

Troubleshooting Tips for Technical Writers

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What to do on an ongoing basis

1. Keep a paper diary or *black book* handy to support your computer.
2. Record all software patches, upgrades and new installations.
3. Record all hardware upgrades, changes, and additions to your system like desktop peripherals.
4. Note the source of the new software, and the time/date you made the change, and how will you get support for the new application if you need it.

What to do when a software application is behaving badly

1. Make a note of what you were doing, mental or otherwise.
Can you remember the steps that led up to the bad behavior? Were you working across a network or on a dial-up connection?
2. If you see an error message, log it in your diary.
Use a pen. Note the date, time, and application.
3. Save your work if you can.
4. Exit the application.
5. Check if your other applications are working, for example, try to Send/Receive E-mail, or Refresh your Web browser.
6. Close all desktop applications.
7. **Power down and count to 30.**

8. Get down on the floor and check all of your cables.
You are checking to see if they have become loose or unplugged.
9. If you were working on a shared file across a network, disconnect your network connection.
10. Restart the computer.
If you can't restart the computer, you may be experiencing a hardware problem. Call your help desk now.
11. Restart the application, locally if possible.
If you can restart the application locally, you may be experiencing a network problem.
Power down the computer again, connect the network cable to the computer, and restart the computer again. Is it working now? If not, take a walk.
Go for coffee and ask your coworkers if they are experiencing delays or difficulties with the network. You may be able to wait it out.
12. You *might* be able to recover your work if you were unable to save it.
Many software applications will try and walk you through this task.
13. Try and reproduce the error.
14. If you can reproduce the error, log it.
Note the exact text of the error message if you saw one, the version of software you were using, the operating system, the date the error occurred, and the steps that led up to the reproducible error. Name the widgets involved. Take screen grabs if possible.
Check the manufacturer's web site for a searchable knowledge base. Try and look up the text of the error message.
If you can't find it, then report the error in writing to the software manufacturer or the developer. Call and ask for a workaround.

