

Harness the Full Power of Windows XP

Windows XP

Windows XP is Microsoft's flagship desktop operating system. Introduced in 2002, Windows XP has a long track record and is installed on hundreds of millions of computers worldwide. Just because it's been around so long, that doesn't mean you know everything you need to know to make it work. Here are some tips and tricks that can help.

● Starting with the Start Menu

- The Start menu has been around in Windows since Windows 95. If you've ever worked with earlier versions of Windows, you'll notice right away that Microsoft has made changes to XP's interface as soon as you hit the Start menu.
- Microsoft moved many items from the desktop on Windows 9x and Windows 2000 Professional onto XP's Start menu. You'll find things like My Computer, My Network Places, and My Documents.
- Recently accessed programs appear immediately above the Start button so you can access them quickly. Other programs appear in the All Programs menu.

● Basic File Handling

- The core purpose of an operating system like XP is to facilitate the storage of important data on a computer. Applications let you create data and files, but it's the OS that determines how the files will be stored and how the application talks to the hardware to get it stored.
- Most modern applications, especially Microsoft Office applications, store data in your My Documents folder. You can usually specify an alternate location other than My Documents, but keeping them there can make them easy to find.
- As My Documents grows, it can slow down your system's start up, shut down, and backup times as it's part of your profile. To change My Document's location, right-click the My Document's folder and select Properties. In the General Tab, click Move. When the Select A Destination window appears, find My Documents a new home. You can create a new folder if need be.
- The safest location is to a network share. Network shares can be slower than storing files locally, but they can be safer. The network administrator does backups on network drives, so if you lose something or if equipment fails, your data is safe.
- You can move files by dragging and dropping files in Windows Explorer.

● Viewing System Information

- Windows XP can give you lots of information about the hardware in your system.
- If you right-click My Computer and select Properties, you can quickly view the amount of memory in your computer as well as the processor speed. That can be a fast way to see if your computer is underpowered.
- You can also use the System Information tool. Click Start | All Programs | Accessories | System Tools | System Information.
- You can't change any information here, but it will display detailed information about your computer for troubleshooting purposes or for just general FYI.

Harness the Full Power of Windows XP

● Surfing the Internet

- Windows XP was designed with the Internet in mind. Internet Explorer is the default tool for surfing the Web. Other Web browsers, such as Firefox and Opera, exist, but you must download and install them separately.
- On your home computer Microsoft includes MSN Messenger for instant messaging, although you can use programs such as Yahoo Messenger and AOL Instant Messenger to do the same thing. None of the services can talk between each other however.
- Many different packages allow file sharing over the Internet, but beware. Most of these programs can allow Trojan Horses, viruses, worms, or illegal software to be loaded on your system. Don't install such programs on your system without talking to the Help Desk first.

● Connecting to Printers

- You can connect printers to Windows XP two ways, either locally or over a network. Local printers attach directly to your workstation using either a USB or parallel cable. Local printers usually come with software that helps you configure them, including configuring settings and printer drivers.
- Network printers are shared by many people and, as the term suggests, are connected to a network rather than directly to a workstation. To be able to print to a specific printer, the network administrator must grant you rights to it.
- You can access a network printer by clicking Start | Control Panel | Printers And Faxes. Click Add A Printer. When the Add Printer wizard appears, click Next and select Network Printer. You can either enter the name of the printer or browse the network to find it. Once you select the printer, the drivers usually automatically install. You may have to contact the network administrator to get proper drivers.

● Connecting to Network Resources

- Windows XP can access shared drives on the network or other computers as well. This allows you to share data from one computer to another or centrally locate files for backup purposes.
- To find shared resources on the network, click Start | Control Panel | Network Connections. Click My Network Places. Recently accessed resources will appear on this screen. To find others, click Entire Network. Then click Microsoft Windows Network. You'll then see a list of domains. Double-click the domain you want to view and then select the computer you want to connect to. It will then display available resources.
- To map a drive, right-click it and select Map Network Drive. When the Map Network Drive screen appears, assign the new drive an available drive letter. To make Windows XP connect automatically when you log on, check Reconnect At Logon. Then click Finish.

● Administrator Rights

- Part of Windows XP's built-in security is the ability to allow different users on a computer to have different rights. Administrator rights allow a user to do anything they want, including adding hardware or software to a workstation, making system changes, and running certain programs.

Harness the Full Power of Windows XP

- Often the network administrator will disable Administrator rights for users on workstations to protect the workstation from accidentally having hardware or software installed that can expose the network to security threats.
- Only the network administrator can grant you Administrator rights to your local machine if you don't already have it. Check with the Help Desk if you're trying to do something but get a message saying that you don't have rights to do so.

● Removing Programs

- If you install a program and want to remove it later, you can do so using Add Or Remove Programs in Control Panel. You may also want to remove a program if it installs itself automatically from a Web site as part of spyware or a virus.
- Click Start | Control Panel | Add Or Remove Programs. Scroll through the Currently Installed Programs list until you find the one you want to remove. Select it and click Remove. Follow any instructions that appear on the screen.
- Don't randomly remove programs that you don't recognize. Some of them may be required. Also, don't remove any Windows XP updates. If you're not sure, check with the Help Desk before removing a program.

● Optimizing XP Performance

- Sometimes Windows XP doesn't seem to run as fast as it should. There are things you can do to help speed it up. First, check to make sure that your system exceeds XP's minimum system requirements, especially in the amount of RAM. XP can run in 128MB of RAM, but you won't be very happy with its performance. At a minimum, XP should have 256MB of RAM. You may need more depending on the applications you're running.
- To check the amount of RAM in your system, right-click My Computer and select Properties. The amount of RAM will appear under the Computer section.
- XP will run slower if you try to run too many programs at the same time. Every program takes away from the total amount of memory XP has available and creates additional tasks for the CPU to monitor. Only run the programs that you need to have running at any one time. Close out the others.
- Many programs load automatically in your taskbar in the lower right-hand corner near the clock. Having too many of these programs loaded can also drag performance on your computer. Unless the Help Desk tells you otherwise, the only program you HAVE to have running all the time is your virus scanner. Most other programs are optional.
- When XP runs out of physical RAM, it uses a swap file, also called virtual memory or the paging file. XP swaps information from RAM to this temporary file and then pulls it back as needed. This can slow down your system. Having a large quantity of RAM will minimize the use of a paging file.
- XP uses a variable size paging file by default, expanding and contracting the file in the background, which also slows down a system. If you set a permanent swap file, you can speed performance. Do so by right-clicking My Computer and selecting Properties. Click the Advanced tab. Then click Settings under Performance. Click the Advanced tab. Click Change under Virtual Memory. Select Custom Size and set a value in Maximum and Minimum equal to at least twice the amount of RAM on your system. Click Set and then OK. Exit all screens. You may have to restart your system.

Harness the Full Power of Windows XP

- Finally, a suddenly slow system may be evidence of viruses or spyware on your system. Contact the Help Desk if you notice a sudden slowdown in your system over the course of several days so they can check for viruses or spyware.

● Guarding against Viruses

- Viruses are the common term for rogue programs that run on a computer and do damage. Viruses can damage files and hardware. Sometimes viruses can be used to hijack a computer and turn it into a zombie. Zombies are used by hackers to initiate attacks on third parties. Types of viruses include:
 - Trojan Horses—appear to be legitimate files or programs, but attack your computer when you install them.
 - Worms—self-replicate and install themselves automatically. You don't need to do anything to get a worm. They search for vulnerabilities on a workstation, install themselves, and then repeat the process.
 - Viruses—require you to do something to install them. E-mail viruses can sometimes read your address book and mail themselves to other people.
- Antivirus programs are necessary to defend against viruses. Common antivirus vendors include:
 - Symantec
 - McAfee – UAH has campus license for McAfee.
 - TrendMicro
- It's vital that you keep virus signature files up to date. An outdated virus scanning program is worse than no scanning program at all because it leads to a false sense of security. Virus signature files should be no more than one week old.

● Guarding against Spyware

- A bigger problem than viruses nowadays is spyware and adware. These programs install themselves on your computer, usually by either exploiting holes in your browser, by hitching a ride with legitimate programs, or by tricking you into installing them. Once installed, they monitor what you do, often reporting back online activity to central servers. They can collect personal and surfing information to allow the company that installed the spyware to display ads on your computer.
- Spyware and adware rarely do actual intentional damage to a system. Too much spyware can cause the system to slow down significantly as the computer spends more time doing spying than actual work. Modifications made to the browsers by spyware can cause blue screens or errors to appear on-screen.
- Some spyware will change your home page, default search engine, and other things. If your computer is acting funny, contact the Help Desk if you suspect it's infected with spyware.
- Unlike antivirus tools, usually no single spyware program will remove all spyware. Common spyware removal tools include:
 - Spybot-S&D
 - SpySweeper
 - AdAware

Harness the Full Power of Windows XP

● XP SP2 Security Features

- Windows XP Service Pack 2 added several new security features to Windows XP. First, Microsoft added the Windows Security Center. The Security Center is a Control Panel item that centralizes security information for Windows XP. It checks to make sure that the Windows firewall is enabled and that you've installed and properly updated an antivirus program.
- SP2 updated XP's built-in firewall, turning it on by default. Microsoft added features to the firewall to allow you to selectively enable programs to access the Internet.
- Microsoft added a pop-up blocker to the version of Internet Explorer that ships with SP2. This blocker will block most non-spyware generated pop-up windows.
- Finally, XP's new update service will check for and download system updates to ensure you've got the latest security and system updates from Microsoft.

● Keeping XP Up to Date

- Microsoft uses the Windows Update feature to send security and system updates to your system. Check with the Help Desk before running Windows Update. Sometimes Updates, especially Service Packs, will cause problems with system software.
- You can run Windows Update by clicking Start | All Programs | Windows Update. You may need to install additional software from Microsoft so it can check for currently installed software.
- If you do run Windows Update yourself, typically you'll want to install all High Priority updates. Optional updates are, as the name suggests, optional. You should install these updates only if you need a feature they contain. Hardware updates may actually cause more problems than they fix. Check with the Help Desk before installing any hardware updates.

● Top Ten Tips When Using Windows XP

- Keep Windows XP up to date.
- Don't run too many unnecessary programs at the same time.
- Don't install new programs without notifying the Help Desk.
- Don't visit unauthorized Web sites.
- Make sure you're running an antivirus program and that all files are up to date.
- Make sure you're running an anti-spyware program with the latest updates.
- Store data files to the network.
- Don't share user IDs or passwords with anyone else.
- Set a password on your XP screen saver.
- Check with the Help Desk when error messages or warning windows pop up.