

With computers, as in life, many problems can be avoided with proper maintenance and preventative measures. Always treat your PC with respect. Keep it clean and free from dust, food and drink and always shut it down properly. Remember to keep your applications up to date by downloading the latest versions available where "bugs" may have been fixed. Invest in virus software as well, and update your system with the latest virus definitions.

Windows Update

Windows Update is the online extension of Windows that helps you to keep your computer up-to-date. Use Windows Update to choose updates for your computer's operating system, software, and hardware. It is imperative that you check the Windows Update site at least once a week in order to protect your computer from anyone hoping to exploit a flaw in the Windows OS.

Virus Scan

Virtually every problem that you can/will encounter while using a computer can be caused by a virus. In order to reduce your chances of being infected by one of these viruses you should always install software that scans your computer. There are a variety of companies from which you can buy one, but the main two manufacturers are McAfee, and Norton; both programs have similar features. AVG is also a free download from www.grisoft.com

ScanDisk

ScanDisk is a Windows utility used to check your hard disk for errors and to correct problems that are found. These errors often occur when Windows locks up and must be restarted.

In order to invoke ScanDisk you must:

1. Open *My Computer*
2. Right-click on the drive you wish to run ScanDisk on, and then select Properties from the context menu that appears.
3. Click on the Tools tab in the menu.
4. Click on the "Check Now" button under "Error-Checking".
5. For a simple scan, which will detect most errors, just click start on the dialog box that appears.

When running ScanDisk, you will want to close all open programs to prevent them from accessing the file system. It is recommended that you run ScanDisk at least once a month.

Disk Defragmenter

Defragmentation is the process of locating the noncontiguous fragments of data into which a computer file may be divided as it is stored on a hard disk, and rearranging the fragments and restoring them into fewer fragments or into the whole file. Defragmentation reduces data access time and allows storage to be used more efficiently.

In order to invoke Disk Defragmenter you must:

1. Open *My Computer*
2. Right-click on the drive you wish to run Disk Defragmenter on, and then select Properties from the context menu that appears.
3. Click on the Tools tab in the menu.
4. Click on the "Defragment Now" button under "Defragmentation".
5. When Disk Defragmenter opens, first click on the "Analyze" button. Windows will examine the disk to determine whether or not it needs to be Defragmented; defragmenting the drive regardless of Windows suggestion will not harm anything.

Remove Obsolete/Unnecessary Programs

Not only will your computer run more slowly, but some programs may actually conflict with other programs down the road. Uninstalling programs that you will not be using for a very long time will improve your computers performance. Use the Control Panel to correctly uninstall a program.