

Streamlining Your Windows Experience

With the information in this article you can:

- Solve the most common Windows errors that people often overlook
- Use hidden tools to sweep all the glitches from your PC
- Get your system running at tip-top performance

Your Windows system may have been functioning perfectly for months when suddenly an irritating little problem manifests itself. It might not prevent you from using your system but it's annoying all the same. Using the advice in this article you will be able to identify these problems and fix them, streamlining your Windows experience and making you more productive.

Stefan Zasada:

"Windows works perfectly most of the time, but occasionally little problems surface which you don't have a clue how to fix. The information in this article can help you solve many of these tricky little bugs."

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Identify your problem at a glance.

An End to Windows Problems

There are many small problems that can occur when using Windows that have no obvious cause. The problem might not make your system unusable, but getting rid of it is still a priority. The advice in this article will tell you how to solve many of these common problems. Use the following table to identify your problem and look up a full description of the solution in the following pages.

Error in	Description	Solution	Page
Windows Setup	Windows components are missing.	Re-install the Windows component via Add/Remove Programs in the Control Panel.	S 22/3
Windows Desktop	Desktop icons arranged incorrectly.	If the icons won't let themselves be arranged, you can switch off automatic arranging.	S 22/4
Fonts	Fonts are missing or symbols from fonts are missing.	Fonts have been installed incorrectly. Re-install fonts in the correct way, and ensure that the printer driver is installed properly.	S 22/6
DVD Player	Unable to watch DVDs with Media Player.	Adjust settings in the registry to take advantage of Media Player's hidden DVD playback features.	S 22/8
Windows Startup	Windows has problems with the programs it loads during startup.	Use Autoruns or Absolute Startup, advanced management tools included on the CD with this update, to control what programs are run by Windows at startup.	S 22/9

Error in	Description	Solution	Page
Windows Update	Error with a download or installation.	Activate the Cryptographic Service in the Control Panel.	S 22/11
Windows System Files	Your computer continually crashes.	Use Windows built-in repair tools to identify faulty files and replace them.	S 22/11
Windows Device Drivers	Device drivers have become corrupt.	Use Windows built-in tools to check the integrity of your device drivers.	S 22/12

Fix Missing Windows Components

If Windows games or important system programs are missing from your computer, for example Microsoft Paint is not available, then Windows itself is not faulty but the relevant component was not installed. You can manage which parts of the Windows system are installed by following these instructions:

1. Go to Start > Settings > Control Panel (Start > Control Panel in Windows XP).
2. Double-click on Add/Remove Programs (Add or Remove Programs in Windows XP).
3. Select Windows Setup (98/Me) or Add/Remove Windows Components (2000/XP).

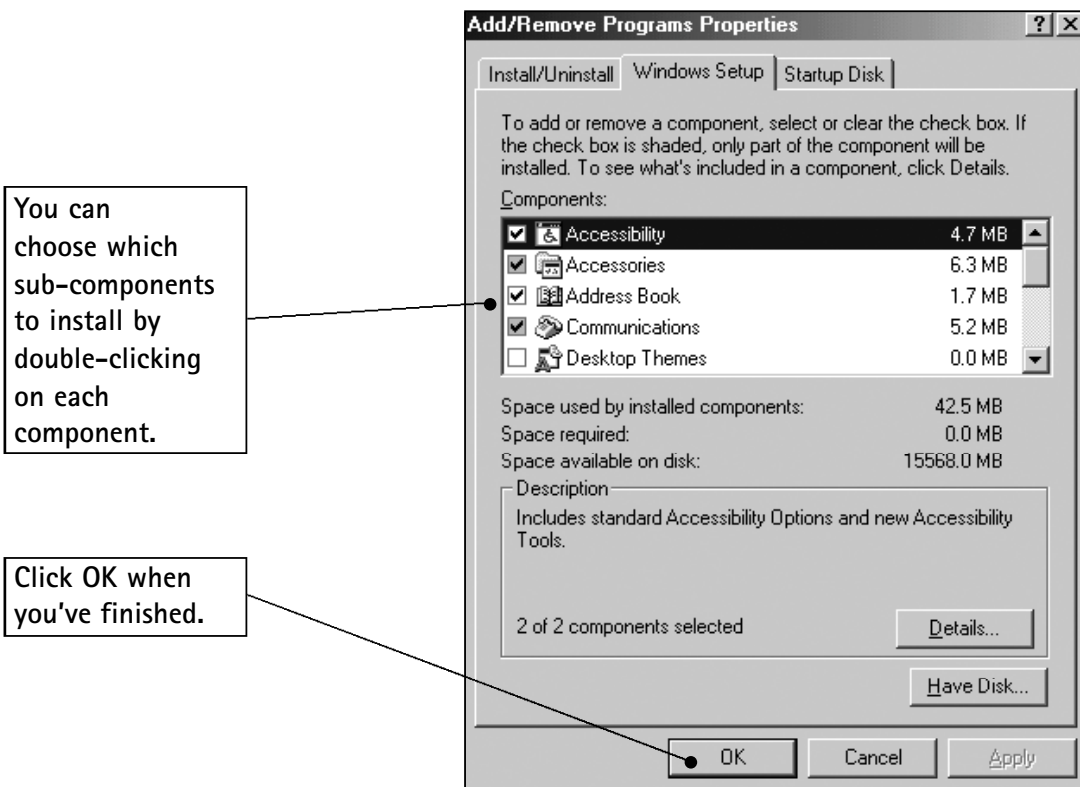
You can now activate the missing parts of your Windows system. You may be asked to insert your original Windows installation CD. You can also use this to remove the Windows components you find useless, for example if you never play the Windows games you can get rid of them.



Add missing Windows components using the Control Panel.



Remove Windows components you don't use.



Adding Windows components in Me



Fix Misbehaving Desktop Icons

You may sometimes find you've spent ages arranging the icons on your desktop only to find they're all over the place the next time you turn your computer on. Sometimes the icons may even spring back to their original position when you try to move them. Below are some common solutions to these problems:



- If the icons are automatically ordered on the left-hand side of the screen and don't stay in their desired position then 'Auto Arrange' is activated on your desktop. Right-click on an empty part of the desktop, from the popup menu go to Arrange Icons and deselect Auto Arrange.

- If you've positioned the icons on your desktop manually, you can neaten up the layout by aligning the icons to a grid. Windows XP users right-click on an empty area of your desktop, select **Arrange Icons > Align to Grid**. Windows 95/98/Me/2000 users, right-click on an empty area of the desktop and select **Line Up Icons**.

You can control exactly where icons are positioned on your desktop.

The new Start Menu is activated by default in Windows XP. This means that My Computer, My Documents and My Network Places are not shown on the desktop. You can reinstate these icons by following these steps:

Windows XP only tip.

1. Right-click on an empty area of the desktop and select **Properties**.
2. Click on the **Desktop** tab, then click on the **Customize Desktop** button.
3. Click on the **General** tab and in the **Desktop icons** section place a tick next to the icons you want visible on your desktop.
4. Click **OK** then **OK** again.



If none of these steps let you see your icons in the way you want, then it is possible a Windows file has become damaged. Luckily you can cure this by following these steps:

If all else fails ...

Windows XP

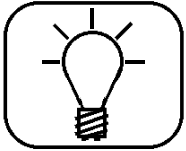
1. Navigate to:
C:\Documents and Settings*username*\Local Settings\Application Data
Where *username* is your Windows login.
2. Rename the file **IconCache.db** to **IconCache.old**



... delete the icon cache.

Windows 98/Me/2000

1. Open **C:\Windows** (**C:\WINNT** in Windows 2000).
2. Rename the file **ShellIconCache** to **ShellIconCache.old**



See the hidden files.

Now re-boot your computer. When Windows finds that the file is missing it will build a new, uncorrupted copy. Note, the IconCache.db may not be visible. If this is the case select **Tools > Folder Options**, click the **View** tab and select **Show hidden files and folders**. Click **OK**.



Fonts: Problems and Solutions

Windows saves all of its fonts in the folder `C:\Windows\Fonts` (`C:\Winnt\Fonts` in Windows 2000). This is automatically loaded up each time Windows starts and is kept permanently in your PC's memory. Even when the file size of an individual font seems small you should not keep more than 1000 fonts on your system, because the Windows registry cannot cope with more than 1000 entries.

Correctly installing fonts

Make sure you install new fonts correctly.

Many users try to install new fonts by copying them directly into the Fonts folder. However this is not the correct way of installing fonts and means that applications such as Word will not be able to use them. To correctly install a font:



1. Select **Start > Settings > Control Panel** (**Start > Control Panel** in XP).
2. Double-click on **Fonts** (This may not be available if you're in **Category View** on Windows XP).
3. Select **File > Install New Font...**
4. Select the font file that you want to install and click **OK**.



You can remove fonts by deleting them from the Fonts folder in the Control Panel just as you would a normal file. Be careful not to delete any files that end `.FON` as these are essential Windows system fonts, although some TrueType fonts (ending in `.TTF`) are also required by Windows.

Problem: Only a few fonts are available

If, for example, you are writing a letter in Word and you find that none or only a few fonts are available instead of all the fonts you expected, this could be caused by a problem with your printer driver.

If you find that none of your fonts are available help is at hand.

You can fix this by this by installing the correct printer driver:

1. Open the Control Panel as described in step 1 on the previous page.
2. Double-click on Printers (Printers and Faxes in Windows XP).
3. Right-click on your printer and select **Properties**, then click on the **Advanced** tab (Details in 98/Me).
4. Click on **New Driver** and select the correct driver from the list.

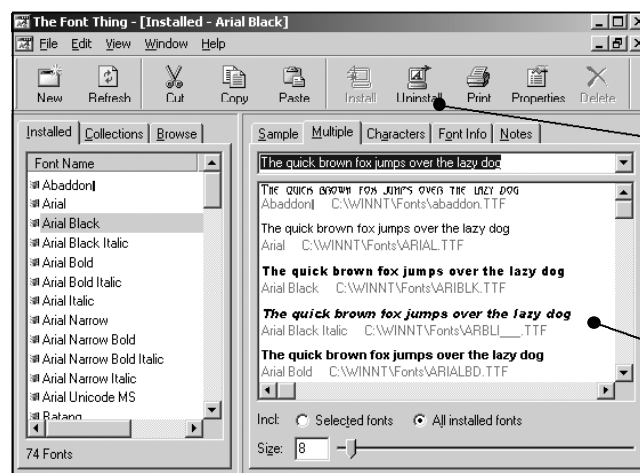


Alternatively you can re-install the printer driver from the manufacturer's CD that came with your printer.

Font management tools

On the CD that accompanies this update, you will find a link to a handy tool called The Font Thing which you can use to simplify the installation and removal of fonts, along with viewing examples of what the font looks like and lots of other data about it. Take control of your fonts today.

Font management software is available on this update's CD.



Uninstall your fonts with this button.

Preview fonts in this window.

Use The Font Thing to manage your fonts



Software available on the CD that accompanies this update.

Unlock Media Player's hidden features.



Ensure your computer has hardware based support for DVD playback.

Windows 98 users need to install an MPEG-2 codec.

Take Control of Your CD and DVD Drives

A CD-ROM drive is an indispensable part of your computer's hardware setup, and many new machines will also come with a DVD drive. Here are some handy tips to get the most from them.

Play DVDs using Media Player

Many new computers come with a DVD drive, but not all have DVD playing software included. Fortunately with a small registry tweak Windows Media Player will play DVDs. A link to version 9 of Media Player is available on the CD accompanying this update. To be able to watch DVDs:

1. Start the Registry Editor by clicking **Start > Run**, typing REGEDIT and clicking **OK**.
2. Locate the registry key:
HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\MediaPlayer\Player\Settings
3. Right-click in the right-hand panel and choose **New > String Value** from the pop-up menu.
4. Enter **EnabledVDUI** as the name of the new string value.
5. Double-click on your new String value and give it a value data of 'Yes'.
6. To start playing DVDs select **File > Open**. In the **Files of type** dialogue box you can now choose to open DVDs.

In Windows 98 you may need to install an MPEG-2 codec for this to work. An MPEG-2 codec is available on the CD accompanying this update.

Change your CD-ROM drive letter

If you want to change the drive lettering after installing a DVD/CD-ROM drive then this is easily achieved.

In Windows 2000/XP:

1. Click **Start > Settings > Control Panel (Start > Control Panel in XP)**.
2. Double-click on **Administrative Tools** and then **Computer Management**.
3. Click on **Disk Management** in the left-hand panel.
4. Right-click on the drive you want to change (eg. D:) and select **Change Drive Letter and Path**.
5. You can now re-assign a new letter to the drive.



In Windows 98/Me you can carry out this alteration in the Device Manager:

1. Right-click on **My Computer** and select **Properties**.
2. Click on the **Device Manager** tab, expand the **CDROM** section and double-click on your CD-ROM drive.
3. Click on the **Settings** tab and change the start drive letter to the one you want to use for your CD-ROM drive.
4. Click **OK** then **Close** and choose to restart your computer. Your CD-ROM should now be labelled with the new drive letter.



Recognise and Correct Autostart Problems

As well as certain keys in the registry, the Windows Autostart folder is a common location for programs to be placed so that they are automatically loaded when Windows starts. Problems occur when programs are uninstalled but fragments are left behind in Autostart, causing slow startup or error reports while Windows is loading.

On the CD accompanying this update you will find two programs to help you manage which programs are started with Windows: *Autoruns* and *Absolute Startup*.



Control which programs are loaded when Windows starts.

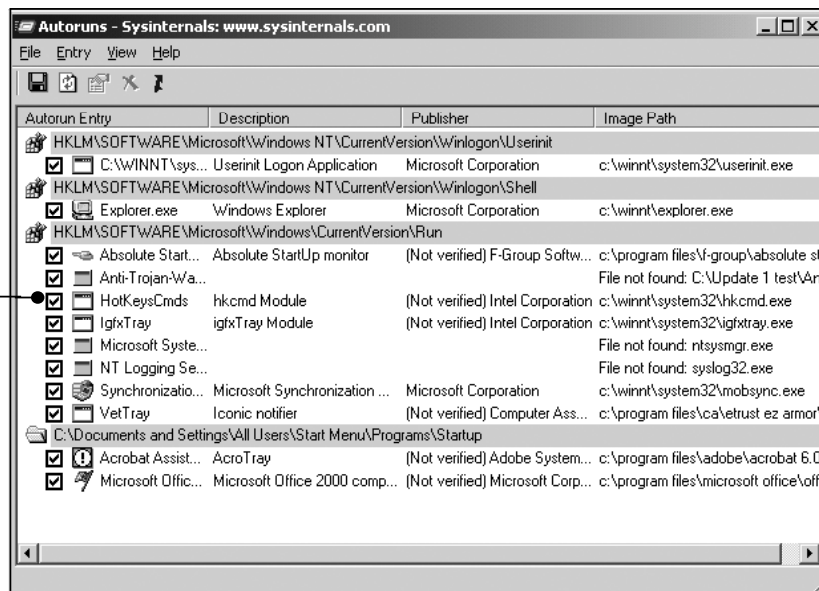
Software available on this update's CD.

Autoruns

Autoruns allows you to take control of your startup programs.

Autoruns gives you control over all of the programs that are configured to run at system startup or login. It searches all of the locations that Windows uses to store information about startup programs (such as the Startup folder and Run registry keys) and displays them in a list in the order that Windows runs them. It has many benefits over the MSCONFIG program that comes with Windows, such as the ability to view all startup programs in one convenient location.

Place a tick next to the programs you want to load at startup.



Use Autoruns to manage startup programs

Absolute Startup

Use Absolute Startup to backup your startup configuration.

Absolute Startup allows you to manage all of the programs which start when Windows starts. You can edit, backup and restore your startup lists, so that you can restore a previous configuration if you encounter problems with one of your startup programs. You can also freeze the state of your system startup to prevent new programs from adding themselves. The version provided on the CD is a 21-day trial.

Solving Windows XP Update Problems

The Windows XP update facility allows you to automatically keep your system up-to-date by installing service packs and patches provided by Microsoft as they are released. Unfortunately downloading or installing updates does not always run smoothly. If you are experiencing error messages when trying to update your copy of Windows, it could be because the Cryptographic Service has become deactivated. Reactivate it with the following steps:

1. Open Start > Control Panel.
2. Double-click on Administrative Tools and then Services.
3. Check the Status column to ensure that the Cryptographic Service has been started. If not right-click on it and choose Start.
4. Your Windows Update should now work properly.



Make sure Windows Update is working properly in XP.



Repair Windows with its Built-in Tools

Microsoft provides many different ways to help users configure their Windows system and troubleshoot problems. Many of these take the form of Wizards that guide you through the process of configuring a certain part of Windows, but there are many hidden system utilities that only the experts know about.

Check incorrect system files with SFC.EXE

Does your computer crash a lot, or do you have stability problems with some of the programs you use now and then? These problems could be caused by a defective driver or an error in a system file. Since Windows 2000 Microsoft have included a special command line tool, System File Checker, to help solve these problems. Start System File Checker by going to Start > Run, type `sfc /SCANNOW` and press **Enter**.



Use Windows hidden tools to repair your system.



Use System File Checker to repair your system.



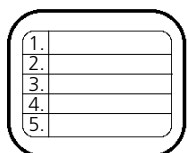
Check your drivers haven't been altered.

System File Checker will scan your computer and attempt to repair damaged system files by replacing them with the original copies from your Windows Installation CD-ROM. For this reason you need to have your original Windows CD handy while running this program.

Check your device drivers with SIGVERIF.EXE

Digital signatures are a means of ensuring that a piece of software has come from the company it claims to be from. Microsoft has used digital signatures to verify the origin of device drivers since Windows 98, as they can be used to verify whether a piece of software has been altered, for example by a virus and check for unsigned drivers in your system.

Signatures for device drivers are produced in accordance with the Windows Hardware Quality Labs specification. Windows provides a program to check that the signatures of the device drivers have not been altered. By going to Start > Run, typing SIGVERIF.EXE then pressing **Enter** you can run the Signature Verifier.



There are many little things that can go wrong with a complicated system like Windows that while not major are nevertheless annoying. This article has shown you how to master some of these problems, and make your PC sessions much more fun and productive.