



Troubleshooting Tips for Home Users

A white paper from PLATO Support Services

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- PLATO Learning Environment™
- PLATO® Web Learning Network
- Client Hosted PLATO® Web Learning Network

Troubleshooting Tips for Home Users

Introduction

This white paper offers helpful tips and troubleshooting strategies for students who are running PLATO® Learning lessons on their home computers.

You're not alone. Thousands of students participate in PLATO Learning online classes from home. If you understand the most common Internet issues encountered by home users, you can

- Prevent problems before they occur
- Fix problems quickly if they do occur
- Decrease downtime caused by technical difficulties
- Solve problems independently at your own convenience

Use the tips and strategies in this white paper to set yourself up for success with PLATO Learning lessons.

Meet System Requirements

Before you run PLATO Learning lessons from home, make sure your computer meets the system requirements for your PLATO Learning web-delivery platform. This includes hardware requirements, connection speed requirements, and configuration requirements.

Your PLATO Learning web delivery platform is the name of the product you log in to before you run PLATO Learning lessons. Typically it is one of the following:

- [PLATO® Web Learning Network](#)
- [Client-Hosted PLATO® Web Learning Network](#)
- [PLATO Learning Environment™](#)

Make sure your computer system meets the requirements for your product. This includes the type and version of the browser you are running.

Hardware Requirements

Your computer's processing speed, available memory, and network, sound, and video cards all work together to run your operating system and software applications at maximum efficiency. If your computer doesn't meet hardware requirements, it's like trying to drive a car to a destination that is impossible to reach because the car is too slow, has an engine that keeps breaking down, or runs out of gas.

Internet Connection Speed Requirements

Slow Performance and Bottlenecks

Even if your computer exceeds hardware requirements – for example, you have more than enough processing speed, memory, and the latest, cutting edge hardware – you can have serious performance issues if your Internet connection speed is too slow. When your Internet connection speed is too slow, you will have difficulty loading plug-ins and launching lessons. Web pages may take several minutes to appear, and error messages may display.

Think of your Internet connection as a pipe, and your connection speed as the diameter of the pipe. The diameter of the pipe determines how much data can flow through the pipe at once. If the pipe is too small, it will restrict the amount of data that can travel back and forth between your computer and PLATO Learning's web servers. If the pipe becomes "clogged", data does not flow fast enough, resulting in slow performance of your system. This is known as a **bottleneck**.

Dial-up modems that cannot connect at an average connection speed of at least **30 to 40 Kbps** cannot run PLATO Learning lessons at an acceptable performance level. The connection speed for PLATO® Life Science is even higher: **128 kbps**. You may think that if you have a 56k dialup modem, your connection speed is sufficient. However, *having* a 56k modem does not guarantee that your computer is *connecting* at a speed of 56 Kbps (kilobits per second). If you're connecting to the Internet over an analog (phone) line, your connection may never reach that speed. Analog, dialup modems use almost all of the full bandwidth of the present day phone system. A speed of 33.6 Kbps is pushing the speed limit of the current analog phone system. A connection speed of 28.8 Kbps is not fast enough to run PLATO Learning lessons at a satisfactory performance level.

We strongly recommend using a broadband Internet connection speed (either DSL or cable) instead of a dial-up modem. DSL and cable Internet connections are capable of much higher data transmission speeds than a modem and telephone line. Contact your local phone company and Internet service providers to find out what broadband services are available in your area.

If you're not sure what your Internet connection speed is when you're running PLATO Learning lessons, here's how to find out:

- **Dial-up modems:** At the lower right of your desktop, point your mouse at the computer icon on your system tray. The speed at which you are connecting will display:



- **Cable or DSL modems:** Find out how fast your Internet connection speed is at YourSpeed, a speed test used frequently by PLATO Learning's Field Engineers. You may also find their throughput tips helpful.

How fast is a cable modem?

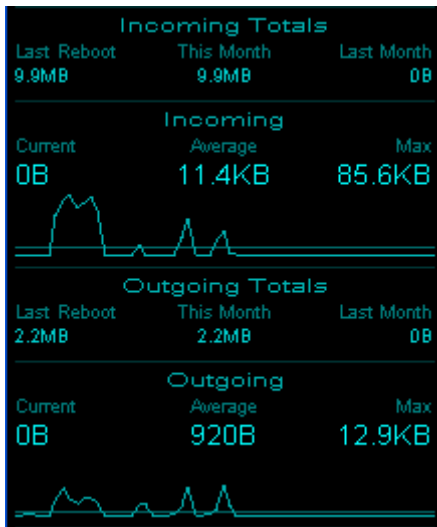
This [speed test](#) from cable-modem.net checks your speed and compares the connection types and speeds for cable, DSL, and dialup.

When you purchase broadband Internet connection services through an Internet Service Provider (cable modem) or a phone company (DSL), your provider can give you an estimate of how fast your Internet connection will be or how much bandwidth you will have available.

Speed and traffic tests

The web offers free tools that you can use to check your Internet connection speed and bandwidth, or monitor the flow of Internet traffic. Speed tests can tell you if certain regions of the Internet are currently slowed down, which helps you determine if your Internet connection speed is a global or local problem.

NetStat Live



AnalogX offers NetStat Live (NSL), a free utility you can download and install to see your exact throughput for both incoming and outgoing data – whether you're using a modem, cable modem, DSL, or local network.

NSL also graphs your system's CPU usage. This is especially helpful in identifying if it's your computer that is slowing things down, or if it's the Internet. [Download NetStat Live](#)

The [Internet Traffic Report](#) site monitors the flow of data around the world. It displays values between zero and 100 for various continents. Higher values indicate faster and more reliable connections.

Meet Configuration Requirements

Your hardware meets or exceeds system requirements, and you have a high speed Internet connection in place. The next step to ensure your success is to make sure that your home PC meets configuration requirements.

Supported Browsers

The type of web browser and version you have installed on your computer can make or break your ability to run PLATO Learning lessons successfully. The browsers that are tested and supported by PLATO Learning, Inc. are listed in the system requirements for your PLATO web product:

- [PLATO® Web Learning Network](#)
- [Client-Hosted PLATO® Web Learning Network](#)
- [PLATO Learning Environment™](#)

Internet service providers with propriety browsers such as **AOL, CompuServe, or MSN** are not supported. However, you can use these browsers to connect to the Internet. Once you are connected, minimize the proprietary browser and launch a supported version of Internet Explorer or Netscape to log in and navigate in your PLATO Learning web product.

Browser versions are sensitive to hardware and software technology. If your browser version is too old, it may not run properly with the latest software or hardware, and error messages may display. If your browser version is not supported, download and install a supported version of [Internet Explorer](#) or [Netscape](#).

Disable Popup Blockers

PLATO® courseware cannot run if you have a popup blocker installed on your workstation. Popup blockers prevent extra popup windows (usually advertisements) from opening in your browser. Unfortunately, popup blockers may also prevent some software applications from running. For example, PLATO Learning lessons depend upon JavaScript to launch and run successfully. If your popup blocker disables JavaScript or ActiveX® controls, PLATO Learning lessons will not launch.

You may have popup blockers installed without realizing it. The latest Google™ and Yahoo!® toolbars include popup blockers that are installed and enabled by default. Norton Internet Security™ and ZoneAlarm also have popup blocking features. Service Pack 2 for Windows XP automatically installs a popup blocker. [Disable or remove popup blockers](#) before you try to launch PLATO Learning lessons.

If you have Service Pack 2 for Windows® XP, see the following support tip for what to do:

[Unable to run courseware with Windows XP Service Pack 2 installed](#)

Enable JavaScript & ActiveX

Internet Explorer web browsers must have ActiveX[®] controls and JavaScript enabled to launch and run PLATO Learning lessons. Netscape browsers must have JavaScript enabled to launch and run PLATO Learning lessons.

Most browsers have these features enabled by default. However, they may be disabled if someone has changed the default settings in your web browser.

If your workstation has a **Macintosh** operating system, please see your web browser's Help file for instructions to enable plug-ins, enable scripting, or control access of JavaScripts.

If your workstation has a **Windows** operating system, follow these instructions to [enable JavaScript and ActiveX controls](#).

Enable Cookies

We recommend that you enable [cookies](#) on your workstation. PLATO web products use cookies to remember your account number. If cookies are enabled, you won't have to enter your account number each time you log in.

Web browsers have cookies enabled by default. If you find that cookies are not enabled for the browser on your workstation, you can enable them by following the instructions in your web browser's Help file. (Start your web browser, and then click "Help" on the menu bar at the top of the screen.)

Download and Install Plug-Ins

PLATO Learning lessons require the use of plug-ins on your workstation. Without plug-ins, you won't be able to launch PLATO[®] lessons.

If you try to run PLATO lessons and don't have the required plug-in installed, you will be prompted to download it. The key to downloading and installing plug-ins successfully is to make sure that you are logged on to your computer with **administrator privileges** when you do so. If you have a Windows operating system, this means you must be logged on to Windows as an administrator user.

If you are not logged on with administrator privileges, plug-ins may appear to download and install successfully. However, you may have unexplained problems or [error messages may display](#) when you try to launch and run PLATO Learning lessons.

You can download and install the required plug-ins when you log in to your PLATO web product. Before you attempt to download and install plug-ins, temporarily disable your antivirus software or security software first.

Downloading and installing the plug-ins may take a fair amount of time, depending on your connection speed.

Protect Your Computer From Adware, Spyware, and Viruses

Adware and Spyware

Third-party adware or spyware programs may be installed on your computer without your knowledge. While you're surfing the Internet, marketing vendors may download adware or spyware as hidden software onto your computer. Adware and spyware send details about the web sites you visit or other info (including your e-mail address) to advertisers. Advertisers can then target your computer with popup ads and spam.

Most of the time, adware and spyware are not malicious. However, they may install advertising trojans on your system, which behave like viruses. The following symptoms may occur if you have adware or spyware installed:

- You are suddenly unable to launch or run PLATO lessons successfully
- When you try to launch your browser or PLATO lessons, another program starts up and takes control of your browser
- Your browser's homepage unexpectedly changes
- You are unable to use your browser normally and navigate to where you want to go on the Internet
- When you start your computer, or when your computer has been idle for many minutes, your web browser opens to display web site ads
- You cannot start a program, or a link in a program no longer works when you click it
- Your web browser suddenly closes or stops responding
- Starting or resuming your computer takes much longer than it used to

Adware and spyware often cannot be detected by antivirus software, security programs, or firewalls. Therefore, we strongly recommend that you scan your computer weekly with adware and spyware protection software.

Adware and spyware removal tools are very effective at detecting and removing unwanted adware and spyware. See the following knowledge base article for details:

[27322](#) - Adware, Spyware, or Hijacked Browser Results in Failure to Run PLATO Products

Antivirus software

Make sure you have antivirus software installed and enabled on your computer to protect it from viruses. Two of the leading antivirus software programs are Norton Antivirus™ and McAfee® VirusScan®:

Norton Antivirus: <http://www.symantec.com>

McAfee VirusScan: <http://www.mcafee.com>

Please note that you must temporarily disable your antivirus software whenever you download or install plug-ins.

For better security, you may also wish to install a personal [firewall](#), such as Norton Internet Security or McAfee Personal Firewall.

If you do use a personal firewall, make sure to configure the firewall to allow content from your PLATO Learning web site. If your firewall is not configured to allow content from your PLATO Learning web site, you may have problems logging in or launching lessons.

Troubleshooting

Trouble Downloading or Installing Plug-ins

If [error messages display](#) or you have problems connecting to your PLATO Learning web site, you may need to download the latest version of one or more plug-ins, or reinstall your plug-ins. The following articles should help you solve any problems you may have with plug-ins:

- [26795](#) – Permissions Required to Run Web Learning Network or Install Plug-ins
- [25695](#) – Access to Specified Device, Path, or File is Denied
- [26786](#) – Downloading, Installing, or Uninstalling Flash Player
- [26120](#) - Trouble With Macromedia Flash Installation on Macintosh Workstations
- [26118](#) – How to Fix Almost all Macromedia Flash Player Issues
- [26787](#) – Unable to Install ActiveX Controls or Plug-Ins (Flash, Authorware)
- [25839](#) – Authorware Troubleshooting Tips; Downloading Authorware Player
- [26561](#) – Unable to Run Biology or Chemistry Lessons; 404: Page Cannot Be Found
- [26953](#) – How to Fix Almost All Shockwave Issues
- [25604](#) – "Server Address Not Specified" When Trying to Run Courseware

Clear Your Browser's Cache

You may experience unexplained problems with viewing web pages from time to time. Your browser may load out-of-date web pages or images, or take longer to exit. For the best performance on the web, we recommend that you occasionally clear your browser's cache.

A cache is a storage area where your browser saves local copies of web pages on your disk or in memory. This enables the web pages you previously visited to load faster. However, in time, your cache may become filled up and result in slower loading, or may point to old web pages. When this happens, clearing the cache should improve performance.

- [26801](#) – Windows Users: How to Clear the Cache (Delete Temporary Internet Files)
- [26800](#) – Macintosh Users: How to Clear the Cache (Delete Temporary Internet Files)

Unable to Launch Lessons

The most common reason users are unable to launch PLATO Learning lessons is that a popup blocker is enabled on your computer. [Disable popup blockers](#) before you try to run launch lessons.

You may also have problems launching or running lessons because of security settings, user profile restrictions, plug-in issues, or video display issues. The following articles will help you troubleshoot problems with launching or running lessons:

[24217](#) – Current Security Settings Prohibit Running ActiveX Controls

[24212](#) - Downloaded File is Not Available

[26125](#) – Local User Profile Restrictions Prevent Users From Running Courseware

[26023](#) – My Courseware Windows Locked Up

[24225](#) - Plugin is Not installed Properly...You May Not Be Able to Run Courseware

[25604](#) - "Server Address Not Specified" When Trying to Run Courseware

[27555](#) - "Unable to Open Registry iPCD3" When Trying to Run Courseware

[27424](#) - Unable to Run Courseware With XP Service Pack 2 Installed

[27099](#) - Virus on System Prevents Users From Running Courseware

[23685](#) – Workstations Hang at Black Screen When Running Courseware

Technical Support

- If you're experiencing a computer problem that is not related to PLATO software, the following self-help resources are available:

[Microsoft Help and Support](#)

[Microsoft Knowledge Base](#)

[Apple Knowledge Base](#)

- If you experience technical difficulties with PLATO Learning web products that aren't resolved by following the instructions in this white paper, try searching the [knowledge base](#) for self-help tips to solve the problem.
- If you still need help, contact your **teacher** or the designated **technical staff person** at your school.
- If your teacher or technician is not available, e-mail a [Support Request](#) to PLATO Support Services.

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