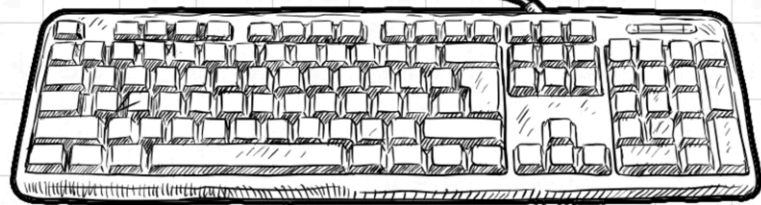


- Save your work as you go
- Restart once in a while
- Keep some free storage space; full drives cause problems
- Don't ignore update notices, but don't install them right before important work
- Keep liquids away from electronics (lids on drinks)
- Use devices on hard, flat surfaces so they don't overheat
- Be gentle with cables - don't yank or sharply bend them
- Use a surge protector or UPS if power flickers where you live
- Back up important files somewhere outside your computer regularly.
- If something suddenly breaks, think about what changed last
- Get a password manager and use distinct passwords! Breaches happen constantly, protect yourself.

## habits for better computing

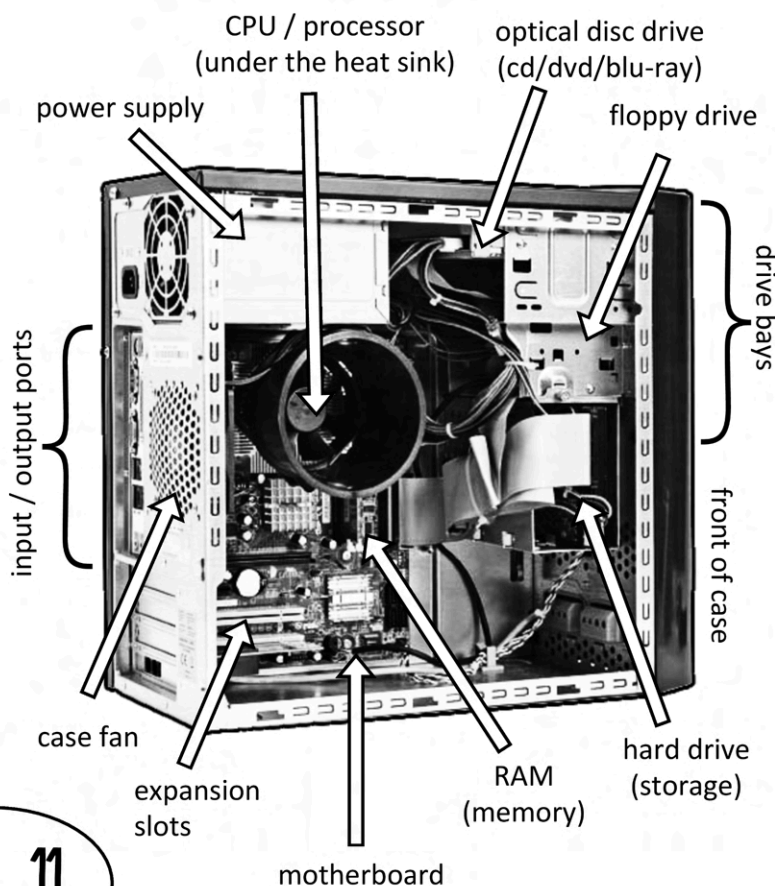
# PC Problem Pocket Zine

a beginner's guide to fixing common computer problems



by alexisgee.bsky.social | January 2026

## inside a computer



## it won't turn on

*But did you really check the power?*

### Try:

- Unplug and replug cables (from both ends if possible), remove and reinsert batteries.
- Different outlet, different power cable.
- Additional power switches on back or power strip?

If nothing happens at all - no lights, no sounds, no beeps, no fans - the power supply might be bad.

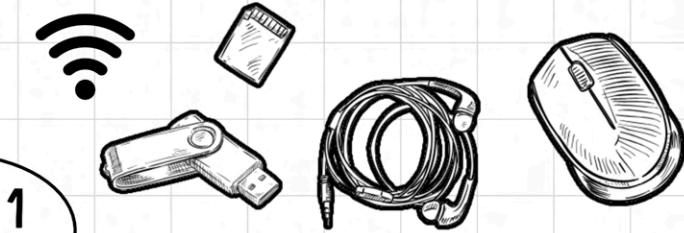
## the screen is black

**If the device seems on but nothing shows, it might be:**

- Too dim - turn the brightness up.
- Sending the picture elsewhere - disconnect extra screens. (**Win+P** shortcut for display modes on PC)
- Stuck in sleep - click or hit enter on keyboard; might need to replace batteries in a wireless mouse or keyboard, if applicable.
- Hibernating - tap power button or open laptop lid.
- Temporarily stuck - try restarting. Since you can't see the computer menu, hold the power button for about 10 seconds to force a hard shutdown. Wait a few seconds. Then turn it back on.

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## peripherals

Some peripherals (mouse, keyboard, webcam, printer) install automatically, and others need drivers or specialty software.

### Check first:

- Physical connections
- Power to the device
- Restart with the device connected

**Avoid random third-party driver sites, these can spread malware.**

### If it still isn't recognized:

- Go to the device's website
- Search for your model
- Install drivers or software following their instructions. If you need to reinstall: Uninstall, restart, then reinstall.
- PC - search for "Device Manager" and look for your device. If it's there, right click to check for updates or uninstall.

## water spilled on it

### Immediately after a spill:

- Unplug, turn off, remove battery
- Turn it upside down to drain liquid
- Gently blot with a towel
- Let it dry for 24-48 hours

Turning it on too soon can cause more damage due to shorting out. Also - do not put it in rice, the rice trick was more of an urban myth than an actual fix.

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# quick buying cheat sheet

**General use:** i5 / Ryzen 5 · 16 GB RAM · SSD

**Creative work:** Strong CPU · 16-32 GB RAM · SSD · GPU

**Gaming:** Mid CPU · 16 GB RAM · Strong GPU · SSD

**CPU (Processor)** - How fast it thinks. Brands Intel and AMD are both fine to start out. Higher number = more power.

**Everyday use:** Intel i5 / AMD Ryzen 5 is sufficient

**RAM (Memory)** - How much can it do at once

- **8 GB** → Bare minimum (web, docs)
- **16 GB** → Recommended (multitasking, creative work)
- **32 GB+** → Heavy video, audio, VMs

**Hard Drive (Storage)** - 512 GB is comfy, 1 TB for lots of files

- **SSD (solid state)** → FAST (preferred)
- **NVMe SSD** → Even faster (best)
- **HDD** → Slow, only good for cheap bulk storage

**GPU (Graphics Card)** - If no gaming/editing, skip a big GPU

- **Integrated (built in) graphics** → Office, browsing, general
- **Dedicated GPU** → Gaming, video editing, rendering, 3D

**Display (Laptops & Monitors)**

- **1080p (1920×1080)** → Standard, usually good enough
- **1440p / 4K** → Sharper, needs stronger GPU (gaming)

Updated Jan 2026

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Unscrew / release and slide open computer case

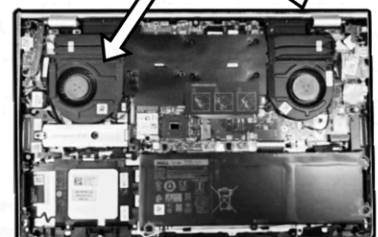
Make sure ALL screws are removed before GENTLY prying open laptop



Check fans and vents for dust accumulation. Blow out with compressed air, avoid letting fans spin as this can build static electricity and zap parts.



Only handle components by their edges.



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# acronyms & abbreviations

## Computer Basics

**CPU:** Central Processing Unit  
**GPU:** Graphics Processing Unit  
**PC:** Personal Computer  
**PSU:** Power Supply Unit  
**RAM:** Random Access Memory

## Software & Interfaces

**APP:** Application  
**CLI:** Command Line Interface  
**EXE:** Executable file  
**OS:** Operating System (Windows, MacOS, Linux)  
**UI:** User Interface

## Internet & Networking

**DNS:** Domain Name System  
**HTTP:** HyperText Transfer Protocol  
**IP:** Internet Protocol  
**ISP:** Internet Service Provider  
**LAN:** Local Area Network  
**VPN:** Virtual Private Network  
**WAN:** Wide Area Network

## Storage

**KB:** Kilobyte  
**MB:** Megabyte ( $\approx 1,000$  KB)  
**GB:** Gigabyte ( $\approx 1,000$  MB)  
**TB:** Terabyte ( $\approx 1,000$  GB)  
**HDD:** Hard Disk Drive  
**SSD:** Solid State Drive  
**ZIP:** Compressed file format

## Security

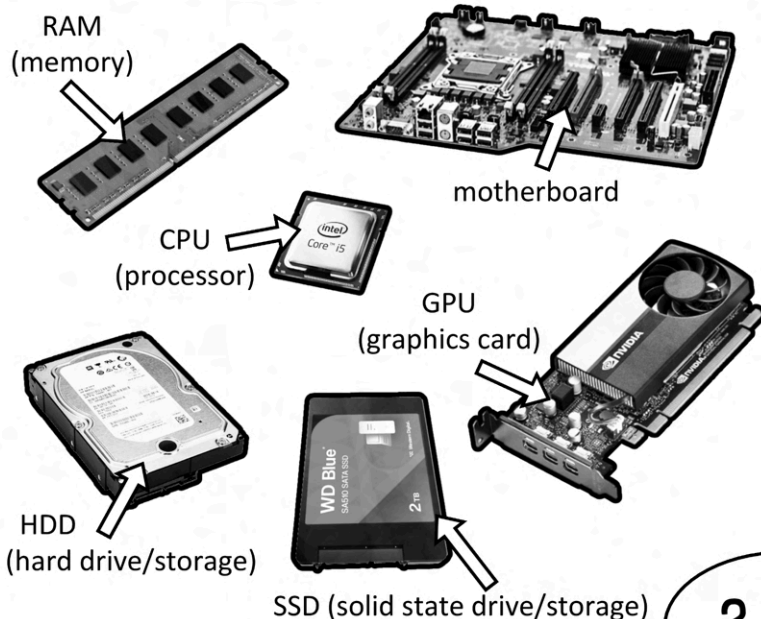
**AV:** Antivirus  
**2FA:** Two-Factor Authentication  
**MFA:** Multi-Factor Authentication

## Performance & Troubleshooting

**BIOS:** Basic Input/Output System  
**BSOD:** Blue Screen of Death  
**CMOS:** Complementary Metal-Oxide Semiconductor (stores firmware settings)  
**FPS:** Frames Per Second  
**POST:** Power-On Self Test  
**UEFI:** Unified Extensible Firmware Interface

# about this guide

This zine is a collection of tips for basic computer troubleshooting. While a Google search can go a long way, sometimes you just “don’t know what you don’t know” and I hope this can help point you in the right direction.



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# opening the machine

When opening a computer, you should never have to force anything. Opening a device is at your own risk.

- Unplug all cables.
- Discharge electricity from desktop computers by pressing and holding the power button a few seconds.
- Ground yourself (touch something metal like the case to remove static) before touching components. Don't work on carpet. If you're concerned about static, get an anti-static wrist strap.
- If laptop battery is external, remove it; if internal, unplug it.
- Always use the correct screwdriver to prevent stripping.
- Track your screws (at a minimum, use a bowl).
- Take photos as you go to remember how to put it back.
- Most desktops either have screws on the back or a button/lever release for the case to slide open.
- Laptops have lots of screws to keep track of and sometimes screws are hidden under stickers, the battery, the keyboard, or rubber feet.
- When popping open the edges of a laptop, use something plastic (spudger, corner of an old credit card) to prevent damaging the plastic case. Don't use the screwdriver.
- DO NOT open the power supply.
- Apple products are difficult to get into and use specific screwdrivers. Use tutorials or take them to a specialist.

Search “(model name) disassembly” for model-specific info.

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# no internet

No internet on one computer:

- Turn Wi-Fi or Ethernet off and back on in settings
- Check cables on both ends
- Use “Diagnose Network Problems” if available

No internet on any device:

- Unplug modem/router
- Wait 10-15 seconds
- Plug it back in
- Wait a few minutes to reconnect

If it still doesn't work, there may be a local outage - contact your provider.

Check speed: <https://www.speedtest.net/>

Your **modem** connects to your Internet service provider (ISP) like Cox, AT&T, etc. Your **router** passes that internet signal to other devices (Wi-Fi, wired) and can connect devices to each other. **Many devices have both built-in.**

# no sound

Check/Try:

- Volume
- Mute button
- Speaker power
- Correct port
- System sound settings
- App-specific settings
- Muted browser tab
- Different headphones
- Reboot

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# troubleshooting basics

**Trust your senses!** See something weird? Smell something weird? Is it too hot? Do you hear a noise? Take in whatever clues you find, and don't be afraid to Google it.

*Rule of thumb: if you smell burning or it's dangerously hot, unplug it immediately.*

## power reset

If a normal restart doesn't work for a hardware issue:

### Full power reset:

- Shut the device down
- Unplug it completely
- Remove the battery if possible
- With no power connected, press and hold the power button for 15-20 seconds.

*This helps drain leftover electrical charge.*

### When starting back up:

- Let the device fully start up
- Give background services time to load
- Wait a minute or so before opening apps; a little patience goes a long way

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## frozen apps

If a program won't respond, try:

- Click once, not repeatedly. Wait 30 seconds.
- Close other programs that you can access.

### Force quit shortcuts

**PC:** Ctrl + Alt + Delete

Then select "Task Manager" and end task.

**Mac:** Command (⌘) + Option (⌥) + Escape

## error messages

Error messages usually explain what failed, even if it doesn't explain why. If you get one:

- Take a photo or screenshot of it
- Search for keywords

## when asking for help

You'll get better help if you provide:

- 1) What device and app.
- 2) What you were trying to do.
- 3) What happened instead.
- 4) What you already tried.

The Internet is full of great resources.

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# common connectors



USB C



Lightning (Apple)



Mini USB



USB 2.0 Type B



USB Type A



Thunderbolt (Apple)



Micro USB



USB 3.0 Type B



VGA



DisplayPort



HDMI



PS/2



DVI-I Single Link



DVI-I Dual Link



DVI-D Single Link



DVI-D Dual Link



Ethernet  
(Cat5/Cat6/etc)



Headphone/Microphone  
Audio Jacks



3.5mm Audio Plug

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## it's very slow

**Slowness usually means the device is overwhelmed.**

- Close apps you aren't using
- Check for pending updates running in the background; go ahead and update if you can.
- Check to see if storage is almost full

**PC:** Start > Settings > System > Storage

**Mac:** Apple Menu > System Settings > General > Storage

### Free up some space

- Clean out your downloads folder
- Uninstall unused programs (games consume a lot)
- Move large files to an external flash or hard drive
- PC - search for Disk Cleanup and clean system files.

### Check for excess heat

Feeling a lot of heat at the vents? Hearing a lot of fan noise? Some fan spinning is normal for more intensive tasks like graphics rendering, but excessive heat will slow the machine down.

Check ventilation, check for dust. If it's dusty, many machines can be opened up to (GENTLY) clean out dust. Compressed air and microfiber cloths work well.

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