

Speed up your PC: Automate your computer maintenance schedule

(Provide by Microsoft)

Most people do one of the following when their computer begins to slow down (besides get angry):

Speed up their computer by buying more memory.

1. Try to tweak their computer's settings.
2. Give up. They figure that their computer is old, there's nothing else they can do, and it's probably time to buy a new computer.

All these solutions can help increase PC speed. However, what's to keep your newly blazing PC from slowing down again after a couple months or years? A badly fragmented hard drive will bring even a top-of-the-line new computer to a grinding halt.

One option is to create a preventive PC maintenance plan—a computer maintenance schedule that's easy to set up and put in motion so you never have to think about it again. The plan outlined in this paper uses tools that are built in to your Windows operating system, including Disk Defragmenter, so they can be run free of charge as often as you like.

The following sections provide information on how to automate a maintenance schedule to help keep your PC running smoothly. These procedures differ from version to version, but overall you'll find these tasks work for Windows 7, Windows Vista, and Windows XP.

Create a preventive maintenance plan for your computer

When people notice their computer's performance slowing, the most common reason is the hard disk. Your computer's hard disk is a non-removable area that holds all the information available from your computer. Over time, hard disks begin to lose their ability to store data efficiently.

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 clean the hard disk of temporary files, optimize (defragment) the hard disk, and check the hard disk for errors on a weekly basis.

Who has the time (or the desire) to keep up with this schedule? The best solution is to let Windows do all of the work.

Windows allows you to set up and automate these tasks. Please note that the tools may require user input or administrator privileges to run correctly.

Tip: In Windows 7 and Windows Vista, you can go directly to any of the tools mentioned in this article. Just click the **Start** button, and, in the **Search** box, type the name of the tool. When you see the name of

the tool populate in the Search list, just click it. This works for the Task Scheduler tool referenced on some of the pages linked to in this article, as well.

Clean up your hard disk

Your computer amasses temporary files over time. These files can come from any number of sources, with 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 your PC of these temporary files. The Windows Disk Cleanup tool requires user input to complete its designated task. For this reason, it is recommended that, when setting up the utility to run automatically (as described in the next paragraph), you choose a time when you are typically on the computer so you can provide this input. When using the **Create Basic Task Wizard**, select the **Open the Properties dialog for this task when I click Finish** check box. This allows you to access additional properties related to the task. On the **Settings** tab, select the **Run task as soon as possible after a scheduled start is missed** check box to ensure that the task starts the next time you are logged on to your computer.

Optimize your fragmented files

Whenever a file becomes too large to store in a single location on your hard disk, your computer breaks that file into parts (or fragments). Don't worry, though. Your computer keeps track of all these fragments, piecing them together whenever the file is accessed.

However, as fragmented files accumulate on your hard disk, your computer becomes gradually slower. This is because your computer has to go through all these fragmented files to piece the correct parts together again.

Although 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 your hard disk and quicker performance from your PC.

About once every week, you should run the Windows Disk Defragmenter utility.

Note: Windows 7 and most versions of Windows Vista are preconfigured to automatically run Disk Defragmenter on a weekly basis. Follow the directions for your operating system to confirm that Disk Defragmenter is already set up or to make changes to the existing schedule.

Check your hard disk for errors

Whenever a program you're using crashes, your computer may create errors on your hard disk. These errors will eventually slow your computer to a crawl.

The good news is that Windows includes a Check Disk program. Check Disk corrects these types of errors on your hard disk, resulting in better PC performance.

About once every week, you should run the Check Disk utility. While Check Disk runs, a black window will open. If you happen to be working at your computer when the window opens, you can ignore it. The window will automatically disappear when Check Disk is complete.

Note: You must be logged on as an administrator to perform these steps. If you aren't logged on as an administrator, you can only change settings that apply to your user account.

Follow the prompts in Task Scheduler to schedule a program to run at a set time (for Windows 7 and Windows Vista only—the directions in Step 1 for Windows XP are all inclusive).

Note: Check Disk isn't available within the scroll-down list of programs that you select from in the Task Scheduler, so you'll need to select it manually. To select it, click **Browse**. Then, navigate to `windows\system32\chkdsk.exe`. Select **chkdsk.exe**, and then click **Open**.

Schedule tasks

The best way to schedule tasks as described in the previous sections varies depending on how you use your computer. For example, if you shut down your computer every day, schedule the tasks to perform during a time when your computer is typically on. You can do this by editing the **Task** properties as described in the steps for each utility and operating system. On the **Settings** tab, select the **Run task as soon as possible after a scheduled start is missed** check box when creating the new tasks described in this article. This ensures that the task starts the next time you are logged on to your computer, should it happen to be turned off during the scheduled time. If you set your computer to Hibernate or Sleep and want to schedule the tasks to run during that mode (for example, overnight), on the **Conditions** tab, select the **Wake the computer to run this task** check box. If you don't set these parameters during the initial setup, you can always go back and access them via the **Task Scheduler**. Simply locate your task in the **Task Scheduler Library**, and then double-click it. This opens the **Properties** dialog box for a given task.
