

Computer Crises

If you're experiencing an issue with your computer during general use (one that isn't startup-, software-, or device-related) click the link below that's closest to your scenario to get troubleshooting steps that can help resolve your issue. If you have a computer issue but don't see your specific one listed here, click the last link for more troubleshooting options.

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My arrow turned into a spinning disc that won't go away

When your arrow turns into a colorful spinning disc, your Mac is hard at work on a processor-intensive task. This is generally normal behavior—your Mac may be rendering or calculating something, or even spinning up the hard drive after being awakened from sleep. Depending on what task is taking place and how many applications you currently have open, you should see your normal arrow return in a few seconds. Sometimes it may take a little longer.

However, if the disc continues to spin and won't go away for several minutes, you can make it stop by doing this:

1. Force Quit the application (or the Finder) that you're stuck in by simultaneously pressing the Command, Option, and Escape (Esc) keys. Please note that you will lose any unsaved changes in the affected application.
2. In the resulting Force Quit window, select the affected application (or the Finder, if that's where the spinning disc occurs).
3. Click Force Quit.

If your Mac constantly displays the spinning disc cursor, try restarting the computer to see if that helps. If not, try repairing your hard disk with Disk Utility as follows:

1. Insert the Software Install disc that came with your computer.
2. When you see its disc icon appear on the Desktop, restart your computer (from the **Apple** menu, choose **Restart**), then press and hold down the C key on your keyboard to start up your computer from the disc.
3. Continue holding the C key until your Mac finishes starting up. When you see the Installer screen, choose **Open Disk Utility** from the **Installer** menu.
4. Select your computer's hard disk volume from the left pane, then click the First Aid tab.
5. Click Repair Disk. When the repair is finished, restart your Mac from the **Apple** menu.

My Mac stopped responding (aka "crashed" or "froze")

If your Mac isn't responding to your clicking, typing, or mouse movements, try these steps to get your Mac back on track. Please note that you will lose any unsaved changes in all open applications.

1. Try quitting applications by pressing Command-Q to see if that jump starts your Mac.
2. If that doesn't work, see if you can Force Quit applications by pressing Command-Option-Escape, selecting an application in the resulting window, and clicking Force Quit.
3. If your Mac still isn't responding, or won't allow you to do steps 1 or 2, try restarting your computer by pressing the power button, then clicking Restart in the dialog that appears.
4. If your Mac doesn't respond to your restart request, press and hold the computer's power button until your Mac shuts down. Wait 10 seconds and then restart the computer.
5. If your Mac is still unresponsive, shut down your Mac as instructed in the previous step, then unplug your computer from its power source. Wait about 30 seconds and then plug the power cord back in and start up your Mac.

#@*! I forgot my password

OK, we know—learning how to use your Mac may seem like information overload at first initiation, so don't worry if you've suddenly forgotten your password (but don't let this happen again). If you forget your account password or any other password in your keychain, here's how to resolve both issues.

For forgotten account passwords:

1. Insert the Software Install disc that came with your computer.
2. Restart your computer and immediately press and hold the C key to start up from the disc.
3. When the Installer appears, choose **Reset Password** from the **Installer** menu

and follow the onscreen instructions to choose a new one.

4. Burn this password into your memory.

For forgotten passwords in a keychain:

1. Open Keychain Access (it's in /Applications/Utilities).
2. Click the Passwords disclosure triangle, then select the item that uses the password you've forgotten (for example, select Internet if you've forgotten an email password).
3. In the resulting list, double-click the item whose password you want.
4. In the resulting dialog, select the "Show password" checkbox.
5. Type your keychain password in the resulting dialog (if it's your main keychain, this password is the same as your login password).
6. Click Allow Once to display your password, or click Always Allow to always display your password in Keychain.

I can't open, move, or trash a file or folder

Sometimes when you try to open, duplicate, move, or trash a file or folder, you may get a message that says you don't have permission to do so. When this happens, do the following to correct the issue:

1. Select the file or folder in the Finder and from the **File** menu, choose **Get Info** (or press Command-I) to open the Info window.
2. In the Info window, click the Ownership & Permissions disclosure triangle to reveal its information.
3. To fully access this item, make sure that **Read & Write** is chosen from the **You can** pop-up menu. If it isn't, you will need to be logged in as an administrator to change your access; skip to step 6. If you used to be able to access the item but now can't, continue to the next step.
4. Click the General disclosure triangle and make sure that the file or folder isn't locked. If the Locked checkbox is selected, deselect it and then try accessing the file or folder as planned.
5. If that doesn't work, fix Disk Permissions; open Disk Utility (in /Applications/Utilities), select your computer's hard disk volume, click the First Aid tab, and click Repair Disk Permissions. When it's finished, you should have access.
6. If this is the first time you're accessing the item and you are an administrator, click the lock icon in the Details section of the Info window. From the **Owner** pop-up menu, choose your user name (type your password when prompted), then choose **Read & Write** from the **Access** pop-up menu directly below it. If you're changing access to a folder, click the "Apply to enclosed items" button to change permissions for all enclosed items.

The Finder displays generic-looking icons

In certain situations, your Mac may swap out some of your normal application and document icons for some generic-looking file or folder ones. To bring your icons back to their original, unique states, run Disk Utility.

1. Insert the Software Install disc that came with your Mac into the optical drive.
2. When the disc icon appears on the Desktop, restart your computer and immediately press and hold the C key. This makes your Mac start up from the disc instead of its own hard drive.
3. Keep holding down the C key until you see the Installer screen appear on your display.
4. From the **Installer** menu, choose **Open Disk Utility**.
5. Select your computer's hard disk volume from the left pane, then click the First Aid tab.
6. Click Repair Disk. When it's finished, restart your Mac from the **Apple** menu.

My Mac is acting sluggish

You may notice that your computer isn't as snappy as it once was. This can happen suddenly or over time. If you notice that your system performance has decreased, it may be due to a number of things. Here are some things you can do to optimize your system.

- Check your free hard disk space. If you have less than 300 MB of free disk space available, you may run into issues because your computer's virtual memory relies on free disk space to run applications efficiently. If you're short on space, throw away unwanted items, or back up stuff to a CD or DVD to free up some space.
- Quit applications that you're not using. The more applications you have open, the more system memory you need to keep things running smoothly. If you have multiple applications open, you may experience decreased performance, depending on how much memory is installed in your computer.

My optical drive is making funny noises

Not all CDs and DVDs are created alike. Some discs may be slightly thicker than others, some may have labels affixed to their tops, and others may have scratches or other defects on the playing surface. Any of these things can cause your computer's optical drive to make unexpected noise (such as constant grinding) when you insert the disc. To find the cause of your issue, try this:

1. Make sure that the disc is fully seated in the optical drive tray (this doesn't apply to computer models with slot-loading drives).
2. Eject the disc and examine its surface. If there are any fingerprints, dust, or dirt, wipe the disc with a dry, lint-free cloth and try it again. If the disc has major scratches, do not use it.
3. If you still hear noise, eject the disc and insert another. If the noise goes away, the disc is the likely culprit (you may want to contact the manufacturer for a

replacement). If you still hear noise, try another type of disc (for example, if you inserted an audio CD, try a DVD movie disc or a CD that contains data files).

4. If you still hear noise, your computer may need service.

I can't empty the Trash

If you try to empty the Trash but get a message that says that you can't, try these steps.

1. Open the Trash folder by clicking its icon in the Dock.
2. If any file displays a tiny lock graphic on its icon, you'll need to unlock the file to trash it. Select the file, press Command-I, click the General disclosure triangle in the Info window, and deselect the Locked checkbox. Then empty the trash.
3. If none of the items in the Trash have a lock icon, most likely an application is preventing you from dumping the file. Quit the application that the file is associated with (for example, if it's a partially downloaded file, try quitting Safari), then try emptying the Trash again.
4. If that doesn't work, a system process could be holding a file hostage. Try restarting your computer, then empty the Trash.

I keep getting an "Out of memory" message, but I have plenty

When your hard drive is full, Mac OS X can't use the required free disk space for virtual memory to run your applications. Even if you have plenty of memory, you may get an "Out of memory" message when your free disk space falls below 200 MB. If you get this type of message, throw away unwanted files or archive files to a CD, DVD, or other backup volume to free up disk space.

My Mac won't go to sleep

Some things can prevent your computer from going to sleep. To resolve the issue, try any of these steps to make your Mac enjoy its nap time.

- Check your Energy Saver preferences to make sure that you've allowed your Mac to sleep: From the **Apple** menu, choose **System Preferences**. Click Energy Saver, then click the Sleep tab. Make sure that the two sliders are not set to "Never" sleep.
- If DVD Player is the active application, your computer won't go to sleep even when it's left idle. Either switch to another application or quit DVD Player.
- If you're using an iBook or PowerBook that won't sleep when you close its lid, make sure that the keyboard is seated properly. If the lid presses a key when it's closed, it will prevent your computer from sleeping.
- If you're using a Mac OS that's older than Mac OS X 10.3 Panther, turn off the faxing option. From the **Apple** menu, choose **System Preferences**. Click Print & Fax, then click the Faxing tab. Deselect the "Receive faxes on this computer" checkbox.

I can't eject my CD or DVD

If a disc in your computer's optical drive refuses to leave, try these steps to eject the disc.

1. Restart your computer: From the **Apple** menu, choose **Restart**.
2. When you hear the startup sound, immediately hold down your mouse button until your computer starts up and ejects the disc.

If that doesn't work, try this:

1. Restart your computer: From the **Apple** menu, choose **Restart**.
2. When you hear the startup sound, immediately hold down the X key until your computer starts up.
3. Open iTunes or DVD Player (both are in the Applications folder).
4. Click the Eject button in either of these applications.

If that still didn't eject the disc, try this:

1. Restart your computer: From the **Apple** menu, choose **Restart**.
2. When you hear the startup sound, immediately hold down the Command, Option, O, and F keys together until you see a text-only screen—this is the Open Firmware screen.
3. At the prompt, type `eject cd` and press Return.
4. Then type `mac-boot` and press Return to start up your computer in Mac OS X.

My issue isn't listed here

If you have another issue with your computer that isn't listed here, it's possible that we have a solution for your predicament in our huge technical articles database. Be sure to visit Apple's [Service & Support](#) site and do a search for your issue by typing a few keywords in the Search box in the upper-right corner.

Their search engine will pull up all matching articles and other web pages that match your search criteria. You can also do an advanced search [here](#) to get better results that are more specific to your issue.