

TECHNICAL GEEKERY TIPS

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Microsoft Word

If you're unlucky enough to still have a version with Clippy enabled, here's two easy ways to zap the annoyance once and for all. (Note: if you have Office 2007, Microsoft finally removed Clippy completely and spared Windows users the world over the annoyance. I just wish they had quit when they were ahead: what's up with the menulless design?)

If you're like me and sometimes enjoy watching Clippy do weird animations or something similar but absolutely detest annoying popups like "It looks like you're writing a letter", try this fix. Choose Help → Show the Office Assistant if Clippy isn't currently showing. Now right-click and choose Options. Uncheck every box except "Use the Office Assistant". This will prevent Clippy from appearing except when choosing "Show the Office Assistant" from the Help menu so you can decide for yourself if you want to give Clippy the privilege of appearing on your screen.

If what you want is a completely Clippy-free Word, just unchecking "Use the Office Assistant" isn't enough. If you or anyone else clicks "Show the Office Assistant," Clippy is re-enabled (yes, the box is checked again). Completely sending Clippy back to the bit bucket from whence he came requires a more permanent solution. Choose Start → Run and type *appwiz.cpl*. This shortcut is an easy way to access Add/Remove Programs (or, as Microsoft calls it in Vista, "Programs and Features → Uninstall or Change a Program"). Find Office in the list and hit whichever option includes "Change." In the resulting wizard, check "Choose Advanced Customization of Programs" or something similar. (Different versions will no doubt be slightly different.) Click the plus next to "Office Shared Features" and click the hard drive icon by "Office Assistant." Choose "Not Available." Now click through the rest of the wizard and Clippy ought to be gone for good. That is, unless you reinstall him.

Firefox Version 3.0

There's a new update out for Firefox. If you ever hear about a new version and want to know if you have it, simply choose Help → About and check the version number.

Internet Explorer Version 7

You can check your version the same way, except because of Microsoft's "Menus are bad for you" campaign, you'll have to hit Alt to display the toolbar before you can check the version.

Google Chrome

If you've tried Chrome, you've probably noticed the weird bookmark system and been very confused about what's happening. Here's how it works:

- When you click the star icon to make a bookmark, the site is bookmarked immediately in the folder that you last used for a bookmark.
- If you click Close, it stays there.
- If you choose another folder from the drop-down, it moves to that folder.

- If you hit Edit, you can create new folders.
- To get to any bookmarks you have put anywhere but the “Bookmarks Toolbar”, click Other Bookmarks at the end of said toolbar.
- If you click the star icon while it’s yellow, signifying that that page is in your Bookmarks, you can edit it at any time.

Keyboard Shortcuts

Ever at an annoying web page where you just have to click one button with the mouse occasionally but otherwise would just keep your hands on the keyboard? Here’s an interesting solution. First, you need a numeric keypad. This doesn’t work on a few desktop keyboards or most laptops. (The numeric keypad is the area to the right of the letters that looks like a calculator.) To start, press <Left Alt>+<Left Shift>+<NumLock> (yes, the Alt and Shift keys have to be the left ones). You should hear a funny tone and a dialog box should appear. Click “Yes” or “OK”. If it doesn’t work, try again; sometimes Windows swallows accessibility shortcuts (which is what this is). Now position the mouse over the button you will have to click. Now just push the 5 on the numeric keypad to click. So it’s still not in the range of where your fingers are while typing, but it’s still a heck of a lot closer than the mouse. To stop this mode, just push the shortcut keys again.

General Windows

How would you like to have a toolbar along the side of your screen that shows the current contents of a folder? You can have it on top of everything (so it’s always visible) or not. And it’s deceptively simple: just drag the folder you want to use to an unused edge of the screen. To set a few simple options, just right-click on an empty section. If you want to get rid of it, just choose Close Toolbar from the right-click menu.

Windows Vista: The Reality

I’m sure we all know that Vista never works right. It crashes randomly, doesn’t work with ANY programs not written exactly for it, runs so slow you can’t stand it, uses extra memory and resources for a pointless new interface, and you should NEVER EVER EVER buy it.

Yeah, right. I’ll acknowledge that Vista doesn’t run as fast as XP on the same hardware, is bigger than XP, and uses more resources than its predecessor. So has every version of Windows. I’m convinced the main problem people have with Vista is bad press.

Case in point: the Mojave Experiment. You’ve probably heard about it. 115 people who had never had contact with Vista were asked to rate what they thought of it on a scale from 1 to 10. The average rating was a 4. Then they were told that they were being shown the next Microsoft operating system, called Windows Mojave. They were given a quick demo on a normal HP laptop (there have been rumors around the Internet that it was some sort of supercomputer) and then asked to rate it. The average rating was an 8. Then they were told it was really Vista. Most didn’t believe it. Everyone was amazed. If you get a few spare minutes, check out www.mojaveexperiment.com where Microsoft has recorded some great video of people’s reactions.

So when you buy a new computer, don’t worry about getting Vista. Worry about the hardware on that computer. Make it just like you were buying an XP computer, except make the requirements higher because, just like every other successive Microsoft OS, Vista takes more resources.

Yes, it's a big jump. Vista has 15 million more lines of code than XP and a couple of groundbreaking additions, like the annoying UAC (User Account Control) popups. But most of the additions are good: Vista is much more secure than XP, not even taking into account the new UAC layer. Speaking of UAC, you can turn it off, too, if you want. The Aero Glass interface (pardon me, Microsoft, "UX" [for User Experience]) actually helps you find windows, allows smoother movement of windows, and generally makes your computing experience more pleasant. Of course, it comes at a price, especially to memory consumption. But if you get a good graphics card, you shouldn't have a problem dealing with it. There's finally a good indexed (read: tolerably fast) search and support for some new technologies that could speed up our computers.

In short, Vista does have a few problems, and some older programs won't run. Generally, programs written for XP will work. Some that were written for, say, Windows 98, and manage to hold on XP, might not anymore. Of course, this comes right before the first public beta test of Windows 7, the next version. Let's just hope it goes over better with the public. And guess what: you don't have to take it. If Windows annoys you too much, just go with something like what I did and install Linux as well. If Windows isn't working, reboot, start Linux, and get the stupid thing to work.

Announcements

Report difficulties, technical issues, and/or factual problems with this newsletter to webmaster@thetechnicalgeekery.com.

Do you have any friends who you think would like this newsletter? Have them send me an email and ask to be added to my mailing list. If you wish to unsubscribe, you can click the link in the email.

Visit <http://www.thetechnicalgeekery.com> for more features, including the new Inside Your Computer and Geek Computer Setup pages. Check back on the webpage soon, as I plan to be fixing it up. I am going to do something I rarely do and send another email to the list when I have it ready.

Formatting

- I use **boldface** to indicate the titles of programs and sections.
- Although I'm not so good at this and it sometimes comes out inconsistent, I try to put wording that will appear on your screen in quotation marks or Capitalize All The Words In It.
- If there are multiple items to click on in a row, I use an arrow like this: →. By the way, if you're interested in how to insert those in Word, just use --> (two hyphens and a greater-than sign) and hit the spacebar.
- If you have to type something, I put it in *italics* to avoid confusion about whether to type quotation marks or not.