

HOW DO I START PLAYING?

Mike Cisneros and Seann Dikkers

“I played it for 12 months before I was even thinking of bringing it into the classroom.”

“So, I think the best advice I can give is to just jump into it.”

- Minecraft Teacher

A First Time for Everything

Last week, I was at a conference and was asked to do a ‘workshop’ session with teachers and show them *Minecraft*. When we arrived... the assigned room had no computers in it. With great flexibility the teachers were willing to review ‘Plan B’ slides of the game and talk about the teachers that we highlight in this book. We spent the next hour in a delightful conversation about how important it was to test out software for yourself. Normally a video game workshop without computers would be a problem, but it wasn’t. The teachers went home, played, and wrote back to share that their play time experiences were outstanding!

Many of these teachers knew a young player that could coach them through it. They stayed after school for a day and had one or more walk them along and encourage them each time they got stuck. In fact, as we interviewed MC teachers, they often recommended this pathway to learning MC. If you know a younger player, have them show you. If you do not, I thought it would be a treat to present this chapter as close to this form as possible. Mike Cisneros is an avid MC player and was willing to let me use our conversations below and is thus a co-author on this chapter. As you read, notice how teaching and learning in this context is a natural, encouraging, process. Mike is a clear and natural teacher - driven by his love of the game.

The following, then, is a simple step by step prompting on how to play *Minecraft*. For new gamers, we’ll walk you through it. For veteran gamers, this may still be interesting as a case of informal digital instruction. For new players, I would still encourage you to read only if you run into troubles - it’s good to go run into some troubles first. The game comes with minimal instruction and encourages you to look around, set your own goals, and grab a friend or student when you get stuck. For some, this vagueness is part of the fun.

Two quick reminders: First, don't confuse your ability to navigate a game with its capacity to be a powerful tool in the classroom. Think of when you first picked up a pencil, or when you first used a camera - it may have felt awkward. Expect a learning curve. Second, remember you don't really *have* to get good at navigating digital worlds before you manage a classroom of players. Students can demo, help with navigation, and joyfully watch you learn.

Playing *Minecraft* is part of your lesson preparation in using it. Later in the book, when we look at teachers who use *Minecraft*, there will be many references to the game itself that will make much more sense if you've played it yourself. Also, most of the teachers in this study (15 of 17) played the game before deciding to use it in classes; the other two had a fellow teacher that they were working with who had played it. So go play. Put down this book, navigate to <https://minecraft.net/download> and follow the instructions. Plan on giving it an evening or at least an hour or two before coming back.

Learning to Play Minecraft

Seann Dikkers: Hey Mike, thanks for this conversation. Before we dig in, tell me what you like about playing MC.

Mike Cisneros: The thing I enjoy the most about Minecraft is that it's versatile. Literally any person, in any mindset, can play it. If you just want to build with your friends, you are able to create a server and play with them! Another thing, Minecraft is that it is very straightforward; to get wood you cut down a tree, to get sand you find a beach, if you want some steak or leather you hunt down some cows.

1) Setting up your account

SD: Moo! Alright, so treat me like I'm a brand new player - a newbie. What do I do first?

MC: First you have to make an account on Minecraft.net. Once there, go to the top right corner and click [Register].

- Fill in the personal information,
- Click the green [Register] button at the bottom, and
- Confirm your email address.

Later, you can choose to try the demo or buy the game. Just use those prompts.

SD: Do I need to worry about getting spam from Minecraft/Mojang? Can my students use a fake email instead of their school email accounts?

MC: Yes, there are options such as *"I would like to receive e-letters from Minecraft/Mojang."* If you don't want these updates, make sure you don't select this option while signing up for an account. Sign up using an email account you can access regularly, whether that be an email address you already have, one you set up just for Minecraft, or even your school email address.

2) Downloading *Minecraft*

SD: Ok, so I'm registered. Now what?

MC: Now you need to download it on your computer. This may be different depending on what operating system you are using. First:

- Go to Minecraft.net
- Sign in (if you aren't already)
- Click the [Download Now!] button...

For Apple operating systems:

- Right below [Minecraft for Mac OS X] there will be a file named "Minecraft.dmg",
- Click "Minecraft.dmg" to download it to your computer,
- After the file is downloaded, double click on it to open it,
- Confirm that you understand you downloaded this [may appear based on your settings],
- Drag the Minecraft Application into your 'Applications' folder as instructed. (This will make place an icon in the folder and on your 'launchpad'. You can drag it to your 'dock' if you want easy access later),
- Open the Minecraft Application by double clicking on it,
- Log into Minecraft when prompted (Use the registration we just set up), and
- Click the "Play!" button at the bottom of the page.

For Windows operating systems:

- Right below "Minecraft for Windows" there will be a file named "Minecraft.exe",
- Click "Minecraft.exe" to download it to your computer,
- After the file is downloaded, open it,
- Once it is open, click "Run",

- Log into Minecraft when prompted to, and
- Click the "Play!" button at the bottom of the page

3) Generating a World

SD: So far so good. I'm going to press on [Singleplayer] for now...



Image 1: Minecraft Startup Screen

MC: Right, later on, you may want to look at the options you have for the game on the startup screen, but for now let's get you playing by pressing [Create New World] next.

SD: Done. I'm naming my world now...

MC: While you do that there is a single middle button that toggles what kind of world you want. When you click on it it will rotate between three settings: [Game Mode Survival], [Game Mode Hardcore], and [Game Mode Creative]. For now, let's play what the community calls 'Vanilla Minecraft' and stay on Survival.

[More World Options...] allows you to customize your world a bit. This is where you can pick a 'seed', or pre-made world, but we won't do that to start. [Structures] are signs of life in your world. [World Type] are options that tell the generator what kind of geography you want. It will still be random, but you can go with lots of hills, or flat as a board.

SD: Why would that matter?

MC: Because when you start playing a bit, it changes the challenge and setting for what you build and how you adventure in the game. Some players just like to explore the world, for instance, so they do [World Type: Amplified] to get impossible mountains and otherworldly landscapes. [World Type: Flat] is more for builders that don't want to do as much terraforming for their designs.

Leave [Allow Cheats: ON], we'll use those to get you started. Also leave [Bonus Chest: OFF] it's cheating.

SD: [laughs!] So it's cheating to have a chest, and not cheating to have cheats?

MC: Yes, that's about it. [laughs]. You have a point there. Cheats are different in a game like this. It's not cheating to get shortcuts to managing the game itself, it is cheating to skip over newbie content that really helps you learn. Cheating to save time is good, cheating to skip learning is bad.

SD: That's fascinating Mike, really it is. We need to spend more time on that idea later.

MC: For now, click [Done], and you return to 'Create New World'. Click on [Create New World] and it will start generating one for you.

4) Moving around and Monsters!!

SD: It is running! I used "W.A.S.D" keys to move around, looks like the space bar lets me jump... and now there is a green thing chasing me!

MC: That green thing is a Creeper, eventually they blow up if you get too close, so just keep running, or stop and let it blow up. Arrow keys work for moving too. You can use your mouse to 'look around' too, most experienced players get good at using the [W] and the mouse together to move around. New players have trouble with that.

SD: AAAAAAH! He exploded on me! I don't like those!

MC: [Laughs at my misfortune!] Lets turn them off. Return to the game menu by pressing [ESC] on your keyboard. Choose [Options...] and in the top right click on [Difficulty] until you see [Difficulty:Peaceful], then [Done] and [Back to Game].

For new players the monsters create a need in the game. You need to build shelter! The first thing you should do is to gather supplies and build some type of protection against monsters. Monsters, or “mobs,” spawn in the dark, so consider building a house before the sun goes down! In the morning the light burns them up so you get some time to explore and collect.

5) Collecting Supplies

MC: Typically, when starting off in Minecraft, you will use anything from your surroundings to make a shelter. When you first spawn, you will be in something called a “biome.” There are 12 main biomes, most have wood. Wood is probably the most useful resource in the game, you can make tools, weapons, and even build a house out of it!

SD: Sure, there are trees over there... birch! I’m running to them now.

MC: To collect a block of wood, approach the tree and use your mouse to move the plus sign (+) in the middle of your screen on top of the block you want to harvest. You hold down the left mouse button to break it, (keep holding down the mouse button, it takes a few seconds), and then walk over the block to collect it. You can collect all the wood you want!

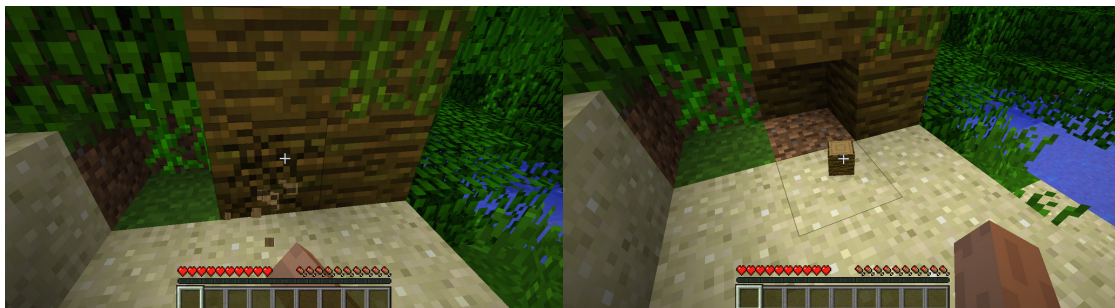


Image 2 & 3: (L) Harvesting Wood, (R) Harvested Wood

6) Crafting

MC: Crafting is a huge part of the game (hence the name MineCRAFT). To access your crafting table and inventory simply press [E].

SD: Okay, I see lots of blocks.

MC: Yes, here you can craft the 'block' of wood into wood planks. Drag (left click and hold) the wood blocks into the crafting table and it will show that you can craft wood planks.



Image 4: Crafting Wood into Planks

To collect the wood planks, either drag the planks into your inventory (or press [Shift]+[Right Click]) to turn all of your wood blocks into planks at once. Now you are crafting blocks that have greater uses within the game, than just the raw material you first mined.

7) Building a House

MC: Once you have materials, you can start making a house. Begin trying to find a flat part on the ground. I found this area in a nearby tundra biome and it will work perfectly for my new house. Harvest enough wood to build a modest shelter for yourself. Mine was 7x7 blocks with a space for a door.

So now you're ready to start building. With your inventory [E] open, drag and drop your building materials into the 'toolbar' at the bottom of your inventory. Click [E] again to return to the game interface. See how the toolbar is still 'in game' too?



Image 5: A Starter House

SD: Yes, so I can use anything on that bar while playing?

MC: Yes, if your planks are ready, to place a block, first use the mouse scroll wheel (or number keys) to select the planks, then target [+] any existing block surface and [Right Click] to place the planks. You can place a block from any direction on any side of an existing block. Keep stacking blocks and you should be able to build a shelter. Use the [space bar] to jump on top of a block and stack higher. Use [left click] to remove one you don't want. A few more crafting tips to finish your house.

8) Finishing off a house

MC: You probably need a door now.

SD: Yes, and a roof... but it looks like I can add blocks from below too. Up to three blocks away from my character. So, how do I make a door?

MC: So for that you need to craft a larger crafting table. The one [E] we've been using only has four spaces to put materials, we need more. So to make a crafting table, fill all four spaces with a wood plank, you can split 'piles' of wood by [right clicking] on them in the crafting window. Now you'll see a 'Crafting Table' ready to drag to your toolbar?

SD: Sure.

MC: Drag it onto your toolbar and leave the crafting window. Highlight the new crafting table on your toolbar [scroll wheel/number keys] and place [right click] the crafting table inside your house on the ground. [Right click] on the crafting table and it will open a crafting screen, like yours [E] but with more space now. Now you can make a door with those wooden planks.



Image 6 & 7: (L) Making a Crafting Table, (R) Making a Wooden Door

While you're in your crafting table, you want to fill the left and middle columns with wood planks. Move the door to your hotbar, leave the crafting window, highlight the door, then place [right click] the door in the doorway of your house.

SD: Home, sweet home. I feel like a pioneer or an island castaway making my way in the wilderness.

MC: [laughs] Yes, so do a few million other people!

9) Forever Mornings

MC: Did you shut off monsters?

SD: I think I left them on.

MC: If you die in the game, you will be teleported back to where you first spawned when you first started the game. So no worries. If you built your house near the original point, you should be able to just run back to it. Making a bed and sleeping in it will make the night go, but that is later in the game. For now, let's save you time and keep having fun building.

SD: How do I do that?

MC: We 'cheat' the natural day and night cycle. Because you left the 'cheats' on when you set up the world, the designers gave you a lot of control over the world. Some gamers want the game to be hard and the 'learning curve' is better when it's more challenging. So the monsters are your foil to building, hunting, farming, and generally doing what you want. But I find that most adults just don't get that this challenge (part of the fun for me) is exactly why it's fun to succeed. Without challenge, your victories are minimal.

SD: I think for an adult the challenge is just getting around and figuring out the buttons.

MC: Well, the next first person game you play, you'll see the buttons are all the same. These are pretty common conventions for gamers. So for kids, it's the monsters that frustrate and validate achievements.

SD: That makes sense and makes it easier for me to want to 'cheat' for now. How do I make it morning.

MC: The designers give you all the tools, so it's 'gamer-cheating'. Press [T], for [T]alk, on your keyboard. This brings up a bar you can type in at the bottom left of the screen. Type, [/time set 0]. That makes it dawn and you have a full day ahead of you again.

SD: Nice, forever morning!

10) Monsters

SD: So what if I wanted to leave the monsters on?

MC: I was hoping you'd ask. If you leave monsters on (ESC>Options...>Difficulty), you'll need to defend yourself or hide. Just run from the green 'Creepers', they explode and aren't worth doodling with at this point in the game. If you get up close, you'll hear a "SSSST" sound that sets the explosion. They stop moving when this starts, so you can run away in time.

To defend yourself use that crafting table to make a sword and keep it handy on your toolbar. You can make one out of wood pretty easily.

MC: Use two sticks for a handle and you can start making all sorts of tools like a Shovel (for digging), a Pick Axe (for mining), a hoe (for farming), and an axe (for speeding up how long it takes you to harvest wood. Play around with this and make a few tools. Using stone instead of wood will upgrade the tools to make them faster and last longer. You'll need a pick axe to harvest stone. To find it, just dig a few layers of dirt and you'll find it - or explore for a hillside with exposed rock.



Image 8 & 9: (L) Making a Stick, (R) Making a Sword

SD: Can I use tools to fight monsters.

MC: Sure, but the sword hits harder. You have other options besides fighting too.

SD: Like?

MC: That house you built is your first and finest defence, to play survival MC, just hide out and play with your craft table a bit during the evenings. You can also build more elaborate defences to ward them off - moats, walls, traps.

Light also repels them from 'spawning' (automatic monster generation) nearby too. You'll want to learn how to make a torch and place them all around your house.

SD: How do I make a torch?

MC: A stick and coal - or charcoal. But I think this is the point to show you a resource that nearly all MC players find out about...

11) Building Everything

SD: What's that?

MC: Here is the link: http://minecraft.gamepedia.com/Crafting#Complete_recipe_list

Anything in the game can be searched and they show you a neat little picture of how to arrange materials in your crafting table. Torches are in there.

Early on, you'll want to make a Chest, Furnace, better tools (with stone and iron), and eventually learn to make food. To eat food you put it on your toolbar and hold down the mouse button. You'll see your hand come up and 'munch' the food until it's gone. That's later though. You have all you need at this point to keep going and learn as you need using Minecraft wiki's like the one above.

SD: Thanks Mike, you are amazing! So what do I do now? What's the point of the game?

MC: [laughs] The point is to play. Use your imagination, explore, build, adventure, dig, or anything. You can do anything. It's like legos. If you have to ask what to do, you've forgotten what being a kid is all about. You've also forgotten how to invent your own purpose, and maybe it's high time you start working on that.

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