

Computer Tips and Tricks for the Over-40 Crowd

By Judge Herbert Dixon

If I were writing this column for college undergraduates or professional techies, my audience would tell me that these computer tips and tricks are old news. However, I am actually writing this article for the members of the over-40 crowd likely to read an article by this title, among whom there are at least a few who will gain new knowledge after reading these tips and tricks.

These tips and tricks are not written for the benefit of Mac users. Some will work and some may not work. Besides, for Mac tips, I need someone to write an article like this for my benefit.

I hope that you find some of the suggestions useful or of some value. If you do, I invite you to let me know and send me your favorite computer tips and tricks that I might share with the over-40 crowd in case I decide to write a sequel to this article.

Removing a CD (or DVD) from the CD/DVD Drive While Your Laptop's Power Is Off

At one time or another, each of us has forgotten to remove a CD or DVD from the disk drive and not thought about it until the laptop's power was off. What a pain it is having to start up the laptop merely to get the CD out of the drive! Well, there is a solution. Look at your laptop's CD drive near the eject button and you will see a small pinhole. Take a straightened metal paperclip, gently push it into the hole, and VOILÀ! The CD drive will start to open, without having to power-up the computer. There is an additional piece of advice that I must offer with this tip. Refrain from using plastic coated paperclips because you might leave shredded plastic inside the drive

that could adversely affect the CD drive's opening mechanism.

Windows Tips

Although I am offering only a few Windows tips in this article, be aware that literally books have been written about numerous features within Windows, and, generally, be aware that there are at least two ways to accomplish every Windows task. Among the many Windows features, however, the two below seem to have escaped the attention of more than a few computer users.

Getting to Your Desktop, Quickly

Consider that you have several programs open on your computer, you need to open a document or another program, and the icon you are trying to reach is on your desktop. You can access your desktop quickly by touching and holding both the Windows Start key¹ and the letter M (as in minimize). This action will immediately minimize all open documents and programs and take you to your desktop so that you can open that new program or document. What is good (or bad) about this technique is that you can keep accessing your desktop this way, opening new documents and programs, until you have exceeded the limits of your computer's memory and it stalls. So, for that reason, do not be carried away with this technique to open more documents and programs than your computer can handle. In other words, be "judicious."

Locking Your Computer, Quickly

Imagine that you are working on a sensitive document and that an unexpected

call requires you to leave your computer for an unknown amount of time. Of course, you can go through the process of shutting down your computer, which only requires a moment, but which will require you to power up again when you return. Alternatively, you can put your computer in standby mode, but this can require the same number of keystrokes that it would take to shut down your computer. Alternatively, based on this tip, you can touch and hold the Windows Start key and the letter L (as in lock). This action immediately locks your computer. This tip only works if you have set up your computer to require a Windows logon password. If you have not set the security feature on your computer to require a Windows logon password, call a techie to help you immediately because this is the minimum amount of security you should insist on for your system. After you set up the logon, then you can use this instant lock technique.

Google Tips

Google is a search engine that the over-40 crowd uses to search the Internet. In addition, there is another Google search application that many persons reading this article have downloaded and installed, which allows the user to search their computer's hard drive. This application is called Google Desktop. I use them both frequently.

Google Internet Searches

With a Google Internet search, you merely type the words likely to be contained on the Web site that you are seeking and the Google search engine gives you instantaneous results. If I

use the search terms [Judge Herbert Dixon](#), the Google search results advise me of over 400,000 hits, including sites that have nothing to do with me but contain the search terms in random order, such as a site that contains the names Clara [Dixon](#) Davidson and [Herbert](#) Spencer and the phrase “he can only [judge](#) of consequences.” Now, if I put my search terms in quotes, Google will find the exact phrase, e.g., “[Judge Herbert Dixon](#)” returns only 251 hits having the exact phrase.

Consider another example using an additional Google tip. If I use the search terms [electronic filing](#), the Google search engine advises me of all the hits that contain those two words in any order. When I use quotation marks to search for “[electronic filing](#)”, the number of hits is substantially reduced. If I add the word [court](#) before “[electronic filing](#)” ([court](#) “[electronic filing](#)”), the search results will be further reduced to include only hits that contain the exact phrase “[electronic filing](#)” and the additional word [court](#). Now, if I add a minus sign (–) immediately followed by the word [taxes](#) to eliminate hits with the word [taxes](#) ([court](#) “[electronic filing](#)” –[taxes](#)), the number of hits is again reduced, thus adding more precision to the search. This last search is designed to return “[electronic filing](#)” hits that include references to “[electronic filing](#)” of documents with a [court](#) and not hits that refer only to “[electronic filing](#)” of income [taxes](#).

After going through all of the above steps, you may think that it is mean of me to save this tip for last. If you click the “Advanced Search” link on the Google site, you will be taken to a menu that provides fill-in boxes for the user to specify the search terms, any mandatory sequence for the search terms, and any word that the user does not want included in the search results. The Advanced Search screen eliminates the need to remember when to use quotation marks and minus signs. I think everyone will agree that first

learning to use quotation marks and minus signs during Google searches and later learning about the Advanced Search feature to access a menu is reminiscent of first memorizing multiplication tables and then being given a calculator.

Google Desktop Searches

A Google Desktop search operates much the same way as a Google Internet search. However, a Google Desktop search will indiscriminately return hits on your computer for key words in documents that may be in any number of formats, namely, e-mail, word processing, PowerPoint, HTML, etc. Fear not, over-40 crowd, there is a way to restrict the Google Desktop search to a particular type of document. Simply specify the format of the document to which you wish your search limited by using the term [filetype:](#) with the file extension of the document immediately following, e.g., [filetype:doc](#), [filetype:ppt](#), [filetype:eml](#), [filetype:pdf](#), and so on. Alternatively, you can click the “Advanced Search” link and make your choices by menu—very similar to the way you would perform a Google Internet search using the “Advanced Search” link.

Final Windows Tips

Printing or Making an Image File of What Your Computer Screen Shows

Occasionally everyone has a need or desire to print or save something that appears on the computer screen that does not itself provide a print or save menu choice. Perhaps an error message has appeared that you would like to show a techie or an image has appeared on the computer screen from the Internet that you would like to save. In connection with this desire to print or save the image on your computer screen, you have likely noticed the Print Screen key² on the computer keyboard and pressed it, only to discover that nothing happened. Back in

the days of DOS (the Disk Operating System before Windows), pressing the Print Screen key would result in printing the contents of your computer screen. That is no more under Windows. Pressing the Print Screen key now saves the computer screen image in temporary memory, but to gain anything out of this process, you must know what to do next.

After you press the Print Screen key, you can then paste (using Ctrl + V)³ the image of the computer screen into an open MS Word document, the open screen of an image-editing program such as MS Paint, or the open screen of your MS Outlook e-mail (if you are using HTML format and not plain text format). After you paste the image of your computer screen into these or any similar programs, you can save the image as a file or print it, or both.

A Tip for the Beginner

If your computer is sluggish or operating slower than when you first got it, you should try the Windows defragmenting utility. In essence, defragmenting reorganizes the data on your computer’s hard drive so that your system will work more efficiently and faster. You can access the defragment utility by touching the Windows Start key, then, in the following order, pointing to Programs — Accessories — System Tools — Disk Defragmenter. Start by clicking either the

Judge Herbert B. Dixon sits on the Superior Court of the District of Columbia and is the immediate past chair of the National Conference of State Trial Judges. He is co-chair of the Judicial Division’s Court Technology Committee, a member of the American Law Institute—American Bar Association (ALI-ABA) Technology Advisory Panel, a member of the Planning Board for ABA TechShow, and the Senior Judicial Advisor to William & Mary Law School’s Courtroom 21 Project. His e-mail is Herbert.Dixon@dsc.gov.

Analyze button or Defragment button and the program will guide you to complete the process. If you have never before defragmented your hard drive, skip Analyze and click the Defragment button to get the process started. It will not hurt anything and will likely speed up your computing.

A Tip for the Advanced User

It may be possible to speed up the rate at which your system shuts down. But before you implement this tip, it is important to understand what you are giving up. When Windows shuts down, it first clears your paging file (pagefile.sys) in which a techie might have been able to access sensitive information, including unencrypted

passwords. This process of clearing the paging file, however, often slows down the shutdown time. If you do not have a concern about clearing the paging file and would like to speed up your shutdown time, follow these steps: touch the Windows Start key, point to Run,⁴ type regedit in the Run box, click OK, and go to HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE \ SYSTEM \ CurrentControlSet \ Control \ Session Manager \ Memory Management. Next, change the ClearPageFileAtShutdown value to 0, and then restart your computer.⁵ Now, the next time you power off your computer, your system should shut down faster. **HOWEVER, BE CAREFUL to not**

change or delete anything other than the ClearPageFileAtShutdown value or you might have to take your computer to a repair shop. ■

Endnotes

1. The Start key is imprinted with the Windows symbol and is located between the Ctrl key and the Alt key near the bottom left of the keyboard.
2. The Print Screen key is sometimes labeled “Prt Sc,” “PRTSC,” or “Prt Scrn.” It is normally located near the top right of the keyboard.
3. In addition, you can sometimes paste by right-clicking your mouse in the area where you desire to insert the image and clicking Paste.
4. In Vista, skip Run; start typing in the box that reads “Start Search,” click Enter, and click Continue.
5. If the ClearPageFileAtShutdown value already is 0, there is nothing more you can do with this tip.