

## Startup Setbacks

When you start up your Mac, you expect to be greeted by that familiar startup sound, the friendly Apple logo, and ultimately your coveted Desktop and Finder. Sometimes your Mac may derail your plans by stopping on a blue or gray screen, a broken folder, a kernel panic, a flashing question mark, or some other startup anomaly.

Don't worry. These types of issues are usually simple to resolve. Just click a scenario below to get the troubleshooting steps. If you don't see your specific issue listed here, click the last link for more troubleshooting options.

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### My Mac won't turn on

If your computer won't turn on—you don't hear a startup sound or any fan or drive noise—try the following steps, one by one, until you resolve the issue.

1. Make sure that the power cord is plugged into a working electrical outlet (to confirm that an electrical socket is working, plug in a lamp or other electric device and turn it on).
2. Make sure that the power cord is properly connected to both your computer and the electrical outlet (if you're using a power strip, make sure that the strip is powered on).
3. Try plugging a different power cord into the computer (if you have a working one available). If the computer starts up, replace your old power cord.
4. Disconnect all devices, except for your keyboard and mouse, that are plugged into your computer (such as a printer, hub, or iPod), and try turning on your computer again.
5. If you have an iBook, PowerBook, or Mac mini, try starting up your computer by pressing the Control key, Command key, and power button simultaneously.
6. If you recently installed additional memory, make sure that it's correctly installed. Try removing the additional memory to see if your computer starts up normally.
7. If you have an iBook or PowerBook, make sure that your computer battery has enough charge to start up—plugging in the power adapter will allow you to start up your computer if the battery has no charge.
8. If you have an iMac G5, read our "[iMac G5: Troubleshooting when it won't turn on](#)" article for further troubleshooting steps.

## My Mac starts up but then stops on a startup screen

If your Mac starts up but then stops on an empty, blue or gray screen or a screen with a progress indicator, try the following solutions, one by one, until you resolve the issue.

1. You may have an incompatible third-party startup item. Do the following to temporarily disable startup items and then see if your computer starts up normally:
  1. Shut down your computer.
  2. Press the power button and immediately press and hold the Shift key to start up in Safe Mode.
  3. When you see the "Safe Boot" screen, let go of the Shift key.
  4. When your computer finishes starting up, drag any third-party items out of the /Library/StartupItems and /System/Library/StartupItems folders.
  5. Restart your computer to see if it starts up normally.
2. An incompatible login item could cause this symptom. Do the following to remove them and then see if your computer starts up normally:
  1. Shut down your computer.
  2. Press the power button and immediately press and hold the Shift key to start up in Safe Mode.
  3. When you see the "Safe Boot" screen, let go of the Shift key.
  4. When your computer finishes starting up, choose **System Preferences** from the **Apple** menu.
  5. Click **Accounts**, then click the Login Items tab.
  6. Select all the login items and remove them by clicking the minus (-) button.
  7. Restart your computer to see if it starts up normally.
3. If you have an Ethernet cable connected to your computer, temporarily disconnect it, then restart your computer to see if it starts up normally.
4. Try resetting a couple preference files by doing the following:
  1. Shut down your computer.
  2. Press the power button and immediately press and hold the Command and S keys to start up in Single-User mode.
  3. When you see white text appear on the screen, let go of the keys.
  4. At the prompt, type `mount -uw /`
  5. Press Return.
  6. Then type `mv /Library/Preferences/com.apple.loginwindow.plist preferences2.old`
  7. Press Return.
  8. Type `mv /Library/Preferences/com.apple.windowserver.plist preferences3.old`
  9. Press Return.
  10. Type `reboot`
  11. Press Return. Your Mac should start up normally.
5. If your Mac still stops halfway through its startup process, see "[Your Mac won't start up in Mac OS X](#)" for more troubleshooting steps.

## My Mac starts up with a dark text screen or a bunch of gibberish text

When you start up your Mac, you may see a dark text screen appear that says, "You need to restart your computer" in a bunch of different languages. This is known as a kernel panic, which is a type of error message that can be caused by damaged or incompatible software or hardware. It can also appear as a bunch of white gibberish text against black text fields on top of your Desktop picture.

In most cases, the kernel panic can be resolved by simply restarting your computer (press and hold the power button until your Mac shuts down, wait 10 seconds, then press the power button to start it up again). However, if it keeps recurring, troubleshoot the issue using these steps:

1. First, determine what you did before the kernel panic occurred. Did you install new software or new memory? Did you see an alert or error message that caused you to restart your computer? Did an application stop responding, which made you restart your computer?
2. If you installed any new hardware (such as adding memory, a new card, or new peripheral device), shut down your computer, remove the new hardware (or disconnect it), then restart your computer. If your computer starts up normally, contact the hardware vendor. It's possible that a new driver is causing the issue; see the next step to remove the software to see if that resolves the issue.
3. If you installed new third-party software, try uninstalling it by doing the following:
  1. Restart your computer and immediately press and hold the Shift key while your computer starts up until you see the "Safe Boot" screen.
  2. Use the third-party software's original installer to uninstall your recently installed software, or do a search to locate the software and any related preference files, drivers, and whatnot, and move them to the Trash.
  3. If you're unsure about which software you installed last, open the /Library/StartupItems and /System/Library/Extensions folders in List view and sort each by Date Modified.
  4. Temporarily remove any recently modified, third-party .kext files and then restart your computer.
4. Use Disk Utility to repair your hard disk and permissions:
  1. Insert the Software Install disc that came with your computer into the optical drive.
  2. Restart your computer and immediately press and hold the C key to start up from the disc.
  3. When the Installer appears, choose **Open Disk Utility** from the **Installer** menu.
  4. Select your hard disk volume from the left pane, click the First Aid tab, and then click Repair Disk.
  5. When Disk Utility finishes the disk repair, click Repair Disk Permissions.
  6. When finished, choose **Restart** from the **Apple** menu to restart your computer.
5. Damaged startup or login items can cause kernel panics. To troubleshoot these items:

1. Restart your computer and immediately press and hold the Shift key to start up in Safe Mode.
2. From the **Apple** menu, choose **System Preferences**.
3. Click Accounts, then click the Login Items tab.
4. Note what login (startup) items you have. Then select all the items and click the minus sign (-) button to remove them.
5. Restart your computer. If it starts up normally, add your login items back to your Login Items list one at a time while logging out and back in after each to test. If the issue recurs, the last item you added is the culprit.

## **My Mac displays a blinking icon at startup**

Sometimes when you try to start up your computer, your Mac may show you nothing but a blinking question mark or a blinking globe icon. This is your computer's way of telling you that it can't find the system software it needs to start up.

Sometimes the blinking icon is momentary, then your computer starts up normally. Other times, your Mac won't finish starting up at all. Usually, all you need to do is remind it where its system software is. Here's how to resolve both scenarios.

- **My Mac starts up normally after a brief delay**

1. From the **Apple** menu, choose **System Preferences**.
2. Click Startup Disk.
3. In the resulting panel, select your Mac OS X volume.

- **My Mac won't start up**

1. Insert the Software Install disc that came with your Mac.
2. Restart the computer and immediately press and hold the C key to start up from the disc.
3. When you see the Installer screen, choose **Open Disk Utility** from the **Installer** menu.
4. Select your hard disk volume in the left pane, click the First Aid tab, and then click Repair Disk.
5. When it's finished, restart your computer.

If you still see a blinking question mark or globe, try this:

1. Restart your computer and immediately press and hold the X key.
2. Your computer will start up to a gray screen and then restart again.
3. Let go of the X key after your Mac starts up the second time.

If that doesn't work, try resetting your computer's PRAM (parameter random access memory), then repeating the X key steps above afterwards.

1. Restart your computer and immediately press and hold the Command, Option, P, and R keys simultaneously before the gray screen appears.

2. Continue holding these four keys until you hear the startup sound for the second time.
3. Release the keys to allow your computer to start up normally.

## **My Mac starts up, but there's no video**

If your Mac starts up normally (you hear the startup sound, as well as fan and drive noise) but you don't see any color or video on the display, try these steps, one at a time, until you resolve the issue.

### **If you have a Mac with a built-in display (iMac, eMac, iBook, PowerBook):**

1. Reset the computer's PRAM (parameter random access memory):
  1. Restart the computer and immediately press and hold the Command, Option, P, and R keys simultaneously.
  2. Continue holding these four keys until you hear the startup sound for the second time.
  3. Release the keys to allow your computer to start up normally.
2. Start up your computer from the Software Install disc:
  1. Insert the Software Install disc that came with your computer into your Mac.
  2. Restart the computer and immediately press and hold the C key to start up from the disc.
  3. If you see video when your computer is started up from the disc, you may have corrupted software. Use the Archive and Install feature of the Mac OS X Installer to reinstall Mac OS X. This kind of installation gives you a fresh version of Mac OS X, but you won't lose any data from the computer because it gets archived.

### **If you have a Mac with an external display (Power Mac, Mac mini):**

1. Make sure that your display is turned on and has power, that the display's power cord is plugged into a working wall outlet, and that it's properly connected. (To check if the wall socket is working, plug in a lamp or other electrical device.)
2. Make sure that the video cable's connections to your computer's video display port and to the monitor are secure.
3. Examine the pins on the video cable connector to make sure they aren't bent or damaged in any way.
4. If you have an extra working display available, connect it to your computer. If you see video after doing so, replace your old display.
5. Reset the computer's PRAM (parameter random access memory):
  1. Restart the computer and immediately press and hold the Command, Option, P, and R keys simultaneously.
  2. Continue holding these four keys until you hear the startup sound for the second time.
  3. Release the keys to allow your computer to start up normally.

6. Start up your computer from the Software Install disc:
  1. Insert the Software Install disc that came with your computer into your Mac.
  2. Restart the computer and immediately press and hold the C key to start up from the disc.
  3. If you see video when your computer is started up from the disc, you may have corrupted software. Use the Archive and Install feature of the Mac OS X Installer to reinstall Mac OS X. This kind of installation gives you a fresh version of Mac OS X, but you won't lose any data from the computer because it gets archived.

## **My Mac makes funny beeping noises during startup**

If your Mac beeps during startup, it usually indicates an issue with its memory. This issue will generally only occur after you've installed new memory into your computer or replaced existing memory. Here's how to troubleshoot what these beeps mean.

- **One beep**—Your computer doesn't detect any memory. First, make sure that the memory card is seated properly. If you replaced your computer's memory, shut down your Mac, swap out the current memory card with the original RAM card, and restart your computer. If your computer doesn't beep on startup, replace your new memory card.
- **More than one beep**—Your memory may be damaged or incompatible with your computer. First, make sure that the memory card is seated properly and verify that it is compatible with your Mac. If it is, shut down your Mac, remove all third-party memory (reinstall the original card if you removed it), then restart your computer to make sure that it starts up normally. If you don't hear any beeps, shut down your Mac and reinstall your memory one card at a time. If you hear beeping, the last card you installed is the culprit. Contact the memory vendor.

It is possible that your Mac may need service if you're absolutely sure that your memory is both compatible with your computer and in good, working order.