

## THE COMPUTER CORNER

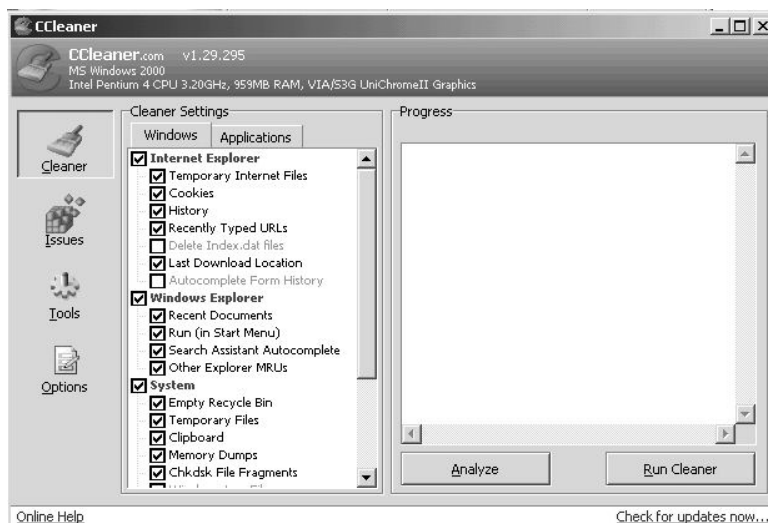
## No. 132. Defrag and Ccleaner

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A typical complaint by computer users that do not themselves do regular maintenance is “my machine is so slow, and it seems to be getting worse”. Computers that are not well maintained are just like cars that have never had tune-ups – their performance degrades with time in tiny increments until the driver finally notices something is not right. What can be done to prevent this degradation in performance of a computer? While you can’t change its spark plugs as in a car, you can make it much easier (and therefore, faster) for your machine to find files and programs. The key is Defrag. However, before you do that, it takes a few preparatory steps so that Defrag does its job for you.

In your home, you create a lot of trash. Cook supper and clean up, and the kitchen wastebasket gets filled up. The same is true for the workshop, the bedrooms, your office area and so on. Now, the garbage service comes to collect your trash on Thursday. What do you do? Wednesday night you collect all your household trash (and recycling materials), and put them out for collection. Do the same for your computer!

How the heck do you clean the garbage from your computer? Sure, you can empty the Recycle Bin, but there are easily hundreds of useless files scattered around on your hard drive that are not in the Recycle Bin unless you put them there. Files with extensions like \*.chk, \*.bak, \*.log, \*.old and many, many others hidden in folders that need cleaning from time to time. For example, you probably have two dozen files in your C:\Windows\Temp folder that could be deleted. I could spend the rest of this article documenting



what to delete and what to leave alone, but let me make it easy for you. Go to [majorgeeks.com](http://majorgeeks.com) (my favorite download site for new freeware and shareware), and find a program called CCleaner. Download and install it (it is [free](#), and designed for all versions of Windows). When run, the program will clean up useless stuff you didn’t even know you had. If you are at all squeamish about some of the items, uncheck the box by the list of items it proposes to delete before you press the Run Cleaner button, and it will leave those items alone. When you are all done with the Cleaner, don’t forget to press the Issues button. This part of the program will analyze your Registry

and give you a chance to correct errors in it. This is one of those “must have” programs. It is safe, and the price is certainly right!

Now, everything is prepared. CCleaner even emptied the Recycle Bin, so you are all set to go. Close all open programs and start Defrag (Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Defragmenter, or something like that, depending on your version of Windows). Don’t run anything else. Defrag is slow enough itself without slowing it down more by running other programs. Let it go – have lunch, mow the

lawn, etc. If it is not finished by bedtime, let it run overnight. If you have a D: drive as well as C:, do D: when C: has finished. When all partitions (C:, D:, E:, etc.) have been defragged, reboot the machine. Work as usual, and notice if it is a little faster (or a lot faster!). If nothing else, you have freed up a lot of wasted space on your hard drive. You have truly emptied the trash.

How often should you run Defrag? Here is a rule of thumb I just made up, which is probably about right. Defrag your machine after every 24 hours of normal use (word processing, working with spreadsheets, surfing the web, playing games, etc.). That means after three 8-hour days at the keyboard. If you do a major software installation (Microsoft Office), several small installations (CCleaner, and two or three others), or update Windows itself, count that as 24 hours of use and do a Defrag. That will keep your machine in tiptop maintenance shape.

What if it is still slow? Before you go shopping for a new machine, examine your installed memory. How much do you have? If you have a full "gig" (1,024 Mb) or even half a gig installed, your machine is probably working about as fast as it can. If you have only 128 or 256 Mb installed, you can markedly improve performance by adding the difference, to bring it up to a gigabyte. Memory is fairly cheap right now, and you might well find a gigabyte stick in the \$100 range. Be sure to get the correct one (or two). Consult the manual that came with your machine, or go to [crucial.com](http://crucial.com) and select memory upgrades by manufacturer and model. Once you have nailed down exactly what you need, go look for it on [google.com](http://google.com) and compare prices. Happy computing!