

Why is My Computer so Slow?

This list is not exhaustive. It shows many reasons for a computer to run more slowly than usual. Where possible, we refer to one of our guides which will address a particular problem.

- The hard drive is failing. Hard drives will re-try when they encounter an error. When the number of errors becomes great enough that the computer continually retries, you can often hear the drive. Check our guide to “Detecting Impending Disk Failure”. If the system is taken to a computer repair shop, the hard drive can be cloned to a new one before it fails completely.
- The system is low on memory. When a computer is running out of memory (for any reason) it tries to keep going by taking some portion of memory that has not been recently used and saving that to the hard disk. This is known as “Virtual Memory” and is *much* slower than normal memory access. Graphics programs (such as Adobe Photoshop) are well known for consuming large amounts of memory.
- The system is low on disk space. This can compound the problem above by making virtual memory unavailable. See the guide on “Disk Defragmenting”. The defragmentation tool will also tell you how much free space your hard disk has available. You may also get error messages about “Not enough virtual memory” which indicate either a disk space shortage, or a limit on the virtual memory settings.
- The hard drive is heavily fragmented. When files are broken up into hundreds or thousands of individual pieces on the disk, it can take a long time to read or write them – since the hard disk is a mechanical object, it can only read and write at a limited speed. See the guide on “Disk Defragmenting”.
- The system is infected with viruses, spyware, and other nuisances. Run a full system virus scan with your Anti-Virus software. If that doesn’t help, then refer to our guide on “Setup Spybot Search & Destroy”, and then the guide on “Run Spybot Search & Destroy” to clean your system.
- Your anti-virus software is set to scan for viruses on access. That is, when you open a file (document, spreadsheet, picture, etc.) the anti-virus software will scan every file opened for viruses before letting the user work with it. This may also affect programs that you run. You may wish to adjust the sorts of files the anti-virus software scans.

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- You may have upgraded or installed new software which uses most of the CPU's time. Anti-Virus and Anti-Spyware applications are unfortunately well known for this sort of problem – due to the fact that to protect your system, they must monitor many aspects of computer activity. Many software companies have been working recently to improve performance in this area. Contact your vendor for assistance.
- There may be several services running on your system which are not necessary for you. Microsoft turns on many of these to make sure that their software works in as many environments as possible, but they each take a certain amount of memory and CPU time.
- The hard drive has been set to compress files to save disk space, AND there is no (or very little) disk space available. This means that the computer is spending much of its time decompressing parts of the operating system and applications to run.
- You may have encountered a conflict between two or more independent programs. Contact the respective support departments (often on a web page) to see if either vendor has produced a fix for the problem. If not, you may have to contact technical support, or an independent expert.
- If you have DSL high speed Internet service, there is a well known problem where the DSL modem gets out of synchronization with the equipment in the telephone company's central office. The fix for this is to unplug the power and phone line to the DSL modem at your home or office, wait 15 seconds, and then plug it back in. This will "fix" the slowness problem in many cases.
- There is also the possibility that your Internet connection is slow, rather than the computer itself. Try experimenting with different applications (web browsing, email, Instant Messaging, etc.) to see if the slowness occurs everywhere or just with one particular application.
- The network cable may have partially failed where it is connected to the plugs at either end. Try replacing the cable.
- The network hub or switch may be failing. Try replacing it (or borrowing one) to replace it for a test.

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