

Tips for a Healthy Computer *by Vanessa Kier*

As with so many relationships, at some point the business partnership between a writer and her computer might start to degrade. Maybe the computer boots up slower than usual. Maybe it keeps stalling. Maybe the laptop battery life is shorter than the time required to read this article.

No writer wants to spend her precious time troubleshooting computer issues. Here are some ways to keep your computer healthy.

Keep your software and the drivers for your hardware updated. Software and driver updates can eliminate programming or security issues that may cause instability in your computer.

Turn it off. Humans need sleep to recharge our bodies and let our brains refresh. So does your computer. Computers left on for days at a time are more prone to stall as the computer tries to perform tasks with an already full memory. Turning off the computer periodically and letting it stay off for at least a couple of minutes clears the memory and closes all programs and processes, so any commands that may have been lost or mixed up get reset.

Unplug that laptop. The batteries in laptops are meant to discharge their energy. Leaving them plugged in all the time quickly degrades their battery life.

Clean up and optimize your hard drive. Microsoft recommends the following additional maintenance for Windows computers: defragment the hard drive to organize fragmented data so the hard drive can find the data quicker (System Tools/Disk Defragmenter) and run Disk Cleanup to get rid of unwanted files (System Tools/Disk Cleanup). For computers running OS X you can run Disk Utility to verify and repair the disk and file permissions (Applications/Utilities/Disk Utility).

Eliminate unnecessary start-up programs. The more programs loading, the slower the start up will be. Check the help section for your operating system to find instructions on how to discover what programs are loading when the computer starts up. This might take several steps. For Windows Vista/7 start by running Windows Defender. For OS X look for the Startup Items folder. Note: If you have your anti-virus program set to scan all files upon startup this can delay the startup process.

Run anti-malware, anti-spyware, and anti-adware programs. Unwanted software can slow down your computer or otherwise interfere with your computer's performance.

Clear your temporary internet files/empty cache. These include copies of pages you've visited on the internet stored on your computer to allow for faster loading of the page the next time you visit. Convenient, but they take up room. Clearing these files is done from inside your internet browser.

Empty your recycle bin/trash. Files you delete aren't really gone from your computer until the recycle bin/trash is emptied. Free up space by emptying this on a regular basis. Note: Depending on how long ago the files were deleted, even emptying the recycle bin leaves traces behind that can be recovered. If you have deleted very sensitive files, check your operating system to see if there's a way to securely empty the recycle bin/trash so that recovering the deleted files will be much harder.

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Check compatibility with your current operating system before you install any program or hardware. Incompatible programs can slow down your machine or cause it to behave erratically.

Close programs you're not actively using. Every program takes up resources. No matter how well your operating system handles multi-tasking, eventually too many open programs will slow the system down. This is particularly true if you're using memory intensive database or graphics programs.

A little preventive maintenance will keep your computer happily humming along and leave you with more time to do what's really important—write!

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