

# What To Do When Things Go Technically Wrong

It's amazing how many things can go wrong with your computer; bad drivers, hardware malfunctions, viruses, software glitches, spyware...and this is only the beginning.

Computer problems always seem to happen at the most inconvenient times and can leave you stranded for hours, even days without a computer. However, vendor "help desk" support can be frustrating and in some cases, expensive. The next time you have a computer problem, here are 5 simple things you can do to try and resolve the problem yourself or to at least prepare and get the most out of your help desk support.

**1. Check your connections.** This may sound obvious, but check all the cables to make sure they are plugged in securely. Don't ignore this step because USB, printer, and serial cables have a way of working themselves loose and causing problems.

**2. Reboot.** Windows sometimes gets into a state of confusion or overload and locks up. You can clear the memory and set things straight by simply rebooting your system. Similarly, if you're having a problem connecting to the Internet, try rebooting your cable/DSL modem and router by unplugging them for 15 seconds and allowing them to reset themselves.

However, this isn't something you should have to do often. If you find yourself rebooting your router once a day, the problem is a bit deeper.

If you still can't resolve the problem yourself, then here are a few more steps to take before calling support that will save a lot of time and get your problem resolved quicker...

**3. Try to narrow down the problem as much as possible.** Identifying what went wrong is 90% of the journey to the solution. Try to isolate when and where the problem happened and note the last thing you installed, changed, or plugged in to your computer. You'll also want to narrow down the error message as much as possible.

For example, if you discover your printer isn't working from Word, try to print from another application. Also note the order of events leading up to the problem.

Maybe you can print when you first boot up, but everything seems to go haywire after you scan a document. Does the problem occur all the time or only after the machine has been running for a while? Does the problem repeat itself or is it only occasional? Observing what situations lead up to a problem can be a great help in determining what is causing it.

**4. Know your system.** When you talk to a support technician on the phone, they are going to want to know what specific hardware, operating system, and software you're using.

To save time, know the make and model numbers for all your hardware. You can access CPU and memory info by selecting Control Panel | System. Drill down from here into Hardware | Device Manager for information about other devices such as your sound and graphics cards.

Write down new software, no matter how small or insignificant, that you've downloaded and installed lately, including upgrades, screen savers, emoticon software, and web browser updates. It can also help to jot down any services running in the background.

To access a list of what is running on your Windows 7 system, press Ctrl-Alt-Del and select Start Task Manager. You can also get very detailed info from Start | All Programs | Accessories | System Tools | System Information.

**5. Back up your data.** Before you start following directions over the phone from a support technician or tearing your system apart to fix it yourself, make sure you have a backup of all your important documents, e-mail, and other data.

Although many fixes will be as simple as downloading a new driver, you'll be glad you have a backup if you find yourself reinstalling the operating system. You should also have your original CDs around in case you need to reinstall applications.