



Computer Literacy



Tips for Taming the Machine

Most normal human beings feel like complete idiots the first few times they sit down in front of a computer. The tasks they've done so well without the computer suddenly must be done this new way that makes them feel incompetent. Finding your way around computers represents a big change in the way you do things, and like all changes, it can be stressful. But as with any other change in your life, coping is mainly a matter of time and patience.

A New Way of Using Language

When people talk to each other they say things in many ways, and often convey information with tone and body language. With computers, you have to state what you want in exactly the right language or the computer won't get it—no matter how obvious your request might seem to another person. There will be a period of frustration, until you learn the precise commands for your task. It's not unusual to feel the computer is persecuting you. Eventually, though, these commands will become second nature. It just takes practice. Here are some tips for becoming computer literate with a minimum of stress:

- ◆ Use any training support that your company offers.
- ◆ Use your software program's "tutorial," a guided tour

through the workings of your computer or software.

- ◆ Become familiar with your software program's "help" command.
- ◆ When in doubt, read the directions. Many manuals offer a step-by-step course in basic operations. If your manual doesn't make sense to you—and this is a common problem—invest in one of the many "made easy" or "for dummies" handbooks written for people who like things explained in plain English.
- ◆ If you get really stuck, call your software program's customer support number. You'll get a clear, step-by-step answer to your problem.
- ◆ Avoid obsessing. If you find yourself in a battle of wills with the computer, frantically trying command after command as the hours go by, take a break. Turn off the computer. Talk to some real people and get your sense of humor back.
- ◆ Before you do any serious work, find out how to save what you've done. Then use the save command every few minutes. If the system crashes, the power goes off or you accidentally delete something important, you won't have lost hours of work.
- ◆ Finally, be patient. Expect to make many mistakes during your training period.

Coping With Anxiety

If you feel real anxiety over getting started on the computer, talk to someone in your employee assistance program about your fears. Or get to know someone sympathetic who's been through the learning process and who can reassure you that you'll come out on top. Then start out slow. Just spend a few minutes each day getting used to the computer. Celebrate each new accomplishment with a pat on the back. Be on guard against the misconceptions that cause computer-phobia: The computer will not self-destruct or destroy all your work if you hit the wrong key. It will not control you or take away your job. You don't have to be a trained programmer to use a computer properly.

Although learning any new skill is stressful, once you've mastered the computer, you'll be amazed at how much easier it makes your job.