

Your top 10 tech questions answered

HP Technology at Work Newsletter – March 23, 2009



Here are the answers you have been waiting for. Your top 10 tech questions are answered...

1. I think I have a virus! What should I do?

Some symptoms of virus infection include unusual errors or weird pop-up messages, slow system performance, frequent program crashes, or applications that won't open. If you experience any of these, run a [virus scanner](#) to determine if you do indeed have a virus. The program should either automatically remove the virus, or can instruct you on how to do so.

2. What is a cookie?

A cookie is a small bit of information that is deposited on the hard drive of your computer by websites that you visit. Cookies help the website to "remember" who you are, and to deliver content that matches your needs and interests.

3. What's the easiest way to back up data?

For small amounts of data, use a USB memory stick, which plugs right into your PC. You might also consider burning your data to CD or DVD. For larger amounts of data, you may want to invest in a second hard drive, or investigate online storage services. If you have Windows Vista®, you can use the [Windows® Backup and Restore](#) feature.

4. What is the best way to create strong passwords?

Try creating an algorithm. For example, combine your spouse's initials with your pet's birthday, then add the first three letters of the website you're creating the password for. So if you're creating a password for Amazon, it might look something like this: RMW011202Ama.

5. Why is my computer running so slowly?

The most likely culprit is spyware. Run an anti-virus/anti-spyware program to detect and remove it. You also may just have a single program that's hogging all your memory. Check your Windows Task Manager to find out. A good way to understand what's eating your memory is to search the Internet for more information on the "Image Names" of the processes using the most memory.

Sometimes, large files can be broken up across your hard drive, which can slow down your computer when it tries to read them. To fix this, run a tool in Windows called [Disk Defragmenter](#).

6. How can I cut down on all this spam e-mail I'm getting?

This one's easy: make sure the e-mail service you're using offers spam filters, and ensure that they're turned on. It may not keep all the spam out of your inbox, but it should dramatically reduce it.

7. Desktop PC vs. notebook PC: which should I buy?

The primary advantage of [notebooks](#) is obvious: they're portable and use less power than their fixed counterparts. Otherwise, there are several reasons to choose [desktops](#): they're cheaper to upgrade and repair, more ergonomic, less likely to be stolen, and have a better price-to-power ratio, meaning that a cheap desktop generally has the power of an expensive notebook.

8. My computer shows an error message that says I'm low on disk space. What to do?

There are three options. The easiest is to simply delete unnecessary files and programs. Use the Windows *Add/Remove* programs tool to get rid of anything you might have installed that you're no longer using. Media files like videos and music take up a lot of space too, so consider burning them to CD or DVD and then deleting them from your hard drive.

If you don't want to delete any files, you'll need to get more disk space by either adding an extra hard drive or upgrading your existing one.

9. What is a firewall, and do I really need one?

The answer to this is short and simple: yes, you need one! A firewall protects your PC and your network from unwanted intruders. Learn more about the [Windows XP firewall](#).

10. Should I turn off my PC at night or leave it running?

Neither! A better solution than either option is to [set your PC to "hibernate"](#). To do this, go to your *Control Panel*, click on *Power Options*, and set your PC to "hibernate" after a specified time. This will power-down your monitor to about 5 watts of energy and your PC to 2.3 watts – virtually the same as if it were completely turned off, but ready to be used again at short notice.

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