

# Computer Troubleshooting:

## top ten steps



Your computer is never going to crash at 4:29 p.m. on a Friday before a long weekend when you couldn't care less if it stopped working. It will crash 20 minutes before a critical deadline when you are trying to get something done.

While solving computer problems can be complex, more often than not some basic troubleshooting will help you quickly fix the more common problems, which are often simple ones. Here are ten steps you should go through to systematically troubleshoot basic computer problems.

**#1 Take a deep breath and don't panic.** Stand up and step back from your computer. You want to approach things in a systematic and controlled manner. Panicking won't help solve your problem, and it could cause you to lose valuable data.

**#2 Save your current work.** Before doing anything, make sure you save your current work so that you don't lose it.

**#3 Back up your critical data.** If it looks like your hard drive may crash or the computer may not start up again, take steps to back up your critical data while it is still working and before you turn it off. Hopefully you have a recent full backup and will only have to back up your most recent documents. Consider copying the data to a network drive or burning it onto a CD-ROM.

**#4 Reboot your computer.** Turn your computer off, let it sit for two minutes, and reboot it. Sometimes one command of the hundreds a computer executes every second can cause temporary, unexplainable problems. Rebooting gives everything as fresh-start.

### #5 Is everything plugged in properly?

Asking this question can seem very basic, but it can often be the fix you are a looking for. Cables get bumped or work themselves loose over time. Make sure they are all snug and tight. Ideally you should check the cables within your computer case as well, and make sure all cards and memory are firmly seated by gently but firmly pushing them into their respective slots.

**#6 Ask yourself what you did last.** Did your problems start just after you installed new software programs or updated hardware drivers? This can be a clue as to the source of a problem.

**#7 Is your hardware happy?** Unhappy hardware is often the source of problems. To check your hardware, right-click on My Computer, select Properties, click on the Hardware tab, and then the Device Manager button. This will open the Device Manager. It lists all the hardware devices on your computer. Devices that aren't working properly will have a yellow exclamation mark next to them. Double-click on them for details on the problem, and a listing of suggestions on how to fix it.

**#8 Check your computer for nasties.** Run a complete system scan with your anti-virus software (make sure you update your virus definitions). You can do a free online scan at TrendMicro's site ([www.trendmicro.com/](http://www.trendmicro.com/)).

Running anti-virus software is just the first step. You should also scan your computer for adware and spyware with products such as Ad-aware ([www.lavasoftusa.com/](http://www.lavasoftusa.com/)), and SpyBot ([www.safer-networking.org/](http://www.safer-networking.org/)).

**#9 Install software or driver updates.** If it seems one program or device is acting up, check the manufacturer's Web site for updates. As people discover problems, software and hardware manufacturers often release revised software or updated drivers that include new code to address newly discovered problems.

**#10 Check online support.** If you get as far as this step, your problem is probably more complex. Most hardware and software manufacturers now offer extensive support information online in searchable databases. Microsoft's support page is at <http://support.microsoft.com/>. Odds are someone else has experienced the same problem, and you can find a solution online.

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