Why is My Computer Dying or Dead?

This list is not exhaustive. It shows common reasons for a computer to fail completely – focusing on areas in which failure is preventable, or can be mitigated.

- The hard drive is failing. Whether a drive fails through normal aging or accidents, the greater number of errors it experiences causes the computer to continually re-try to read or write whatever it was working on at the time. In some cases, you can actually hear the drive. Please check our guide to "Detecting Impending Disk Failure". If the system is taken to a computer shop, the hard drive can be cloned to a new one before it fails completely.

- The computer is not protected by a UPS (Un-interruptible Power Supply) or a good quality surge protector. "Dirty" electricity has killed many systems.

- The system has been allowed to overheat too often. The culprit in many cases is dust buildup, often in combination with limited air flow. Overheating will accelerate the aging of most electronics, whether it is a computer, television, stereo or other device.

- Overheating problems are also caused by cooling fan failure. Many computers have fans with inexpensive bearings in the motor, and when the bearings fail, the fan stops, and the system begins to overheat. Fans are usually found in power supplies, the CPU heat sink, the computer case itself, around hard drive cages, and on video cards. When a fan bearing fails, it usually makes noise anywhere from a week to several months before complete failure. All new or changed noises should be investigated.

- The system (particularly laptops) has been dropped and suffered damage. A running hard drive is particularly susceptible, but memory chips and various connections can also be knocked loose or broken.

- Laptops are more prone to overheating problems because of the limited space for airflow to begin with. If you have household pets, their hair can often completely block the airflow from the *inside* of the system. Opening up the system to clean it out is the only effective way of dealing with this.

- Laptops are also in a position to suffer spills which can get to the inner circuitry and cause shorts or thermal shock. If you spill anything on a laptop computer, do ***NOT*** move it. Instead, power it down immediately, wait for it to cool, and (if possible) use a wet/dry vacuum to remove the liquid.