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5 Good Computing Habits

Published: August 11, 2005
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The time has come to put the past in the past and create a productive, organized future for yourself, your files, and your computer. This article gives you some advice for keeping your computer on the right track.

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1. Organize your Folders

We all know how easy it is to dump files into the wrong folder when we're in a hurry. But one way to make sure you'll keep your files organized is to remove the clutter with a filing system that makes sense for the way you use your computer. [Learn 7 tips for organizing your files](#). Here are a few tips to get you started:

- **Start clean**
Begin by deciding which files you no longer need on your hard drive.
- **Think it through**
Take the time to plan the best way to organize your files. How do you spend your time on the computer and what do you create? Do you work with photos and image editing software, surf the Web, write short stories, research school projects, or play games? The folders you create in My Documents can be easily tailored to show you just the kind of data about your files that you need to track.
- **Use subfolders**
After you have an idea of the kinds of items you produce and want to save, create folders and subfolders to store your files. Be sure to use logical, easy-to-understand names. For example, within My Documents, you might create these folders:
 - Projects
 - HR Benefits
 - Career

Within the Projects folder, you could create subfolders for your different projects.



Tip To create a new subfolder with Windows XP, in the **File and Folder** task pane click

Did you know?

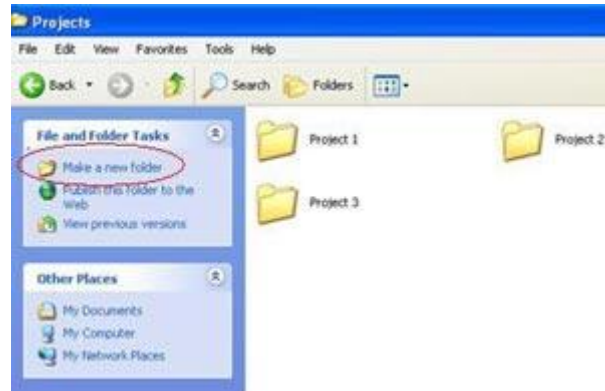
You can customize the look, settings, and style of your computer and inject it with your unique personality. Try these ten tips.

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Make a New Folder. Type the name for the new folder and press **Enter**.



Create a new folder using the File and Folder task pane.

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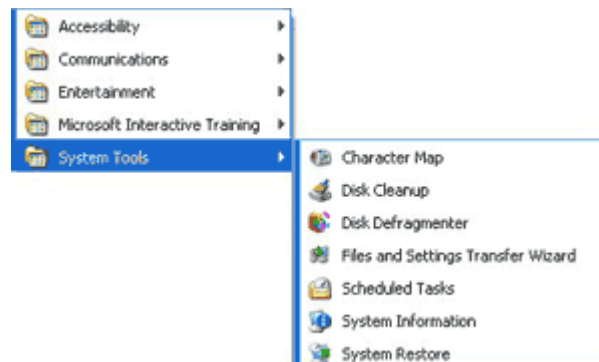
2. Clean up your Hard Disk

Now that you've organized your files and folders and cleaned up your desktop, you can organize the data itself. Windows XP includes two utilities—Disk Cleanup and Disk Defragmenter—that help you free up more space on your hard drive and help your computer work more efficiently. Find additional ways to clean up your hard drive by reading [4 ways to speed up your computer](#).

- **Disk Cleanup** compresses your old files with the intention of recovering additional storage space.
- **Disk Defragmenter** scans your hard drive and consolidates files that may be scattered across the disk (the more you have stored on your hard drive, the more likely this is to happen, and the longer it can take to open and access files you select).

You won't want to run Disk Defragmenter as often as Disk Cleanup. As a general rule, use Disk Cleanup monthly or quarterly and run Disk Defragmenter once every six months or so.

To find both programs, click **Start**, point to **All Programs**, then point to **Accessories**, and then choose **System Tools**. You can click Disk Cleanup and Disk Defragmenter in the System Tools menu.



Find Windows XP System Tools within the Start menu.

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3. Use System Restore

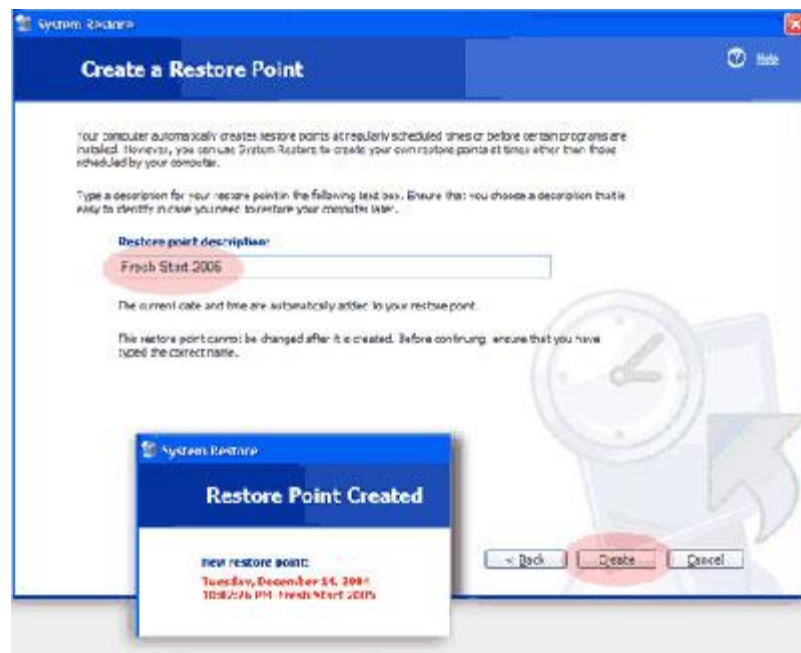
System Restore is one of those programs that can be a life-saver when you've been the unfortunate recipient of unstable software, a badly timed power outage, or a damaging thunderstorm. System Restore records important documents, settings, and preferences on your computer at a certain point in time. If the unthinkable happens and your computer files are damaged or inaccessible, you can use System Restore to put your computer back the way it was before the data was lost.

It's good to get into the habit of creating a system checkpoint (called a restore point) anytime you're preparing to add new software that you've downloaded from the Internet or anything else that you suspect might make your computer unstable. If anything goes wrong with the installation or the program causes a conflict, you can restore your computer to the point just before you began the installation.

Note System Restore automatically adds restore points to your computer daily and before you install device drivers, automatic updates, unsigned drivers, and some applications.

To use System Restore:

1. Click **Start**, and choose **All Programs**.
2. Point to **Accessories**, then point to **System Tools**, and then choose **System Restore**.
3. When the program begins, choose **Create a restore point** and click **Next**.
4. Enter a description of the restore point (such as "Starting fresh 2005") and click **Create**. After a few seconds, the program will tell you the date, time, and description of the new restore point.
5. Click **Close** to exit System Restore.



Use System Restore to put your computer back the way it was before the data was lost.

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4. Keep Windows and Office Up to Date

Computer programs are continually changed and improved based on customer feedback and

continuing product testing. Problems are resolved, features are added, and security is improved throughout the life of the program—and, as a registered user, you should benefit from those improvements. By checking Microsoft Update regularly, you can make sure you've got the most recent Windows and Office improvements available to you.

Visit [Microsoft Update](#) to start the update process. If it's your first time to visit Microsoft Update, you might need to sign up to the service.

To use Microsoft Update:

1. For high-priority updates, click **Express Install (recommended)**. If you're just looking for general updates that aren't critical, choose **Custom Install**.
2. The site will do a quick check of your system to see whether any new updates are available that have not been downloaded to your computer. When the check is finished, a window appears showing you any new updates ready for download.
3. Follow the on-screen instructions and click **Install Now** to update your computer with the latest software improvements.



Use Microsoft Update to make sure you have the most recent Windows and Office improvements available to you.

Once you've visited the Microsoft Update site, you should also configure your computer to receive critical updates automatically. This service is called Automatic Updates and it's free.

To turn on Automatic Updates:

1. Click **Start**, and then click **Control Panel**.
2. Click **Performance and Maintenance**.

Note: If the **Performance and Maintenance** category is not visible, click **Switch to Category View**.
3. Click **System**.
4. In the System Properties dialog box, click the **Automatic Updates** tab.
5. Select a setting. Microsoft recommends selecting **Automatic: Automatically download recommended updates for my computer and install them**. You can schedule Automatic Updates for any time of day. Remember, your computer must be on at the scheduled time for updates to be installed. We recommend choosing a time when you will not be using the computer for other tasks.



6. If you choose to have Automatic Updates notify you in step 5, you will see a notification balloon when new downloads are available to install. Click the notification balloon to review and install updates.

Important If you choose an option in step 5 other than the one we recommend, you must download and install every critical update. If you download the updates, but forget to install them your computer will not be protected with all the latest enhancements.

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5. Run Antivirus Software and a Spyware Detection and Removal Tool

Updating your Windows software is just the first step in keeping your computer safe. Next, you'll want to download and install antivirus software and keep it up to date. Your computer may have come with a free trial of antivirus software, but if you don't renew your subscription, you won't be protected from all the latest threats. If you don't already have antivirus software, or if you'd like to get different antivirus software, check the [Windows Marketplace Antivirus section](#) for products that will work for you.

If your computer seems sluggish or if you begin to see lots of pop-up advertisements, even when you're not surfing the Web, your computer may be infected with spyware, adware, or other unwanted software. [Learn more about spyware](#) and what it can do to your computer, then [download the free antispyware program](#) from Microsoft.

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