

Sure, we Mac faithful know how essential the release of Mac OS 8 was. Many of us also know what came with System 7. Some of us may even know what the difference between 6.04, 6.06, and 6.08 are, but how many of us know the Mac OS in its early years? How many of us knew the quality of the Mac OS when the classic Macs reigned? Well this article is dedicated to versions of the Mac OS before the System 6. I've included descriptions, new features, release dates, screen shots, and even links to downloadable versions. Enjoy a look at the Mac OS's past, you might be surprised at tidbits of the System you never knew about. Don't forget to [e-mail me](#) any revelant information or corrections you might have. Thanks.

In case your wondering about the weird numbering schemes, it's Apple tradition to make them as complicated as possible it seems. After the first System was released, separate versions for both the System and Finder were bundled into "System Software", not until System 7 were the versions finally reunited.

Credits: [Macworld Mac SECRETS](#), [The Mac 512](#), [Insanely Great](#), [Mac OS Crypt](#)

System 1 - 2

System 1.0, Finder 1.0

Released: January 24, 1984 | Size: 216k | [Download](#)

Screenshots: [Desktop](#), [Desktop Accessories](#), [Notepad](#), [Scrapbook](#), [Menus](#)

Hard to believe that the OS that started a computer revolution was only 216k, including the 42k Finder. This was the combined effort of the geniuses at Apple Computer in the early '80s. The original Mac OS was simple and easy to use, a pleasant surprise to computer users who tried it for the first time. The Finder is very familiar, but some of the menu options are unrecognizable. The desktop accessories, which included [Calculator](#), [Alarm Clock](#), [Puzzle](#), [Key Caps](#), [Control Panel](#), [Notepad](#), and [Scrapbook](#) were there just like today, under the Apple menu. These were all installed in the System Folder, which also harbored the fonts. The entire System was shipped on a 400k disk with the first [Mac 128k](#) models, and also included a separate tutorial disk that taught you how to use the mouse (a device alien to most all users at the time) called Mousing Around, which later became Mac Basics. Even though it was a breakthrough in interface design, System 1.0 also had many headaches and inconsistencies. Most apparent was the copying of disks, which would take up to 20 minutes and countless disk swaps (partly due to the Mac's limited memory). Rebuilding the desktop back then removed all your folders, putting all files at the root level of your disk. Also, the tutorial was incompatible with System 1.0, and a patched version of the System had to be included with the tutorial disk to avoid crashing. You also could not create a new folder. Instead, an folder named "Empty Folder" always existed on the root level of any Mac-formatted disk. When you renamed it, a new "Empty Folder" would appear. These problems caused the prompt release of System 1.1.

System 1.1, Finder 1.1g (System Software 0.1)

Released: May 5, 1984 | Size: 198k | [Download](#)

Screenshots: [Desktop](#), [About the Finder](#), [Open/Save Dialog Box](#), [Erase Disk Dialog Box](#)

Only four months after the release of the Macintosh, Apple had already updated the OS to System 1.1. The main advantage of System 1.1 by far was a dramatic speed increase in disk copying. Apple accomplished the task by increasing the Finder's memory buffer, therefore allowing the Finder to copy larger chunks of data at a time and reducing the number of disk swaps needed. A big deal for Steve Jobs was system startup speed, as a famous anecdote explains. Probably because of this, the new System started up 20% faster due to improved code. The Finder also launched faster at startup, and after exiting other applications. Another interesting feature added was the Set Startup command in the Special menu. It allowed you to automatically set applications to launch upon System startup, similar to the Startup Items folder today. The Clean Up command also debuted in this version under the Special menu, which set the icons in specified grids which made you windows and desktop look nice and tidy. [Fonts](#) and [Font Mover](#) were added, as the Mac was starting to evolve into a desktop publishing machine. More aesthetic updates included the [About the Finder](#) dialog box, with the now famous "mountain scene" in the Apple Menu. Still, no New Folder command nor a Shutdown command existed.

System 2.0, Finder 4.1 (System Software 0.3, 0.5)

Released: April 1985 | Size: 173k | [Download](#)

Screenshots: [Desktop](#), [Choose Printer](#), [MiniFinder](#)

Apple worked on the new System for almost a year before releasing it to the public. The bulk of the work was done on improving the Finder, which jumped from version 1.1 to 4.1, while the System only went up to 2.0. The Finder was easily the star of this package, now much faster than ever before, and jam packed with new features. You could finally create a new folder

using the New Folder command, which replaced the Empty Folder command. You could now change the view of the folder for the first time to "List", which created little tiny icons next to their corresponding filenames (much like the "Small Icon" view today). You could also print the list using Print Catalog, a new command under the File menu. The Chooser's predecessor, [Choose Printer](#), made a home in the Apple menu. Users were also now able to shut down their OS using the command in the Special menu. Apple also let users eject disks by dragging them to the trash for the first time. A cool new feature called [MiniFinder](#) also appeared in the Special menu. It let users pick their favorite applications, so when they quit one, a dialog box would appear with icons of all the other ones that they had selected. This was similar to today's Launcher, or At Ease. All subsequent problems were fixed, except for the rebuilding of the desktop problem. Still, most users were content with their Mac until the introduction of [System 3.0](#), which they received with open arms.

System 3

System 3.0, Finder 5.1 (System Software 0.7)

Released: January 1986 | Size: 211k | [Download](#)

Screenshots: [Desktop](#), [Chooser](#), [Control Panel](#), [Open/Save Dialog Box](#)

System 3.0 debuted with the introduction of the Mac Plus, and like the Plus, forever changed the way Mac advocates used their machines. The most notable upgrade second only to System 7 and Mac OS 8, it changed dramatically from System 2.0. A much more efficient Finder, now at version 5.1, was also much speedier. This was in part due to the newly created [Disk Cache](#), which would store frequently used routines and instructions in a chunk of memory. Besides that there weren't many new commands or interesting features added. So what was all the hoopla you ask? Well, it was the first full introduction of the Hierarchical File System (the system was first introduced with Apple's HD20 hard drive, but not publicly announced). HFS was much more efficient, easy, and fun to use than the older Macintosh File System (MFS). The main benefit of HFS was the ability to finally nest folders (put folders within folders). MFS only allowed you to create folders at the root level, which would disappear in Open/Save dialog boxes and when rebuilding the desktop. HFS took care of that, allowing you to create many nested folders allowing for better organization. It was revered so much that it later went on to win [InfoWorld Magazine](#)'s People's Choice Award for OS Environment of the Year. HFS was finally replaced in Mac OS 8.1 with HFS+, which better calculates file block sizes according to maximum hard disk capacity.

System 3.1, Finder 5.2 (System Software 1.0)

Released: February 1986 | Size: 497k | [Download](#)

This System version is a mystery to me. I can't seem to find much information about it except that it was released a month later and was extremely buggy. It seems to have been a problem with the System because version 3.11 was released with the Mac 512Ke Guided Tour disk. This System should be avoided, the link above is for System 3.11 which I think is bug-free.

System 3.2, Finder 5.3 (System Software 1.1)

Released: June 1986 | Size: 312k

Screenshots: [Desktop](#)

This version was more of a bug fixer than anything else. Like I already said, 3.1 had many bugs, and System 3.2 fixed about 30 of them. It also fixed problems with data loss and system crashes. The Chooser was updated as well, since the older version had problems printing in italicized fonts (it didn't!). Another desk accessory update was the Calculator, to the plea of many Mac users. The Calculator was oddly designed conflicting with the Apple Extended Keyboard's numerical keypad that came with the Mac Plus. The keypad had the *, /, and = signs in a different order than the Calculator. This drove users nuts, since they often messed up because of the inefficient design. Whizzing through the accessory to do quick calculation (as we do today) was almost impossible. Therefore, Apple finally changed it to the order it is today.

System 3.3, Finder 5.4 (System Software 2.0)

Released: January 1987 | Size: 333k | [Download](#)

A slightly upgraded version of System 3.2 was released to make way for AppleShare, Apple's hot new networking software. This finally created the much touted "Macintosh Office" that Steve Jobs often talked about. It even inspired the infamous "Lemmings" commercial played in Super Bowl XIX on January 20, 1985. Why was it being advertised two years before its release? Maybe they were using Intel strategy, you don't really know what goes on in Jobs' head. It later caused many headaches for Apple (Jean Louis Gasée called it the "Macintosh Orifice"). Anyhow, by this time it was finally out and System 3.3 made good use of it.

System 4.0, Finder 5.4 (System Software 2.01)

Released: March 1987 | Size: 260k | [Download](#)

Screenshots: [Chooser](#), [Control Panel](#)

Aside from bug fixes left over from 3.2 and 3.3, there wasn't much of a change in System 4.0. The Finder wasn't even updated. In fact, System 4.0's major claim to fame would be the fact that it was the first System to exclude a model, the Mac 128k. It did have some fixes to accommodate AppleShare, like a new [Chooser](#) that looks remarkably like today's, and a new [Control Panel](#) with an AppleTalk section. System 4.0 was recommended for all Macs with 512k of RAM and higher, which means only the Mac 512k and above were able to run it. Not much more became of the System, since it was only current for that month alone.

System 4.1, Finder 5.5 (System Software 2.01)

Released: April 1987 | Size: 422k | [Download](#)

Mac users had just a month to enjoy a nice 1 digit version number of their Mac OS. System 4.1 was released the following month newly adapted for AppleShare 1.1. AppleShare 1.1 was needed to network the newly released Mac II, and an updated version of the Mac OS was needed to accommodate it. Another update due to new technology was the way the Finder handled large capacity drives (namely those larger than 32 MB). This System also excluded a model, the Mac 512k, since you needed 1 MB of RAM to run it. This was the last time Apple did that for a while though, since they would not exclude models from running a version of the Mac OS for over ten years later, with the introduction of Mac OS 7.6.

System 4.2, Finder 6.0 (System Software 5.0)

Released: October 1987 | Size: 2,188k | [Download](#)

Screenshots: [Desktop](#), [About the Finder](#), [Control Panel](#), [Set Startup](#), [Installer](#)

As you can see, besides little fixes not much was done to the Mac OS for about a year and a half before System Software 5.0 was released. But it was probably worth the wait, for several dramatic changes were made when this System came out. The [About the Finder](#) dialog box was improved, it now displayed RAM usage the way About This Computer does today. This did away with the mountain scene however, later to be hidden as a famous easter egg. The Color menu made its debut on color capable Macs, though was not available for the "classic" all-in-one Macs. Finder copying was much more useful, with a progress bar and cancel button. Backgrounder, [DA Handler](#), [Easy Access](#), and Print Monitor were born, as was Background Printing with the LaserWriter. [Control Panel](#) was updated, now with the ability to add or delete different functions that it controlled. This System also brought about something new and exciting to Mac users...cooperative multitasking via Apple's newly released MultiFinder. Using MultiFinder, you could run more than one application at a time and switch between them using the now familiar Application Menu on the top right corner of your screen. Though it is true that multitasking capabilities were available before then using Mac ROM author Andy Hertzfeld's app "Servant", it was not officially endorsed by Apple. The Finder had an improved [Set Startup](#) command that would allow you to use either regular or MultiFinder. With the System also came omissions, among them were the About the Finder mountain scene, and the MiniFinder. The new additions would explain the whopping increase in the System's size, over 5 times that of the previous System.

System 4.3, Finder 6.0 (System Software 5.1)

Released: November 1987 | Size: 2,197k | [Download](#)

This System was a small update to the Finder. It added a new version of Apple HD SC Setup for updating the drivers on Apple brand hard drives, and an updated LaserWriter driver. Besides that, it is for all practical purposes identical to System Software 5.0. Some system version lists I researched don't even have this release, implying that it probably replaced System 4.2 without much hype.