

Optimize your computer for peak performance

Our computers are like our construction equipment and vehicles—they need preventive maintenance to run efficiently and to avoid major breakdowns. The following tips can help improve a computer's performance. This article does not address tinkering with the registry files.

The Windows operating system provides three great tools to help keep your hard drive humming smoothly. These tools are Disk Cleanup, Disk Defragmenter, and Check Disk. Ideally, you should run these tools on the following schedule:

Preventive Maintenance Activity	Frequency
Clean up hard disk of temporary files	Weekly
Rearrange (defragment) hard disk	Monthly
Check hard disk for errors	Weekly

Clean up hard disk of temporary files: All computers generate many temporary files over time. These files can come from any number of sources, the Web being one of the largest offenders. After a while, these temporary files will slow down your computer. About once every week, you should run the Windows Disk Cleanup utility to clear a computer of these temporary files.

Rearrange (defragment) hard disk: Whenever a file becomes too large to store in a single location on the hard disk, a computer breaks that file into parts (or fragments). The computer keeps track of all these fragments, piecing them together whenever the file is accessed. However, as fragmented files accumulate on a hard disk, the computer gradually becomes slower because it has to go through all these fragmented files in order to piece the correct parts together again. While there's nothing you can do to prevent the fragmentation of files, Windows does have a utility (Disk Defragmenter) to help deal with this situation. Disk Defragmenter rearranges fragmented files, resulting in increased free space on the hard disk and quicker performance.

Check hard disk for errors: Whenever a program you are using crashes, it may create errors on the hard disk. These errors will eventually slow the computer to a crawl. The good news is that Windows includes a Check Disk program. Check Disk corrects these types of errors from a hard disk, resulting in better PC performance.

Tips for Using Your Keyboard Properly

Here are some general tips to help you avoid problems:


- ◆ Place your keyboard at elbow level, with your upper arms relaxed at your sides.
- ◆ Center your keyboard in front of you. If your keyboard has a numeric keypad, you can use the spacebar as the centering point.
- ◆ While typing, use a light touch and keep your wrists straight.
- ◆ When you're not typing, relax your arms and hands.
- ◆ Take short breaks every 15 to 20 minutes.
- ◆ Type with your hands and wrists floating above the keyboard, so that you can use your whole arm to reach for distant keys instead of stretching your fingers.
- ◆ Avoid resting your palms or wrists on any type of surface while typing. If your keyboard has a palm rest, use it only during breaks from typing.

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Even if you're a whiz with the mouse for Windows, keyboard shortcuts are typically a more efficient way to work. They are called shortcuts as they reduce multiple clicks into one quick press of keys. Getting to know a few keyboard shortcuts for the things you do all the time, like saving or closing files, can make using your PC much easier and faster. Here are just a few popular keyboard shortcuts that work for Windows:

Press this	To do this
Windows logo key 	Open the Start menu
ALT+TAB	Switch between open windows
CTRL+S	Save the current record
CTRL+C	Copy the selected item
CTRL+Z	Undo an action
CTRL+V	Paste the copied item
CTRL+P	Print the selected item