

In this lesson we'll look at a couple of simple and relatively quick things you can do to speed up your computer.

In this course, we'll zero in on some key ways you can make your PC run faster. Really. When you first take a new PC out of the box, Windows comes with many "default settings" that can significantly slow down your system. Fortunately there are many ways you can adjust those settings to get more performance out of your machine. Sometimes you'll have to strike a balance between speed and looks, but in most cases there's no tradeoff — you simply need to change the way Windows works with your hardware and software.

Of course, making adjustments in Windows can be intimidating. But that's why you're here. We'll try to make this a simple, step-by-step process that anyone can do.



ALERT:

This course only offers recommendations for speeding up the performance of your Windows XP PC. Before you do any troubleshooting or changing to your PC settings, we recommend that you do a full back-up of all your files.

Memory boost

To start off, the single most important thing you can do to increase your computer's speed is to add RAM--random access memory. It's also the one thing in this course that will cost you money (but it's worth it).

Think of your hard drive as a big box full of puzzles and games, and your RAM is like a table where you can assemble puzzles and play games. The bigger the table, the more puzzles and games you can play with at once. Conversely, when you have a small table (limited memory), your hard disk is forced to serve as an "artificial table" (or virtual memory). This fake memory trick works fine, but it causes the computer to slow way down. So it's far better to have enough RAM so that your PC isn't forced to use its hard drive for virtual memory.

The price of memory has dropped dramatically in the last few years, making an upgrade an inexpensive way to get a big boost in performance. Adding or replacing RAM is relatively simple to do: You simply plug some chips into sockets on your computer's motherboard.

The challenge, however, is getting the correct memory module for your PC. Just about every computer is different. Some are already equipped with plenty of

memory, while others have very little. And there are a lot of different types of memory, so you need to be sure to get the exact right module for your system.

A good reference on this topic can be found at [CNET Labs' guide to buying RAM](#). This guide explains what RAM is and how to install it. There's also an online tool called a [memory configurator](#) that tells you exactly what kind of memory your computer make and model uses.

Cut the graphics

Whether or not you choose to add memory, another easy way to speed up Windows XP is to change your graphics settings. The more gratuitous effects you use, the slower your computer will work. So let's reduce or eliminate them.

If you've used other versions of Windows, you know that XP has a very different look. Unfortunately, that look comes at the expense of some speed because it uses more graphics. So if you don't mind a simpler, no-nonsense interface, dump it and reclaim the power.

Here's how:

- Go to Control Panel and choose Display (you may have to click Appearance and Themes first).
- On the Themes tab, change your current theme to Windows Classic, which uses fewer resources than the new look does. You can then click the Appearance tab and change that look to suit yourself.

We're not finished. Windows also uses its graphics power to provide all sorts of special effects — menus that fade, shadows under the mouse cursor, and so on. All of these effects sap performance. So:

- Go into Control Panel and choose System (you may have to click Performance and Maintenance first).
- Click the Advanced tab.
- In the Performance box, click Settings.
- You can now select Adjust for best performance, or you can choose Custom and play around with the settings. The more you uncheck, the less work your computer will have to do.

Browse files faster

Finally, a useful change to speed up your file browsing. When you open a folder or run Windows Explorer, Windows will automatically search your network for folders and printers you might want to access. That takes time, and is especially annoying if you don't need to access one at the time.

So let's tell Windows not to search for them unless you ask it to. Here's how:

- Open My Computer.
- Click the Tools menu.
- Choose Folder Options.
- Click the View tab.
- Uncheck “Automatically search for network folders and printers.”
- Click OK.

The next time you reboot your computer, browsing your folders should be a little faster.

We'll make them faster still in the next lesson, when we do some spring cleaning of your hard drive.