TRICIA'S TOP TECH TIPS

1. **Never retype; or, type once, use often**

   You can copy and paste text and graphics from one program to another (including from the Internet to a word processor for example). Or, you can export and import data among applications (for example, from a database to a spreadsheet). I scored a –3 on a typing test so this is definitely a big one for me. (Ctrl-C to copy, Ctrl-V to paste)

   Think reduce, reuse, recycle – it works with your computer, too. Reduce your efforts and stress (let the computer do it), reuse what you've done, and recycle text and information.

2. **When in doubt, right-click**

   When you right-click (Microsoft® Windows®-based PC's) you get a context-sensitive menu. That means you get a list of what you can do with whatever your cursor is on when you click. For example, if you click on a paragraph in your word processor, you can format the font, format the paragraph, and other things related to text or paragraphs.

3. **If you're going to do something more than 3 times, automate it**

   Since it will take at least three times longer to do it with technology the first time, you want to make sure it's something you'll do often enough to make it worth the effort. It can be small things like creating a shortcut on your desktop to a frequently opened file or big things like mailings to hundreds of people.

   On the flip side, if you only have to do something on the computer once (or very infrequently), let someone else do it. If you need to do it routinely, learn to do it yourself.

4. **Start where you are**

   You don't have to be an expert next week. Just look at what you know now and build on that. Learn a little at a time in selected areas. Along with this, remember that when someone is helping you with the computer, it's not about what they can do, it's about what you can and need to do.

5. **It takes 3 times before something begins to make sense…so show yourself some patience**

   When I was learning Greek, at first I couldn't even recognize the alphabet. Then I had to recognize words. Finally, I could start putting meanings to those words. Computers are like that, too. It takes a few times for the hooks to start forming in your brain.

6. Learn the concepts first; then, learn the keystrokes when you need them

I call it just-in-time learning – there's no point in learning keystrokes you don't need or won't use in the near future. A better strategy is to gain a grasp of features and potential benefits. Learn the logic of your software's menu system and toolbars. Then, when you need a new feature, you are more likely to find it and figure out how to use it. And remember it.

7. Think of e-mail as a postcard

Once you send it, you have no control over who sees it. Be sure what you say, and how you say it, can stand up to public scrutiny. Don't send a hasty e-mail message if it could possibly contain any offensive material. Be certain of your facts. Be careful of expressing opinions, particularly opinions you would not want made public. Be very clear and concise when typing your subject – many people receive so many e-mails, they use the subject lines to decide if they'll read the message at all. Stick to one subject per message. And, keep it short.

8. Disaster preparedness: If you're prepared, it's not a disaster

Save often, create a backup routine, store backups off-site, and keep multiple backups of critical data. Use a surge suppressor. Get a UPS (battery backup) if you experience frequent power loss. Perform routine maintenance on your computer—scan and defragment your hard drive, clean inside and out (keep yourself grounded), and clean your mouse. A little healthy paranoia never hurt anyone.

9. Practice safe computing

Use firewall and anti-virus software and update them regularly. Be prepared for when you get a virus anyway. Keep Windows® and Office® updated (turn on Windows® automatic update). Use a spyware cleaner.

Don't give out personal information like address, drivers license, social security number, or credit card numbers over the Internet, especially in e-mail, unless you are guaranteed security.

Change your passwords regularly. Mix numbers, letters, and other characters in your passwords (substitute a number one for the letters i or l, a zero for o, and $ for s). If you make your passwords 14 characters or longer, they are virtually unbreakable. Instead of using random characters, use a phrase and substitute some of the characters (or use one word twice). Using these strategies, "password" would become "Pa$$w0rdPa$$w0rd."

10. Type first, then format

When writing, type in the text and edit before you begin formatting. Once you start formatting, you can get carried away making everything look just right. If you haven't finished writing, you may run out of time and have to rush through it.