

5 Tricks Every Computer User Needs To Know

In a perfect world, you could sit down at any computer or pick up any gadget and just use it. There wouldn't be a learning curve or workarounds. Unfortunately, that's never going to happen. With all due respect to the late Mr. Jobs, even Apple products don't always "just work." Little problems and annoyances will pop up when you least expect it. Keep these 5 tricks in the back of your mind and they'll get you out of the eventual jam.

1. Retrieve a memory card from a CD slot.

Slot-loaded CD/DVD/Blu-ray drives are sleek and stylish. Unfortunately, it's easy to accidentally jam non-disc items in there. One of the most common objects is SD memory cards. This happens frequently for iMac users. After all, the DVD and memory card slots are right next to each other. However, it can happen with CompactFlash slots as well. And I'm sure someone's put a microSD card in an SD card slot. The big question is how you get the card back out. In some cases, with the power off tweezers work just fine. However, with a slot-loaded CD drive, you don't have the room. Instead, use non-corrugated cardboard. Cut it into the shape of an "L" and put the short end into the slot. Rotate the L so the short end gets behind the card, and then pull. Simple!

2. Recover photos from a damaged card.

A new, high-capacity SD card can hold thousands and thousands of photos, it's a photographer's dream. Of course, if the card breaks, it becomes a photographer's nightmare. That's why you should take a number of smaller SD cards on a trip, that way if one breaks or gets lost, you haven't lost many photos. Then there are times when a memory card just goes haywire. You put it in the computer and it shows up blank, it's corrupt or just missing files. If your card reader isn't broken and the card isn't externally damaged, you have a bad card. But hope is not lost. Grab a free photo recovery program. Zero Assumption Recovery and Recuva are two good ones. Tip inside of a tip: These free file recovery programs find hidden or deleted items on memory cards. You can use them to recover files on flash drives and hard drives as well. After a scan, you might see your photos and other missing files. When you recover the files, be sure to save them to your hard drive. Don't try to save them to the memory card! Not only is the card dying, you'll overwrite the files you're trying to recover.

3. Zoom in on websites quickly.

You bought a new computer and it came with a big high-resolution monitor. Now the text on your favorite websites is way too small! Fortunately, your browser has zoom shortcuts. In every major browser, pressing Control in Windows (Command for Macs) and then tapping the plus sign zooms in. Go too far? Control and the minus sign zooms out. Want to go back to where you started? Control and 0 (that's a zero) puts it back to the default zoom level. This way you can adjust every site you use to your individual taste. It will save your eyes and your sanity.

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4. Use private browsing.

Did you know your browser records everything you do? It isn't just your search history, cookies and passwords, it saves images and code to a special cache for later use. Anyone who knows what they're looking for can see what you've been up to. That's why the latest version of every major browser has a privacy mode. This stops your browser from recording things. You can find private browsing mode in your browser's menu options. In Chrome it's called incognito mode. In most browsers, you can just use the shortcut Control + Shift + P. Again, Chrome is different, with Control + Shift + N. Unfortunately, this doesn't always stop the browser from creating a cache.

5. Take a screenshot.

Need to show something computer-related to a distant friend or family member? Want to capture an error code for tech support? A screenshot is the solution. As the name implies, it creates an image of your screen. And it isn't hard to do. The easiest way to do this is with keyboard shortcuts. In Windows, just hit the Print Screen button on the keyboard (sometimes this is abbreviated as Prnt Scrn or in other ways). This saves the entire screen to the Windows clipboard. You can then paste it into an email or a graphics program. On a Mac, Command + Shift + 3 takes a screenshot of the entire screen and saves it to the desktop. Command + Shift + 4 does the same thing, but you can select what area of the screen is captured.