

Be Compassionate To Your Computer

My computer's name is Dragon Lady. Like me, she is strong and powerful. Most of the time she loves to work and will take me anywhere I want to go and help me do anything within her power. However, sometimes she gets confused, overworked, out of sorts and becomes cranky. Since she is my alter-ego, I try to remain patient and think through possible causes as if she were a person.

A computer's operating system is like our central nervous system. It has a brain (processor) that knows what part of the body (computer hardware or software) handles each task and sends the orders out to get it done. Your brain sends your various body parts all the information necessary for you to stumble to the kitchen and make coffee every morning. If you buy a new coffee maker and move it to a different place in your kitchen, your brain has to send the revised instructions to your body to go to a different place and use the new and improved one. Every day your brain learns new things and that changes the way you think and operate your body.

Dragon Lady's operating system is Microsoft XP Professional. To make sure she is always at her peak, I have her check the Microsoft website every night and automatically install operating system updates.

Frequently I check the websites for all my peripherals for any driver updates and install them. Peripherals are the mouse, printer, scanner, fax etc. These are the hardware tools that your computer uses the way your body uses hands and feet. The driver is the software, or program, that is the communication bridge between the device and the computer. You create a document, format it and make it look perfect on the screen. When you click on print, the computer uses the driver to forward those instructions to the printer and the printer uses the driver to tell the computer if there is a problem and when the job is completed.

For more information and instructions go to the website for each of your products. Usually they will be simple like www.microsoft.com, www.hp.com or www.logitech.com etc. There should be a button for updates or downloads. An update is an improvement to the software; you download that update to your computer and install it into the software. If you do not find what you are looking for, click on FAQ's (frequently asked questions). Look through the list to see if your question, and the answer, is there. If not, there is usually online technical service. If you are still clueless, email me, I will help get you going.

Software companies improve productivity software regularly. Productivity software is a program for creating documents, music, photos, spreadsheets or gaming. For instance, Dragon Lady uses Microsoft Office Word to create documents like this article. At <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/officeupdate/default.aspx> I can check to see if there are any free updates to make the task easier.

Just like our bodies, our computers are attacked every minute of every day by viruses. We have to keep our immune systems strong to be able to fight off attacks or we get sick. The security software on your computer is its immune system. Dragon Lady uses McAfee. Norton is another popular security brand name and there are other less well known. It takes good care of her as long as I do my job.

My job is to make sure that Dragon Lady always has the latest version of the software. I do not rely on my own faulty memory to do this. I have the McAfee program set to automatically update the virus definitions and scan the system every night at 2:00 AM. All incoming email is scanned and infected files are immediately destroyed. Outgoing mail is scanned to prevent exposing my friends to viruses. Dragon Lady is connected to the internet by high speed cable. She is always on and always at risk so I want McAfee using the newest and best programs to protect her.

I am sure you have all had times when you were overwhelmed by too many things happening at once. At work or at home you were trying to do several things and other interruptions kept happening. You kept trying, but you were not thinking clearly anymore and started making mistakes. Eventually you had to crawl into bed and pull the covers over your head for a nap or good cry. Afterward, you could get up with a clear head and start over again.

To a computer that nap or good cry is a "restart". Sometimes when you're trying to do several things at once; write a document while doing research online, add graphics or photos that you have to edit first, while you're instant messaging your friends, your computer may suddenly refuse to print. "WHAT THE #*&*%#!" you may exclaim! Pounding on the desk won't help and neither will clicking your mouse all over the screen; that will just lock up more stuff.

Take a deep breath and realize that your computer is having a meltdown. Before you have a meltdown, simply save and close all programs and click on restart. If your programs will not respond, press and hold down together the Ctrl, Alt and Delete keys. A task box will open to allow you to end programs. Your computer will shut down for a few seconds for a power-nap and when it wakes up it will have a new attitude and happily return to work.

A computer needs to restart after installing new software or updates. When you dump a whole bunch of new information into its head, it needs a quick nap to assimilate it. It wakes up smarter and ready to go!

We need to keep our bodies and our homes waste free to keep them healthy. If we are constipated, we need to detoxify to be clear-headed and fast moving again. If our garbage cans stink, they need emptied. If we cannot find our desks, countertops or dining room table and we cannot walk through the house without stubbing our toes, we need to get rid of stuff. When our computers slow down and act a little stupid and groggy they need to be cleaned out. At regular intervals do some simple housekeeping tasks.

- Go through document files and delete old documents and files, extra photos, old music and things that you stored temporarily. Reorganize what you keep into appropriate folders so you can find it easily when you want it.
- If you've installed or downloaded programs that you no longer use, (games, demo programs etc.) go into your control panel, select add or remove programs and delete stuff you don't use.
- Empty out your email box or boxes. Save the messages you want to keep into folders and delete the rest. Remember to empty the "sent" box. That one seems to silently get bigger and bigger without our noticing. Make sure your trash is set to empty every time you close the program.

- If you use a spam blocker, check the blocked messages every few days. Sometimes messages you actually want, like my New Chapter Announcements or order information about something you ordered online, get trapped there. Rescue them and add sender to your friend list then delete the rest. The spam blocker folder can also become huge, quickly.
- Clean up your internet browser. Internet Explorer is what I use and probably most of you do, too. There are others though like Netscape or Firefox. Select internet options from the tools menu and under the general tab, click on "delete cookies", "delete temporary files" and "clear history".

Even though you clean regularly, you may miss some clutter hiding under the bed and behind the dressers. Sometimes you must do a more serious cleaning so open the start menu and open all programs. Click on accessories and a drop down menu will appear. Select system tools and you will see disk cleanup. If you run this program with all the cleanup options selected, it is a spring-cleaning for your hard drive. Ah...What relief your computer must feel!

Sometimes, when we are working hard and fast we drop our tools everywhere or stick our notes all over the place. We know we have them. We know what general area they are in and remember exactly what color or size object we are looking for but we still take a little while to find what we need. A computer does the same thing. When we tell it to save something, it will just stick it into some convenient place, or break it up into many convenient places, in the hard-drive. When we want it to retrieve our work, it has to look all over the place to find and retrieve all the pieces. This takes time; and the more fragmented the hard drive becomes, the longer it takes.

At regular intervals, the hard drive needs to be defragmented. That means it will reorganize itself and put all the notes together in the correct folders or the tools back together in the workbench so it can easily find them again.

Again, open all programs and return to accessories. Select system tools again, but this time, choose disk defragmenter. When you open it, you will get the option to analyze your disk. Analyzing doesn't take very long and you'll be told whether you need to defrag. Defragging usually takes a long time, so do not start it until you have finish everything you want to do and can walk away and let it work for a few hours.

The best tool you have, for keeping your computer happy and healthy, is the Help and Support button you will see every time you open the start menu. It is a round blue button with a white question mark. It opens a central location of Help topics, tutorials, troubleshooting and other support services. If you have a problem or want to learn how to do something new, look there.

Our computers make our lives both easier and harder. They allow us to learn and stay in touch with our friends but frustrate the dickens out of us when they suddenly go on the fritz and don't perform as expected. My advice is to personify your computer; name it and think of it as a friend. Then you will have compassion when it is not feeling well and be calmer about making it better.