

Computer Ethics? Right vs. Wrong

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Many see computer ethics as a gray area. Some people justify wrong actions for what they shouldn't be doing. Most just don't understand the rules and why the rules were made in the first place. Society has rules about our behavior.

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

- *The Golden Rule*

Ethics is more than just the "**Golden Rule**". It is a principle of what is right and wrong. Everybody knows its wrong to lie, cheat, steal, etc... However, some people don't know you are not suppose to **copy** a game you purchase and then give it to your sister so she can use it on her computer. In this article, we will try and explain different situations that clearly show right from wrong associated with computer technology.

Part of the problem is technology has outpaced society's ability to clearly label right from wrong. While many issues really only require someone to apply their common sense, some issues require more deeper thought and analysis before determining right from wrong. It is our responsibility to give thought to the **wise** and **responsible** use of technology.

Lets look at some different ethical situations handled wrongly that can and do cause harm to others. If a person enters your locker late at night and **steals** your property and the next day at school you see private pictures or notes on display at your school, you probably will feel violated and very hurt. This is no different than someone entering your files and looking at your work or reading your E-mail.

Some people copy software and then give out their copy for others to use. Programmers and software creators lose millions of potential sales each year due to this simple crime. Some programmers work for years perfecting a

program. Money lost due to sales not made only increases the cost of those programs actually sold.

There are other crimes with more dangerous consequences. People who are extremely bright with computers sometimes use their abilities for evil. They create programs we call viruses to take control of our computers in some way. Sometimes these programs actually destroy the contents of our computer.

So what do you think, is it right to read someone else's private electronic property? Is it right to buy a game then give it to friends so they won't have to pay for it as you did? Is it right to use your knowledge to create "virus" software? If your answer is no, then good for you. You are on the road to making ethical decisions about technology.

What can you do about all of this? First, act on what you believe. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". You wouldn't want others to read your private mail so don't read their private mail. You wouldn't want to work hard at something and then not get paid, so don't steal other's hard work.

If you think it's funny or smart to be a **hacker** - people who use their skills to break into other people's private computer - think about how it would feel to have a hacker look into your computer files. If you think it would be fun to create a program that destroys parts or all of someone else's computer then imagine how it would be to try and put back together your computer after a **virus** infected it.

It is a simple question of right and wrong! With the knowledge and ability to use a computer comes responsibility. The skills you are learning will one day provide advantages over someone who doesn't know as much. However remember that your choices of right and wrong affect more people than just yourself. It is up to you to use computers in a way that doesn't harm others.

Name:

Date:

Directions: Answer each of the questions after reading the article. Write in complete sentences. You must think and be creative with your answers.

1. What is the Golden Rule?

2. Make a **TOP 10** list of rules to follow in the area of computer technology.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

3. Define *virus*.

4. Define *hacker*.

5. In what ways does making an illegal copy of a software and giving it to other, affect the people that make and sell them?

6. There are three things someone can steal from you: **time, property, and reputation**. Give an example of a way that each of the three could be stolen electronically.

1. Time -

2. Property -

3. Reputation -

7. What **advice** would you give someone who wants to know how to balance the privilege and the responsibility of having a computer?