

Keep it Clean!

Proper PC care can keep you and your computer working happily by Doug Dygas, Operating Systems Group, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE

As with most necessary, but mundane activities, keeping your personal computer and/or terminal clean and in good working order requires common sense, patience, and diligence. Some tips given here can assist in keeping your equipment in its best condition.

The Hardware Environment

Electronic computing equipment should be set up to be easily used, as well as cleaned. Keep the following items in mind when placing your computer or terminal:

- all ventilation slots should be unobstructed,
- cables should not be kinked or stretched,
- other heat sources should be kept to a minimum,
- the device stand should be sturdy
- every effort should be made to keep items such as fans and space heaters off of the same plug-in circuit as the computer hardware.

The Software Environment

A little personal computer hygiene also helps keep your PC in good working order. For best results, DO NOT eat, drink, or smoke around computer equipment. Keep your hands clean. If not heeded, you will, at a minimum, need to clean the device more frequently and you may end up with permanently damaged hardware. There are other less obvious factors to keep in mind. Wearing fuzzy wool sweaters can be hazardous to a PC's health since static electricity can do nasty little things to computer devices.

Exterior Cleaning (Light Duty)

The two places that most frequently need cleaning are the terminal or monitor screen and the keyboard. For the screen, just clean it when it looks dirty. Use a nonabrasive cloth and glass cleaner.

The keyboard is another matter. The best time to clean a keyboard is before it looks like it needs cleaning. Over time the

oil and dirt on your skin will build up on the keys. If you let this happen, it will become very difficult to remove. If you clean your keyboard once every two or three months, it should not be a problem.

Using a screen cleaner will work just fine if there is little or no dirt on the keyboard. Just spray some glass cleaner on a paper towel or lint-free cloth. Let the foam subside a little and then wipe the tops and as much of the sides of the keys as you can. Do the same for the rest of the keyboard and the other device elements. Remember, if you have a PC/PS2 with a hard drive, park the drive first before wiping down the device.

Exterior Cleaning (Heavy Duty)

When cleaning a keyboard which has not been cleaned in a long time, you will need a work area at least twice the size of the keyboard that can be sprayed with foam cleaner. You may need a cleaner made especially for computer component covers.

Now comes the fun part of removing the key caps. New keyboards have key caps that come in two pieces, a key cap post and sleeve. It is the sleeve that you want to remove. If you have one, use a key cap tool to remove the sleeves. You can also just use your fingers to pull them off.

Older keyboards have one-piece key caps and it takes a little more effort to remove them. The key cap tool will work here as well, but if you don't have this tool, improvise by using a small, flat blade screwdriver or similar implement. Place the blade of the screwdriver under the key cap and lift up with firm, steady pressure carefully prying the key cap off.

It is highly recommended that as you remove the key caps/sleeves, you arrange them in the same pattern as they were on the keyboard. The spacebar should probably be cleaned in place. Because of the way it is fastened onto the keyboard, it can be very difficult to reinstall properly. If you can, clean it while its left on the keyboard.

From a distance of a couple feet, spray the cleaner over the removed key caps. You will get better results if you wait a bit before you start wiping off the key caps. While waiting to replace the key caps, take a little time to clean the keyboard case to remove

any dust, fuzz, lint, or hair, gently using a vacuum cleaner.

Use a lint-free cloth or similar material to wipe each key cap. You may find that one cleaning isn't enough. As you finish with a key cap, reinstall it on the keyboard. When finished, you should try each key to be sure it works properly. If a key doesn't work, removing it and reinstalling it should do the trick.

For cleaning the rest of the computer components, just spray the cleaner on a cloth and wipe down the device. Remember, if the computer has a hard disk drive, park it first. If the components are especially grimy, turn the computer off and spray the cleaner on the component case. Let the cleaner work for a few minutes

before completely wiping it off.

Cleaning Floppy Drives

There are several products available for cleaning your floppy diskette drives. Most of these use a disposable diskette made of a substance that will absorb a cleaning fluid. The diskette lubricated with a cleaning fluid is placed on the disk drive and the drive

is accessed for a specified period.

With a clean working environment, you may want to clean your floppy drives once every six months to a year. In a less than ideal work environment (smoke, dust, old diskettes, improperly stored diskettes, etc.), you should clean your floppy drives more often.

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