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The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.
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Summary of policy

The Open University Student Computing Policy sets out the expected ways in which you, as a student, will use Open University computing services in your studies. This policy ensures you have clear information about how you should and should not use Open University computing services as part of your studies and in your interaction with The Open University, its staff and your fellow students. It includes policy on security, working safely online, communicating, and standards of behaviour.

You should use this document to find out how you will need to use a computer during your studies at the Open University, where you can get help with computing, and to understand your responsibilities when using a computer and communicating online. This document also explains what The Open University will do if you breach this policy.

Support is available from the University to deal with any technical problems with tools and systems we provide for study. Appendices are included on using computers and the internet safely and appropriately.

Students can use their Open University computing account to participate in online activities and to communicate with the University and other people. Many students also choose to use social media in connection with their studies. They must therefore follow the Student Computing Policy regarding protection of Open University computer systems and standards of behaviour.

Failure to comply with the Open University Student Computing Policy may lead to disciplinary action under the Code of Practice for Student Discipline.

Introduction

Students need to use computers for many aspects of their Open University study. With the exception of students in some secure environments, for whom alternative provision is made, all students need to have access to a computer and the internet, and should know how to use them. This policy explains how you will need to use a computer during your studies, where you can get help with computing, and what your responsibilities are when using a computer and communicating online.
Summary of significant changes since last version

The main changes from the previous version of this policy (dated August 2020) are:

a) Replacing the previous alignment to Student Charter Principles to reflect the new Student Charter Values

b) Minor amendments to correct links and references

c) Students studying microcredentials on the FutureLearn platform are now out of scope of this policy

d) Addition of new paragraph 1.2.2 regarding the accessibility of digital services dependent on geographical location, and that access may be restricted or not be permissible without use of a VPN (Virtual Private Network).

e) Addition of new paragraph 1.2.3 regarding details on where a student can find further information on geographical location restrictions, how this can impact upon their registration, and who to contact for further advice.

f) Addition of new paragraph 1.2.4 regarding the student responsibility to ensure VPN provider compatibility with the geographical location required.

g) Addition of new paragraph 1.2.5 regarding eligibility for refund because of VPN sign-in restrictions within your place of residency.

h) Addition of new paragraph 1.2.6 regarding your responsibility to make use of VPN providers within your place of residency.

i) Addition of new paragraph 1.2.7 regarding non provision of a refund for any technical issues arising with VPN use.

j) Addition of new paragraph 1.2.8 regarding travelling or choice to study in a particular location, and your responsibility to arrange access via suitable VPN provider or download materials in advance.

Policies superseded by this document

This document replaces the previous version of the Student Computing Policy [dated August 2020].

Scope

What this document covers

This policy applies to anyone who has permission to sign in to Open University websites and systems, who is not considered to be staff.

Throughout this policy, when we refer to a ‘module’, we include other forms of University study (e.g. short courses, vocational qualifications).

What this document does not cover

This policy does not apply to

- people who do not have Open University sign-in credentials,
- Open University staff,
- students studying a Microcredential via the FutureLearn platform

Related Documentation

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

- Advocacy Policy
- Code of Practice for Student Discipline
- Code of Practice for Student Assessment
- Plagiarism Policy
- Student Privacy Notice
- Safeguarding - Ensuring the Safety of Children and Vulnerable/Protected Adults
- Dignity and Respect Policy
- Prevent Principles
- Social Media Policy
Additional support

- Open University Computing Guide
- Computing help
- Being digital: skills for life online (Open University Library)
- Digital skills: succeeding in a digital world (OpenLearn free course)
- Social Media Toolkit
- How to report bullying and harassment on social media (via Dignity and Respect Policy)
- A template for community guidelines (for student group administrators)
- Student Privacy notice

The Open University Student Charter Principles

This document aligns with the following Open University Student Charter Values:

1. We treat each other with courtesy and respect, respecting the rights of individuals to hold different beliefs and views and to express them appropriately.

4. We communicate with each other in ways which are clear, relevant, accurate and timely.

7. We act ethically and transparently, providing and making use of fair and open means to deal with our concerns and grievances, learning from them.

9. As students, we share the responsibility for learning and make a commitment to study and research using the resources and support services available, upholding the highest standards of academic integrity.
Policy

1. Using a computer for your studies

1.1 What you will need a computer for

A computer and reliable internet access will be needed for any of the following activities:

- logging in and accessing your personal information
- receiving and sending messages
- accessing help and guidance
- accessing module materials
- producing module work and making notes
- storing and organising documents
- enrolling or registering for study
- booking events e.g. tutorials or a residential school
- submitting assignments and collecting assignment and module results
- searching for information and accessing the Open University library
- staying in touch with your tutor and other Open University staff
- experiencing additional multimedia and communications elements of your modules
- sharing ideas with fellow students.

1.2 Computing requirements for modules

1.2.1 You should check the ‘Computing Requirements’ section of the module description on the online prospectus (if applicable) for any requirements of the modules that you intend to study. Computing requirements may vary from module to module and, to reflect developments in technology and to keep our modules and teaching up to date and relevant, they may change during your studies with The Open University.
1.2.2  The following clause only applies to individuals planning to study with The Open University when resident (temporarily or permanently) outside of the UK and Ireland. To be able to engage with your studies, The Open University provides access to study materials and learning events via various digital services. To obtain these, you will need to sign in to your student account. In the majority of cases, the ability to sign in to your student account and use all digital services will be fully accessible. However, in a small number of geographical locations (please see The Open University guidance “Help with signing in to OU systems”), access may be restricted or not be permissible without use of a VPN (Virtual Private Network).

1.2.3  If you are planning on studying with The Open University from outside the UK and Ireland, please see The Open University guidance “Help with signing in to OU systems” for information on current restrictions. This may impact upon your continued registration with The Open University, in line with our Conditions of Registration and Conditions of Registration (Short Courses). You should contact your Student Support Team to discuss any concerns.

1.2.4  The Open University is not responsible for which VPN provider you opt to use to sign in to your student account. It is your responsibility to ensure the VPN provider you use is compatible with the location you are in or intend to travel to. It is also your responsibility to ensure you are aware of any legal requirements or restrictions in the location you choose to study in when using VPN to access your studies.

1.2.5  If you are unable to access your course via a VPN because of restrictions in your place of residency, then you will be offered a full or partial refund. This is limited to locations where VPN access is either prohibited or restricted by law. If you are unsure how this will affect your studies, please contact your Student Support Team.

1.2.6  If there are VPN providers available in your place of residency (albeit with a limited service), it is your responsibility to ensure that you make use of these VPN providers when studying. If you are unsure how this will affect your studies, please contact your Student Support Team.

1.2.7  A refund will not be provided in the event of any technical issues that may arise with your VPN.
1.2.8 If you are travelling and choose to study in another location, it is your responsibility to ensure you can access your study materials online by arranging to have access via a suitable VPN provider, or you download materials prior to travelling. If you are unsure how this will affect your studies, please contact your Student Support Team.

2. Support for computing

2.1 Once you have registered with us, you will have access to help and advice from a dedicated computing helpdesk, the Open University Computing Guide, the HelpCentre and the Library.

2.2 If you have a disability and need help or information about using a computer, go to the HelpCentre accessibility pages.

2.3 There is also an accessibility guide to using a computer for study in the Open University Computing Guide

3. Your Open University computing account

3.1 Your Open University Computer Username (OUCU) and password

3.1.1 Our computing resources are provided for educational, training and research purposes. You must not use them for any business or significant personal purposes. This includes any systems that are personalised, for example Office 365 (including email and storage).

3.1.2 The University will provide you with a secure Open University computing account when you register as a student. This means you will be given an Open University Computer Username (OUCU) and password, which will enable you to access university systems, personalised resources and facilities such as the HelpCentre. You can set a different username if you wish but it must remain a true representation of your real name so your tutor can identify you, and to avoid accidentally causing any offence.

3.1.3 Your password must be in line with accepted good practice. Visit Safe and secure computing in the HelpCentre for advice on suitable passwords. We have an advocacy scheme if you require others to assist with your study.
3.2 Keeping your account secure

3.2.1 It is your responsibility to keep your account secure and confidential. You are responsible for all activities carried out under your username. You must not give your password to anyone else or store it on another computer system. While you are logged into our system, you should not leave that computer unattended unless you can be sure that nobody else can use it while you are away, for example, you have a password-protected screen saver or you can lock the door behind you. To turn on the screensaver, press the Windows Key + L, or Ctrl+Alt+Del

3.2.2 If you think the safety of your Open University computing account has been compromised, for example if somebody else knows your password, you must notify the University Computing Helpdesk by completing this form or calling +44 (0)1908 653972. If you do not keep your account secure, you will be liable for any transactions relating to your registration and study, even if your password is used by someone else fraudulently or without your permission.

4. Sharing information in online activities

4.1 What is displayed

Your Open University computing account enables you to participate in online activities. These may include assessed tasks for your module. When you participate in these activities, your name (or preferred online name), preferred email address, Open University Computer Username (OUCU) and the content you contribute may be displayed online to students and staff. You can set your preferences for what is displayed. Guidance on how to do this is provided in the Profile section of the Open University Computing Guide. Messages sent or received on University systems form part of the administrative records of the Open University. The Student Privacy Notice sets out how we use your personal data.

4.2 Sharing personal information

When working in shared online spaces you must carefully consider the information that you are sharing with others, for example personal information such as your home address or bank details. More information is available in the ‘Conduct when communicating online’ section of the Open University Computing Guide.
5. **How we will communicate with you**

5.1 **Your email address**

You must provide us with a valid email address, which we will use to correspond with you. You must inform the Open University of any changes to your preferred email address by updating your personal profile on StudentHome.

5.2 **Communicating with you by email**

It is your responsibility to check your email regularly. You will be sent important service information about your registration as a student and about your studies by email. It is also your responsibility to manage any filters on your account to ensure that email from The Open University is sent into your inbox and not to a spam or junk email folder. You should ensure that your inbox has an adequate amount of space to receive messages from The Open University. If you have opted in to receiving marketing messages you can opt-out or update your preferences in your [StudentHome profile](#). The [Student Privacy notice](#) sets out how we use your personal data.

5.3 **Communicating with you through StudentHome**

Your Open University computing account will include access to your personal StudentHome website. This includes details of personal information we hold about you and it will provide you with access to some study materials and a range of other resources that will support your Open University studies. The Open University will also use StudentHome to display messages that will be relevant to you and may not be provided by any other media. It is your responsibility to check StudentHome regularly.

5.4 **Communicating with you through Open University websites**

You will be provided with access to module and study websites (where available) as part of your studies at The Open University. These websites will provide access to learning materials and other resources and may be used to post messages about your modules and/or qualification that may not be provided by any other media. It is your responsibility to check your module and, if applicable, study website regularly.
6. Protection of Open University computer systems

6.1 Precautions you must take

The integrity of our computer systems is jeopardised if you do not take enough precautions against malicious software (for example, computer virus programs). You must not jeopardise the integrity, performance or reliability of computers, networks, software and other stored information that belong to us. ‘Software’ includes programs, routines, procedures and their associated documentation that can be used on a computer system, including personal computers and workstations.

6.2 What you are expected to do

6.2.1 You are expected to have and keep up to date virus protection software and take all reasonable steps to avoid distributing virus or malware to other Open University computer users.

6.2.2 The Open University understands that individuals cannot control or prevent some unsolicited email; however, users must not send junk or phishing email or encourage others to do so. Your email software may have a ‘report junk’ function to enable you to report or block junk email sent to you.

6.2.3 You should be aware that email attachments may carry viruses, so if you are in any doubt, you must not open the email. For further information please see our guide to Safe and Secure Computing.

6.2.4 You should not download any software or files without up-to-date virus protection measures. Our Safe and Secure Computing guide includes advice on virus and malware protection software.

6.2.5 You should not visit hacking sites or download hacking or evidence eliminating software.

6.2.6 You should not intentionally visit, download or share in Open University systems, material from internet sites that are likely to contain obscene, racist, hateful or other objectionable materials.
6.2.7 You should not attempt to hack into other Open University computer users’ accounts or Open University systems by using password recovery, cracking, security analysis or any other security software.

6.2.8 You should not intentionally interfere with the normal operation of Open University and other student systems, including the propagation of computer viruses.

6.2.9 You should not cause sustained high-volume network traffic to The Open University that substantially hinders others in their use of the network, for example by sending emails to large numbers of addresses.

6.3 The University may automatically block or quarantine any email or post to an Open University website or forum identified as a potential threat to the organisation. Further information on safe computing can be found in the ‘Using a computer’ section of the Open University Computing Guide.

7. Standards of behaviour

7.1 Acceptable standards

Acceptable standards of behaviour apply to computer-based information technology just as they would apply to other forms of communication:

a) Software or information we have provided may only be used for educational purposes unless agreed otherwise. By beginning to study at The Open University, you agree to follow all the licensing agreements for software that we have entered into. Please see Appendix 3 for more detailed guidance.

b) You must not send offensive, obscene or abusive information.

c) You must not present your own opinions or any facts or other information from your own sources as if they are those of the Open University or made on its behalf.

d) Any software, printed data or other information provided by the University must not be copied or used without prior permission from the University, software or information provider.
e) You must not break any copyright in documentation or software (or both). The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1998 gives copyright owners the right to bring civil proceedings if anyone breaks a copyright, and makes it a criminal offence to break certain copyrights. Specific legislation relating to computer programs can be found on the legislation.gov.uk website.

f) You must not use any University computing or network resources to use or publish material that is obscene, libellous or defamatory, or breaks our code of practice concerning harassment. You are personally responsible for your own activity on any Open University communications channel.

g) You agree to follow the conditions of the Computer Misuse Act (1990), the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, data protection legislation and other relevant Acts.

h) You must not do anything that damages our reputation, for example make threats against another student or a member of staff, share confidential information about the university, its students or staff, or make libellous statements about the university on social media sites.

i) You may only use approved University links to other computing facilities which you are authorised to use. When using other facilities, for example in libraries or internet cafes, or other online and social media spaces, you must also follow their rules or code of conduct.

7.2 Blocking content

The Open University may use software tools to block sites that are obscene, hateful or have other objectionable materials or may affect the University’s operations. Further information can be found in the ‘Conduct when communicating online’ section of the Open University Computing Guide.
8. The principles of online communication

The Student Charter sets out the responsibilities we have to each other as members of the Open University community. The principles of online communication set out in Appendix 2 describe the way in which staff and students should work together online to support learning, research, administration and participation in all aspects of the University community. The principles of communicating with other students in Open University collaborative spaces are outlined in the ‘Conduct when communicating online’ section of the Open University Computing Guide.

9. Social networking guidance

If you are using a social networking site to connect with other students or to help your study, please see the Social Media Policy.

10. Using your computer safely

You should take care of your own health and safety when you are working on a computer. Further information is available in Appendix 1 and in the 'Using a computer' section of the Open University Computing Guide.

11. Monitoring

11.1 In exceptional circumstances, we may have to use records of your contact with us and about your study to carry out our work or meet our legal obligations. The Student Privacy Notice describes how we will manage these records.

11.2 For security and maintenance purposes, authorised individuals within the Open University central IT teams may monitor all data, systems and network traffic at any time to ensure compliance with this policy and other security policies, and the effective operation of the University’s systems.
11.3 The Open University has a statutory duty to have regard to the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism. If the use of Open University computer equipment, information and systems gives rise to a concern that a person may be at risk, this may result in action being taken in accordance with the Open University Prevent Principles.

12. Failure to comply

12.1 Any breach of this policy may undermine the effective running of The Open University and its ability to meet its duties and legal obligations.

12.2 Failure to comply with some aspects, for example paragraph 3 on ‘Your Open University computing account’ may mean your learning experience is negatively impacted. For more serious breaches of the policy, for example around security and standards of behaviour, action may be taken under the Code of Practice for Student Discipline. It may also be the case that your conduct and/or action(s) may be unlawful. The Open University reserves the right to inform the appropriate authorities in such cases.
Appendices

Appendix 1

Using your computer safely.

Appendix 2

The Open University online communications principles.

Appendix 3

Terms and conditions governing the use of software, tools and content.

Further information

For your personal contact list including assistance with using Open University systems go to the HelpCentre and click on ‘Contacts’. If you are a research degree student, contact the Research Degrees Office at research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk. For questions about social media use at The Open University, contact the Social Media Engagement Team at social-media@open.ac.uk.

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please email SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk.

Alternative format

If you require this document in an alternative format, go to the Help Centre (phone +44 (0)300 303 5303). If you are a research degree student, contact the Research Degrees Office at research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk.
Appendix 1: Using your computer safely

1. **Health and safety advice for using your computer**

   Set up and connect your equipment in accordance with the instructions provided by the supplier or manufacturer. Always be sure that the computer is switched off and disconnected from the mains electrical supply when you connect or disconnect any of the electrical leads.

2. **Working safely**

   The use of display screen equipment (DSE) has been related to various symptoms to do with sight and working posture. These symptoms are often perceived as fatigue of some kind. Applying simple ergonomic principles to the layout of your work area and how you study can readily prevent them.

   Try to position the monitor to minimise glare and reflections on the screen. Suitable lighting is important: remember that glare can occur either directly or by reflection from the screen. Glare from windows can usually be eliminated by curtains or blinds, or by facing the screen in a different direction. It might be a good idea to make adjustments from time to time during the day, as light changes. You should have general lighting, by artificial or natural light or both, that illuminates the whole room adequately.

3. **Eyes and eyesight**

   There’s no evidence that working with DSE is harmful to the eyes, nor that it makes visual problems worse, although a few people who have difficulties with their sight may become more aware of them. But working at a screen for a long time without a break can have effects similar to reading or writing uninterruptedly and may make your eyes feel ‘tired’ or sore. You might find that it helps to look away from the screen from time to time and focus your eyes on a distant object.

4. **Making yourself comfortable**

   As for any task that means working in one position for some time, it’s important to make yourself as comfortable as possible when you use your computer. Place the monitor in front of you and at a comfortable viewing distance. If you’re working from a document, you might find it better to have that directly in front of you and the screen to one side. Try to position the top of the monitor display slightly below eye level when you’re sitting at the keyboard.
5. **Before starting work you should:**

- Adjust the positions of the screen, the keyboard, the mouse and the documents you’re working from, so as to achieve the most comfortable arrangement. Make sure that you have space to use your mouse easily and rest your wrists in front of the keyboard when not typing.

- Adjust the position of your chair to give you a comfortable viewing distance and posture. The screen should probably be somewhere between eighteen and thirty inches away from you, whatever suits you best. Good keyboard and mouse technique is important. Keep your upper body as relaxed as possible and don’t over stretch your wrists and fingers. As a general guide, your forearms should be roughly horizontal and your elbows level with the keyboard or the mouse.

- If your feet don’t reach the floor when you’re sitting in a good position, try a footrest.

- Use a document holder when copying from a manuscript. Take a break whenever you can, try to arrange your study to consist of a combination of work on and away from the screen, to prevent fatigue and to vary visual and mental demands. Long spells of intensive screen work should be broken up by periods of non-intensive work of a different kind. The nature of your study and the combination of media you’re using will determine the length of break you need to prevent fatigue, but as a general rule:
  
  - You should take breaks before the onset of fatigue, not in order to recuperate. The timing of the break is more important than its length. Short, frequent breaks are more satisfactory than occasional, longer breaks. A break of thirty seconds to two minutes after twenty or thirty minutes of continuous work with the screen and keyboard is likely to be more effective than fifteen-minute break every two hours.

  - If possible, you should take your breaks away from the screen, and avoid activities that require actions similar to your work (writing, crosswords or needlework, for example).
Appendix 2: The Open University Online Communications Principles

These principles describe the way in which OU staff and students should work together online to support learning, research, administration and participation in all aspects of the University community.

**Principle 1  The benefits of ‘Digital Professionalism’**

Good online communication skills cannot be assumed, but they can be learned and are essential for effective engagement in learning and work. The development of ‘digital professionalism’ and skills in online communication has positive benefits for staff, for students and for employability.

**Principle 2  Developing our skills**

We will support each other to learn, develop and enhance our online communications skills, through advice, guidance, learning resources and working together.

**Principle 3  Communicating effectively**

We will support and encourage clear and effective communication in online situations and the use of language, style and tone which is relevant and appropriate to the circumstances and the purpose of the communication.

**Principle 4  Managing our online image**

We will ensure that we are all aware of the importance of managing our digital footprint and support each other to raise awareness of the benefits of creating a positive online image and how to achieve it. We will be mindful of maintaining our own confidentiality and personal security.

**Principle 5  Freedom of speech and ideas**

We will promote the open exchange of ideas and uphold the fundamental principle of freedom of speech and thought. We acknowledge that people have the right, within the law, to hold and to express ideas that others may find challenging. We will not allow views to be presented in a way that is hostile or degrading to others.
Principle 6  Dignity and respect

We will treat each other with dignity and respect, even where we disagree with each other, and be sensitive to the impact our conduct may have on other students and staff. We recognise that good manners aid effective communication. We aim to be welcoming and inclusive and do not provide a platform for threats, personal abuse, derogatory comments, unreasonable behaviour that causes offence, discrimination, victimisation, bullying or harassment.

Principle 7  Criticising others and accepting criticism

We should be prepared to accept legitimate criticism, provided it is within the law, based on accurate facts, measured and in an appropriate forum. It is rarely appropriate for named individuals to be criticised in public or anywhere that they have no right or opportunity to reply.

Principle 8  Confidentiality, privacy and copyright

We will respect each other’s confidentiality and privacy and we will not share personal details or distribute ideas, words and images that belong to others without their express or implied permission and without acknowledgement. We will not tolerate plagiarism or activities which encourage or enable it.

Principle 9  Responsibility and consequences

We will accept responsibility for our own actions and encourage others to do so. We should be aware that poor communication skills and unacceptable behaviour may have a negative impact on others.

Principle 10  Moderation and control

Moderators and other controllers of online communication spaces, whether they are staff or students, have a responsibility to uphold these principles. The aim of moderation or control is to provide an environment within which meaningful, relevant and effective communication can take place. Moderators’ decisions should be open, transparent and consistent with any relevant guidelines, which should be available to all participants. Moderators have the right to expect reasonable decisions to be respected but must be prepared for some decisions to be challenged, through appropriate channels.
Appendix 3: Terms and conditions governing the use of software, tools and content

1. Introduction

1.1 By accepting a place on an Open University module or otherwise using Open University facilities, content or other systems that include computing or involves the use of tools being provided via a computer, such as online learning, you have given a legal undertaking to comply in full with the requirements set out below. These requirements regulate the use of computer software packages, tools and content supplied or otherwise made available to you by The Open University as part of your module material or otherwise.

1.2 A ‘computer software package’ includes all disks and manuals, the material contained in or on them, and any other related material that is protected by intellectual property rights. The software may be supplied to you on any suitable medium, such as optical disk or electronic networked service.

1.3 ‘Tools’ refers to those on- or off-line mechanisms by which The Open University supplies or otherwise makes available ‘Content’ to you.

1.4 ‘Content’ refers to all proprietary module material, and other content which is owned by The Open University, together with, for example, all information contained within forums, wikis, blogs and podcasts.

1.5 You are granted a non-transferable, non-exclusive licence to use the computer software packages, ‘Tools’ and ‘Content’ on the conditions set out in the list below.

1.6 You must not transfer any computer package or the use of it to any other person in any way. Any use, copying or adaptation of the computer packages, ‘Tools’ or ‘Content’ that is not authorised by these conditions may constitute an infringement of intellectual property rights and may be illegal.

1.7 Your licence to use the computer software packages, ‘Tools’ and ‘Content’ may be restricted or terminated if you fail to meet any of the conditions listed here, and your continued use may be illegal. Legal action may be taken against you or any other person or body who infringes the intellectual property rights of The Open University or other owner of the rights in the computer software packages, ‘Tools’ or ‘Content’.
2. **Software packages**

The conditions on which you may use the software packages are:

2.1 You may use the computer software packages only for educational purposes to do with an Open University module for which you have registered.

2.2 Each computer software package may be used only by you, yourself, and only on a single computer at any one time.

2.3 You are allowed to reproduce the software, both in order to use it and for security purposes, as follows:

   a) You may install all or part of the software from an original copy on to the local hard disk (or other permanent storage medium) of a stand-alone computer, keeping the software on its original medium as a back-up.

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