

QuickTips

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Defragment Your Hard Drive for Faster Performance

Last week we talked about how you can change your filing system to free up storage space and quickly find files on your hard drive. This week we'll talk about another vital part of hard drive health: defragmenting.

Here's [Geek Girls' explanation](#) of why defragmenting is so important:

When you first install your operating system and programs on your hard disk, they are written to the disk, for the most part, in one contiguous block without any gaps. The exceptions are certain system files that must be stored in specific locations. Over time, as you create and then delete documents or uninstall programs, once-filled locations are left empty and you end up with files dotted all over the disk.

Now, when Windows is writing a file to the disk, it looks for a suitable piece of free space in which to store it. What happens, then, when you copy a 40M database or audio file to the disk and the biggest slice of free space is only 30M? Or say you modify an existing file, appending a whole bunch of data so the file now takes up more space on the disk. To accommodate the files, Windows writes the first part of the file in one section of the disk and then scouts around for other places to store the rest of the file. The end result is that a single file may be stored in several chunks scattered about the disk.

And the harder your computer has to look for all those chunks, the slower it can take for documents or programs to load. The defrag process tidies up your disk to put all those data blocks in a row again, resulting in faster performance and a happier computer.

To run a defrag, just go to the Start menu, select Programs, Accessories, System Tools, and finally Disk Defragmenter. It can take a while for the process to run, particularly if you've got a lot of data on your hard drive. For this reason, you might want to schedule it to run during off hours.

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