Resetting the PRAM

What is the "PRAM"?

Your Mac stores certain low-level data in a special place in memory called the Parameter Random Access Memory, or 'PRAM'. It is possible for this data to become corrupted, and cause strange behavior as a result such as constant program or OS crashing, and even sometimes making the computer extremely slow. When that happens, it is time to 'zap' it, which clears it out, restores all the settings to their factory defaults, and allows the system to write new, uncorrupted data there.

What kind of information does the PRAM store?

Some Macintosh computers may not have all the settings described below.

- Status of AppleTalk
- Serial Port Configuration and Port definition
- Alarm clock setting
- Application font
- Serial printer location
- Autokey rate
- Autokey delay
- Speaker volume
- Attention (beep) sound
- Double-click time
- Caret blink time (insertion point rate)
- Mouse scaling (mouse speed)
- Startup disk
- Menu blink count
- Monitor depth
- 32-bit addressing
- Virtual memory
- RAM disk
- Disk cache

When should you zap the PRAM?

Certain symptoms 'cry out' for this: if you cannot select a startup disk, printer, or enable or disable AppleTalk or VM reliably, it is likely that the PRAM data is corrupt. Sometimes, though, the presenting problem does not SEEM to have anything to do with the PRAM data, but if you have tried everything else and there's still no joy, it might turn out that zapping the PRAM makes the difference in restoring your Mac to full health.

Resetting PRAM

1. Shut down the computer.
2. Locate the following keys on the keyboard: Command (Apple key), Option, P, and R. You will need to hold these keys down simultaneously in step 4. (See image for keys here.)
3. Turn on the computer.
4. Press and hold the Command (Apple key)-Option-P-R keys. You must press this key combination before the gray screen appears.
5. Hold the keys down until the computer restarts and you hear the startup sound for the second time.
6. Release the keys.

Your computer's PRAM is reset to the default values. The clock settings may be reset to a default date on some models.