

# COMPUTER MISUSE

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## ABSTRACT

This poster explores the topic of computer misuse by initially explaining the respective laws. Secondly, the context in which the act was created is outlined and a relevant example is introduced. Thirdly, an insight into the creation process of this poster is given. Penultimately, frequently asked questions regarding computer misuse are answered. Finally, several constructive guidelines are offered to protect users against computer misuse.

## INTRODUCTION

The computer misuse act is an important computer legislation introduced by UK Parliament in 1990. It is split into three sections:

### Section 1: Unauthorised access to computer material.

If someone gains unauthorised access to a computer system without the intent to commit a serious crime then they are breaking section one of the computer misuse act. The unauthorised user does not need to cause any harm to be guilty.

**Sentence: Up to six months in prison and/or a fine.**

### Section 2: Unauthorised access with intent to commit or facilitate commission of further offences.

If someone gains unauthorised access to a computer system with intent to commit a serious crime then this is breaking section two of the computer misuse act. Serious crimes include things like fraud and stealing information.

**Sentence: Up to five years in prison and/or an unlimited fine.**

### Section 3: Unauthorised modification of computer material.

If someone modifies any kind of computer material, or knowingly assists the distribution of a Trojan or virus, they are guilty of section three of the computer misuse act.

**Sentence: Up to five years in prison and/or an unlimited fine.**



## BACKGROUND

The computer misuse act was introduced as a response to two hackers' attempt to create a connection and retrieve private information from British Telecom. At that time there were no specific laws regarding this type of offence so the Computer Misuse Act was introduced in 1990 to address this issue.

A prominent example of computer misuse would be Gary McKinnon's case, described by prosecutors as one of the "biggest military hacks" of all time. Between 2001 and 2002 Gary McKinnon planned a series of attacks on U.S NASA and military computers in the United States. The U.S government claimed he managed to disable the US Army's Military District of Washington network consisting of 2,000 computers for 24 hours. The extent of the damage has been estimated at 700,000 U.S dollars. Under U.K. Law, he has infringed upon Section Three of the Computer Misuse Act of 1990. He currently (as of Jan 2010) faces extradition and trial in the U.S. However, Gary denied the allegations stating that his main purpose was finding evidence of UFO landings.



## METHOD

The project began by scheduling a meeting to discuss initial ideas and how we would start to organise the project. We agreed upon an organisational structure consisting of Internet conferencing and group meetings. We collected some information on meeting mechanics and organised our meetings using a standardised format, whereby a chairman was elected and minutes were taken. Once a suitable topic was decided upon, each member of the team was assigned the task of finding at least three relevant sources which were then compiled into a reference list. Members were then delegated tasks for the development of the poster and resource set.

## DISCUSSION

### If I unknowingly access some classified information, could I be convicted?

No. The law specifically states that you must be aware of what you are doing.

### Are you breaking the law if you only attempt to gain unauthorised access, but fail in doing so?

Yes. You would be breaking the law and it's possible that you can be charged.

### Is it an offence in the computer misuse act if you look over someone's shoulder while they enter their password?

No. This may be covered by a company's code of conduct or other laws, but it is not within the scope of the computer misuse act.

### If someone creates a virus that does little or no harm to the target computer system, are they breaking the law?

Yes. Running a program on another person's computer without their consent is illegal.

### How can I protect myself in regards to computer misuse?

Many companies provide software which is intended to protect your computer from computer misuse such as firewalls and antivirus. Also, use strong passwords (numbers, symbols, etc) to protect your private information.

## CONCLUSION

Computer misuse is an important law that computer users and professionals should be aware of. Important information to keep in mind:

- Always ask for permission (verbal or written) to access data for which you may not have authorisation for.
- Make an effort to inform friends and colleagues of the law if you feel they are in danger of breaking them.
- Always make sure that you have adequate protection against viruses/
  - Remember the three acts of computer misuse and know what they mean.
  - If you require further information, please visit: <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/>
  - Know the law!

