.

Lance's lucid, well-organized guide starts with the rudiments of setting up a personal computer and goes on from there to cellphones, TVs, video games, online services, email, audio-visual devices and even cloud computing. His is a hands-on treatment for the absolute neophyte, taking readers from the simplest operations—"Make sure your printer is turned 'on' before you start to print"—to higher-order tasks such as sharing music files, setting up a LinkedIn page and banking via smartphone, all with detailed step-by-step procedures. Fortunately, it's not all eye-glazing details; the author also imparts in an intuitive way some of the logic of how gadgets operate, along with easy rules of thumb for self-training. (For instance, on a computer, simply hovering on a position or right-clicking the mouse, he advises, will often show you how to proceed.) Despite the 595-page length, Lance does a fine job filtering and signposting an enormous array of topics to make the book an easy browse, with chapter openings that tell readers who will—and won't—need the information that follows. Wherever possible he dispenses a simple bottom line—"Never allow an outside computer to 'remember' your password!"—and where he can't, he boils down decision-making protocols to a short list of pros and cons. There's some *Consumer Reports*-style advice here (the "annoyance factor" of Kindle Fire's ads aren't worth the savings, Lance opines) as well as nonpartisan hardware info (when it comes to monitors, "just about any manufacturer brand will do"), which help take some of the anxiety out of shopping. Lance has an extraordinary feel for the ways in which beginners are confused by digital gadgets and for ways to clear up these mysteries, and even relatively experienced operators—e.g., a book reviewer who thinks his DVD drive is broken because he is putting the disc in upside down—can also profit from Lance's tutelage.

A useful, highly readable and reassuring owner's manual for novices baffled by their gadgets.