

Slow macro execution on a laptop... why?

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- *From:* Jonathan Sachs <xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
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While attending school, I used Windows XP and Word 2003 on a Dell Inspiron 5100 laptop computer which the school provided for my use as a disability accommodation. (I have carpal tunnel syndrome, and I operate the computer mostly by speech recognition.) This machine had a 2.6 GHz CPU and 512 MB of RAM. It ran Word macros at an agonizingly slow pace. I once timed some lengthy macros and found that they ran 8 to 10 times slower on this computer than on a 2.8 GHz tower machine that I also used.

I never figured out why things ran so slowly on the Dell machine. Here are some possibilities and observations on them:

* **Version of Word:** the tower machine ran Word 2000 and the laptop ran Word 2003. I cannot rule out the possibility that Word 2003 inherently runs macros 10 times slower than Word 2000, but I think it is unlikely.

* **RAM:** the tower machine had 1024 MB of RAM and the laptop had 512 MB. Several of the people have told me that this was the problem, and saw no need to look further. However, I cannot reconcile this theory with the fact that while the machine was running macros so slowly it typically was not accessing the hard disk much at all. One access every couple of seconds was typical. Is there a known, specific way that inadequate RAM can lead to slow performance, other than by causing overuse of the swap file? I am not aware of one.

* **Virus:** it seems unlikely to me that the computer was infected by a virus, because a current copy of Norton AntiVirus was running the whole time, and it never found problems. Also, I searched Windows Task Manager many times for a task that was eating up CPU time, and never found one. Most of the time went to the idle process.

I am now looking for a job in which I will probably have to provide my own portable computer (most likely a tablet PC) to accommodate my disability needs. Before I select one I need to figure out what was wrong with Word on the Dell machine, or least, how to avoid a repeat of the Dell experience. Does anyone have information about this, or testable theories?

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My email address is LLM041103 at earthlink dot net.

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