

trouble shooting 101

"better late than never" - [Dave Slipp](#)

Anyone who's never had their Mac crash can leave now.

For the rest of us - it's irritating isn't it? You're working away happily and all of a sudden your Mac freezes, or throws an error dialog at you. Depending on your frame of mind and how long it's been since you last saved, you'll either start cursing or shrug and restart.

One of the great things about computers in general and about Mac in particular is that they rarely do anything just for the heck of it. There is almost always a reason for anything that they do. There are only a limited number of things that can cause your Mac to crash. In order of frequency, they are 1. extension conflicts; 2. damaged system components, programs or files; and 3. hardware problems. Knowing this can help you figure out the reason for a crash quickly and easily.

Here's a step by step way to isolate what's wrong.

First:

As soon as you crash, stop.

Don't do anything for a few seconds except think about what you just did. Keep a scrap of paper on your desk so that you can write it down. If you keep good notes, you'll be able to find the common factors in your crashes, and maybe find what the real cause is.

If you've just crashed for no apparent reason, doing something you've done dozens of times before, ask yourself "What is different?"

I cannot tell you how many times I've received phone calls from a client whose Mac has suddenly stopped working for no reason. They always tell me that they've changed nothing and that the machine just stopped. Almost invariably, a bit of quizzing reveals that they've installed a new program or hardware device.

Second:

If you've just installed something new, suspect it.

If you've added a new external device like a hard drive or scanner, check the connections. For SCSI devices, check the addresses, termination and power for everything on the chain. For USB, serial, and ADB devices, unplug them and plug them in again. Check that their power supplies are plugged in and turned on. Check that the wall socket they are plugged into has power.

If you've added a new internal component like a card or RAM, check that it is properly installed. Make sure it is properly seated in the right place, and that you've done all of the things that the installation manual said to do.

If you've installed new software, have a look in your system folder to see what it has installed there. If you're running MacOS 8 or later, every time you install a new program, look in the extensions folder and see if you can find "ObjectSupportLib." If you find it, throw it out. Under System 7.5 and 7.6, "ObjectSupportLib" was necessary, and many software packages still install it. Under MacOS it is not required, and seems to cause all kinds of random craziness.

Third:

Try again.

Without making any changes, try to duplicate the conditions of the crash. I know it sounds dumb, but if you can reproduce the crash at will, you can avoid it at will, too.

On my machine, I know that if I launch program A before program B, at some point the machine will freeze up. My solution? Always launch program B before program A. Easy.

If it is just one specific program that is causing you grief, try reinstalling it. It may have become corrupt.

Fourth:

Remove or turn off the latest things you've added.

If you're satisfied that it was properly installed and configured, but your problems are continuing, remove it and see what happens. There could be a fault in the device or a flaw in the program.

Contact tech support for the item and find out what they have to say. They are probably going to tell you to reset your parameter RAM, and rebuild your desktop, so you can try those before you call, but in general, neither process actually has much of a chance of fixing anything.

Fifth:

Run a hard drive repair utility. If you cannot find any other explanation for your problems, your hard drive structures may be fouled up. Disk First Aid is capable of checking the basics, like messed up directory structures, but commercial utilities often go to much more detail, checking for problems with file resource forks and other potential trouble areas.

Sixth:

Run your virus checker. Viruses on Macs are rare, but not completely unheard of, so check.

Seventh:

Panic.

Once you've gone through all of these steps, if you are still crashing, you're going to need to go to the extreme measures, like formatting your drive and reinstalling everything.

This is the point where you start congratulating yourself for maintaining such a terrific back up of all of your work. You DO have a terrific back up, don't you?

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