

Apple Bytes

The Newsletter of the **Lynchburg Apple Core**

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October Meeting

General meeting is at Lynchburg College, Thursday, October 20, 7:00 PM.

Mac OS X Troubleshooting will be the main topic of discussion at the regular meeting at **Lynchburg College, Hopwood Hall** which will begin with a Q&A session at 7:00 PM and the program will follow at 7:30 PM. Plan to bring your questions about troubleshooting.

A new feature this month will be that the opening Q&A session will be lead by Vic Galan. It is designed especially for newer Mac Users. Vic, a new Mac user himself, will lead the discussion to encourage newer users to ask their questions and will help them to get clear, straightforward responses from the more experienced users present at the meeting.

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Plan Now for the Annual Dinner Meeting.

The November meeting will be at **Oakwood Country Club, Thursday, November 17**. This will be a social affair to meet and chat with your fellow club members. Bring your spouse or a friend. It will include a social hour before the buffet which will have a number of choices for your dining pleasure.

The program will be presentations by Apple Core members sharing examples of their knowledge and experience with their Macs. Details to be announced in the November *Apple Bytes*.

The tickets for the dinner are \$15 per person for members and spouses or dinner partner, and \$25 per person for nonmembers. Tickets will be available at the October meeting or from Scott Glass (847-7433), Gordon Mattox (401-0163) and Tom Johnson (993-2822).

To attend, you must purchase or reserve your tickets **no later than November 10th**.

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Let's Talk About Mac OS X Troubleshooting

The Macintosh platform seems to have reached a situation where more and more people are having fewer and fewer problems with their machines. Or at least that is what seems apparent to many Mac OS service providers. There are fewer calls for help with problems, either with software or hardware problems. Or do you not agree? Shades of the Maytag Man!

Whether it's a car engine or a computer operating system, anything with several thousand parts can, and will, develop a problem. We are all aware of that. Mac OS X is based on the well developed foundation of the Unix operating system, and is more resilient than Mac OS 9 and its predecessors. But it still is a very complex system with the potential for occasional glitches.

If you are experienced with troubleshooting the older Mac OS 9, many of the “fixes” we used there do not apply to OS X. For one thing, you can forget about tracking down extension conflicts; the extensions in OS X do not function in the same way as OS 9. In fact, some technical writers tell us we don’t have extensions in OS X. If we don’t, what are those files in the Extensions folder of the System Library? Anyway, there are no extension conflicts in OS X.

As for allocating more memory to an application to make it run better, as we could do in OS 9, we can’t do it in OS X. There is no way to do it. But we don’t have to since the operating system does it quite well with no help from us. But do realize that putting more physical memory into your computer, more RAM, will make OS X and the running applications run better.

As a part of the memory management of OS X, the System makes good use of free space on the hard disk. This free space on the hard disk is where the System stores parts of running applications and open files that are not in immediate use, where those file and application fragments can be retrieved instantaneously when they are needed. If you have more physical memory, more RAM, those fragments don’t have to be transferred back and forth and can stay in memory for immediate use.

At this point, we should make it clear that hard disk space and physical memory are related because of what we have just discussed, but they are far from being the same thing. Some inexperienced people think that they can free up memory by removing files from the hard disk, or that this will somehow give their machine more memory. No! Memory is on the RAM chips installed in the machine. The only way to get more is to install more or larger memory modules, memory “chips.” The hard disk is storage space. A file cabinet for storing files and applications not in use. “Virtual” memory can be provided by the hard disk, but only to the extent that it is called for by the operating system, which you cannot control directly.

You can forget about rebuilding the desktop, too. Things don’t work that way in OS X. For Windows users, they can forget all about driver conflicts, IRQs, and the Registry.

So What Do We Do?

So what can you do to solve a problem that you may have with your computer? Well, it depends on what the problem is. There are hardware problems and there are software problems. Software problems are generally the most common troubles you have, so we’ll deal with them first.

It was discussed last month in Apple Bytes that Mac OS X Users don’t need to worry about viruses since there are no known viruses affecting OS X, not one! David Pogue, author of *Mac OS X, the Missing Manual* has said, “Viruses? What viruses?” Moving on...

Is the application just being quirky and doing unexpected things, or not doing what you want it to do? One of the first things to do is to save your work, if you have something in process, and then quit the application. Then restart it and take up where you left off. Often, doing this simple step will let the application “pull itself together” and it will then work just fine. If this doesn’t clear things up, try quitting all applications and restarting the computer. This lets the computer “clear its head and start fresh.” Often this simple step will solve the problem.

If this in turn doesn’t solve the glitch, log out and log back in through another user account. You do have more than one user account on our computer don’t you? It’s a good idea to have a second user account just for this purpose. Call it “Maintenance” or “Other” or something, and for ease of use you may want to use your same password. It should be an administrative account, just like yours, or it won’t be very useful. Without administrative privileges you can’t take much action to solve the situation. After you’ve logged in to the Maintenance account, start the application that was giving you trouble, and do the same kinds of things you were doing before. If the problem doesn’t rear its ugly head, you may then make the assumption that the problem is limited to the environment of your original account. If it does still occur while logged into the maintenance account, then the problem is associated with the application or the

system software and you can go for a solution knowing it's not just your account.

If the situation cleared up in the maintenance account, log out and log back into your account. Open your Home folder, then your home Library folder, then the Preferences folder, where you'll find neatly labeled preference files for all the programs you use. Most of the filenames end with the suffix *.plist*. Some will end otherwise, such as *prefs* or *settings*, and there will be folders as well. For example, *com.apple.finder.plist* is the Finder's preference file, *com.apple.dock.plist* is the Dock's, and so on. Find the file or folder associated with the quirky program and put it in the Trash, but don't empty the Trash just yet.

Then start the troubled program again and see if it works OK. The program will build a new preference file as it opens, and updates it as you make your preferences known to the program, such as window size and placement, etc. If the program operates correctly now, you've probably solved the problem, and you can empty the Trash later. If the problem's not solved, quit the program, retrieve the original preferences file and reinstate it if you think it might be helpful in further troubleshooting.

Another solution may lie in going to the internet and checking with the program's publisher or originator to see if there is an update available. A good way to find out if it is up to date is to check at <http://www.versiontracker.com/macosex>. This is a good suggestion if your problems started after a System update or the use of another newer associated program.

Some glitches arise because the *permissions* of the application or associated files have become confused. *Permissions* are the settings contained in each and every file on your computer that records who owns the file and what they can do with that file: read it, write to it, move it, etc. When the permissions become muddled because of a hiccup in the operation of the computer caused by a power surge, a program crash, or some other malfunction, things sometimes go awry.

It is a good idea to periodically repair permissions as a maintenance activity. To do this, go to your Utilities Folder in your Applications Folder and run Disk Utility. Select your hard disk in the column on the left of the window, and be sure the First Aid tab is selected. Then press the **Repair Disk Permissions** button. The repair will take only minute or two. Read the messages that scroll by in the window to better understand the operation. Remember, this repair must be done using disk utility on your hard disk so that Disk First Aid can determine what the correct permissions should be.

A repair and maintenance activity that can help eliminate problems is Repairing the Disk. This is also done using the Disk First Aid program, but from a different vantage point. Get out your Mac OS X install disk, put it in the optical drive, and then restart your computer. As soon as the startup chime sounds, hold down the "C" key so that the computer will start up booting from the CD or DVD. After it has started and arrived at the first screen, STOP!

If you are using the Mac OS X 10.3 Install CD, go to the Installer Menu, the first menu to the right of the blue Apple. Select Open Disk Utility... and proceed. As before, choose your hard disk in the column on the left, and then press the **Repair Disk** button.

If you are using the Mac OS X 10.4 Install DVD, you must first choose your language, and go to the next screen. At the "Welcome to the Mac OS X Installer" screen, go to the Utilities Menu and select Disk Utility... and proceed.

There are more items that we will talk about in the discussion at the meeting at 7:30 Thursday, October 20th.

Apple Bytes, the monthly newsletter of the Lynchburg Apple Core is delivered via e-mail and is available as a downloadable PDF at <http://www.lynchburgapplecore.org>. Please send your comments and questions to Program Chairman & Newsletter Editor Tom Johnson at graystranger@earthlink.net, or President Gordon Mattox at gcmattox@mac.com.