

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 102. The System File Checker

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Did you know that Windows 98 has a built-in System File Checker? This handy tool will check all your critical operating system files for any that are corrupt. If any are found, it will give you a chance to restore fresh copies from the installation disk. Moreover, if set up correctly, it will also check for missing and updated files, and will keep its findings in its own little database so that it knows, next time, what it found this time. Not bad. A good way to make sure your system is tuned up and working to peak efficiency.

Before you start, make sure you have your Win98 installation CD-ROM handy, if needed to restore a file. It is also a good idea to close Norton System Doctor if you use it (don't just minimize it; close it), and to temporarily disable any virus scanner. If you use Norton Antivirus (You should! It's the best.), temporarily disable its Autoprotect feature. Now, you are ready to begin.

Click **Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools** and **System Information**. Once in the System Information screen, select **Tools** on the header bar, then **System File Checker**. Read the panel so you know what you are doing. Then click the Settings button.

On the settings bar, there are two boxes to be concerned with, at the bottom left of the panel. The first is **Check for changed files**. I recommend you select this box, but be aware that when the checker is running it will notify you of every file that has changed in size or version number since the original installation. It may find dozens of changes, which can be boring after you read the first few warnings. However, that's OK, because when you are tired of responding to these warnings, it is possible to select a box that will update all changed files, saving you the necessity of responding to each one. It will also record all the new versions in its database, so you won't be bothered next time you run the File Checker.

The other box to check is **Check for deleted files**. Again, select this box and be prepared to encounter a number of files that were deleted when you actually start the checker. For example, if you use Norton's Virus Scanner and have updated the program or virus definitions since the original installation, there will be 12 old files that the update deleted and replaced by new files. The checker will detect these. Don't restore these. Just let Windows update its data. Again, once the checker is running, if you wish, select the box that will appear allowing the checker to update its database for all deleted files to speed the process up.

Now you are ready to actually start the checker. Click OK to close the Settings panel, and click Start. Likely, you won't have time to sit back and relax until a warning message pops up telling you of a file that has changed or has been deleted. I recommend you click the Update Information bullet for each of these, and when you get tired of doing that, click the Update Information for all deleted files (or all changed files). That will speed things up considerably. Watching the process for the first few files is a learning experience for you (and for the checker, since it records everything in its database), but you can't possibly know if all the deleted and changed files are valid, so just let it go on with its job of recording everything for the first time. However, next time you run the checker, there should be no files deleted or changed unless you did an upgrade of some kind.

The real value of the System Checker is evident when it detects a corrupt file. It will think a file is corrupt if it has the same version number and date of the original installation file, but has a different size (number of bytes). If that is the case, maybe a cosmic ray hit the directory, changing a number in the file size. Or maybe a virus altered the file in some way. If a corrupt file is encountered, you will be presented with a screen that will permit you to restore a fresh copy from the installation disk.

If that screen appears, select **Extract one file from the installation disk**. Then, if not already typed in for you, enter the name of the file to extract. Then, in the **Restore From** box, type in the name of the folder on the installation disk where the **.cab** files are located. The **.cab** files are files that contain many files within them in compressed form, just like a **.zip** file. If you are using the Win98 installation disk, put it in your CD-ROM drive at this time, and type **D:\Win98** for the location, where D: is the letter of your CD-ROM drive. Click **OK**, and the current (corrupt) file will be replaced by a fresh copy from the CD-ROM. Of course, if you followed my advice in Number 100: A Better Way to Install Windows 98 (available on the First 100 CD-ROM), you don't need an installation disk at all. Just point to the W98Flat folder on your hard drive, and the **.cab** file will be there.

That's it. Run the System File Checker periodically (maybe every couple of months) to insure the integrity of your important files. A great way to help keep your machine tuned up. Happy computing!