Responsible use of computers

# Introduction

Society (and your behaviour) is governed by a set of rules that determine what is wrong and right. In the same way, there are ‘rules’ that govern the way we (should) use computers – and ideally, just like we do in all other aspects of life, we should try to follow these rules by not doing anything regarded as illegal or anti-social.

We are not going to cover all aspects of these rules but we will take a quick look at three aspects of computing that you are sure to encounter – and in each case you will have to make a choice about how you will behave and react to the situation...

# Software piracy

Without software the hardware of a computer is practically worthless. The creation of software (of any sort) requires a significant investment of time, money, research effort, hard work and creativity. Unfortunately the high price of software and the fact that computers make it easy to copy software – makes software piracy a widespread problem.

Copying software is illegal and occurs in different forms – three of which are:

* Businesses that sell computers pre-install software onto the computer and ‘include’ it in the price without actually paying for the software. (They do this to make their computers more attractive – more value for money.)
* Large-scale piracy involves the duplication and sale of software (complete with manuals and packaging) as if it were the ‘real’ thing (at a lower than normal price).
* ‘Borrowing’ a game or an office suite from a friend and installing it on your computer.

When you buy a piece of software you are really only buying the right (license) to use the program on one computer only. You are entitled to make one copy of the media as a backup, but that is all. Copying a program like a game for someone else is therefore also software piracy.

Software pirates do not only steal from the companies that develop the software but, because less money and resources will be available for further development, their actions really affect all users. One of the reasons behind the high price of software is the fact that the companies build an allowance for piracy into the price when they calculate it (in other words those who buy software are almost subsidising the pirates).

This is how YOU can make a positive contribution to the whole issue of software piracy:

* Buy all the programs that you need.
* Don’t lend the copies of the programs you have bought to anyone.
* Don’t buy software from questionable sources (like flea markets)!
* Encourage others to do the same.

# Computer viruses

A virus is a program designed mainly to ‘reproduce’ – to copy itself from computer to computer and file to file without the user’s knowledge or approval. They sometimes have ‘payloads’ which cause them to do various things ranging from trashing the hard drive to displaying silly messages.

Even without a ‘payload’ a virus damages your computer simply by using up space on the hard drive. Some of the more dangerous payloads do things like clogging up a mail server, deleting the entire contents of a hard drive, etc. Most of these payloads are triggered by things like the date or the number of times a specific file has been accessed.

**How do computers get infected by viruses?**

Viruses are spread in the following ways:

* By infected disks – when you copy a program onto diskette (usually illegal piracy).
* Through a computer network, especially large ones such as the internet.

**What can I do to stop my computer from being infected with a virus?**

* Use a good anti-virus program (remember use only one program and it needs to be updated frequently to be effective)
* Scan diskettes for viruses before using them
* Don’t open e-mail attachments unless you know who they come from (and then rather save them to disk and scan them before opening them)
* Make sure all CDs and diskettes are removed from your computer before you shut it down (booting with them can infect you with a virus)

# Computers and practical economising

## Internet access

Remember, people have to pay to use the internet (even if it is only your parents or your school). It always costs money to download information.

The following are tips to help you save time and money when doing research on the Internet:

* Plan! Set a reasonable time limit for yourself to find the information you need.
* To prevent being overwhelmed by too many ‘hits’ you need to plan your search terms and criteria.
* Save the pages you think worthwhile to your hard drive so that you can consult them again without having to be online.
* Try to make use of things like callmore time or R7 call to minimise costs (i.e. surf at night after 7pm or over weekends).

## Switching off the computer

To switch off or not to switch off, that is the question!

Periodically switching your computer off can save money and electricity. However, most modern computers are ‘eco friendly’ in the sense that they can ‘power down’ after a while. Practically the computer uses almost no electricity at all – the hard drive, CPU, screen – all working parts go to sleep.

Switching off your computer when you are not going to use it for some time, also has other advantages. It can

* prevent cumulative errors in memory – and therefore a ‘crash’
* prevent security risks such as unauthorised access to your computer
* prevent power cuts or electrical storms from damaging your computer (though remember that lightning can still cause damage even if your computer is switched off but still plugged in – or if the phone line is connected).

## Computer equipment and other media

Treat all computer equipment as if it is your own – as if you have paid for it yourself! Don’t do anything to any computer that you would not do to your own.

* Avoid eating and drinking near a computer.
* Keep your keyboard and mouse clean.
* Use a dust cover if your computer is standing unused for a while.
* Switch off or switch to “standby mode” or “hibernate mode” when the computer will not be used for long periods of time.
* Only allow knowledgeable people (qualified technicians) to work on your computer.
* When you buy a computer ensure that the RAM, etc. are upgradeable so that you do not have to buy a new computer every time you want to improve performance.

Paper and ink cost money!

* Ensure your document is correct before you print it! Proof read on the screen as best you can – and to prevent those layout errors use the print preview option to check what the printed page will look like.
* Recycle your waste paper by placing it in recycle bins.

*Be patient with people who know less than you. Assist them rather than being blasé about their mistakes and lack of knowledge. Remember, it doesn’t matter how much you know today, in the future you may have to rely on others to pass their knowledge on to you.*

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