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How to use a power supply tester

Here's how to test the power supply unit (PSU) in your computer with a power supply tester. This process isn't for a beginner, but if you're comfortable working on your computer, these steps should take around 30 minutes. After you read the safety tips, it's time to get started: Turn off the PC, remove the power cable, and unplug anything else connected to the outside of the computer. Then, open the case. To make the power supply test easier, move the disconnected and open case somewhere you can easily work with it, such as to a table or other flat, non-static surface. Unplug the power connectors from every internal device inside the computer. An easy way to make sure each power connector is unplugged is to work from the power cable bundle coming from the power supply. Each group of wires should terminate at one or more power connectors. It's not necessary to remove the actual power supply from the computer, nor should you need to disconnect any data cables or other cables not connected to the power supply. Group all the power cables and connectors together for easy testing. As you organizing the power cables, pull them away from the computer case as much as possible to make it easy to plug the power connectors into the power supply tester. Check to make sure that the power supply voltage switch located on the power supply is properly set for your country. In the U.S., this switch should be set to 110V/115V. Plug both the ATX 24-pin Motherboard Power Connector and ATX 4-pin Motherboard Power Connector into the power supply tester. Depending on the PSU that you have, you might not have a 4-pin motherboard connector but instead a 6-pin or 8-pin variety. If you have more than one type, only plug in one at a time along with the 24-pin main power connector. Plug the power supply into a live outlet and flip the switch on the back. Some power supplies don't have a switch on the back. If the PSU you're testing doesn't, plugging in the device is sufficient to provide power. Press and hold the ON/OFF button on the power supply tester. You should hear the fan inside the power supply begin to run. Some versions of the Coolmax PS-228 tester don't require that you hold down the power button, but others do. Just because the fan is running doesn't mean that your power supply is supplying power to your devices properly. Also, some power supply fans don't run when being tested even though the PSU is fine. You need to continue testing to confirm anything. Confirm the LCD on the power supply tester is lit, and you see numbers in all the fields. The motherboard power connectors plugged into the power supply tester support the entire range of voltages that your PSU can deliver, including +3.3 VDC, +5 VDC, +12 VDC, and -12 VDC. If any voltage reads "LL" or "HH" or if the LCD screen doesn't light up at all, the power supply isn't working properly; you need to replace it. You're just looking at the LCD screen at this point, so don't worry about any other lights or voltage indicators not located on the actual LCD readout. Check Power Supply Voltage Tolerances and confirm that the voltages reported by the power supply tester are within approved limits. If any voltage is outside of the range shown, or the PG Delay value isn't 100-500 ms, replace the power supply. The tester is designed to give an error when a voltage is out of range, but you should check yourself to be safe. If all the reported voltages fall within tolerance, you've confirmed that your power supply is working properly. If you'd like to test the individual peripheral power connectors, continue testing. If not, skip to Step 14. Turn off the switch on the back of the power supply and unplug it from the wall. Plug in one connector to the appropriate slot on the power supply tester: a 15-pin SATA Power Connector or a 4-pin Molex Power Connector. Don't connect more than one of these peripheral power connectors at a time. You probably won't damage the power supply tester doing so, but you won't be accurately testing the power connectors either. Both of the motherboard power connectors that you connected to the tester earlier should remain plugged in throughout these tests of the other power connectors. Plug in the power supply and then flip on the switch on the back if you have one. The lights labeled +12V, +3.3V, and +5V correspond to the voltages being delivered through the connected peripheral power connector and should light up appropriately. If not, replace the power supply. Only the SATA power connector delivers +3.3 VDC. You can see the voltages delivered by the different power connectors by looking at the ATX Power Supply Pinout Tables. Repeat this process, beginning with Step 11, testing the voltages for the other power connectors. Only test one at a time, not counting the motherboard power connectors that stay connected to the tester the entire time. When the testing is complete, turn off and unplug the power supply, disconnect the power cables from the power supply tester, and then reconnect the internal devices to power. Assuming your power supply tested good or you've replaced it with a new one, you can now turn your computer back on and/or continue troubleshooting the problem you are having. Testing a power supply on a desktop computer using a power supply tester device is one of two ways to test one in a computer. There should be little doubt about whether your PSU is working properly after testing it with a PSU tester. However, there are several reasons a computer won't start other than a malfunctioning power supply. See How to Troubleshoot a Computer That Won't Turn On for a troubleshooting guide and more help with this problem. Image not available forColor: To view this video download Flash Player A power supply tester is an electronic device used to test how well a computer power supply is functioning. This type of testing is often performed as part of maintenance on a computer, and can be used to try to determine the source of a computer problem. It is typically a handheld device that has a number of different plugs that can be connected to the power supply within a computer, and a digital display screen and indicator lights used during the testing process. A power supply tester is fairly inexpensive, but due to its singular usefulness it may not be an investment most people wish to make. A multimeter. The power supply within a computer is responsible for properly distributing power to the various hardware devices within the computer case. This means that a faulty or malfunctioning power supply can lead to a number of different computer problems, including crashes, lockups, and the computer simply not even starting up. A tester is often used during computer diagnostics to establish whether the power supply is failing, to better narrow down the cause of computer issues. A faulty power supply can lead to a number of computer problems. Despite the importance of the power supply, it is often one of the first parts of a computer to wear out or fail, and checking it with a power supply tester is often the first step in computer diagnostics. There are many cables that run from the power supply to the motherboard and every piece of hardware within the computer. If any of these cables are no longer moving power properly to those devices, then problems can arise. This is why a tester will usually have several different types of connectors on the device, allowing these different cables to be tested. If there is a problem with the major connection between the power supply and the motherboard, then the power supply will likely need to be replaced. Problems with the other connectors to different devices in a computer can potentially be solved by using a different connector, when one is available. If a power supply tester determines that the power supply is simply not distributing enough power throughout the computer, then the power supply will likely need to be replaced. Due to the single purpose of a power supply tester, it is a specialized piece of equipment and not something most people are likely to purchase. Other types of power testers such as a multimeter can also be used to test a power supply, but the process can be somewhat more complex. These devices can be used for many different purposes, however, so are more likely to be a useful investment for someone who does not do computer repair professionally. The power supply within a computer is responsible for properly distributing power to the various hardware devices within the computer case. February 02 2008 As anyone who has ever built their own system can tell you, their comes a "moment of truth" so to speak, when you hit that power button on your PC for the first time. No matter how many times you have done it before, or how good the equipment is that you are using... there is always a margin of error/failure which can creep up on you and smash your new PC dreams. While you can minimize your risks by using quality hardware from a reputable manufacturer, there is always the chance that the piece of hardware could have been damaged during shipment as well as a myriad of other possibilities. There is a way to further increase the likelihood that your new PC will fire up that first time, though. Test the power supply! A properly working PSU will fire that new rig up and you will be off and gaming in no time. However, a bad PSU will set you back until you are able to secure a new one... a REALLY bad PSU could even end up killing other parts of your PC. I know this because I have been a victim of such a catastrophic event. Checking out the PSU with a PSU-tester before hooking it up can save you time, money & stress. When you consider these points, the \$15 - \$30 cost of a tester seems pretty trivial and the first time you run across a PSU that fails the test, you have virtually paid for the tester many times over. Testing a PSU using one of these devices is a quick and painless task. For this article I will be using a modified PC Power & Cooling PSU shown to the left. The PSU tester I am using both come from FrozenCPU including a standard LED-only model (~\$15) and a model with a more informative LCD display (~\$28). First, here is the basic testing procedure: First, make sure that the switch on your PSU (if it has one) is turned to the "Off" position. Connect the main motherboard wire bundle (20 or 24 pin) to the tester and then plug the PSU into a power source. When you turn on the PSU the tester should quickly light up and show you which voltage tests are within specs. From this point on you should only connect one other line at a time. Plug-in, read, unplug... this is repeated until all lines (for all plugs) are tested to your satisfaction. The pics below will show you what to expect on a good test; I had to take the pics in low light so that you could easily see the test results. 20 & 24 Pin (Main Motherboard bundle) When you first fire up the PSU the tester should greet you with a quick beep which means that everything is ok. If you don't hear a beep, then something did not check out right. The LED row along the right show results for +3.3V, -12V, PG (Power Good meaning that overall the PSU test was good), +5VSB, +12V, -5V, & +5V. Don't be alarmed when testing your new PSU if the -5V LED does not light up. If you are testing an ATX PSU that adheres to version 1.3 or higher for PSU Specs, the -5V LED may not come on since the spec for -5V was removed because it was only used by, now non-existent, ISA cards. On the LCD version you will see a PG Value which is the time, in milliseconds, from turning on the PSU to when the voltage is actually sent. 8Pin & 4Pin Motherboard Power Plug in the 8pin or 4pin motherboard power connector and you should see the +12V LED on the left hand side light up. If you are using the LCD model, the +12V2 rating will display. Floppy Power Connector For the Floppy connector the +12V and +5V LEDs will be lit up along the left hand side of both PSU tester models. Standard Molex The Molex Connector (located along the bottom edge of the tester) should give results similar to the Floppy connector. A lit up +12V and +5V LED. PCI-E (Video Cards) Using the middle connector group along the left side of the testers to test the 6Pin PCI-E (video card) power connectors will give you a +12V2 rating on the LCD tester and a lit up +12V LED on the left side of the standard tester. SATA Power The SATA power connector is located along the top edge of both testers. When you test this connector you should see all three LEDs along the left side of both units light up; these represent +12V, +3.3V & +5V tests. The tester did not beep and/or the xxxV test light did not light up! Now what? Well, as was mentioned earlier, if you are testing an ATX PSU that adheres to version 1.3 or higher for PSU Specs, the -5V LED may not come on since the spec for -5V was removed because it was only used by, now non-existent, ISA cards. If it was a different LED indicator or rating then make sure that you test all connectors along that string (if applicable) to determine if it is just a problem with that particular connector or the entire line. If it is a problem with the entire line then it that can be indicative of a failing, or already failed, PSU. Check your PSU's warranty and make plans to replace it ASAP. Please Note: Do not leave the PSU tester plugged into a PSU for a great length of time and do not leave them unattended. They can generate heat and are not intended to be plugged in for an extended duration. They are intended to be used as a quick means to evaluate a PSU's health and reliability.

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