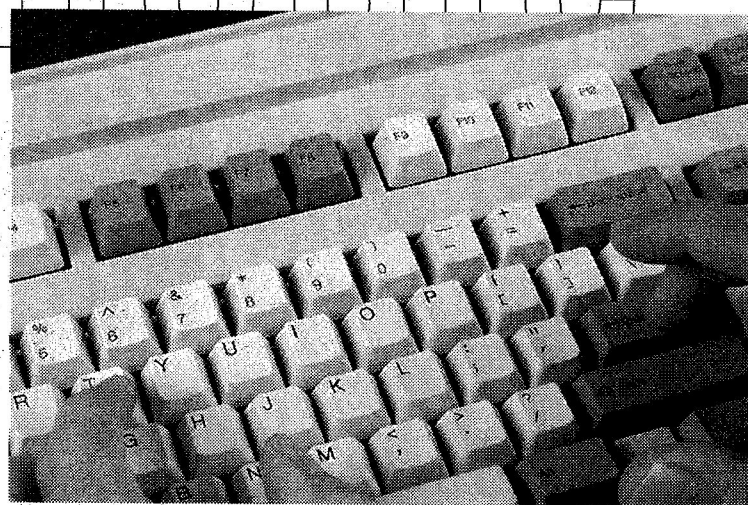


# are you Computer

# PHOBIC?

Enter the millennium  
with some basic  
knowledge of  
those high-tech  
contraptions.



By Brett Aronowitz

**Y**ou've almost made it to the new millennium without ever using one. Perhaps you were one of those people who avoided the computer room in high school back in the days of punch cards and programming. As the electronic age gained momentum, you hoped computers would be a fad and pass by like polyester, bell bottoms and bread machines. In an age when many people are doing their holiday shopping online, you can't turn your computer on—and you're too embarrassed to ask your kids for help. Sound familiar? You could be computer phobic. But don't worry—there's help for you.

The best way to tackle your phobia is through a process called exposure therapy. If you cook with a microwave or use the keypad on your telephone to retrieve voice mail, you're already familiar with this process.

**I won't be able to catch up; I'm starting too late.**

Believe it or not, now is the perfect time to begin learning. Computers have evolved and are designed with you, the user, in mind. In most cases, words appear as black on the screen as they do against white paper so you won't strain your eyes. Most of your options are presented in multiple choice format so you don't have to commit any key commands to memory.

**I'll break it.**

You can't break the computer. A picture of a bomb on your screen doesn't mean the computer has detonated. It just means if you haven't saved your data, you may have to start again.

**I'm overwhelmed.**

Take some deep breaths and start slow. It was scary when you first learned to read. Words that you'd never seen before stopped you until you remembered that big words are made of smaller words. Try to access your beginner's mind, the mind of your inner child who loves to learn about the world. Most computers come with on screen tutorials that you can work on alone and at your own pace.

**There's too much to learn.**

Don't try to learn everything in the first hour. Everyone has a different learning curve. As soon as you notice your mind wandering, stop for a while. If you run into a problem, get up and clear your head. Go for a walk. Relax. Often the solution will come to you if you aren't thinking so hard. Reward yourself with treats as you go.

**I feel so stupid.**

Ask for help. If you have kids, asking them to help you will help them learn better too. You must know a subject thoroughly before you can teach it. If you get stuck, there are classes, videos and private tutors available.

**I don't have the right set up; My eyes hurt.**

Sitting for long periods of time can make your muscles sore and stiff. Remember good

posture. The height of your chair should allow your thighs to be horizontal and your feet flat on the floor. Give your eyes frequent rest breaks by refocusing on a distant object out a window.

**Establish reasonable goals.**

Computers can be a blessing in your life. Visualize yourself working at the computer when a screen pops up congratulating you every time you balance your checkbook to the penny. You can stay in touch with family members and save on long distance telephone bills, print your grandmother's recipes that have been stashed in a manila envelope all these years, experiment with your creativity by making greeting cards and invitations, print mailing labels instead of writing them by hand and create T-shirt iron-ons on a rainy day with your kids.

Have faith! In a short time you'll think of your computer as just another household appliance like the microwave. **BAF**

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