



A
BIT
OF A

RASCAL

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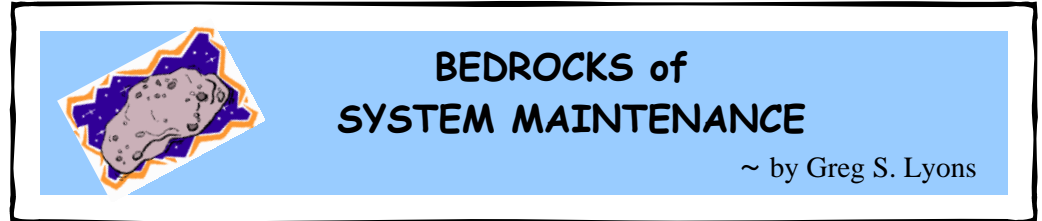
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This issue is devoted primarily to an important subject for all computer users. In March, Greg Lyons, a recent graduate in Computer Sciences at SOU, offered RASCALS a new course on PC Hardware. The following article is taken from his handouts for this course.



Computers and computer use have become increasingly complicated over the years. Without a consistent and organized process to protect our personal computer, the system will quickly become slowed, and eventually unusable. Most users notice the problem(s) very late in the “my system has slowed down” phase, and some live with it until the “now it doesn’t work at all” phase. At that point the probability of recovering the system without rebuilding it (reinstalling the OS and starting from scratch) is really poor. Ideally, it’s best to start with a “clean and uncorrupted” system.

The first cut we’ll take at properly maintaining the computer involves **disk cleanup, disk defrag, uninstalling unused applications, removing system tray icons that represent an application which is running all the time in the background consuming memory, and is loaded at system startup.** I will not give “blow by blow” keystrokes for all of this. If you don’t know how to run **defrag** or **cleanup**, ask a friend or ask your favorite search bar online: “How do I run disk defrag?” or “How do I run disk cleanup?”

Disk cleanup simply deletes files and file remnants that aren’t needed by the system anymore. Why they get left all over is an advanced topic I won’t cover here. Just remember, you’re not going to lose anything important by using disk cleanup. **Disk defrag** simply organizes all the data on the hard disk such that it becomes contiguous and not scattered all around the disk. This decreases search time for when the data is needed.

Uninstalling unused applications frees space on our computer. Hopefully, removing such an application will eliminate some active processes that are running and consuming memory unnecessarily. **System tray icons** represent applications that are running all of the time. Sometimes they are necessary, but I limit mine to four or so, and I don’t permit more things than that to run in the background (in the system tray) on my unit. This reduces/eliminates potential software conflicts that plague many users.

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BEDROCKS of SYSTEM MAINTENANCE
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Visit Windows Update at least weekly and get the **critical and security updates** plus any other system enhancements you may want. Microsoft recommends that you check your system for spyware **prior** to installing system updates. If you are not sure how much of the rest to take, ask a knowledgeable friend (do find a knowledgeable friend).

Another good maintenance feature that should be used, at least monthly, is called **Check Disk**. It is accessible from another menu near the defrag and cleanup utilities. Check the boxes for “scan for bad sectors” and “automatically fix errors” and restart the computer. The check occurs during startup. This utility scans (among other things) the physical surface of the disk, corrects errors in file structure, repairs sectors, or marks any bad sectors for “work-around.” Any of these options by themselves could correct a system, although they generally do not represent the majority case for bringing a system back under good control.

Viruses are a problem but awareness is high and protection isn't too complicated anymore. More and more ISP's have built-in protections for small viruses and they scan their server traffic with great diligence. Although the threat is serious, it is not so much anymore because awareness is so high and most of us run Norton or McAfee (or whatever) and keep them updated with great diligence and consistency. Installing antivirus protection after you suspect a problem is a real crapshoot. Sometimes it will find and fix the problem; other times it is too late and the system must be rebuilt from scratch.

Put antivirus on your new computer or, if you've had a rebuild, make sure the antivirus is the first thing you put on the system, keep it updated, run it weekly. Most applications have great documentation and are easy to configure. If you need additional help installing or operating the antivirus protection, do ask a friend. “AVG Free” is a highly rated antivirus program. It is available online, and free to download and use. Go to your browser and search on “AVG Free.” Note that everything I cover here (with the exception of

Norton, which came with my computer) and all of the applications I use for maintenance are free.



Spyware is at present, and without question, the greatest computer killer of our time. Otherwise known as **malware, adware, slimeware,** and many other neat names. Spyware does every possible bad thing to

our computer that can be done, short of pouring a bucket of water right on our motherboard. To check this out you may go to your favorite Internet search bar and type in “What is spyware?” Spyware uses our computer's resources for ill purposes, clogs our systems, halts our normal use of the computer, and hijacks our use of the Internet and our browser.

Many things that spyware does are similar to virus behaviors. Even the most sophisticated computer experts are getting horribly stuck in the spware mess. I've not found a way to perfectly protect my system; no one has. I have spent countless hours fortifying my defenses, and being vigilant in the oversight of my own computer. The spyware problem is totally out of control; it overwhelms even advanced users, and the problems it causes are making both beginning and advanced users hate their computers. At present, I use all free stuff to combat this problem.

Basically, for your own mind, realize that the spyware problem can be vastly reduced by the same simple process that you use for viruses. You'll get some applications to install, update, and use regularly to combat the problem, in the same manner that you use your antivirus protection. First, is “**Spybot Search and Destroy.**” Simply search on it (**download.com** is a good place for this as well as the other applications). Install it, update it, run it, use the immunizer, and enable the permanent blocking feature (get a friend to help you set it up, or read the manual). **Get Spywareblaster (download.com),** update, then enable all protections. This utility has no “run” or “scan” feature, it is a blocking utility that is rated extremely high. **Get Lavasoft's “Adaware,”** install, update, run it (set it for full system scan). When it is done, go to the “scan summary” and check all of the boxes; then click “next” to quarantine and delete the bad stuff it found. **Running these three applications will greatly impact the overall protection of your system,** and can even be critical steps in recovering a

compromised/slow system to normal operations. This, however, is not the majority case and ideally you should have these three in place, starting on a clean and uncompromised system.

For the most advanced users there are other free utilities that will scan for free and tell you what's there, but they want money for the fix. Well, I use their free scans (which, in many cases, are deeper and more powerful than Adaware and Spybot), which give location for the baddies. I go in myself and take them out manually. In some cases, this involves simply deleting files off my hard drive; in other cases, it involves deleting various keys and entries directly out of the registry. **Scanspyware**, and **Xoftspy** are two such applications I use simply for their free and powerful scanning engines. Then, instead of buying them, I write down the baddie entries they list for me, and remove them myself.



Now, working in the registry is not for beginners or intermediates. It's not that hard to do, but let me put it this way:

There are a lot of places on the computer where you can make a mistake and it is no big deal. You made the screen red? No big deal. You set your Internet home page to the wrong thing? No big deal. **You deleted the wrong key or data in the registry? VERY BIG DEAL!** The key to working in the registry is this — don't make any mistakes. The “scan only” utilities that I use, and my technique of manually removing things is only for the **MOST ADVANCED USERS** to employ. If you have fear of your registry, or don't understand it well, do not use my scan-only methods. However, you could have that knowledgeable friend come over, view the “scan only” scan results, and the friend may be advanced enough to brave registry operations and manually yank out the baddies for you. Be sure your friend isn't just experimenting and **REALLY** knows what he/she is doing!!!

The idea of strictly casual computer use is DEAD,

DEAD, DEAD. You either get over it, or throw out the computer. Even beginners must learn or be taught about proper system maintenance, and virus and spyware protections. Those who preach Linux and new spyware-proof browsers, will have egg on their face if, and when, those applications become popular enough to become the focus of heavy-duty virus and spyware creators/deployers. The only reason they are not targets now, is just that: there does not exist enough users of Linux and alternative browsers to be worth the time of those who'd target them. It is only a temporary safe haven. Other operating systems are “off the beaten path” for a reason: it is a Microsoft world, like it or not.

Do not use “chat rooms,” instant messengers, or file sharing unless you really know the risks, or have a well-protected system. The instant messenger stuff, and file sharing activities are the best ways to get heavily virused and spyware. **Do not download “smiley's,” free icons, freebie clocks, counters, or other such stuff, unless you really know the risks.** Trust me, the rewards of those goofy things are never worth it.

Learning what is safe and unsafe to download is as much art as science.

Learn to use the “Create Restore Point” on your computer (look it up). With this feature you can “go back” to a point where you knew the system ran well. For example, my computer is healthy now and runs as great as the day I bought it. Now, let's say, when I see some smiley's I'd like to try, I can download them for free, and they come with a free desk clock and some nifty icons and a special chat room hookup. Hmm, sounds neat. First, I set a system restore point (Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools, System Restore). Then, and only then, I go back online and download the smiley's. **Hey, they look great, and I love the clock, but now my system is running screwy, and a scan shows I got 800 spyware and forty viruses along with the smiley's.** The cleaner applications are overwhelmed and they can't take the stuff out. So (assuming my unit demonstrates some control and I can access it), I go back to system restore and restore my computer back ten minutes (to where it was when I made the restore point), and then I am OK again. All my settings and contents are “restored” to only what existed when the point was created (for the most part).

BEDROCKS of SYSTEM MAINTENANCE
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This is an extreme example but the principle is clear. Restore points are useful for “undoing” changes that were harmful to your computer, or for changes that had consequences you didn’t like. Even if you want to learn registry manipulations, if you goof it up in the registry, but have a restore point (hopefully, you made one before you started messing around in the registry), then you can “go back” to when things were OK. **Restore points are a great safety net, but remember that the greatest safety device is prevention and avoidance of installing questionable or know problem makers such as AOL.** Be advised that AOL can corrupt a computer, and often does. Do not install it. Uninstall it if you have it.

A complete system rebuild (wiping the hard drive and reinstalling Windows, starting from scratch) is not a bad thing!! Of course it is upsetting to lose all of your settings and preferences. Make sure you have copied your Word documents, pictures, spreadsheets, letters, and any other such data, to a CD. **A periodic and complete rebuild is a normal and natural part of maintaining a computer.** Computers gather a “build up” of junk inside them over time that really can’t be removed (easily or at all), and most systems need a rebuild after one to one-and-a-half years anyway. Two years is probably too long.



A fresh start, and suddenly your computer works just like the day you bought it. You can also re-examine the applications you have on it. Maybe you didn’t really use that calendar creator or other goofy software, so you can re-examine what you put back on

the system when it is rebuilt. It’s like cleaning out a neglected garage. Clean house. Make sure you know where your Original Equipment Manufacturer’s CDs are located for your printer, as well as programs such as Office, or whatever applications you know you’ll want back. Periodic rebuilds are NORMAL and good to do but, yes, I agree that they can be time consuming and a hassle — although hardly more of a hassle than a clogged system that doesn’t run well!

As for the maintenance elements of defrag, cleanup, virus scans, and spyware scans; if you try to do them all at once, you may come to hate your computer quickly. I have integrated these maintenance things into my daily computer use. I read my e-mail, then — before going to the shower — I start a **virus scan**. When I’m done with the computer another time, I’ll set a **check disk, restart**, then go out the door to work. When I’m done playing online chess, I’ll start a **spyware scan** just before I go to eat dinner. Let the computer run these things when you’re out watering the garden. Make a schedule and a routine; do them each in turn (once you have a stable system that’s under good control). You must do them, or suffer the consequences of bad performance. Do them this way, and you won’t come to despise the computer and its ability to consume your time.

This article covers a TON of material. Most beginners/intermediates will not learn or master all of this in thirty minutes or thirty days. Keep these instructions handy. Every reference I’ve made can be searched for online, and your skilled computer friends know much of this also. No one buys a car to learn about oil changes and brake pads. The knowledge comes with owning a car — whether you want to know it or not is immaterial. Don’t change the oil and have the brakes checked? We know what happens there!

The price of ignorance is high.
Computers are no different.
Happy Computing! **Greg**

Free downloads, recommended by Greg, which may be accessed at download.com, are:

AVG Free
Spybot Search and Destroy
Spywareblaster
Lavasoft’s Adaware

Education Tips

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”

~ Abraham Lincoln

“Learning from experience is a faculty almost never practiced.”

~ Barbara Tuchman, Historian — 1912-39



Need Help? • Dial-A-Pro

Just call or e-mail and an attempt will be made to solve the problem by phone or e-mail. If that isn't enough, most of those listed will make house calls on an individually arranged basis.



GENERAL TROUBLESHOOTING

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APPLICATIONS & OTHER SPECIFIC HELP

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WORD PERFECT & MS WORD (for beginners)

Karen Janssen 956-6067 ilea@terragon.com

EXCHANGE COMPUTER RELATED QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

For RASCAL members only. Limited to technical problems and responses. Subscribe to the **Technical Help**

Listserver E-mail Forum for help with your computer problems at

<http://mailman.userservices.net/mailman/listinfo/rascal-tech>. Subscribers use **rascal-tech@mailman.userservices.net** for discussion. The Listserve Moderator is reached at **rascal-tech.admin@mailman.userservices.net**.



COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

April 2005

E-Mail & Internet — Beginning

(PRE-REQ: Beginning Windows.) Very detailed, very basic handouts will teach you how to get started in e-mail and the Internet. Upon completion of the e-mail segment you will be able to create, send, and receive e-mail over the Internet, using Outlook Express. Upon completion of the Internet segment, you will know the basics of searching, surfing, and downloading using Internet Explorer.

Greeting Cards & Print Shop 20

(PRE-REQ: Beginning Windows.) Learn to make greeting cards. This is a great class for beginners. Get started with this versatile and highly creative program featuring desktop publishing tools and thousands of images and templates designed to help you create projects such as cards, newsletters, photo projects, invitations, and more.

Introduction to Computers

(Required for the first time computer user.) A fun course. Learn the proper method to turn a computer on and off. Learn to use the mouse and keyboard. Get acquainted with hardware, software, and computer vocabulary.

MS Paint

(PRE-REQ: Beginning Windows.) Learn to use Microsoft Paint, a simple graphics editing program included with Microsoft Windows. This is a good introduction to more sophisticated graphic programs.

Photoshop Elements — Beginning

(PRE-REQ: Beginning Windows and Works or Word; ability to use the mouse well.) You will gain a basic understanding of the capabilities of Photoshop Elements. Learn how to manipulate photos, moving one into another; learn to present pictures over the Internet; learn transferring, feathering, and opacity. Learn to choose resolutions and, generally, how to use tools.

Photoshop Elements — Intermediate

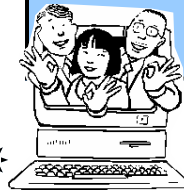
(PRE-REQ: Beginning Photoshop Elements.) Upon completion of this course the student will advance to a higher level of Photoshop, going deeper into the many capabilities of this program.

Word — Beginning

(PRE-REQ: Beginning Windows; diskette use.) Learn to name and locate the elements of MS Word's program window, with emphasis on the Standard and Formatting tool bar buttons. Print and save documents to a diskette. Bring two 3.5 floppy diskettes to class.

BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

~ by Jane Frincke



Complete Board Meeting minutes, and those of more recent meetings than can be published here, are found on

the RASCAL Website at www.rascal.cc.

Below are highlights of the February 8, 2005 meeting.

Vice President Lou Garrotto tendered his resignation effective February 28, 2005 and received a hearty round of applause for his service to RASCAL and to the Board. He will continue to be active with the club but will focus on education. The Board voted to appoint Bill Rose to succeed Lou as Vice President for the remainder of 2005. **President Chris Oman** reported that RASCAL's insurance and contract with the Fairgrounds have been renewed. The Board discussed the recruitment of out-of-area members and ways to best serve the needs of new members who are beginners. **Nancy Kain** spoke of the possibility of a RASCAL entry in the 2005 Boatnik Parade. Determination pending.

CURIOSITIES



We aren't the only
RASCAL in the universe.

- RASCAL:** Random Access Secure Communications Anti-jam Link
- RASCAL:** Rancho Attorney Service of California
- RASCAL:** Responsive Access, Small Cargo and Affordable Launch
- RASCAL:** Remote Agent-Sensing Chemical Alarm
- RASCAL:** Rotocraft-Aircrew Systems Concepts Airborne Laboratory

*"How does a project get to be a year behind schedule?
One day at a time."*

~ Fred Brooks, Computer Scientist — 1931-99

RASCAL

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PLEASE NOTE: Your month of membership renewal is located in the upper right corner of your mailing label.
Please mail yearly dues to the RASCAL address listed above.

KEEP in TOUCH



Let RASCAL know when you change your e-mail address, your telephone number, or your residence address.
Contact Shirley Byrd at sndbyrd@uci.net

RASCAL meetings are held in the Floral Building at the Fairgrounds in Grants Pass. Weekly meetings are on Tuesdays, except holidays. The General Membership meets from 9:30 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. Come early for coffee and chat with friends.

We also invite you to visit our website:
www.rascal.cc


You will find up-to-date information about our club, our members, classes, meetings, and links to other websites. Our website is hosted by Smartwire Internet.

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*We reserve the right to edit and/or omit submissions.
Items received after the newsletter deadline may appear
in the next issue.*

*“Courage doesn’t always roar.
Sometimes courage is the quiet voice
at the end of the day
saying, I will try
again tomorrow.”*



~ Mary Anne Radmacher