

Computer Running Slow? It Might Be Your Internet Connection

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Much of what we do on our computers, smartphones, and tablets relies on the Internet. Checking e-mail, participating in Zoom meetings, surfing web sites, gaming, and streaming music or video all require a reliable and reasonably speedy connection to the Internet. When the connection isn't adequate, your computer response time suffers. AT&T, Sonic, and Comcast/Xfinity are the three residential providers servicing Oakmont.

If you've signed up for "bundled" service from your provider – Internet/phone/TV - you may be getting your provider's slowest Internet speed unless you specify you need more speed. Your computer may seem slow when the real problem is your connection speed or "bandwidth". Bandwidth is the maximum amount of data transmitted over time, usually measured in megabits per second (mbps). Some urban areas (not Oakmont) have excellent service in gigabits per second (gbps).

Test your Internet speed: go to speedtest.net and click the GO button. Speedtest.net will report back with two numbers: download speed (data coming FROM the Internet) and upload speed (data sent FROM your computer TO the Internet). Residential Internet service typically has download speeds 10-50 times faster than upload speeds. Historically, most of our Internet usage involved web sites downloading data to our computers, but with the pandemic and the onset of videoconferencing (e.g. Zoom), upload speed is becoming more important.

You've run speedtest.net and got the numbers – what do they mean? The download speed is usually the most important number unless you have large files that you are sending over the Internet and/or you are participating in video conferences like Zoom. The good news is that if you have a good download speed your upload speed is likely to be adequate.

So what is "good"? If speedtest.net says that your Download speed is 10mbps or less, you are probably experiencing a slow response from your computer and difficulty participating in Zoom meetings, as well as lots of buffering when streaming video to your computer, phone, tablet, or TV. To get the best quality for video, with much content now available in ultra-high definition (e.g. 4K), you need a download speed of at least 25mbps. If you have other devices in your house (computers, tablets, smartphones, smart TVs, gaming systems, security systems, smart speakers, etc.), you will need more than 25mbps.

Most internet service providers are priced about the same for a given speed, but not all providers in Oakmont can sell you speeds above 50mbps. Sadly, Sonic does not have their own infrastructure in Oakmont; they utilize AT&T infrastructure and offer slow speeds. Most providers will negotiate their rates, especially if you've been with them for a while; ask for "customer loyalty" or "customer retention" department.

In summary, just because your computer appears to be running slow doesn't mean it's time to replace it. Check your Internet connection with speedtest.net. If it's slow, consider upgrading your Internet. The upgrade is likely cheaper and more satisfying in the long run than shelling out the cost for a new computer.

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