

## **Giving Your Computer a Checkup (2/19/18)**

This write-up is almost a checklist of things to examine when your computer isn't performing the way you'd like. It would be a good idea to revisit the handouts from the Computer Club meetings of January 15th and 22nd, 2018. Those handouts are "Settings and Features" and "Virus Summary". This may seem like a redundant write-up but it is better to consider it a cogent summary of previously discussed items.

### **Computer's Specs**

First find out your computer's specs. This may be needed in order to make some decisions that are described below. Left click the start button and find the control panel (Win 7) or settings "gear" (Win 10). Find the System reference. In Win 10, click on About. This tells you the version of Windows and what service pack is installed. An example would be Windows 7 Home Premium, Service Pack 1 or Win 10 version #1709. It is important to keep your computer's Windows system up to date. Also note the amount of RAM, in GB, and whether you are a 32-bit or 64-bit architecture. Also keep in mind that a "generation", where a computer doubles its capability, is about 2.5 years. In general terms, that means if your computer is 7.5 years old or more, serious consideration should be given to a new one. (a new one would be  $2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$  times faster) As far as repair, obviously the older a machine is, the less willing you should be to invest big bucks in fixing a malfunctioning unit. My thought: If repairs will cost more than a third the price of a new one...consider a new one.

### **Install ONE Virus Checker**

If you have one already, make sure it is up to date and the subscription is active. You should have only one as more than one can lead to sluggish computer performance due to virus-checker conflict. McAfee or Norton may have come pre-installed in your machine but it was likely only a 60 day trial. I would go to Programs and Features in the Control Panel and uninstall (different from delete) any pay Virus Checker. Then go to [www.filehippo.com](http://www.filehippo.com) and get yourself a free Antivirus Software (examples: Avast and AVG). Avast, which is free, still requires that you "register" the program. Windows 7, 8 and 10 come with Windows Defender built in. This works just fine as a virus checker - especially in Win 10.

### **AntiMalware Software**

Although a virus checker is very necessary, an AntiMalware program is also vital. There is a whole category of invader known as "Rogues" that can get past an active Antivirus Program. For these you need an Antimalware program. In my opinion, far and away the best one is Malwarebytes Antimalware. Offered free from [www.filehippo.com](http://www.filehippo.com) it is important to download and install. If you pay for it (approx \$25 per year) it will deflect the bad guys as they try to come in. If you install only the free version, it is still very effective but only during a scan. With the free version a scan must be initiated by you.

### **Other Keep-Me-Clean Programs.**

I recommend SuperAntiSpyware and CCleaner, both of which have free versions. These get rid of tracking cookies and other extraneous files that can hinder performance. My suggested health plan consists of four things - An Antivirus, an Antimalware, an Antispyware and a Cleaner program. There are many out there with varying degrees of effectiveness. Always be aware of programs that are too aggressive or promise too much.

### **Check Startup Utility**

MSCONFIG is the program that gives your computer instructions on how to boot. Open the Run Command and type in "msconfig" without the quotes. Then get to the startup tab. In Win 8 & 10 it's the Task Manager that represents the startup tab. The default setting is "Normal". This means everything in startup begins running at boot time. As your computer ages and more software is installed, more things get added to this list. It is important to revisit this list every few months and disable some items that are not needed at startup. Remember items that are disabled here are not uninstalled, but rather they just remain inactive until needed.

### **Potentially Unwanted Programs (PUPs)**

There are loads of programs out there that almost seem to install themselves without permission. These can become anywhere from annoying to totally hindering to your computer's performance. They can generate pop-up messages that try to goad you into doing something you didn't think needed doing (such as updating a driver that is working fine). There are several ways to address these.

- Get to the Control Panel and go to Programs and Features. This list appears listed alphabetically by program name. There is also a column for manufacturer of program and date installed. Click on the heading marked "installed on" to sort by date. Then look at what happened lately. Also look for repeated dates as these programs often install in groups. If you see programs you didn't specifically want, or those that generate pop-ups, then click on the line and click on uninstall.
- Malwarebytes AntiMalware and SuperAntiSpyware also have features that flag unwanted programs. These should be run to help identify undesirable programs referenced in the bullet above.
- Unwanted programs, once removed, may still leave scars. You will have to identify those and fix them. A common symptom of a PUP, that will not change after the program is gone, is the reassignment of your Internet Home Page. You will need to get into the settings in your browser to correct that. A loose analogy is that once you have cured the disease, you need a plastic surgeon to undo some of the damage.
- System Restore - taking your system back a few days - can be very effective in curing PUPs and their symptoms. See next section

### **System Restore (SR)**

With all versions of Windows starting with XP there is a built in feature called System Restore. This is a means to, in essence, put your computer in a time machine and make it look as it looked some day in the recent past. Dates are put on the Restore list by the computer and only dates on that list can be used. System Restore can be found in the programs list under Accessories and System Tools. In Win 8 and 10, the easiest way to get there is by typing "rstrui.exe" in the run field, without the quotes. The rstrui.exe method can be used in any version of Windows. An easy way to remember rstrui.exe is that it is the word "restore" without vowels followed by "ui" meaning user interface.

It should be emphasized that System Restore does NOT affect your pictures, documents or email. This is important to know since some reluctance may be associated with System Restore for this fear. SR changes programs that were installed or uninstalled and settings that were altered. Once started SR will cause your machine to reboot and may take 15 or 20 minutes to complete. Once started it is best to not manually turn off your machine until you get one of two messages: 1) that the machine restore was successful or, 2) the restore failed and no changes were made. If the SR fails, another attempt can be made from Safe Mode. This is often more effective. Please remember that System Restore is different from System Recovery. Recovery takes the machine back to the day it was purchased and can WIPE OUT ALL YOUR DATA.

### **Slow Internet Browsing**

Most Internet Service Providers (ISPs) offer different speeds, depending on your plan. If you have high speed (which is usually defined as 4 Mbs or faster), a web page should open in five seconds - maximum. If it doesn't, you should check your settings in your browser. Internet Explorer, Edge, Firefox and Chrome are all browsers. See Computer Club handout from January 22nd, 2018 meeting.

### **User-Friendly Settings**

With Windows Vista and beyond, Microsoft introduced a dubious feature called User Account Control. In my opinion this instills a level of paranoia in a computer that quickly becomes a nuisance. It generates a message quite often that requires you to manually give permission to continue. Turning it off can reduce your stress. To do this, open the Control Panel, User Accounts and the Change User Account Control. In Vista, remove the check; In Win 7, 8 & 10, move the slider to the bottom. After reboot, the annoying message will be gone forever.

I, personally, like the Control Panel to show in icon view. It makes it easier to find things. You can click on view and choose the one you like the best. Even in Win 10, the Control Panel is still there. It may be useful to find it (Win Key-R) and type Control Panel and then put an icon on your desktop. This can be a more familiar reference than the Settings area in Win 10. Eventually you should get used to using Settings in Win 10.

Pinning items to Task Bar can be desirable. The Task Bar, usually shown at the bottom of the screen, has an area that serves as a quick launch area, where only one click of an icon is required to open a program. In Win 7, 8 & 10 these items are "pinned" to the Task Bar. They can be placed there by simply dragging a desktop icon to that area of the bar. To remove, right click and choose unpin.

The absence of a Windows-7-like start button in Windows 8 (8.1) can cause stress. Stress reduction is good! There is a free program available from [www.classicshell.com](http://www.classicshell.com) that puts such a button in Win 8.