10 Computing Tips and Tricks for Students

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1. Backup your data at all times

Rule #1 of computing is: never lose your data. It is frequently broken.

Use Google Drive, DropBox or anything like that.

2. Control your screen luminosity

Install Caffeine (Mac, Win) to stop the screen from dimming.
Install Flux to vary screen luminosity through the day.

Your eyes and your sleep cycles will thank you.

3. Use a launcher

To use your computer quicker, learn the keyboard shortcuts of your applications, and install a launcher.

Install Alfred (Mac) or something like it. On Window, Wox looks like a good alternative.

Alfred will give you quick application launching, search shortcuts (e.g. Google, Google Scholar, Wikipedia), local file search, music playback control, and a lot more stuff.

4. Use a proper Web browser

Use Google Chrome or Mozilla Firefox to browse the Web. Brave and Opera are also fine.
Apple Safari and Microsoft Internet Explorer might not be as secure.

Essential security steps – (1) Always keep your Web browser(s) up to date. (2) Install the HTTPS Everywhere extension. (3) Disable or uninstall Adobe Flash (find instructions online).

To enjoy a basic modicum of browsing privacy, you will also need extensions to block ads and trackers, such as Decentraleyes, uBlock Origin and Privacy Badger, and to clean up after you, such as History Limiter and Vanilla Cookie Manager (both for Chrome only). For more suggestions, see the extensions listed at privacytools.io, as well as the rest of the advice at that website.
5. **Use a password manager**

To keep your data secure, use different, complex passwords for every service that requires one. Complexity means long, random passphrases.

Install something like Dashlane to store your passwords.

Your passwords do not protect you against network attacks: *never* log on to a sensitive website, such as one that stores your credit card details, from an insecure connexion like airport or hotel Wi-Fi.

6. **Use a bookmarking system**

The Web is full of things that you will want to go back to later on.

Either use your browser bookmarks intelligently, or use a bookmark service like Pinboard, which seriously rocks.

7. **Use RSS**

Among the many Web technologies that are currently disappearing, one does not deserve to die. That technology is called RSS. Its twin technology is called Atom.

Use a service like Digg Reader or Feedly to subscribe to interesting websites via RSS.

Subscribing to websites via RSS feeds will incite you to read from a diverse array of sources in many different languages. For instance, if you are studying political science, you might consider subscribing to blogs like *The Monkey Cage* (RSS), Josep Colomer’s blog (RSS), *Presidential Power* (RSS), and the Project on Middle East Political Science (RSS).

8. **Add to the digital public domain**

The Web is a fantastic playground. Share back some of the fun with everyone. Even small contributions to the digital public domain are valuable.

Contribute to Wikipedia, publish a blog, write smart tweets – whatever.

You can contribute to Wikipedia in any language that you know. You can very easily blog through services like Blogger, Medium, Tumblr or WordPress. You can tweet on Twitter or on Mastodon.
9. Don’t be an idiot

Use your computer and online skills to help yourself and/or others, not to harm yourself and/or others.

Do not interpret online pseudo-anonymity as a right granted upon you to be a jerk.

Do not become a virtual prisoner of governments and their allies in the computing industry. You are making it harder for everyone else to live freely.

Do not send emails that look like they were written by a five-year-old.

10. Learn some basic computing nerdery

1. Learn how your computer works.
2. Learn how to make your computer work for you.
3. ???
4. PROFIT

Step 3: install a plain text editor like Atom, Sublime Text or TextMate; then, start learning and playing with languages like HTML by learning them from websites like W3Schools; last, transition to learning a bit of scripting and text processing, using Stack Overflow to get help.

On top of being fun and intellectually rewarding, learning how your computer works will

1. avoid you lots of (minor, or not so minor) computer trouble
2. save you hours of work on whatever you do on your computer
3. extend the lifespan of your computer by many years
4. make your mom think that you are some kind of whizz-kid

So, less trouble, more time, and parental wonderment.

Final note – All university students are required to learn some computer skills to complement their research and writing skills, and to ensure that the network communications that they share with everyone else at university remain secure. If you are thinking something along the lines of “computers are not for me, and my [humanities, social science] studies do not require me to know how to use a computer properly,” you are seriously fooling yourself.