

Tips & Tricks to Keep Your Mac Running Smoothly

Presented October 16, 2017
San Miguel Mac Users Group
Mark Wirganowicz

Keep your Desktop clear of files and folders

Everything stored on your Desktop is kept active and running by your computer at all times. This can be a significant drain on your computer's resources, and will slow your computer.

If there are files/folders that you absolutely need on your Desktop, create aliases for them. Aliases behave exactly like any other file or folder on your Desktop, but they do not tax your computer's resources. Here's how to make an alias:

- Drag the file/folder from the Desktop to its final destination (e.g., Documents folder, Pictures folder, your Home folder).
- Select the file/folder you just moved, go to the **File menu**, click **Make Alias**.
- Rename the alias, if desired, and hit the **Return** key on your keyboard.
- Drag the alias back to the Desktop.

Keep all your software up-to-date

For all Apple related software and some 3rd-party applications, go to the **Apple menu**, select **About This Mac**, then click the **Software Update** button.

For all other 3rd-party software, you need to check for updates from within the application. This is either done from the application's main menu, then select **About [insert application name]**, or from the application's **Help menu**.

Here are two examples. To update a 3rd-party web browser, such as Firefox:

- Open Firefox.
- Click on the **Firefox menu**, and select **About Firefox**.
- Firefox will automatically check for an update, start downloading it one is available, and will prompt you to **Restart Firefox** to install the update.

To update Microsoft Office:

- Open any of the Microsoft Office applications.
- Click on the **Help menu**, and select **Check for Updates**.
- If any updates are available, you will be prompted to download and install them.

Quit any unused applications

- **Command-Q** to quit an application, or
- Go to the application's menu, and select **Quit** ⌘Q, or
- **Control-click** on the application's icon in the Dock, select **Quit** (or **Force Quit**)

Stop unnecessary applications from opening automatically at startup

- Go to the **Apple menu**, select **System Preferences**, and click **Users & Groups**.
- Now click on the **Login Items** tab to view which programs and services are launched when you first power up (or log in) to your Mac.
- Highlight an item in the list that you don't want and click on the Delete from Login Items (-) button at the bottom of the list.

Make sure you have enough free space on your computer

Your computer needs (at the very minimum) at least 10% free space on your hard drive or flash drive. That means:

- If you have total storage capacity of 120GB, you need at least 12GB of free space.
- 250GB => 25GB free space
- 500GB => 50GB free space
- 1TB => 100GB free space

Things to do:

- Delete unnecessary files.
- Go through your Downloads folder and delete files you don't need.
- Delete old emails from the Mail program, then empty Mail trash.
- Empty the Mac Trash can.
- Use iCloud Photo Library and Optimize Storage.
- Move files to an external hard drive.
- Move your Photos Library to an external hard drive.
- Move your iTunes Library to an external hard drive (or subscribe to iTunes Match).
- Note that using a cloud service, such as Dropbox, Google Drive, or Amazon Drive, does not clear space from your computer.

Upgrade your hardware

If possible, install more RAM. In my opinion, 8GB of RAM is the minimum for current operating systems.

If possible, replace your standard rotational hard drive with a flash drive.

Turn off File Vault

File Vault is an option that encrypts your hard drive. While it provides more security, it REALLY slows down your computer.

- Click on the **Security & Privacy** tab in **System Preferences**, then on the **File Vault** tab. Click the padlock, type in your Admin password, and select **Turn off File Vault**.
- This will take a long time to complete.

Restart your computer often

This clears caches and releases unused RAM, and will help your computer run optimally.

Leave your computer on periodically overnight

This may seem like a contradiction to the previous recommendation, but it's true. The Mac operating system is designed to optimize and maintain itself automatically, and this happens in the middle of the night (when most people aren't using their computers).

Run Disk Utility First Aid periodically

If you know how to do this, do it once every month or so.

Another easier way to do this is to boot your Mac into Safe Mode.

- Shut down your computer.
- Turn on your computer while holding the Shift key for about 2 minutes.
- This will automatically check your hard drive for faults, and repair them if possible.
- After your computer has finished booting up, restart it normally to get out of Safe Mode.

Do Not install MacKeeper!

Marketed as a cleaning/optimization tool, it is actually considered "malware" because it causes more problems.

If you have MacKeeper installed (look in your **Applications folder**), just drag it to the Trash can.

Install anti-malware software

And run it periodically. I recommend Malwarebytes for Mac. It's free.

<https://www.malwarebytes.com/mac/>

Get a voltage regulator

A voltage regulator not only protects against power surges, but also “brown outs”. They are inexpensive, and are installed directly into a wall electrical outlet. All electronic devices should be plugged into a voltage regulator. Or some houses have them built directly into the electrical system, which therefore protects the whole house.

Backup your computer

This doesn't do anything to improve performance, but you should be doing it anyway!!

- Time Machine
- Cloud services
- Clone your hard drive
- Keep copies of important files on external hard drives or thumb drives.