



How to Use and Maintain a Microcomputer

Buying a microcomputer is a major investment. Once you have purchased one, you will want it to continue paying for itself for many years to come. A microcomputer can only do this if you know how to use and protect it. This guide will help you determine how to install a microcomputer, how to secure your microcomputer from theft, how to use it properly, how to keep the hardware free of contaminants and other damaging items, how to maintain your software and how to keep yourself informed about new products and developments.

Installation

When you open the boxes containing your new microcomputer, you'll find a number of items such as manuals, disks, cables and a checklist to make sure you've received everything you should have. The manuals will explain how each component should be connected and how to get your system assembled and running. If you've never used a microcomputer before, you may find it helpful to read through the user's manual first before undertaking any of the installation procedures.

Once you have assembled and installed your system and are satisfied the system is working properly, you may then install the applications programs (software). Most software comes with step-by-step installation procedures that you should follow. If anything goes wrong check the trouble-shooting guides, which are often found in the manuals, or contact the Computer Sales section of the University Bookstore (453-4664 Fredericton, 648-5540 Saint John) for assistance if you purchased your system there.

Checking for Problems

Generally, microcomputer hardware, software and other supplies are very reliable; however, if you are going to encounter problems, they will often occur soon after you begin to use your new equipment. It is recommended that you set up your machine and begin to work with it soon after you pick it up. If a hardware item is not functioning properly and you bought it at the Campus Computer Store, contact the store for assistance. Check your software documentation for more information, or contact the bookstore. Good software usually comes with support through a long-distance helpline. Check your software documentation for more information.

All microcomputers purchased through the Campus Computer store have at least a one year warranty, supplied by the manufacturer, covering all parts and service. We have access to technicians who have been trained by the microcomputer manufacturers to repair any hardware problems that might occur. If your problem cannot be corrected over the telephone, you may be required to bring your microcomputer peripheral into the Bookstore for service.

Insurance and Security

Once you are satisfied that your system is running correctly, you should then think of insuring your microcomputer against theft, fire or other possible risks through a homeowner's policy or some other commercially available policy. Although a homeowner's policy does provide some coverage for personal computers, it is usually limited and does not cover some of the likely sources of damage you may encounter - such as power surges or food or drink spilled onto the keyboard. Check with your insurance company to see if wider insurance coverage is available.

Learning to Use a Microcomputer

At first, learning how to use a microcomputer may seem a bit intimidating but you will become more comfortable and proficient with your microcomputer the more you use it. You should keep in mind that you need to devote time learning how to use your microcomputer.

If you've never used a microcomputer before, you may find it helpful to read through the first chapter of the user's manual. Many software programs also come with "guided tour" disks which demonstrate what the application does and how you operate it. The manuals also come with tutorials that allow you to practice using some of the techniques shown in the demonstrations.

Many applications also have built-in help menus that you can call up at any time if you have a problem or forget a particular command or procedure.

Maintaining your Hardware

You should begin taking care of your hardware properly from the start. Place it in a clean, controlled environment. Microcomputer equipment should be installed in a stable location - on a sturdy table, not on a stack of books. Equipment should be out of direct sunlight and away from other sources of heat, such as radiators. Air vents on the microcomputer should not be blocked by papers or other equipment.

Surge protection is advisable. Buy a power bar which has a built-in surge protective device. A power bar is a foot-long (30 cm) unit into which you can plug your microcomputer and printer. You can purchase a good power bar from the Campus Computer Store for under \$20.

Once you have a power bar, you should establish a power up and power down sequence for your equipment and stick to it.

First, you should turn off your low power equipment (your modem), then turn off your high power equipment (such as your microcomputer and printer). Always switch off your equipment before turning off your power bar. Unplug your equipment if you know you won't be using it for a number of days or weeks. Don't plug the microcomputer into an already overloaded circuit.

Also, you should ground yourself (by touching a metal object) before touching any part of the microcomputer or handling disks, in order to disperse static electricity built up on your body. Where static is especially prevalent due to dry climates, carpets, or other factors, you may find antistatic mats or sprays appropriate.

Pollutants which can affect your microcomputer may come from general environmental causes or from users. Because your microcomputer uses electric currents and circuits to represent, store and process information, you must treat your equipment with care. The biggest environmental culprit is general dust and dirt, which can leave a thin film on the monitor screen, get into the disk drives and clog up the keyboard. Place the equipment away from open windows, fans, ducts and other areas exposed to moving air. If your microcomputer is at home, keep pets out of the computer room. Dust covers made of non-electrostatic material are also available.

Spills are probably the number one hazard to the keyboard, yet most of us continue to park a coffee cup or soft drink next to the microcomputer. Don't do it!

That goes for food and other items, as well - the keyboard can't work properly clogged up with bread crumbs, food particles, paper clips, eraser leavings and other debris.

Smoke is also a serious hazard to your microcomputer's health. Smoke particles get into the keyboard and prevent complete electrical contact; they get into disk drives and cause sporadic read/write errors. Smoke leaves a dingy film over the monitor and other external surfaces of your computing system. It can also interfere with cable connectors, empty chip sockets, video display controls and switches.

Microcomputer disks attract dust. Handle disks carefully when they are in use.