



# BUG-BYTES

THE MONTHLY ONLINE NEWSLETTER OF *COMPUTER BUGS*

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## HELP TROUBLESHOOT YOUR PROBLEMS

LEARN THE BASICS AND MORE RIGHT HERE



Whether you are very new to computing, or you are very experienced, you can help troubleshoot your computer, or you can provide useful information that will help someone else to solve your problem.

If you have a problem with your car and call for an appointment, even if you are not mechanically inclined, you are expected to provide your auto mechanic with some basic information about your car. For instance, your mechanic needs to know the make, model, and year of your car, and for you to briefly describe the problem as you see or hear it.

Similarly, if you take a pet to a veterinarian, you are required to provide similar information . . . well not the make and model.

So it is with computers. Before problems arise look up the following information, and store it where you can quickly and easily find it. I suggest you store the information on your computer so you can just cut and paste the relevant information into an e-mail message that is related to your problem.

### Is your problem software or hardware related?

#### GATHER BASIC INFORMATION

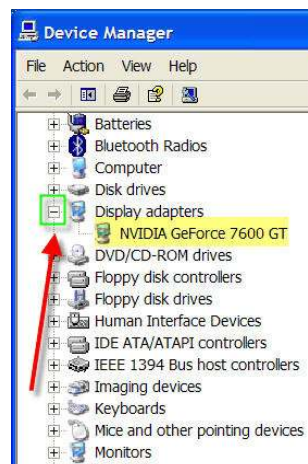
Look up the following information: You will find the information by right-clicking on My Computer, select Property. Note the information on that screen. Then click on Hardware, Device Manager, and the individual items called for below.



PORTION OF PROPERTIES

- Provide the brand name and model of your computer, i.e., Dell 8250, or custom computer with an AMD X2 64 4400 processor.

- Know how much Random Access Memory (RAM) is installed in your computer
- Know the capacity of your hard drive and how much free space is available
- Know the brand and model of your graphics card, or graphics chip. See the example at the right. **Click on the plus sign to expand the information for any item you select.** The plus sign will change to a minus sign. Click the minus sign to contract the listing.



If the problem is related to a peripheral product, such as a printer, external drive, scanner, router, etc., provide the brand name and model number for the peripheral.

#### DEFINE YOUR PROBLEM

An e-mail message containing the sole subject word “Help” is heart wrenching, but it does not convey any useful meaning to someone who is willing to help you. Similarly, the statement “Help, my computer doesn’t work” doesn’t contain the minimum information that a another member needs to help you anymore than the simple statement “I’m sick” will help your medical doctor.

**Define your problems in terms that someone else can understand.** Do not hide any information. If you recently installed new hardware or software, just say so. Be aware of when the problem or problems first showed up. Jot down the name of the problem and when it occurred on your desk calendar. You may be able to use Windows Restore to roll your computer back to a time before the problem occurred. That is one way to fix problems. If necessary, send a screen shot that shows what you are seeing. Click the Print Screen key. Paste the image into an e-mail message and describe what to look for in the image.

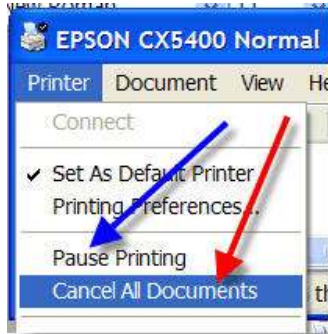
Before asking for help, see if the problem is something that you can solve. Often, problems are related to simple causes and effects rather than due to exotic reasons. For instance, a cable pulled loose (reconnect or reseat cable), a breaker popped (reset breaker), the computer overheated (remove

dust build-up inside of your computer), there is an accumulation of spyware on your computer (remove spyware), your computer is affected by a virus (remove virus), you deleted important files (restore from the recycle bin), you changed an important setting, etc.

First, look for the simple things, then consider other possible problems and solutions.

For example, if you can't print, is your computer and printer turned on and is there paper in the printer's paper feed? Did you accidentally put your printer in pause mode? If you did, then there is probably a long queue of print jobs waiting to be printed.

Click on Start, Printer and Faxes. From the print menu, double-click on default printer, select Printer, Cancel All Documents, and uncheck Pause Printing.



See the screen shot above. This is just one example of something that can go wrong, but which is easy for you to fix.

My goal in writing these monthly articles is not to give you a fish, but rather to teach you how to fish. We in Computerbugs want you to learn to enjoy your computer and to make the most of it. My goal, and I believe it is the goal of Computerbugs in general, is to help you to be self-sufficient and thereby to get more out of your computer experience, and to have more fun while doing it.

#### USE WINDOWS BUILT-IN TROUBLESHOOTERS

While your occasional computer problems may seem unique to you, chances are that many other users have experienced similar problems. Therefore, the solutions to those problems are well known.

**Windows Help** includes troubleshooters that are designed to find and fix a variety of common problems. Explore the help menu as shown in the screen shot at the

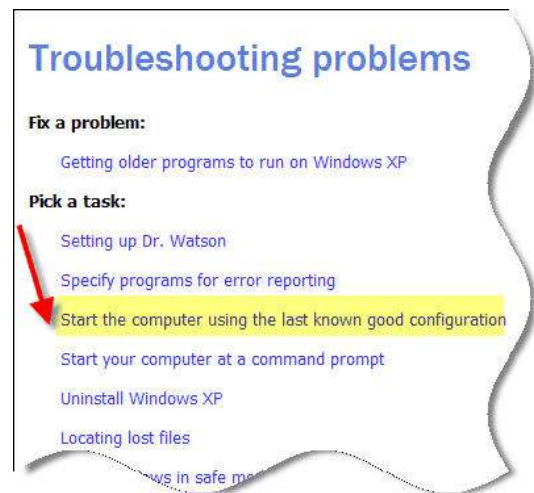


top of this column, or search for information on "Troubleshooters."

Note that the Troubleshooters menu is divided into topics based on the type of problem. Only a part of the whole menu is shown in the screen shot.



The following example shows a portion of the "Troubleshooting problems" link. Get to know the kinds of information that is already available at your finger tips. If you don't see what you need, then by all means, ask for help, or search for it online.



#### USE ONLINE RESOURCES

Learn to use your search engine, such as Google, to find answers to your questions. You will be amazed at how much good information is available. Fortunately, you can use simple English queries to find answers. For example, if you are having a problem with slow shutdown of Windows, enter *Slow Windows shutdown* as your search term in

Google. If it is convenient, do that now in Internet Explorer. If you don't think there are a lot of articles on the subject take a closer look at the bar at the top of your screen. Here is a screen shot of what I see after that query.

Results 1 - 10 of about 3,460,000 for [Slow windows shutdown](#). (0.69 seconds)

Notice that the query above took less than a second to return answers to this search.

Shutdown problems were very common with Windows 98, and less so with Windows XP. The point I want to make here is that no matter what the problem, you will probably find relevant information about any give problem with your search engine.

However, if your search doesn't return information that helps you, you don't understand the information, or your don't get useful information, please ask for help.

NEED HELP? SUBSCRIBE TO THE COMPUTERBUGS LIST SERVER

Computerbugs List Server is one of the benefits of your annual membership. There is no extra charge to subscribe to the list server. Click the Help tab on [www.computerbugs.cc](http://www.computerbugs.cc) and scroll down to the Computerbugs List Server heading.

To paraphrase our web site, "The Computerbugs List Server is a discussion group via e-mail for members who subscribe to that list. Subscribers receive and respond to e-mail messages that are sent to everyone on the list server." Only technical questions are answered there. Get quick answers to your computer related questions, or answer questions submitted by other subscribers, and learn from the exchange of information you see there. Yes, it is "people helping people." That's the whole purpose of that discussion group.

To subscribe, click on the "Email Us" icon on the Help page. Fill out the form and make you're your name and e-mail address are included on your request. This service is only available to Computerbugs members. You will receive a conformation note when you have been added to the list with information on where to send your questions.

#### Q AND A SESSIONS

Submit questions via e-mail for upcoming meetings to [president@computerbugs.cc](mailto:president@computerbugs.cc), or write them down and give them to a board member before a meeting starts. The first method is much preferred. It lets the president pass on questions to the person handling Q and A, and for that person to research the problems, and to ask for clarification, if needed, prior to the meeting.

If possible, submit problems that are of general interest to our members.

CONTACT VENDORS AND/OR A COMMERCIAL HELP DESK

Sometimes a problem is so sticky that only the original hardware or software vendor can fix the problem, or you need the paid services of a professional help desk, or a computer repair facility.

Software and hardware vendors, and professional help desks, see the same problems often rather than only occasionally, or rarely as you or I do. Therefore, they develop written procedures to deal with those problems that are searchable in their databases.

Depending on the hardware or software, and when you bought it, the vendor will offer either free or for-a-fee services to solve your problems. You can purchase services on a per incident basis, or subscribe for a set period of time.

For instance, [www.pcpitstop.com](http://www.pcpitstop.com) offers both a free forum for general questions and a 24/7 paid service for instant help by computer professionals. See the following sample link.

<http://www.pcpitstop.com/store/livehelp.asp>

While there are some free services, sometimes the quickest and least expensive solution is to use a paid service. They give you their undivided attention and offer the fastest response. You are back and up and running before you know it.

#### IN SUMMARY

- Gather basic computer information so that you can use it or provide it to whomever attempts to help you.
- Carefully define your problem so someone else will understand what you are facing. If necessary, include a screen shot that illustrates a part of the problem.
- See if the built-in troubleshooters will solve your problem.
- Search for help online. Use Google or another search engine to research the problem. Subscribe to our Computerbugs List Server.
- Submit your question to a Q and A session, preferably well before a meeting so that the question can be properly researched.
- Contact the software or hardware vendor, or a commercial help desk or computer repair facility. Remember that time is money, or at least a loss of enjoyment until you get your computer fixed.

## WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO COMPUTER HEAT PROBLEMS?



KEEP YOUR COMPUTER RUNNING COOL

Excess heat shortens the life of computer components, and in some cases can permanently damage them. The following are some common sources of heat problems.

- The CPU fan stops working, or something interferes with the fan turning as it should. Periodically check the CPU fan.
- One or more fans in your computer's case have stopped working. Periodically check that the fans are working and are dust-free. Hold your hand close to a fan exhaust to verify that it is working.
- Pet hair can build up behind the front grill of your computer case blocking the cooling airflow. Check your computer manual for how to temporarily remove the front panel and clean behind it.
- Dust accumulates in the intake holes of your computer's power supply. Clean power supply intake holes. Use a soft brush to loosen accumulated dirt. Use canned air to blast out remaining dust from the front to the back.
- Check that nothing blocks the airflow to your computer.
- Your power supply provides insufficient power for power hungry peripherals that you recently added.
- You added a new and more powerful CPU but your existing system can't handle the additional heat it throws off. The CPU may need a better heat sink and fan combination such as the one found at the right. Use thermal compound on the CPU to properly spread heat to the heat sink. Carefully follow the directions. Just a little dab will do it.
- You added a more powerful graphics card, one that requires much better cooling.
- See How to Read Sensors in the March 2007 Bug-Bytes. Periodically check your computer's temperature sensors as you would your car's temperature gauge.



ZALMAN CPU COOLER

## SHORT STUFF

TIPS AND TRICK



REGISTER YOUR SOFTWARE TO RECEIVE BENEFITS

Make it a habit, a good habit, to routinely register your software. As a result, you can opt to receive new product announcements, and to download fixes and patches that are released for the software. In many cases, you also become eligible for money saving offers on upgrades, or for other products offered by the software vendor.

CAN YOU REINSTALL SOFTWARE IF YOU HAVE TO?

The answer should be yes. However, to do so, **you need to know where the software resides** so you can put your hands on it. Backup software that you buy and download from online sources. Burn the software to a CD or write the backup files to another drive. Include copies of the e-mail messages that acknowledge your purchases and which include order and registration numbers that you may need to reinstall the software.

If you have a lot of software, **consider maintaining a software database that includes the information you will need to reinstall the software**. Then, when you need the information, you will find everything you need in one place. Just cut and paste the registration numbers. It is hard to remember where your software vendors store the information. Some print the information on cards, on loose labels, others on the back of CD jewel cases or in or on software folders.

If you lose the information, and have registered your software, you may be able to retrieve an online copy from your software vendor.

Microsoft Windows XP comes in a slick tri-fold folder while Windows 98 and 98 SE may be found in a CD jewel case. Adobe Photoshop Elements, Avanstar Quick View Plus, Microsoft Digital Image Suite, Roxio Easy Media Reader, and Trend Micro Internet Security, are just some of the products that come in slick plastic CD folders like books. Thus, you may find them stored in a location or locations different from those of your software CD collection.



## WINDOWS SECRETS

### WHY YOU DON'T WANT TO USE NORMAL STARTUP MODE



Is your computer running much slower than it did when it was brand new? Windows experts know that they need to change a simple default setting as soon as they buy a new computer, or if they subsequently reinstall their operating system. If they don't change the setting, they know they will suffer the consequences.

#### MSCONFIG TO THE RESCUE

Is your computer affected? Here is an easy way to tell. Click on Start, Run, and type in the word *msconfig*. Press the OK button.

When the Msconfig (that is the System Configuration utility) opens, look to see if the Normal options is selected. If it is, you have big problems in River City.

**What you want to have selected is the third option, Selective Startup.** More on that in a minute.

#### WHY IS THE NORMAL SETTING BAD?

The normal setting let's third party software vendors startup their software whenever your computer boots (starts) and to stay running whether you need the software are not. The effect of having Normal Startup selected is that some 20, 30, or more unnecessary programs start up and run continuously every time you start your computer. This is one of the major reasons why computers do not start as quickly as they could, and why users have available memory problems.

So, why did Microsoft set the default to Normal? I'm only guessing that it is because of pressure from third party vendors to provide that service.

WHAT IS SELECTIVE STARTUP AND WHAT CAN IT DO FOR YOU?

**Selective Startup puts you in the driver's seat.** You get to choose which programs load at startup.

The decision is pretty easy. Disable all the programs that show up on the Startup Tab. Now, enable (signified by a checkmark) only the main program for your anti-virus software, such as ccapp.exe from Symantec, sidebar.exe if you have Vista, and perhaps the programs you use to fight spyware, and spam. In my case, I also have answers.exe selected. It provides instant answers.

If you have an internet keyboard with special buttons, then you may want to load the supporting program at startup. Everything else is superfluous.

What happens if you turn off something that you later find you need or want? That is, that particular program doesn't load at startup. If you discover that you want something to load at startup, reopen Msconfig and check that item. The next time you start your computer, that program will load. (The unchecked items remain in the list. Therefore, you can go back at any time and select items).

Remember, you can manually open any of the programs that you uncheck during the Selective Startup editing phase. The programs are always available. Most of them are accessed from the menu of Start, All Programs.

It is as easy as that. What are you waiting for? Use selective startup to return control of startup to you and not to third party vendors.

No, you don't need to let Adobe or Google load or to monitor stuff at startup. As I said above, there are very few programs that *absolutely need* to load at startup. The Adobe and Google Programs are set to automatically recognize when you have new photographs. That is nice, but it is not necessary. Instead, deselect Adobe or Google from Selective Startup. When you manually open those programs, they automatically add photos. So, as you can see, it is not necessary to let the programs run all of the time from startup.

What you gain from switching to Selective Startup, and doing some serious pruning of Startup, is more available memory, faster startups, and a faster computer. That's the name of the game.

