

Some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) 1/8/2018

Can you give me some basic definitions I should know to make computer discussions more understandable?

This is such a broad questions that it is difficult to answer quickly. Even someone new to computers has likely heard a lot of these terms that they sort of understand. I think they are still worth a brief explanation. Below are listed a few with a quick definition that will be expanded upon in upcoming Computer Club Meetings. There are obviously many in addition to this list.

- Hardware - The physical stuff, including desktop tower, monitor, keyboard, mouse, speakers & a laptop
- Software - The programs that a computer uses that make things work. This would include the Operating System (e.g. Windows). Windows would be an example of System Software, while Microsoft Word or Quicken would be examples of application software.
- Driver - A software program that makes a peripheral (or internal) device function such as a printer or keyboard.
- Hard Drive - The main storage device in a machine. Size usually measured in GigaBytes - GB. Most of the time this is a spinning, sealed disk. It can, however, be a solid-state device - SSD, which is smaller but faster than an actual disk.
- RAM - Random Access Memory. Temporary storage that is the "buffer" between the hard drive and the processor. New machines would have somewhere between 4 and 16 GigaBytes - GB. More is better.
- Processor (Chip) - The small integrated circuit that actually performs calculations. Often made by Intel or AMD (American Microchip Devices). Clock speed, stated in GHz, is one measure of chip's speed. Intel currently makes i3, i5 and i7 processors where higher is better. Clock speeds should only be compared across similar products. When looking at a new machines be aware of a lot of buzz words here.
- Boot - The process of powering up a computer. Sometime called a cold start.
- Task Bar - The area across the edge of the screen (usually the bottom) that shows the start button, the pinned program shortcuts, the open programs, the System Tray or notification area and the Time and Date.
- USB Port - The most common female jack found in a machine (Universal Serial Bus). Can be used to connect a printer, keyboard, mouse, flash drive or backup drive. Most laptops have two or three. Desktops can have four or five.
- CD/DVD drawer - A place to read Compact Disks (often audio or program software disks) or Digital Video Disks, such as movies. Thin, light-weight laptops may have no drawer.
- Browser - a program such as Edge, Internet Explorer, Chrome or FireFox that "gets you around" the Internet
- ISP - Internet Service Provider. The company you pay to get your Internet such as Cox.
- TLA - Stands for Three Letter Abbreviations. There are far too many of these in the computer world. BTW (By the Way) this is a joke. The point is, so many abbreviations are commonly used, you should try to ask what they mean as soon as you hear them.

When buying a new machine a few of the above items should be considered. Especially important are amount of RAM, the type of Processor and Hard Drive Size. Today you would be buying a machine with Windows 10 preinstalled.

How can I find out basic information about my computer?

It is often good to know exactly what version of an operation system you are running, how much RAM you truly have and what processor your machine contains. The fraction occupied of your hard drive is also good to know. Getting this information differs slightly in each version of Windows. All versions still contain the Control Panel. The System Icon in the Control Panel, when displayed in icon view, tells you most of what you want to know. Below are Window's-specific instructions.

- Windows 10 - left click the start window icon, find the little gear icon and left click it. Then find the System Icon and left click it. Now in the left column click on the word "about" and it will reveal the information you are seeking.

- Windows 8/8.1 - Reveal the Control Panel under the settings charm, display Control Panel in icon view and left click on System to reveal the info.
- Windows 7 - Left click the start button (circle with Windows Logo in it), find the words Control Panel in the right column of the menu and click on it. Display in icon view. Left click on System.

You can also easily generate a pie graph that shows your hard drive occupancy (This became a donut graph in Windows 10 - go figure). Right click the start button, left click on Windows Explorer or File Explorer (these are the same thing, just called by different names in different versions of Windows) then right click on the C: drive and left click on the properties entry of that menu. This will produce the desired graph.

Another method in all versions is to hold down the Windows Key and hitting the 'E'. Also, there is an icon in the Task Bar that looks like a manila folder and a bookend. Left click this and it reveals File Explorer.

What is the difference between a right and left mouse click and a double click?

This may sound awfully basic, but there does exist some confusion about the fundamental mouse functions. Moving the mouse causes the pointer to move around the screen. Pointer can take the form of an arrow, a hand with a pointing finger, an "I-beam" or some other symbol depending on the application you are in. Clicking the left button chooses things - i.e. if your pointer is an arrow it can choose the item that is being pointed to. If your pointer shows in the form of a hand (with pointing finger extended), left clicking can choose to send you to the website in reference. Double clicking the left button usually activates things. (When you hear "double click", it ALWAYS means the left button.) The right button usually brings a Menu into view. The menu will be different, depending on where the pointer is located when you right click. The wheel between the buttons is used to scroll up and down. In most cases the wheel does the same thing as the scroll bar on the right of many screens. (In certain applications, however, the turning of the wheel can zoom and unzoom a picture.) Left handed people can reverse the mouse button functions in the Control Panel - which confuses the daylights out of right-handed people.

Windows 10 came out in late July of 2015. What happened to Windows 9?

There is no Windows 9. Microsoft skipped number 9 as they went from 8.1 to version 10. In my opinion (IMO) since 8 and 8.1 were not well received, Microsoft decided that it would be best to distance themselves from 8 by going directly to 10. Another thought I have heard is that twenty years ago there were versions of Windows that had "9s" in their names - Windows 95 and Windows 98 (at that time named for the year they came out) - and Microsoft didn't want any confusion so they skipped 9. Personally, I'm not sure I believe that explanation.

Can I still upgrade a Windows 7 or Windows 8/8.1 machine to Windows 10 for no charge?

A qualified maybe (see second paragraph in this section). As stated above, Win 10 came out in July of 2015 and was offered as a free upgrade to Win 8.0/8.1 and Win 7 users for exactly one year. To be honest, Windows 10 was rather insidious about wanting to put itself on those machines. If you managed to avoid installing Windows 10 until after the one-year anniversary of its announcement has passed, it is supposedly no longer offered for free. If you are running 7, IMO you are just as well off by not putting it in. If you are still running Win 8, see next question.

Although the official offer of free Windows 10 has expired, you could still download and install it for no charge from this website <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/accessibility/windows10upgrade>. This is primarily for people who need the accessibility features of Windows 10, but it turns out to be a normal version and no check is done to see if you need accessibility options. Microsoft says this offer ended December 31, 2017 but I have not tried it. Other sources have told me that you can still try to do the normal Windows 10 upgrade (the one that supposedly ended in July of 2016) as it may still work. My thought is if you haven't upgraded to 10 by now, you probably don't want to.

I am totally dissatisfied with Win 8. Is there a way to make it look more like Win 7 without the hassle of upgrading to Windows 10.

Actually there is. One of the biggest complaints about Win 8 or 8.1 (any subsequent reference to Win 8, also includes 8.1) is the inconvenience of the missing "Start" button in the lower left corner. There are several third party providers that allow you to download and install this start button for little or no charge. One of the free ones is called "Classic Shell". (A shell is a user interface) Easiest way to do this is to go to the Google website and search for "start button for Win 8" and see what comes up. As with any free download, be careful that you don't accidentally install other unwanted programs that are piggy-backed on the

desired download. This website gives you a free version that works. <http://www.classicshell.net/>. I've had good success with that website.

Should I worry about Microsoft not supporting Windows 7?

Microsoft has stated that they will support Windows 7 (meaning they will issue updates and appropriate fixes) through the year 2020. It's my belief that the useful life of most computers these days is at least five years. This usually equates to two generations - where a generation is roughly defined by the version of Window being run. Since Win 7 computers were sold between 2009 and 2012, for the most part they will still be good until the NEXT version (#11?) is announced. Even then, it won't be the new version of Windows that makes it obsolete, but rather the fact that, over time, units "get tired" and have specs that fall behind current availability and therefore can't run the most current stuff.

Microsoft has stopped "supporting" Windows XP and Vista. Do I need to get rid of those machines?

No, but you might want to keep the number of the Smithsonian handy. When Microsoft quits supporting a Windows version, it just means there will be no more updates. If you have an XP machine (installed in computers sold between 2002 and 2007) or a Vista Unit (2007 to 2009) you can certainly keep using it as long as you can. Just realize that a machine this old does not have anywhere near the power of a new one. Being realistic, you should realize that a machine of this vintage is almost on borrowed time. Be sure your files, pictures, tax data and songs are *backed up*. If this machine dies you don't want to lose important information. A common complaint about computer performance these days is "slowness". Machines in the XP/Vista era have a physical limit of how fast they can be made to run. Also Win XP machines may not be able to support newer printers or some other peripherals. That's true to a lesser extent with Vista. Finally some software is not supported in these old machines. New ones are not that expensive. Don't hold on to these older machines too long.

I am in the market for a new computer, should I get a desktop or a laptop?

Either choice has its pros and cons. With a desktop you get the most power for your money. Since everything is separate - monitor, tower, speakers, camera, keyboard and mouse - it is easy to upgrade one component, such as a larger monitor or better speakers. The negative is there are a lot of wires and it tends to be stationary. With a laptop you have compact portability. Laptops have built-in wireless capability (most newer desktops have wireless capability too) and often a built-in camera. Laptops are a little more expensive. Also you can't get really big screens with a laptop (a 17" is the largest available). If you are only going to have one computer a laptop might be the better choice because of its flexibility.

A third option is the "all-in-one" desktop. This is a stationary screen that actually contains the processor. It is often a touch screen but usually has an external keyboard and mouse. These are good but usually on the expensive side. They still don't have the portability of a laptop.

Should I turn my computer off every night or leave it on?

I've often said, if you'd like to start an argument at a party, just present this question and then step back and watch the argument. Ask 100 people and the vote will likely be 51-49 and I'm not sure who'd win - and people will argue loudly. I, personally, leave my computers on. Here are the pros and cons. Leaving it on allows you to schedule time-consuming things such as scans, updates, disk defrags and backups at night. But leaving it on uses a small amount of power. Power usage can be minimized by turning monitor off or setting it to go to sleep. Also there is some benefit to the cleansing that takes place during a reboot. Leaving it on saves the two minutes of boot time the next day. In the end, make your own decision and it's probably best if you don't broadcast your choice. Certainly turn laptops off to pack or transport them and turn desktops off if you're going to be gone for a while.

How do I properly shut down my computer?

Proper shut down is done with the mouse and/or keyboard, not with the physical on/off button. To turn a computer off click on the Start Button (circle in lower left), find and point to the right-pointing arrowhead at the bottom right and a menu will appear with shut down options (Win 7). Point to the one you want and click on it. In Win 8 make the list of charms appear by pointing to the upper right corner of screen. Then choose setting and under Power you will find the shut down/restart option. With Win 10 the start button produces a Power entry (circle with vertical line at the top) that has the turn-off choices.

If your computer freezes up and does not respond to mouse movement, as a last resort you can use the power button. You may have to press it and **hold it in for five to seven seconds** before the machine will power down. The machine actually calls this an "improper" shutdown and will tell you so next time you boot.

My Computer's Fan Seems to Run Constantly. What should I do?

If you are aware of your computer's fan running excessively, it may be linked to a heat problem. If it's a laptop, I would put about a one-inch thick book under the back edge so the machine sits at an angle, thereby allowing air to flow underneath. If it's a desktop, you need to check out a couple of things. If it is in an enclosure like a desk cubby hole, make sure there is enough venting so heat doesn't build up. If it is in the open and the fan is still running check for an accumulation of dust on the fan vents - and vacuum them if necessary. Opening up a desktop tower and vacuuming is also desirable, but be very careful of the wires.

I'm confused between Windows 7 and Microsoft Office 2007. What's the difference?

First of all, the naming of these two, very different products, is unfortunate. Windows 7, named such because it is the seventh generation of the Windows Operating System, came out in Oct of 2009. Office 2007, whose core components are MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint actually did come out in 2007. They are not really related. Office 2007 can be loaded on a computer running XP or Vista. Office 2007 is actually the 12th generation of that office production suite. (There is a 2016 version of Office that is now the most current version). Office for Apple products may have different year designators.

Here are a couple of other things that add to the confusion. Until version 2007, every Word Document had a .doc extension. Excel had extension .xls. With the introduction of version 2007 the extension for Word Documents became .docx and for Excel became .xlsx. Regardless of what benefits Microsoft saw in this change, it generated a great deal of grief - because documents created in version 2007 (with the docx extension) cannot be opened in previous versions of Word (Office). There is an easy fix, but it is up to the person running 2007. When saving a document in 2007, the author can do a "save as" and choose to save it in the .doc format (Word 97-2003 Document).

Also Office 2007's appearance is quite a bit different from its predecessors. Instead of a menu across the top, it uses what are called ribbons. According to Microsoft, they did a lot of testing and this change, when mastered, leads to better productivity. However, if you have been a Word or Excel user for ten years and the format suddenly changes, you may be justifiably upset. If you transfer to the 2007 or 2010 or 2013 or 2016 version there is a significant learning curve that must be dealt with. The later versions fixed a few of the obvious shortcomings of version 2007 but it retains the same format. Many folks would still rather stick with 2003. There is a new way to buy Office called "365". It is inexpensive but only leases the product for a year.

How do I properly remove programs from my computer?

Often it is necessary to remove an unwanted program from your computer. New units often come with things installed that you don't want. These may be free trial versions of programs that will want payment in a month or so. To remove a program properly, click Start, Control Panel in Classic View (XP) or Icon view (Vista, 7, 8 or 10)), then double click Add/Remove Programs (in XP) or double click Programs and Features (in Vista and Win 7, 8 and 10). When the list appears, right click on the program you want to get rid of and choose remove or Uninstall. This will get rid of any settings that this program may have changed. In Windows 8 the Control Panel is accessed by exposing the charms at the right and going to search. Once the Control Panel has been opened the procedure is the same. To get to Control Panel in Windows 10, right click the mouse on the Start Button and choose run and type in "Control Panel".

How can I speed up a slow computer?

There is really no quick answer to this question but I will try. Technology in personal computers advances so fast that they double their capability about every two to two and half years. This means if you have a computer that is five or six years old (two Windows versions or more), it is going to appear slow compared to today's new units. There are still things you can do:

Increase memory – Very old units may have come with as little as 256 MB of RAM (That's only ¼ of a GB). Increasing RAM is fairly inexpensive and easy to do. It is probably the single most economical hardware upgrade you can make. Most new units have a minimum of 3 or 4 GB. Better machines have 8 or 12 GB or even 16 GB.

Insure machine is virus free - Have an efficient virus checker that is up to date and running daily. I am personally NOT a fan of Norton Antivirus or McAfee Antivirus because they really bog down machines - especially older ones. Just the presence of Norton can slow your machine down. It is not an efficient

program. If you are running Norton, even if you have paid for it, I would strongly suggest you uninstall it (go to Control Panel, Add/Remove Programs, right click on Norton and remove it) (In Vista or Win 7,8 or 10, go to Control Panel, choose Programs and Features, right click Norton and remove it). In its place, install Avast, free edition (from www.filehippo.com under AntiMalware). Also having more than one "true" virus checker will slow your machine down because they present an internal conflict. (example: Norton and Avast installed together is really bad)

Control spyware - There are several free programs that do this, including SuperAntiSpyware and Spybot Search and Destroy. Spy Sweeper from Webroot is a well respected program (that Best Buy pushes) that costs in the neighborhood of \$25 per year. I use a free one and it does a good job. This should be run at least once per week. Another source of this type of program is www.bleepingcomputer.com.

Limit programs that execute at boot time - In Win 7 left click Start, then type "msconfig" in the box that shows "Start Search" in it. In Win 8 or 10 get to the run command (hit Windows Key-R) and type "msconfig". Under the General Tab, choose Selective Startup. Then go to the Startup Tab and remove the check marks from entries you don't need. Anything that is checked is starting at boot time. This is a little tricky since it isn't obvious what each entry controls. There are a number of websites that can guide you through choosing which entries to Uncheck. BTW there is no list with checkmarks in Win 8 and 10. Instead you go to the Task Manager that is referenced on the screen and disable the things you don't want to start.

Are there more things to do to keep my computer running well?

Yes. This is actually an extension of the previous question. Computers can get their hard drive cluttered with unnecessary files. You can do a quick Disk Clean Up by going to Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools and then choosing Disk Clean up. After analysis, this gives you the opportunity to get rid of temporary files that are not needed. Do this once a week or so.

Disk Defragmentation can help too, but can take a while, and is, in most instances, sort of overrated. Let the operating system analyze the disk to see if defragging is needed. Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Defragmentation and then choose Analyze. This will suggest doing it now or not. In Vista, Win 7, 8 and 10 defrag can be set to run automatically. The more full your hard drive is, the more it will benefit from a defrag. A hard drive that is 25% full need not be defragmented. The danger point comes when a hard drive is over 85% occupied.

If my computer won't boot, does that mean I need a new computer?

Likely not. Here are a few things to consider.

If it's a desktop and it won't power up, meaning no electricity, and you are sure it's plugged in and the circuit breaker hasn't been tripped, there is a very good chance it is the power supply that has failed. A new power supply for a desktop is about \$40 and when installed, machine may be as good as new. It is always possible that the machine has booted (light on tower will be on) but the monitor is not working. So make sure monitor is plugged in and indicator light is blue (sometimes green or white). If indicator light is orange, it means the monitor is not getting a signal from the computer. You should check the cord that connects the monitor to the computer tower. But only consider the monitor if there IS an indicator light illuminated on the computer.

Power supplies on laptops are more difficult to change but, with a laptop, make sure the cord is firmly plugged into the "brick-like" box that is often in the middle of the power cord.

If machine boots part way, meaning you get a screen that is lit up, but it freezes during boot, try this: In a laptop, turn it off with the power button by holding it in for 7 to 10 seconds. Remove the power cord. With the machine off and the cord out, close it, flip it over, and remove the battery. Most laptops have a battery that is about ten inches, by two inches, by one inch that can be removed by moving two toggle switches. (A few laptops have internal inaccessible batteries, so this approach won't work.) Now with the cord and battery out, so there is no chance it will go on, hold down the power button firmly for about 20 to 30 seconds. This grounds the static electricity that may have built up on the mother board. Replace the battery, reinsert the power cord, cross your fingers and try it again. This works a surprising number of times.

The above paragraph can also be tried with a desktop that only boots partway. In this case, simply remove the power cord and while cord is out, hold in the power-on button for about 20 to 30 seconds. Re-plug it in and try it again.

If these things don't work, you may need the opinion of a professional. It is possible that the hard drive has failed or become corrupted. Repairing or replacing a hard drive is typically more expensive. Purchasing a new drive costs in the neighborhood of \$75 and then about that same amount to install it a reconfigure your machine. At this point you might want to weigh the cost of repair versus the cost of a new computer. This will certainly be influenced by the age of the failing one.

Dan's rule - if your computer is 4 years old or more and repair costs are more than one-third the price of a new one, I would consider a new one.

If my hard drive has failed or become corrupted, have I lost my data?

Probably not. This is where you really want to make sure your data had been backed up - sorry, I had to say it. But if you are like many users backing up data is not a priority. I once said that backing up a computer is like flossing your teeth. You know you are supposed to do it, but until there is an imminent dentist appointment in your future, you tend not to do it.

A hard drive that won't boot is perhaps only bad in the boot sector, which represents only a small portion of the drive. If this is the case, the data is likely intact. The hard drive can be physically removed - desktop or laptop - and connected to a special "docking device" and the data read by, or copied to another working computer through a USB connection. It can then be put back on the original computer if a new drive is installed.

If the failed drive is severely damaged where, perhaps the seal had been broken, the docking device won't work. In this case you would have to go through a data-recovery company, where they take the disk apart in a "clean room" and restore the data. This process cost starts at several hundred dollars. Backing up is cheaper.

What is the easiest way to back up my computer's data?

I personally use a Western Digital, 1 TB External Hard Drive (That I purchased at Wal Mart for about \$60) connected to each computer all the time. The disk came with backup software that can be set to run at a periodic interval, such as once per week. This is a great peace-of-mind thing.

There are companies, such as Carbonite, that charge a monthly fee to back up your computer at some secure external location. This is expensive, but it works even if your computer and backup disk are stolen or lost in a fire.

Windows has a firewall. Is it dangerous to turn it off?

Only turn your firewall off if you have a router in your house. The router serves as a hardware firewall. Otherwise use the windows firewall to discourage intruders. Many virus checkers such as Norton, Webroot, McAfee and others have their own firewall. This can really cause havoc. Beware of trying to keep "too safe". Having an extra firewall can mess up networking too. I guess we could get the National Guard to man the gates in PebbleCreek. We might be safer, but even residents would have a hard time getting in.

I can't seem to download attachments sent by Email. Also some of my Emails contain little red x's instead of pictures.

There is one security setting in most email handling programs (e.g. Microsoft Outlook) that prevents attachments from coming in. There is another that stops imbedded pictures or logos from showing. Open your email handler and look for Security Settings or Safety Options. Make sure the checkmarks are removed from the entry that says ""Do not allow attachments to be saved or opened that potentially contain a virus" and from the entry that says "Block images and external content in HTML emails". This second one will allow pictures through that used to appear as a small red "x".

It seems like Win 7, 8 or 10 (Vista too) are forever asking permission to do things. Is this normal?

This is something called User Account Control (UAC) and it is ON by default for Windows Vista and 7, 8 and 10. Windows 7, 8 and 10 actually has degrees or levels of UAC. In my opinion this falls under the category of "nagware". These warnings are so insidious that after while you will just click to give permission to do things without even reading the warning. You CAN turn this off (and I would recommend it - even though Microsoft says "Not Recommended"). Click Start, Control Panel and double click on User Accounts (Found In classic view - Vista; or Large Icons View - Win 7, 8 or 10). In Vista choose the entry that says Turn User Account Control on or off. Remove the checkmark and reboot your machine and this "feature" is disabled - YEA! In Windows 7, 8 or 10 lower the level of notification so it doesn't remind you quite as often. Moving slider all the way to the bottom turns notification off - and this is what I would do.

I am still using Internet Explorer. Where did the Menu Bar go?

Internet Explorer 7 and beyond (current version is number 11) have the menu bar turned off by default. (Don't ask why, because I don't know.) Open IE and point to the top section and right click. A dropdown menu will appear that has, as its first entry, the words Menu Bar. Check it and the well-known menu words will appear. Versions of Internet Explorer should be kept as current as you can. The reason I say that is because if you are running Win XP, IE 8 is as high as it will let you go; If you are running Vista you can only go to IE 9. Win 7, 8 and 10 allow you to get to the current version IE 11. With Win 10 there is a new Microsoft browser called Edge. This is actually different from IE, but IE11 is still there. In newly purchased machines with Windows 10 loaded, Edge is the default browser. This can be changed if you don't like Edge.

Are there other Browsers besides Internet Explorer (IE) or Edge and are they better?

Yes, there are others. It is a judgment call as to whether they are better. Mozilla Firefox and Google's Chrome are common alternatives to IE and Edge. They are downloadable from the Internet for free. AOL and MSN each also have their own browser. If you think of a browser as just a method to get around the Internet, you realize that they all essentially do the same thing. Pick one you are comfortable with and stick with it. Internet Explorer is part of Windows so it is likely the most utilized. Included in Window 10 is a new browser called Microsoft Edge. It is similar to, yet a little different from, the old Internet Explorer and is touted as more efficient. If you have Windows 10 and like Edge, go with it. Otherwise you can still use Internet Explorer. It is still loaded as version number 11 but just a little hard to find.

Don't confuse a browser with a search device or search engine. Google's main claim to fame is that it is a fantastic search engine. It looks through the billions of websites on the Internet and returns a list of websites that meet your search criteria. The browser is the mechanism to take you from site to site. Google has written a browser called Chrome. It must be downloaded to your computer to use. Google searching is done from the Internet itself.

This represents a sample of questions that are often asked regarding some general computer topics. It is by no means meant to be all-inclusive. If there are any errors or oversights in the answers, they were unintentional and I apologize ahead of time. Also, I have on several cases given MY opinion - which I have labeled as such. Also I have purposely avoided questions regarding details in Word or Excel. They are a completely separate matter.

This may be the longest handout of the Computer Club season. It has been a popular one. I'd like to emphasize that some of the topics mentioned here, such as speeding up a slow computer, will be covered in a greatly expanded manner in future Club Meetings. Since these topics were often found in a list of frequently asked questions, I tried to start addressing them here (even if only superficially). I truly hope this handout will stir some interest in learning more about these subjects and perhaps make you want to attend future meeting that cover these topics in more depth.

Also, notice that Internet got only a brief exposure here. I plan to dedicate two full weeks to the Internet later this month including interesting websites and how to utilize a search engine effectively.

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