

Windows 95 Troubleshooting Tips

Introduction



Modern computers are more powerful and incorporate more features than ever before. The Windows 95 operating system, while offering benefits in terms of ease of use and customisation, is more complex than any of its predecessors. Consequently, when something goes wrong, it can be difficult to correct the problem. The aim of this document is to outline some of the steps you can take to minimise the disruption to your working routine when a problem arises.

How Does Windows 95 Work?

Windows 95 stores important information about the configuration of hardware and software in the Registry. Whenever you start your computer, Windows 95 sets up your system according to the settings in the Registry. Additional information concerning the set-up of your system is read from the CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT files located in your root directory. These are read after the Registry has been processed. In order to be compatible with previous versions of Windows, the operating system also processes two other files on startup, SYSTEM.INI and WIN.INI, located in the Windows folder. These contain information relating mainly to older 16-bit applications, while information relating to Windows 95 32-bit applications is usually stored only in the Registry.

The information in the Registry is stored in the file SYSTEM.DAT located in your Windows folder. If your system is set up for more than one user, for example on a network, additional user-specific information may be stored in the file USER.DAT of which there can be more than one version on your hard disk. Whenever you install a new piece of hardware or software, or change the layout of your Desktop, any changes to the system settings are recorded in the Registry. Whenever you shut down your PC, Windows saves any changes to your system configuration in the files SYSTEM.DAT and USER.DAT.

During the startup process, Windows 95 makes a backup copy of these data files in case something should go wrong during the session. The next time you start up your computer, Windows will attempt to build its Registry database from the .DAT files saved at the end of this session. If, however, it is unable to find these files, for example if they have been corrupted or deleted, Windows will load the backup copies.

So What Can Go Wrong?

If your system closes down abnormally, for whatever reason, Windows will be unable to write the files SYSTEM.DAT and USER.DAT on shut down. If on recovery, the system is unable to find these files, it will then try to load the backup copies. If during your previous session, you had made major changes to your system, for example installed a new piece of software, this may have lead to inconsistencies between the system settings employed by this new application and the recovered version of your Registry. If your system hangs on start up giving a message of the type: "While initializing device IOS Windows protection error, possibly caused by missing file Filename.VXD", this may be what has happened.



Of course, this is just one of the many types of problem you can encounter with Windows 95. So what can you do to prevent problems arising? How can you prepare for problems before they occur? Finally if you have a problem, what can you do to remedy it?

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Preventing Problems

Some Simple Steps

- Always remember to shut down your computer by clicking the Start Button on the Taskbar, selecting Shut Down and then clicking Shut down.
- Whenever you install a new piece of hardware or software, close all open applications such as word processors and spreadsheets before you start the installation program. (*Tip: Press Alt+Tab on the keyboard to alternate between open applications*).
- Restart your computer after every installation by selecting Restart from the Shut Down Windows menu.
- Always check for viruses when you place a diskette or CD of unknown origin in your machine (see below)—before you access any files or applications on the disk.



Preparing for Problems

Some Important Measures

- Make copies of your important system files by copying them to floppy disk or to an alternative location on your hard disk. For example, create a folder in your Windows directory called Safekeep and copy all the files with the MS-DOS file extensions .INI and .GRP to this location.
- Carry out regular full backups of your system including the Windows 95 Registry and system files and all your work files to tape or disk. Ideally, businesses should store one complete backup set off-site (in case of fire or theft).
- In the event that you do not have the means to perform regular full backups of your system, make sure you have backup copies of all your work files by copying them to disk.
- Create a Windows 95 Startup disk so that you can access your hard drive if Windows 95 refuses to load.
- Install an Anti-Virus checker to monitor your system for viruses, trojans and other invasive programs.

Responding to Problems

Basic Troubleshooting

- Check cables and connections if a piece of hardware (e.g. monitor, modem or mouse) isn't working properly.
- Make a note of what you did before the problem arose.
- Record any error messages when they occur.
- Record any measures you take to rectify the problem.
- If you are unable to fix the problem, phone for help.



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