

No. 92. How to Avoid Clogged Computer Syndrome

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Lets face it, we all don't clean out our garages, basements or closets as often as we should. Then, one day, when rummaging among the shoeboxes and boots, the whole thing comes crashing down, sometimes along with the closet pole and all the clothes hanging on it! Field repairs are necessary right immediately, and we often give in to the necessity of finally cleaning out the junk and organizing the remainder. Well, a disorganized, junk-ridden buildup can develop in a computer's hard drive, too. So here are some tips to fix that. It will not only prevent buildup of files leading to the dreaded "Disk Full" message, it will also reorganize and defragment those files and programs you wish to keep. Moreover, it is quite an easy task.

However, it takes just a little preparation. Assuming you are working with Windows 98 (you should be) double-click **My Computer**, then click **View**, then **Folder Options**, then select the **View** tab. The list shown there will display a number of option boxes. Select (by clicking the box to put a black dot in it) **Show all Files**. Similarly, deselect (so no black dot is in the box) **Hide File Extensions**. You have just instructed your computer not to hide any files from your view, and not to hide any file extensions. You are the human boss of your computer, and nothing should be hidden from you! Now you can clean things up.

If you are a bit worried about deleting files, remember that any file you delete while in Windows still resides in the Recycle Bin until the bin is emptied. It can be restored from there should things stop working properly. If you are really skittish, instead of deleting the files you can move them to a new folder you create for that purpose. Call the new folder JUNK, and delete its contents after a few days when you are sure that all is well. If a program complains that it cannot find a file that you moved to JUNK, simply move it back to where the program expects to find it (write down any error messages so you know where that is).

1. Erase **temporary files**. In Windows Explorer, navigate to the C:\Windows\Temp folder. Open it and look at the files inside. Highlight any file with the **.tmp** file extension that has a date/time stamp earlier than the last time you started your computer. Then right-click it and delete it. Repeat as necessary until they are all gone. These are temporary files, used by installation programs or by open application programs. They are supposed to be deleted automatically, but were not, sometimes because a programmer was sloppy or lazy and did not provide for proper cleanup. They are no longer useful for anything at all once the intended activity is over.
2. Erase **Mscreate.dir**. Click **Start**, then **Find**, then **Files or Folders** and type in ***.DIR**. Make sure the **Include Subfolders** box is selected, and then click **Find Now**. If any **Mscreate.dir** files turn up, right click them and delete them. There may well be hundreds of these files on your drive. They were created during execution of any of Microsoft's installation programs and are completely, totally useless. While they are zero-byte files that take no data space, they do take directory space. Delete every last one.
3. Repeat the **Start, Find, Files or Folders** bit and type in ***.old**. Erase any files with that extension.

4. Do it again for *.bak.
5. If you are ruthlessly seeking more disk space, do it again for *.log and *.txt. If you prefer to use a safety measure, open each file first (double click it to open it with Notepad – they are simple text files) to view the contents before deleting. If expendable, right click to delete.
6. If your browser is **Internet Explorer**, open it, click **Tools**, then **Internet Options**. Under the **Temporary Internet Files** click **Delete Files**. While you are at it, under **History** click **Clear History**.
7. If you use **Netscape**, open it and click **Edit**, then **Preferences**. Click **Advanced** to expand it. By the way, this screen under **Advanced** is where you can turn off cookies if you choose, which is my recommendation. Click **Cache** and then click both **Clear Memory Cache** and **Clear Disk Cache**. Return to the desktop.
8. Now is a decisive moment. If you feel confident, delete the contents of your Recycle Bin. If not, double-click the bin to open it, right click the file(s) you are worried about and select **Save To**. You can save the files to floppies, or to some folder you have created for that purpose.
9. Next is perhaps the most important step of all. Click **Start**, then **Programs**, then **Accessories** and select **System Tools, Disk Defragmenter**. In the pull-down slider bar, select **All Hard Drives** if you have more than one partition. Click **Start** and **Show Details** if you would like to watch the process. The “defrag” process will put the files in proper order on the disk, and will consolidate all scattered file fragments into contiguous blocks, as they should be. It is much like making certain that matching pairs of shoes are together in all the shoe boxes in your closet, and neatly stacking the boxes in the order in which you use them. It can significantly increase the overall speed and efficiency of your computer, so do it! Try to remember to do it once a month or more often if you use the machine heavily.

That is it for this month. Happy Computing!