

Windows XP - Performance & Maintenance
Performance, Maintenance and System Tools for Troubleshooting
Hardware - Printers and Mouse
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I. Sluggish and Quirky PC

There comes a time when your once powerful PC becomes slow and sluggish. Windows itself takes longer to load, and your PC seems to freeze or crash more often.

II. Maximize Performance

Reset Your Clock – Use the Control Panel to set the clock date/time. Or right-click the clock on the Taskbar, choose Adjust Date/Time. Or double-click the time in the lower-right corner.

Close Documents Not In Use –Keep only the documents that you need available and close all other programs and documents for maximum PC performance.

Close ALL Documents/Spreadsheets in Word/Excel with One Command – Hold down the Shift key while you select File from the menu to get the Close All command.

View Available Space on Hard Drive – To determine how much space is available on a disk, click Start, My Computer and click on the disk drive to check. The status bar will display the total disk capacity and the amount of free space. Or right-click the disk and click Properties.

Tidy Up Your Desktop with the Desktop Cleanup Wizard – Right-click on the desktop, select Properties, Desktop tab, and Customize Desktop button. On the General tab, check the appropriate boxes. Under Desktop Cleanup, select Clean Desktop Now. In the Desktop Cleanup Wizard, click Next. The Wizard dialog box lists the desktop shortcuts that you haven't used in the last 60 days. Uncheck the ones you want to keep on the desktop, click Next. Click Finish to acknowledge the final list of shortcuts to be removed. Windows puts these shortcuts in a folder called Unused Desktop Shortcuts. If you want to retrieve a shortcut, drag it out of this folder.

III. Manage Your Startup Programs

Check your System Tray – Look for startup items in your System Tray. Hover your mouse over each icon and a small window shows you the name of the program. Right-click an icon to display a pop-up menu of commands, one of which may be a Setup or Preferences command.

Check the Startup Folder and Remove Shortcuts – The Startup Folder contains links or pointers to programs. Right-click Start, select Open. If there are shortcuts to programs in this Startup program that you do not want to run at reboot/restart time, delete them from this folder.

Msconfig to the Rescue - Stop Unwanted Starts with Msconfig - Select Start, Run, type "msconfig" in field box, press Enter or OK button to access System Configuration Utility. Select Startup Group tab to view apps that launch when you boot, deselect the ones you don't need.

IV. Preventive Maintenance

Take out the Trash –Right-click the Recycle Bin icon, choose Empty Recycle Bin, and click Yes to confirm. Hold down the Shift key as you press the Delete key to bypass the Recycle Bin.

Internet Right-Clicks to Clean Your Cache - Click Start, right-click Internet Explorer and choose Properties. Or choose Tools and Internet Options from within IE.

The Big 4 – Disk Cleanup, Check Now/Scandisk, Disk Defragmenter, and Anti-Virus Scan
The 4 Big utilities cleanup your hard drive, maximize performance, & enhance speed. Disk Cleanup removes unnecessary files, Check Now/Scandisk checks for file directory integrity, Defrag speeds up the PC by organizing files contiguously, Anti-Virus scans with up-to-date list.

Disk Cleanup – One Stop-Shopping – Disk Cleanup deletes useless files such as those in the Windows Temp and Internet Explorer (IE) cache folders, and lets you empty your Recycle Bin. It offers safe, reasonably effective, one-stop shopping. Select Start, All Programs, Accessories, and System Tools. Or select Start, My Computer and right-click on desired hard drive, select Properties, General tab and Disk Cleanup button. Select type of files you to remove & click OK.

ScanDisk –ScanDisk scans & repairs errors on your hard drive that occur when your PC crashes and has to be restarted. Select Start, My Computer, right-click on the hard drive that contains the Windows XP Operating System. Select Properties, the Tools tab, and press the Check Now button to run ScanDisk. If you select either “Automatically fix file system errors’ and /or “Scan for and attempt recovery of bad sectors”, then you need to restart Windows XP.

Defrag – The Defrag utility places all of the data clusters that belong together next to each other. Run the ScanDisk/Defragment combination after you have removed files and software and before you install new software. Select Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Defragmenter, Tools tab and press the Defragment Now button. Or Start, My Computer, right-click the hard drive, Properties, Tools tab, and press Defragment Now. Press the Analyze, Defragment. Run Check Now/ScanDisk BEFORE you run Disk Defragmenter.

Speed Up Maintenance – You can launch Check Now/ScanDisk, Disk Cleanup or Disk Defragmenter by choosing Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, or Start, My Computer, right-click the drive you want to work on and choose Properties. On the General tab, click Disk Cleanup to launch that tool for the disk you right-clicked or select the Tools tab to open one of Window’s other system utilities.

Scandisk and/or Disk Defragmenter Keep Restarting – It is important that no other applications access the hard disk drive during the scan of Scandisk and the running of the Defrag program. If another applications interrupts Check Now/ScanDisk’s or Defrag’s access to the hard drive, you will get an error, and Check Now/ScanDisk or Defrag will restart.

Solution to Prevent Check Now/ScanDisk and Disk Defragmenter from Restarting – Run in Safe Mode - If you have encountered errors, make sure you close all programs, including antivirus applications. The best way to ensure that no other programs access the hard disk drive during a Check Now/ScanDisk or Defrag routine is to run those utilities in Safe Mode.

Safe Mode Startup – Safe Mode allows you to start Windows with a minimum of drivers and software loaded. Click Start, Shut Down and select Shut down from the drop-down list. Click Restart and OK. When you see the message “Please select the operating system to start”, press F8. Use the arrow keys to highlight the appropriate safe mode option and press Enter.

Cleanliness and Good Housekeeping Counts – Reclaim Hard Drive Space – You may encounter slowdowns and crashes if you pollute your pool of good data with unwanted software, adware, spyware, junk files, and unnecessary startup items.

Reduce Clutter - Remove Unwanted Software – The first line of attack to remove unused software is to run the uninstall or remove program that came with the software. Check Start, All Programs, and locate the group for the desired software to find an Uninstall program. To remove a program that doesn't have its own uninstall program use the Add/Remove Programs utility, from the Control Panel on the Start menu. Highlight the program you want to uninstall and click the Change or Remove Programs button. Windows will delete the program and its settings.

Computer Management – Click Start and then right-click My Computer and choose Manage. Explore some of the Programs in the left panel.

Scheduled Tasks – Select Start, Control Panel, Performance and Maintenance and Scheduled Tasks. A list of your Scheduled tasks is displayed. Double-click on one of the Scheduled Tasks to view its details. Click on Add Schedule Task to start the Scheduled Task Wizard.

Check for Virus with Updated Signature Files – If your system has recently slowed down, make sure your antivirus software is up to date and then scan your hard drive.

Remove Adware and Spyware – Adware and spyware don't come with any means of removal. You have to use a special utility to eliminate them such as Lavasoft's Ad-aware (free at <http://www.lavasoft.com.de>), Spybot Search & Destroy (free at <http://www.spybot.safer-networking.de>) or Kephyr's Bazooka Adware and Spyware Scanner (free at <http://kephyr.com>).

V. Trouble Shooting

Switching Back and Forth Between Open Apps – Use the Alt and Tab key combination.

System Freezes – Use 3 Finger Salute - Ctrl + Alt + Del - If your system freezes, use the 3 finger salute and press Ctrl+Alt+Del in any order. At the Windows Task Manager, select the Applications tab and look for a program that is “Not Responding”, highlight it, select End Task.

System Freezes and Ctrl + Alt + Del Doesn't Work – If your system is frozen and the Ctrl + Alt + Del doesn't do the trick, then you need to power down your computer. Hold the On/Off button until the system turns off. On a notebook there is a Reset button that you can depress with a ball point pen if the On/Off button trick doesn't work.

Windows Task Manager and Processes (Daemons in UNIX) – Most times, the Task Manager is only called upon to force unresponsive and recalcitrant programs to quit.

Application Tab in the Task Manager – The Application tab displays a list of programs currently running. You can review the status of each and close programs with the End Task button. Check for programs with a Status of “Not Responding” if your PC is acting sluggish or if specific programs freeze up. Use the End Task button to force the application to quit. Check End Now if necessary. Close all other open applications and reboot after an End Task.

Process Tab in Task Manager – The Process tab shows what’s running on your PC. Many processes run in the background, don’t show up on Applications list, yet consume resources.

Know Your System – System Information – Use the System Information program to identify information about your PC system. Select Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, System Information. View the General description of your PC on the first screen under System Summary. Expand the various headings in the left panel to explore this program.

Use the PC Notary for Digital Verification – Run File Signature Verification - Use Tools, File Signature Verification Utility to scan for signed drivers. Click on the Advanced button.

Check Hardware with Device Manager –When a device such as a printer or scanner or network card stop functioning properly, get the latest drivers downloaded and handy. Start, Control Panel, Performance and Maintenance, System, Hardware tab, Device Manager to see a list of devices. Find the device in question, click on it, and press the Remove button. Shut down Windows and Restart it. Windows will most likely detect (PnP) the new device and reinstall it.

View System Properties – To view System Properties, select Start, Control Panel, Performance & Maintenance and select System. The General tab gives you information about your PC.

Get to System Properties without Control Panel – To access System Properties, right-click My Computer and choose Properties. If the My Computer window is already open, click View System Information in the left pane under System Tasks to see the same menu.

Suspect a Corrupt Windows File – Run System File Checker – If you suspect that something is wrong with the files of your Windows XP operating system, run the System File Checker. This utility program examines your system files and notifies you if it finds something that may be corrupted. Select Start, Run, and type in “cmd” in the Open field to open a DOS-like window. Then type “sfc /scannow” and let the program do its job.

VI. Maintain Updates

Automatic Updates –Start, Control Panel, Performance & Maintenance, System. Or Start, right-click My Computer, Properties, Automatic Update tab. Select Automatic Updates tab and verify that “Automatic” radio button is selected, use drop-down boxes to select frequency & time.

Launch Automatic Updates from the Internet – Start, All Programs, Windows Update to access the Microsoft web site that provides the updates.

VII. Error Messages

Error Message	Possible Cause	Possible Solution
Invalid Page Fault	Minor error that occurs when a program requests data that does not exist or is already in use from memory.	Restart affected application
Windows Protection Error	Occurs when a virtual device driver (software that lets the OS communicate with PC hardware) is corrupt or missing.	If you have recently installed new hardware, call the product's technical support number. Also, reinstalling Windows will help.
General Protection Fault	Sometimes called application errors, these errors indicate a conflict between programs or between a program and the OS. May cause crash or freeze-up.	Press Ctrl+Alt+Del to load Task Manager or the Close Program window. End programs that are not responding. Restart the PC.
Fatal Exception Error	Occurs when PC tries to perform invalid process or use an uninstalled component. Blue Screen of Death.	Restart the computer.

VIII. Printers

Take Advantage of the Printer Icon on the Taskbar – To check the status of a print job or to pause/resume printing, double-click on the printer icon in the Notification area aka System Tray.

Abort a Print Job – Double-click on the printer icon in Notification area, aka System Tray, to open Print Monitor. Highlight document, click Cancel All Documents from Document menu.

Add Access to a Printer – Select Start, Control Panel, Printers and Other Hardware, Add a Printer or View Installed Printers & Fax Printers to view what is installed. Follow the Wizard.

Eliminate Parallel Printer – Use the USB Port Instead – If you have a printer that connects by parallel port, try using the printer's USB port if it has one or get a USB-Parallel cable.

IX. Mouse

Change Speed of Mouse – Start, Control Panel, Printers and Other Hardware, and select Mouse.

Scroll Wheel on Mouse to Zoom Text – Press the Ctrl key as you rotate the scroll wheel of your mouse up to make the text bigger or down to make it smaller in 10% increments.

X. Where Have All the Icons Gone? Where Do I Find It In Windows XP?

My Computer – Start, My Computer in the top right pane.

Set up Printers – Start, Control Panel, Printers and Other Hardware, Add a Printer.

View Event Log – Start, Control Panel, Performance/Maintenance, Admin Tools, Event Viewer

Internet Options – Open IE, Tools, Internet Options. Or Start, Control Panel, Network & Internet Connections, Internet Options. Or Start, right-click on IE & select Internet Options.

My Documents – Start, My Documents.

My Recent Documents – Start, My Recent Documents.

My Pictures and My Music – Start, My Pictures. Start, My Music.

XI. Miscellaneous Interesting Web Sites

URL	Explanation
www.whatis.com	Online encyclopedia of techno-terms
antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/archivepix.html	Astronomy photos
www.time.gov	Coordinated Universal Time or World Time
Timeanddate.com	Time search, calendar creator, time between two dates.
People.yahoo.com	Obtain phone number and address of a long lost friend. For a fee of \$39 you can get detailed information.
www.phonespell.org	Make words out of your phone number
www.anywho.com	Find phone numbers, addresses, maps & directions for People and Businesses. Use reverse lookup, so you can type in a phone number to find person or business.
www.bigyellow.com	Business lookup with a reverse lookup.
www.drivershq.com	Headquarters to locate a driver for you PC
www.bandwidthplace.com	Test your Internet connection and view test statistics.
www.tweakxp.com/tweakxp	Site dedicated to improve & customize Windows XP
Maps.yahoo.com	Online maps and driving directions
www.mapquest.com	Online maps and driving directions
www.ehow.com	Clear instructions on how to do just about anything
Toolbar.google.com	Download the Google Toolbar, a free add-on that appears next to Internet Explorer toolbar.
Office.microsoft.com/home/default.aspx	Office Online to offers templates, downloads, clipart and updated Help.
www.yourtechonline.com	Manned by PC gurus
www.askdrtech.com	Ask Dr Tech
www.smart-computing.com	Q&A Answer Board for Smart Computing magazine
update.microsoft.com	Microsoft's update site
www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,118512,findid,49336,00.asp	Kirk Steer's Five Minute Fixes from PC Word mag
www.pcworld.com/howto/index.asp	How To Tips from PC World mag
www.windowsstarup.com/wso	Information on over 6,000 startup items with details descriptions and advice. Browse or search for files. This site also lists know spyware and adware.
www.answerthatwork.com/Tasklist_pages/tasklist.htm	No search tool, but you can browse its massive list of startup programs organized alphabetically.
Sysinfo.org/startuplist.php	Over 10,000 startup items. Browse or search for file. Describes the startup item & recommends if you can safely disable it. Also names spyware and adware.