

Tips for Troubleshooting Common Computer Problems

Ok, here it is! I got this one from one of the books we've used in our A+ Computer Tech class .

I hope this will help solve your common computer problems.

Monitors

I can't see anything on my computer screen

Is the computer turned on? There is a light on the CPU. If the computer is on, it will be lit.

Is the computer plugged in? Check to see if ALL plugs are secure.

- Power cord from the computer to the power strip.
- Power strip to the wall socket.

Is the Power Strip turned on? There is a light on the strip. If the strip is on, the indicator light will be on.

Is the Monitor on? There is a light on the monitor. If the monitor is on, it will be lit. If it is turned on, check the contrast and brightness buttons to see if they have been tampered with.

Is the computer in Power Save or Sleep mode? Move the mouse or press any key on the keyboard to see if the computer will "wake-up."

Are all peripherals plugged in? Verify that all cables and cords leading in to and out of your computer to insure they are all in tight and not disconnected.

Secure the following to the computer:

- Monitor
- Mouse
- Keyboard
- Printer
- Network cable to computer and wall (Blue)

Is the printer turned on? There is a light on the printer. If the printer is on, the indicator light will be on.

Is the printer plugged in?

Here are some basic trouble shooting tips for new monitors:

1. **The picture does not appear**
 - Check to make sure the signal cable is firmly connected in the socket.
 - Check to see if the computer system's power is ON.

- Check that the Brightness Control is at the appropriate position, not at the minimum.
- 2. **The Screen is not synchronized**
 - Check to make sure the signal cable is firmly connected in the socket.
 - Check that the output level matches the input level of your computer.
 - Make sure the signal timing of the computer system is within the specification of the monitor.
- 3. **The position of the screen is not in the center**
 - Adjust the H-Size, H-Phase or V-Size, V-Center controls.
 - Check if the signal timing of the computer system is within the specification of the monitor.
- 4. **The screen is too bright or too dark**
 - Check if the Brightness or contrast control is at the appropriate position, not at the maximum or minimum.
 - Check if the specified voltage is applied
 - Check if the signal timing of the computer system is within the specification of the monitor.
 - Especially, check the horizontal frequency.
- 5. **The screen is shaking**
 - Move all objects that emit a magnetic field, such as a motor or transformer, away from the monitor.
 - Check if the specified voltage is applied.
 - Check if the signal timing of the computer system is within the specification of the monitor.

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Hard Drive

My computer is on, but it is frozen. My cursor is stuck on the hourglass and won't let me do anything.

Here are some things you can do that may fix the problem you are having with your computer.

Open Task Manager

1. Simultaneously press [Ctrl] [Alt] [Delete]. You will see a list of all tasks (programs) currently running. You may notice one program has "Not Responding" instead of "Running" listed next to it. Select this task and click the End Task button.
2. Another dialog box will open stating that the program is not responding. Choose End Now to close the program.

Reboot your computer (Warm Boot).

Resetting a computer that is already turned on

1. Press [Ctrl] [Alt] [Delete] once to open the Task Manager.
2. Press [Ctrl] [Alt] [Delete] again to restart the computer.

Shut down your computer (Cold Boot). Start-up of a computer from a powered-down state.

If you restart your computer and the problem isn't resolved, make an attempt to completely shut down the computer by pressing the power button. Let it set for 15-30 seconds then restart the computer.

You have run out of disk space on your computer. Music files, movies, digital pictures, and other big data files can fill up your hard drive. To check for disk space:

1. Open My Computer. Right click on the C: drive and select Properties from the shortcut menu. A pie chart will appear telling you the used and free space.
2. Try running the Disk Cleanup Wizard. This utility can tell you whether you are running out of room and help you clear away some space. Click the Start button and choose Programs | Accessories | System Tools | Disk Cleanup. Choose the disk to clean up (C :) and let the wizard do the work.

Empty the Recycle Bin

Right click on the recycle bin on your Center to and select "Empty Recycle Bin".

Delete all files with .tmp extension

These files are temporary files that are not needed. You may do a search for all .tmp files and delete them all.

The temporary Internet files folder stores the link to the images and the pages you have seen (unlike Netscape that saves the image itself to it's cache folder). The folder is located in c:\windows\temporaryinternetfiles.

Clean Temp Directory

1. Right click START button on start bar. Slide up and click EXPLORE once.
2. In Explore scroll down and highlight the TEMP folder.
3. Click EDIT at top once; get a drop down menu.
4. Slide down to SELECT ALL; click once.
5. Click FILE at top and get drop down menu.
6. Slide down to DELETE and click once.
7. SAY YES and/or YES TO ALL. DELETE ALL FILES IN TEMP FOLDER

Delete old .zip files

If you have received zip files and unzipped them, the original .zip file may be deleted.

When did your computer last work properly? If your computer was working satisfactory yesterday or the last time you were logged on but are now having trouble, try to identify everything that has changed recently.

Did the trouble begin shortly after you installed a:

New program?

New piece of hardware or updated a device driver?

Do you receive a consistent error message? If so, write down the precise error message that has appeared on your screen, either write it down verbatim or leave the message when you call the Help Desk. If you know the precise working, it makes finding the trouble much easier for the Technical Support Specialist.

Can you reproduce the trouble with specific steps? If you can identify a specific set of actions that consistently cause the trouble to occur, the Technical Support Specialist and outline your steps to determine the problem. Write down the precise sequence of actions.

Does the problem only occur after you have been using your computer for a while? If your computer runs fine first thing in the morning but crashes after several hours it could be heat related problems.

Computer Won't Start. Check the following:

- Check All Connections!
- Is the computer plugged in?
- Is there a Surge Protector switch to turn on?
- Is there a Master Wall Switch that controls the outlet?

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Keyboard

Keyboard doesn't respond

If your machine, when booting, gives off a constant beeping noise, it is telling you that your keyboard is not connected or not working.

Check the plug to make sure it's connected securely. Try unplugging it and re-plugging it again.

If there is no response, check the indicator light on the keyboard. Is it on? Do the lights respond when you press the caps lock or the num lock key? If not, maybe your keyboard is broken.

Is there a key stuck? Gently pry off the cover and clean it with alcohol. Make sure it is not connected to your machine when you are cleaning it. The space bar frequently comes off track. Gently pry it off, noting which way the bar lies in your particular keyboard so you can replace it properly.

Mouse

- If your mouse starts acting erratic, it could be an insufficient memory problem. Reboot and see if that corrects the problem.
- If your mouse will only move one way, either vertically or horizontally, your mouse may need cleaning.

Shut down your machine and unplug your mouse from the computer. Open the underside of the mouse and remove the ball. If the ball is a rubber ball, do not clean it with alcohol. Clean it with a soft cloth. There should be no lubricant placed on a mouse ball. Clean the roller in the body of the mouse with a cotton swab that is slightly damp with alcohol. Replace the ball when the rollers are dry and replace the bottom portion.

An Unresponsive PC

- First check the cable. Unplug it from the computer and the outlet. Replug in both sides and try booting it again.
- Check the wall outlet. Plug something else into the outlet and see if it works.
- Turn the system off and wait 30 seconds and then try again.
- Reach behind the machine and see if you feel air blowing out of the power supply. If you do, then you know the machine is getting some power.
- Look at the keyboard for the indicator lights being lit up as the machine boots.
- Sometimes the monitor has something to do with the system acting up. Unplug the power cord from the monitor and the wall and replug it. Unplug the cable from the computer to the monitor and replug it into the monitor. Try rebooting.
- Listen to identify a beeping series if there is one to report it to the technical help.
- Turn in all comments to the Help Desk.

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Networking

Computer will not connect to the Internet

- First check to see if the cable connecting the network card into the network drop is connected to the drop and to the computer.
- Check the back of the computer to see if the network card light is on.
- Check to see if the site you are trying to pull up is at fault by typing in a common URL to see if it will make it out to that site.
- Check to see if anyone else's machine is having problems. If everyone is, then it could be the network is having difficulties.
- If the Internet connection is off on a particular hallway only, a hub connection could be down or bad.
- If there is only one machine having problems and the light on the network card is not on, try plugging another machine that works into that drop. It could be that particular drop is bad, or plug the machine that doesn't seem to work into a different drop to see if it would work there.
- Record all the data and call the Help Desk.
- Only send a call in one way either by email, in person or by Phone. Sending it in more than one way can cause multiple trouble tickets and will slow down the time it takes to get the machine repaired.

Find out if anyone near you has the same problem. If there is a problem with one of our main services, then others will be having the same problem. If other people near you can do whatever it is and only you can't, that helps us narrow down the source of the problem.

Restart your computer. Often problems can fix themselves if you close down the program you are having the problems with and then open it again – save your work first! More extreme problems can often sort themselves out if you close all your programs (save your work!) then close down your machine completely, then start it up again. If you are having problems with a program freezing, try pressing Ctrl-Alt-Delete simultaneously and ending task on any programs that are freezing or have a (not responding) message after them. ****Note** you should not end task on Explorer, as this is the only program that is necessary for your computer to continue running.

Is the computer plugged in? This sounds simple enough, but you'd be amazed how often a power cord is the source of the trouble. Also check the power strip or surge protector to see if it somehow has been switched off.

Are you looking at the right cord? If the computer starts but the monitor doesn't, guess which power cord it is? That, or it's the monitor cable if the monitor turns on but there is no picture.

Plug and replug. And if the network, modem, keyboard, or mouse is on the fritz until proven otherwise, it is always a cable problem. Turn everything off and unplug and replug all the cords and cables, and many problems will amazingly work themselves out.

Have you checked your PC cards? Check to see if a cable has somehow wiggled one of the add-on cards out of its socket. If any of the cables attached to your PC want to wiggle around despite being firmly screwed in, this is likely your problem. You'll have to open the computer to fix this one.

Is there ink/toner in the printer? It's remarkable how a lack thereof can hold back your printing efforts.

Are you sure the phone jack works? When you plug a regular phone into your modem line, do you get dial tone?

What have you changed recently? Most problems have something to do with new hardware or software and occur shortly after installation. Does uninstalling, then reinstalling problem software fix things?

Does removing the hardware clear up the trouble? USB devices are a problem in this regard as the computer may not be able to provide enough power to the device. Trying uninstalling as many USB devices as you can and see if the problem goes away--some devices, for example, don't get enough power from a hub but work fine when connected directly to the computer.

Where are you booting from? If there is a diskette in the drive or a CD is trying to boot your computer, you can get really odd errors--so make sure all the drives are empty.

When in doubt, reboot. Finally, of course you've already rebooted the computer (more than once, if necessary) to see if it solves the problem. You have, haven't you? You'd be amazed how many people stare at a frozen computer waiting for it to come back to life. This sometimes does happen, but after about 10 minutes of waiting, consider a power-down reboot. Likewise, sometimes it takes multiple reboots to make a problem go away.

Write down any error messages.

If you can tell us the wording of any error messages you are getting, it makes it a lot easier for us to identify your exact problem and help you fix it.

Remember what you were doing when it happened.

What software package were you using at the time? Word? Excel? Netscape? Student Records?

What were you trying to do? Print? Save? Access something you haven't accessed before?

When was the last time you did this successfully? Or is this the first time you've tried it?

PLEASE provide all the information. We have heard nearly all the stories in the book and we understand that sometimes people make mistakes. If you accidentally deleted some files please do not feel frightened to tell us everything. We cannot accurately diagnose a fault unless we know EVERYTHING that has happened to your computer.

Find out if anyone near you has the same problem.

If there is a problem with one of our main services, such as the print server or Student Records, then other people will be having the same problem.

If other people near you can do whatever it is & only you can't, that helps us narrow down the source of the problem. It also means that we will get fewer calls reporting the same problem, giving us more time to fix the problem.

Restart.

Often problems can fix themselves if you close down the program you are having the problems with and then open it again – save your work first!

More extreme problems can often sort themselves out if you close all your programs (save your work!) then close down your machine completely, then start it up again.

Cleaning Out Your Hard Drive.

Before you run ScanDisk and Defrag, you need to clean out the old files that you no longer use. These old files take up space on your hard drive and slow down your computer. Remember the rule of thumb should be that if you are unsure about a file, leave it alone.

Deleting Unnecessary Files.

Files you do not need include: .tmp files, cookies, cache files, file000.chk files, and Temporary Internet files. These files can be eliminated easily and should be cleaned out at least once a month.

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Printer Problems

- Check the cables first. Unplug and replug the printer into the computer. Be sure the power cable is plugged in and the outlet works.
- Check to make sure the correct printer is selected in the Print Dialog box. If you are on a network, you could be sending the output to a printer in someone else's room.
- Can you print from a different application? Does it only occur with a certain application or is it not working with anything?
- Can you print a test page directly from the printer with it unconnected to the computer? Each manufacturer has their own special series of buttons to hold down for this self-test. Most of the time it will be in the user's manual.

Reinstall the software. Delete the old drivers first. Did that fix the problem?

Printer machine won't turn on.

- Check to see if the power is on.

- Check to see if the printer cable plugged into the back of the printer and the wall.

Error lights are flashing.

Check the error display on the fax for jams, paper, toner, etc.

Can connect to the network.

Open the Network Neighborhood icon on your desktop. You should see a long list of servers. If not, reboot.

My printers are gone.

Open your Start Menu; go up to settings, then over to printers. You should see a list of your printers that you use there. If not, reboot.

My printer is set to work offline.

Open your Start Menu; go up to settings, then over to printers. Click once on your printer, select "File" in the top left corner and verify that "work offline" does NOT have a check mark next to it.

The printer is paused.

Open your Start Menu; go up to settings, then over to printers. Double click on your printer, select "File" in the top left corner and verify that "pause printing" does NOT have a check mark next to it.

Printer Does Not Respond.

First, make sure that the printer is online and has paper in the tray. Check to see if the printer will work with another program. If so, Clear the unit's memory by turning it off, waiting a few seconds, and turning it back on. (Check the printer cable to make sure it is firmly connected to the printer and the computer. Reinstall the printer, select Start-> Settings-> Printers to open the Printers folder. Right click the icon for the printer and select Delete. Then reinstall it by clicking the Add Printer icon.

Laser Printer

1. Laser printer problems usually are caused by a paper jam, lack of preventative maintenance or improper operation.
2. Should be inspected at least once each week. Check for obstructions in the paper feed path, clean up loose toner and check the condition of the corona wire.
3. Preventative maintenance should be done at least once each month.
4. When the toner cartridge indicator shows orange, cartridge life usually can be extended by shaking the cartridge.
5. Don't move a laser printer with the toner cartridge inside. The toner tends to spill and is conductive. If it spills, the toner must be cleaned up before the printer can be used.
6. It is not recommend to use refilled toner cartridges. Many have had problems with the print quality and longevity of these products.
7. Shelf life for toner cartridges is approximately 2 years. Store at room temperature in its original packaging, which will seal it from humidity, light, and dust.
8. Do not use paper that did go through the laser printer already. Used paper introduces more dust and dirt into your printer.

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Fax Machine

Fax machine no working.

- Check to see if the fax machine is turned on
- Check to see if the power cable plugged into the back of the fax and the wall

No dial tone.

Be sure that the phone jack that the fax is plugged into has a dial tone. Turn up the volume on the fax when dialing to hear the dial tone, actual phone number dialing and any busy signals or operator messages.

Error lights flashing.

Check the error display on the fax for jams, paper, ink, etc.

Dialing for accuracy.

Fax machine dialing is very similar to the phone. You must first dial a "9" for an outside line, then "1" and the area code (if needed) and then the number. If you are dialing a long distance number, you will need a long distance code. When sending a fax long distance, you will need to enter the phone number, as specified above, then insert a pause or break, and then enter the long distance code.

The fax still isn't working. Is it really a fax number?

To verify that a fax number is really connecting to a fax or that there is no interruption in the line, try dialing the fax number from your phone. You should hear a "screeching" and "beeping" noise on the line, indicating a connection to a fax machine. Then try your fax again.

Having trouble sending or receiving faxes.

If you feel you are having trouble receiving faxes, the Help Desk would be more than happy to send you a test fax for verification. You may also test your fax by sending a test message to the Computer Resource fax machine.

Palm Pilot

What can I do when my Palm Pilot will not synchronize?

- If you have an error message on the screen, please write it down so that you have it available.
- Click on the HotSync icon on the right side of the Windows Taskbar at the bottom of your screen (near the clock). Check the resulting menu to verify that Local has a checkmark next to it.
- From the same HotSync menu, click View Log, and read the log displayed on the screen to see if any error messages were recorded for the date and time you tried to synchronize. Make note of any errors in the log.

Why do I get an error message that my Palm Pilot's memory is full when I try to synchronize? Usually this error occurs when you select to synchronize Notes Mail, and there are too many messages in your Inbox in Lotus Notes to fit within the memory limitations of the Palm Pilot. You can try to delete or move some of your mail messages to folders before attempting to synchronize again. If it continues to be a problem, you may need to disable the Notes Mail synchronization.

Error Messages

Non-system disk or disk error. You may have left a disk in the A drive. Remove it and press any key on the keyboard to reboot the computer. If you don't have a disk in the A drive, and the message is accompanied by a "clunking" sound, turn the computer off and run for help (or cover)!

Windows was not properly shut down. Press any key to run Scandisk on these drives. The machine did not use the shut down sequence programmed into it through Windows. Press the enter key and allow the machine to do a scan. If it finds the lost clusters to repair, click on the OK to let it do self-repairing. You do not need to save these so select DELETE or DON'T SAVE when asked to make a choice.

Out of memory. There are too many programs open at one time or you could have too many documents with lots of graphics open close some and try again. Acknowledge the error message; then check the taskbar to see what applications are running. Close the applications that you aren't using. If you still get the message, exit everything and reboot the machine.

This program has performed an illegal operation and will be shut down. The program listed in the upper-left corner of the error message window is crashing because it experienced some sort of destabilizing error. The best thing to do is save all your open files in applications that are running, and then close all those applications. Reboot the system by clicking Start-> Shut Down, and choosing Shut Down from the menu. Then wait 10 seconds before turning the PC back on.

A file being copied is older than the file currently on your computer. The application or hardware device driver software is attempting to overwrite a file already installed on your hard drive with an older version of that file. Always click YES to skip copying the file and keep the newer version. If the product you are installing doesn't work, make a backup copy of the newer version of the file, then try uninstalling and reinstalling the program, this time letting the older file overwrite the newer version. Usually programs run better when you leave the newer version alone.

Boot disk failure or Operating system not found. If you get one of these messages instead of a "Starting Windows" message, your PC can't load Windows from the hard disk. This may indicate a badly damaged drive.

Can't find boot record. This error can be a symptom of a virus or indicates a problem with the hard drive. Try rebooting your computer. If the error returns, contact your technician.

Missing shortcut: Windows is searching for XX. To locate the file yourself, click Browse. XX is the name of the file you were trying to access via a shortcut, but this error message is telling you that the program the shortcut is associated with is no longer there. If you are using a networked computer, this may mean that you have not logged into the network or have been disconnected from the network. If you restart the computer and login, the shortcut should work. If not, the file that the shortcut points to has been deleted from your system or moved to another location, so you just need to find it if it is still installed on your computer. Right click the shortcut icon and click PROPERTIES, making sure the shortcut tab is selected with the properties box appears. The Target line shows the name of the file associated with the shortcut; it appears after the final slash. Click Start->Find->Files or Folders. Enter the name of the target file in the Named box and search all your drives for the file. If the file shows up, delete the old shortcut, then hold the right mouse button down as you drag the file's icon to

the desktop. Release the mouse button and select Create Shortcut Here to make a fresh shortcut that points in the right direction. If the file does not show up, you have to reinstall the application associated with the broken shortcut.

Rename: A filename cannot contain any of the following characters: \/:*?"<>| or Rename: If you change a filename extension, the file may become unstable. Are you sure you want to change it? These messages appear when you have just typed a new name for a file and either pressed ENTER or clicked outside the file icon. The first message is telling you that you tried to use characters that have special meaning to Windows and therefore cannot be used in file names (this occurs frequently when people try to use a slash or a colon) Remove these characters from the file name and click OK (Note file names cannot exceed 230 characters in length) The second message is warning you that the three-letter extensions (such as >EXE, .DOC, or .TXT) was modified when you typed the new name. This is a no-no, because file extensions tell Windows what program to use to open the file and let the programs know how to handle the file.

Error Reading CD-ROM in Drive X: Please insert CD-ROM XX with Serial You have attempted to eject a CD-ROM from the CD-ROM drive while a program was accessing it. Sometimes the error appears when the drive can't read a dirty, scratched, or damaged CD-ROM. Either press the ESC key to close the error message or reinsert the CD-ROM and press ENTER to attempt to let the program pick up where it left off.

DLL is Invalid or Corrupt. Since the last time you ran this program, you probably installed a new application that uses a DLL file the same name as one used by this program. The two DLLs are incompatible, and that makes the older program crash. One solution is to reinstall the older program.

Error Copying File....Cannot copy XX: The disk is write-protected. Remove the write protection or use another disk. The diskette is configured so information can be read from it, but not added to it. Remove the diskette from the drive and look for a little sliding plastic tab on the back. If you see an open hole through the diskette, the disk is write-protected, and you need to slide the tab downward.

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Audio

No sound is heard from audio (music) CDs. Check the following:

- Volume Control or your mixer program mute options and volume sliders are turned up.
- Headphones are connected to the stereo phone jack on your CD-ROM drive's front panel; the volume control settings on the drive are adjusted. If there is sound from your headphones, check the CD audio cable connection from the CD-ROM drive to the audio card.
- Ensure the speakers are properly connected to the audio card's output connector.

Missing/Lost Documents

How do I locate a lost document?

- Select Find from the Start menu.

- Type in the name of the document.
- Select the drive you want to search (C to search the hard drive; A to search your disk).