

# Beat Your Computer (Into Submission) Part 1

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## **The Current State of Affairs**

Today's world, as far as computers go, is vastly different than even in the last decade. Processors have gotten smaller and faster, memory has gotten cheaper and monitors come in any number of different sizes, shapes and aspect ratios. All of these bells and whistles obviously come with a price but anyone buying a computer knows that price is merely an investment. What they fail to realize is that by not utilizing the machine to its full potential, they are not getting a full return on their investment. You could say that a machine that doesn't work has nearly as much worth as a machine that never gets used.

## **What You Can Do**

The whole basis of this series of articles is to better equip the average computer-user to more efficiently and accurately carry out their daily tasks. The subject area of computers has expanded to vast proportions so I will have to say that the journey to computer-literacy might not be fun and definitely will not be short but at the end, as computers invade our lives more and more, it will be very worthwhile. It is advisable to print these out and highlight and mark things that catch your eye as some information may be of use to you while other info will not. Also, reading this all in one sitting is probably not the best idea and will not yield long-lasting results (just like cramming right before an exam).

With all of that said, the last thing that should be considered pre-requisite is to read with an open and curious mind. When you think you've learned all you need to know to do your daily tasks more efficiently, feel free to stop reading, otherwise, let your curiosity take you all the way to the end. Regardless, the first step in this seemingly unending journey starts not at your computer but in your own mind.

What many able-minded users fail to realize is that their self-perception and the perception they carry towards the computer can prevent them from learning. Many thoughts can go through your mind when you're unsure about something. "I don't know what I'm doing", "I hope I don't break anything", "Stupid computer..." for example, are probably all familiar mantras. While these may be true statements, they are really nothing more than distractions that keep you from focusing on the current task. To emphasize, the first step toward computer literacy starts within your own mind by developing a "can-do" attitude, no matter how trite it may sound. After developing this, the rest comes much easier and you can start to develop a basic set of operating guidelines in addition to a working dictionary of "geek speak".

## **Language undeniably shapes our lives**

A person that can't communicate effectively with others faces a severe handicap. As such, it's important to learn how to communicate with your computer in addition to learning to communicate effectively with other people *about* computers. This means learning:

- what the different keys on the keyboard do and are called
- what the different devices and components in and on your computer do
- what different pieces of software make your computer “compute”

Naturally, every computer-user is on a potentially different level. The secretary that comes in every day and writes up reports in Microsoft Word doesn't need to know as much about computers as does the teacher that teaches a Computerized Secretarial course despite the fact that they use the same software. In spite of this, when problems do occur, the more knowledge the user has, the more effectively she can communicate the symptoms of the problem to the technician that must repair the machine or even find a solution themselves.

Your computer doesn't understand English. It only understands certain input; a click from the mouse or a key pressed on the keyboard, input from a scanner or any number of other devices (barcode readers, fingerprint scanners, joysticks, etc). These devices usually come with **drivers** which, you could say, are the pieces of code that describe the “language” in which the computer and the device need to speak in order to communicate; a digital Rosetta Stone, if you will. If there is no driver, the device could talk but the computer would have no idea that the scanner was sending the details of a document that was just scanned.

We humans can be considered devices theoretically in that we need to communicate with the computer. The problem there lies in the fact that we cannot effectively interface with the computer. We have few input devices or **human interface devices**, generally limited to a mouse or keyboard. These do allow us to “talk” with the computer although at a much slower rate than a CD-ROM, to give an example. We would be hard-pressed to type in several million letters in one second, indeed. What all of the really means is that we need to effectively use our interface devices in order to effectively use our computers. This will come only with familiarity as you learn what each click will do and anticipate how your computer reacts to your own input.

For now, that should be enough information to soak in and maybe even pique your interests to learn more. Please check in next time where we will get more into the specifics and cover basic keyboard key functions as well as some nifty shortcuts that can make everyday tasks easier.