



Part 5 & 6 - How do I Speed up my Computer?

Welcome back to a series of computer related articles brought to you by VistaSol Computer Solutions. Over the coming weeks we are going to be featuring articles based on the theme of 'How do I . . .?'

Last week we showed you how to use 'Check Disk' to recover from Hard Disk Drive problems. In this week's article we will be continuing with the theme of 'How do I Speed up my Computer?', with the next subjects:

How Do I 'Defragment' files on the Hard Drive?
Virus Prevention /Cure

How Do I 'Defragment' files on the Hard Drive?

What is fragmentation?

Disk fragmentation is a common problem that can have serious ramifications on the performance of your computer. It plagues every computer at some point, yet many people fail to address the issue. Disk fragmentation affects your computer in many ways, including the speed and reliability of the computer. If you notice your computer is slower than usual, it is likely that this is the reason.

File fragmentation occurs because most 'files' are too big to fit in the 'clusters' available on the hard disk. To overcome this, the files are broken up into pieces which will then fit in available clusters on the hard disk. Inevitably however, this will mean that files become 'fragmented' across the hard disk, making the task of finding them and piecing them together all the more arduous. This can lead to this process making your computer appear slower or even freeze.

Signs of Fragmentation

There are several signs which will indicate that your disk is fragmented. The most common sign is that it slows down your computer. This can take many forms, you may notice for instance that it takes longer to boot up or shut down your computer. You may also notice that software takes longer to load. This is especially true of web browsers and word processing software. Finally, if your computer is really fragmented you will notice that your software crashes frequently or becomes unresponsive. This is because as the computer tries to find files on the hard disk, resources are taken away from that particular software application, preventing it from running efficiently.

What you really need to do is 'Defragment' these files so that the pieces are arranged 'contiguously' (connected together so as to form an unbroken sequence) on the hard drive.

Enter 'the Defragmenter'!

There are a number of 'Defragmentation' utilities available in the market place. Our personal favourite is a program from a company called 'AusLogics'. You can download it by typing this link into your browser:

http://www.vistasol.co.uk/free_downloads.html

Look for the program called '**AusLogics Defrag**' and click on the link

[N.B. *DO NOT USE the defragmentation program which comes with Windows, it's very slow and not nearly as effective*].

Once you have downloaded the latest version and installed it, start up the program by double clicking on the 'AusLogics Defrag' icon on your desktop.

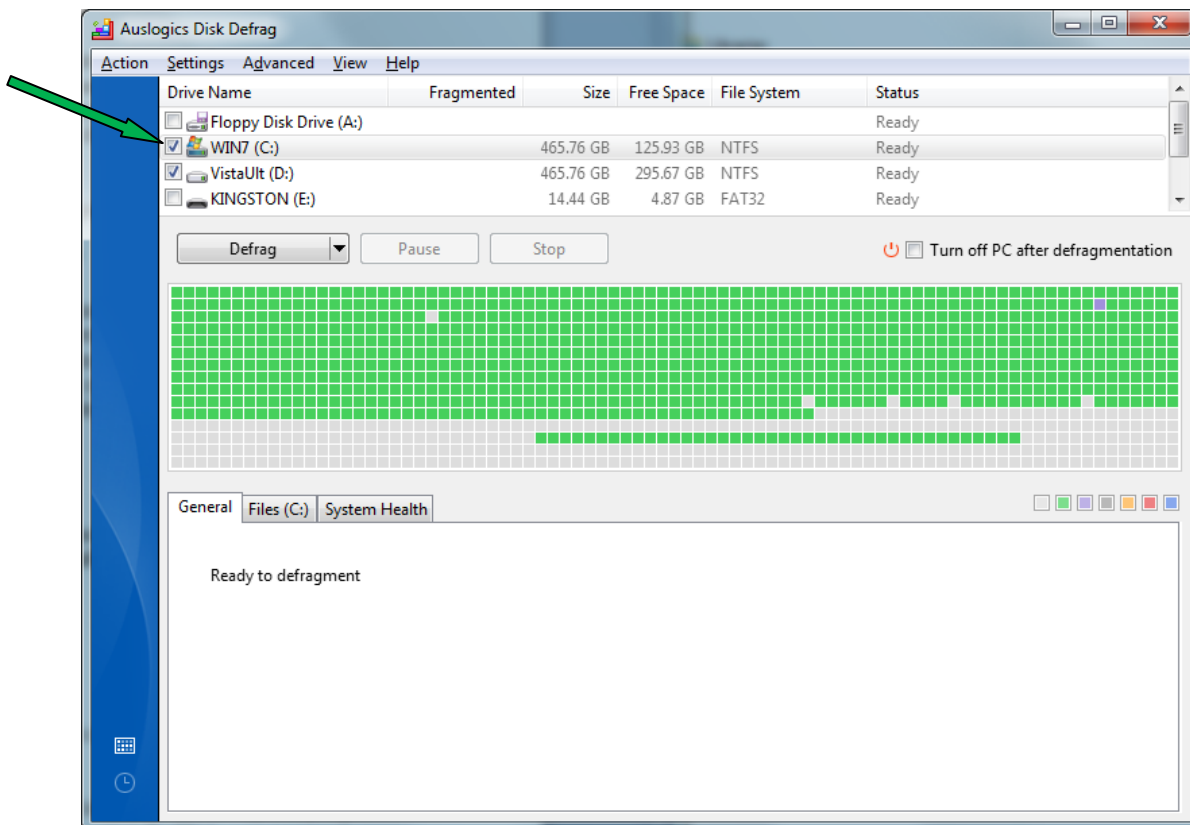
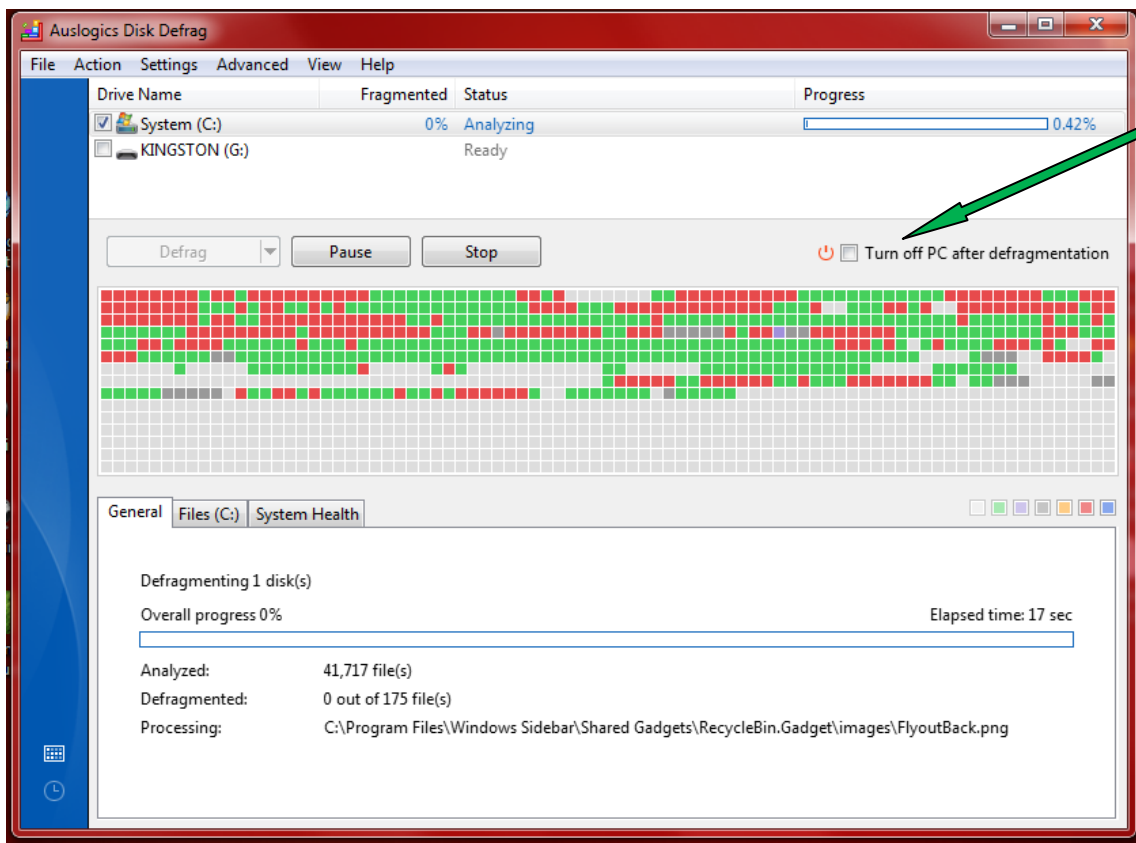


Figure 1

Make sure there's a check mark against the drive (or drives) to be defragmented (click in the box to the left), and then click on the 'Defrag' button. If the drive is heavily defragmented, this may take some time, so you should only do this when you're not going to be using the computer for a while.



Fragmented files will be shown as red squares; non-fragmented files are shown as green squares.

But I don't have time to wait

If it takes too long and you can't wait for it to finish, look under the drive listings and click in the box labelled "Turn off PC after defragmentation". You can then walk away safe in the knowledge that once the defragmentation has completed, your computer will be shut down automatically – that's why we particularly like this program.

We recommend running this program maybe once per month, or as and when your computer shows signs of sluggishness.

That's another 'tool' in your toolbox and another step out of the way. Until next time, we hope you are now well on your way to speeding up that 'ailing' computer and beginning to enjoy your computer once again.

Part 6 – How do I Speed Up my Computer?

How Do I Protect my Computer Against Viruses?

Just because you have no visible signs of a virus on your computer does not necessarily mean you don't have any!

If that's a bit of a worrying statement – I agree, but it's true nonetheless. Viruses can take many forms and nowadays are more generally referred to as 'Malicious Software' or 'Malware', which incorporates all variants of the nasty little critters. Throughout this article we'll refer to them by their more generic term i.e. 'Malware'.

Every computer which accesses the Internet needs to have some form of protection – think of it as 'safe surfing'. Which product you choose is up to you, but we recommend either: **AVG 2011 FREE**, or **Avira AntiVirus Personal**. They are both as good as each other, although AVG Free tends to be very 'resource hungry'. With this in mind we would recommend using **AVIRA** on your computer if you are running **Windows XP** and your computer is already struggling to keep up. Either of these 'Anti Malware' programs can be downloaded by typing the following location into your browser's address bar:



AVG: http://www.vistasol.co.uk/free_downloads.html



Avira: http://www.filehippo.com/download_antivir/

I mentioned in the opening paragraph that you may have Malware installed even though you may not be aware of it. The ones that hide themselves are usually there to do one (or more) of the following activities:

1. Disable your computers security features e.g. Firewall, Windows Update etc.
2. Prevent your Anti-Virus program from updating itself, or even from running
3. Log key strokes to determine bank account information, e.g. user names and passwords
4. Monitor your internet browsing activities, which they then sell on to market analysts

This list is not exhaustive, but would require more space than I have in this article.

The first step you should take is to download a program called '**MalwareBytes**'. This program is Free, but has no automated features; however it is one of the best in the market place for correcting security issues and removing most forms of Malware.

You can download it from here:



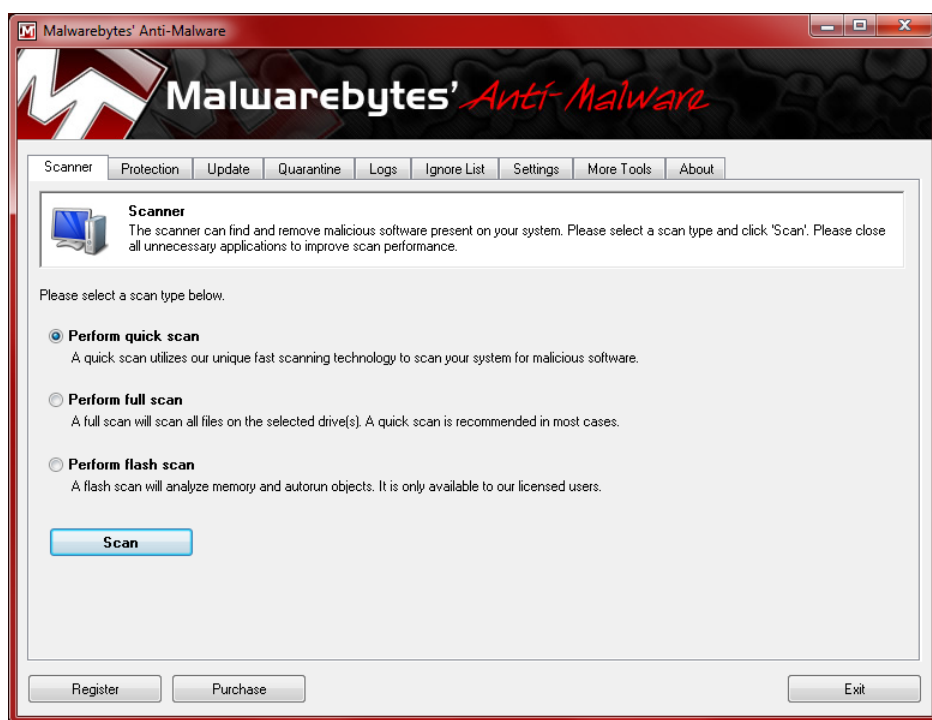
http://www.vistasol.co.uk/free_downloads.html

Top Tip: *Before continuing, make sure you run CCleaner to clear out all the rubbish in the temporary areas, otherwise the next step could take considerably longer.*

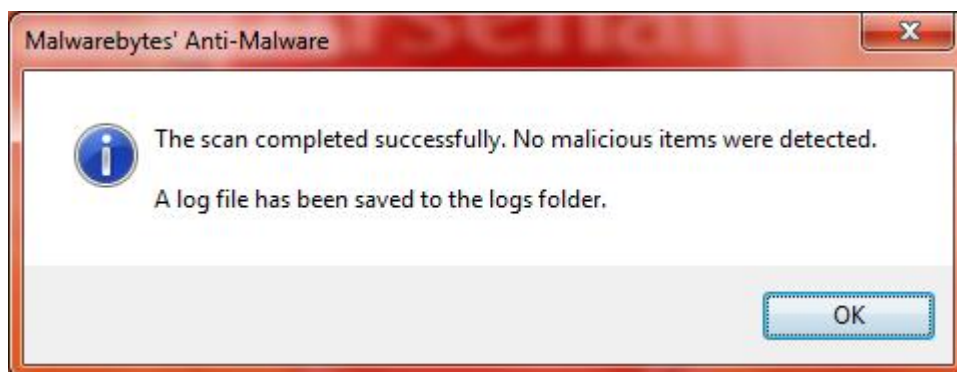
Once you have downloaded the program, double-click on the program icon to install it. At the end of the installation, the program will need to update itself – this should only take a minute or two. The program should then start up.

The first screen will ask if you want to run it as a 'Trial Full version', you should probably click on the 'Decline' option as it is only for 30 days, after this time you have to pay.

At the main screen, accept the defaults i.e. 'Quick Scan' and click on the 'Scan' button. The process of doing a quick scan should not take more than about 10 minutes to complete.

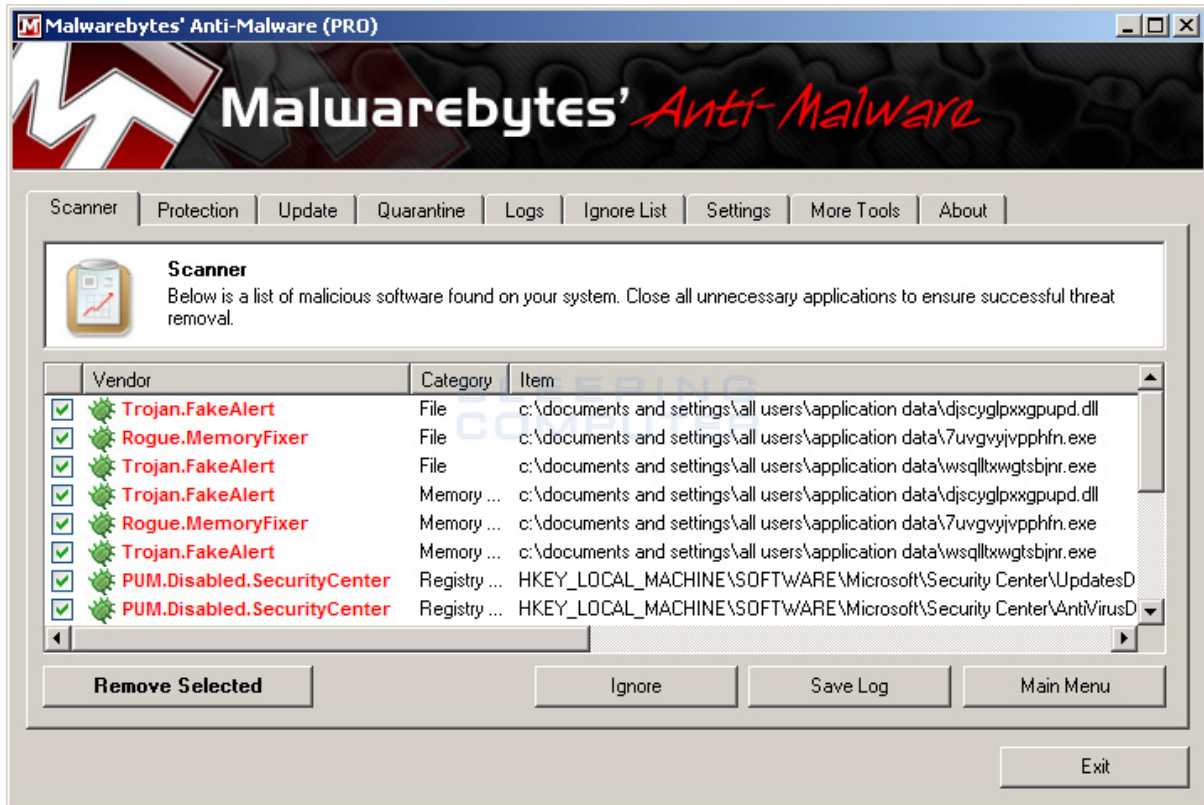


If all you see at the end of this process is a window with a lot of text entries – congratulations your computer is clean (close this window and exit the program).



If however, any items of Malware are found, these will be indicated in **red** (you may be surprised at the amount of Malware items it has found!). Follow the prompts to 'remove infected items' and restart the computer if necessary.

Sample results screen



Out of date or no Anti-Virus program installed?

If you are not running any Anti-Virus program at all, or the one you have is out-dated, now would be a good time to uninstall your old program and follow one of the links above to download and install the latest version of either **AVG** or **AVIRA**.

Make you sure you run a complete scan at your first opportunity – AVG will prompt you to do this shortly after installing it.

AVG Installation/Configuration

We will be dedicating a separate article with Top Tips on how to install and configure AVG Free correctly without any 'Toolbars' and to correctly run a scheduled scan just once per week.