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Windows XP®
Monthly
Computer Maintenance

Revision Date: 5/3/2008

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INTRODUCTION

I've had a few requests for information showing how to perform system maintenance. Since Windows® is the most predominantly used Operating System on today's desktop computers, and Windows XP® is still a crowd favorite among users, that will be my focus in this manual.

The Windows® Operating Systems provide a few tools to keep your computer running smoothly. We'll explore them over the next few pages. Keep in mind though, they are included in all Windows® Operating Systems since Windows 95®.

It is recommended that you perform these tasks every month, and should do it at a time when the computer is not going to be used for several minutes at minimum, as the computer cannot be used during this time to perform other tasks.

Performing routine maintenance is an important step to having a stable computer. While these tasks are not a "Fix-all", they will help in maintaining the integrity of your computer, in turn, providing a more enjoyable computing experience.

I recommend that you read this manual completely, including the "Disclaimer", before you attempt to perform any of these tasks. I have tried to keep it as short and to the point as possible, while giving you as much important information as I can.

More information on the three tools decribed in this manual can be found in the Windows® Help and Support section.

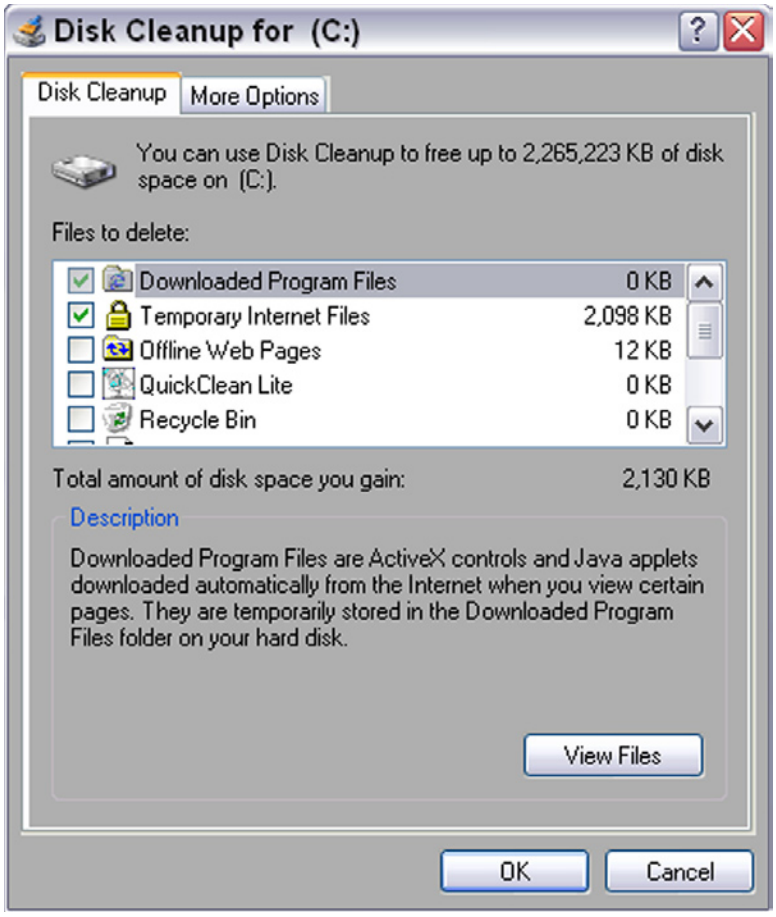
DISK CLEANUP

Disk Cleanup is a tool to help clear Hard Drive space by cleaning up, or deleting, unnecessary files. This is customizable, and fairly easy to use. While there are several options Disk Cleanup offers, we'll stick to the important stuff.

To access Disk Cleanup, click on the **"Start"** button, select **"All Programs"**, **"Accessories", "System Tools"**, and select **"Disk Cleanup"**. This will bring up the following dialog box:

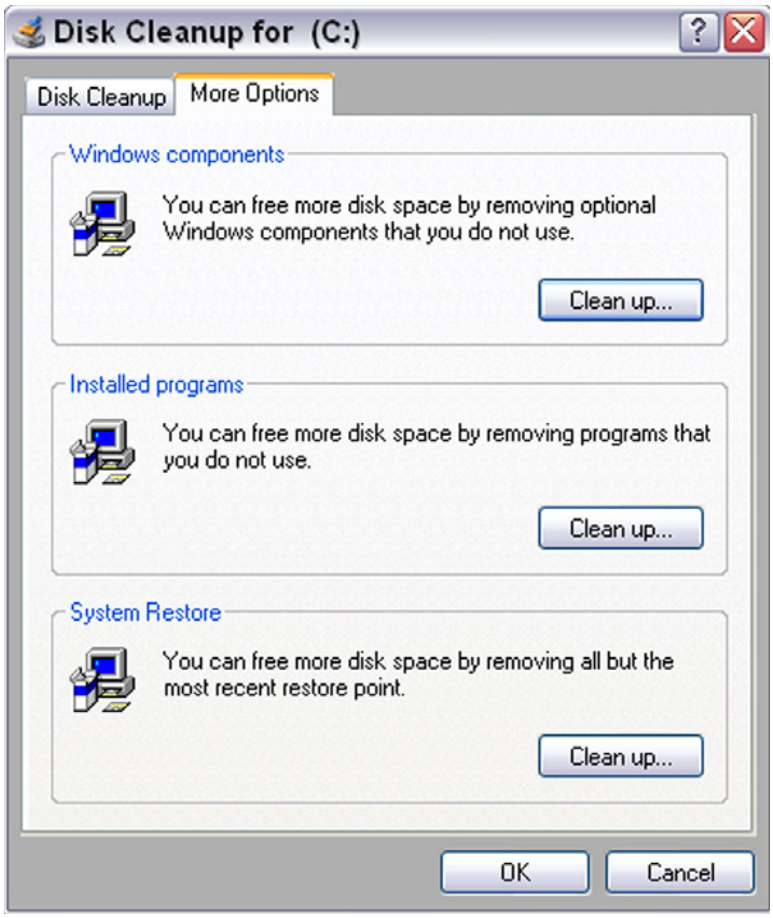
As you can see, the default is set for (C:) drive, which is the drive that normally contains all the files that will need to be "Cleaned up". Select "**OK**". This will cause the Disk Cleanup program to start scanning the hard drive for files that need to be cleaned up. This may take several minutes, so do not stop it while it is performing it's tasks.

After the scanning process is complete, the following dialog box will appear:



There are several options here, but I usually select "**Downloaded Program Files**", "**Temporary Internet Files**", "**Recycle Bin**", "**Temporary files**", and "**WebClient/Publisher Temporary Files**". There is another selection that can usually save a lot of disk space, "**Compress old files**". What this option does is "Compress" files that haven't been accessed in over 50 days, thus, making the file smaller and freeing up more disk space. I usually don't select this option because when you do access a compressed file, it will take longer to open because the file must be "Uncompressed", in order to view it. Besides that, if compressing old files is the only thing that will free up enough space on your hard drive to operate normally, it's time to get a bigger hard drive!

There is another tab on the Disk Cleanup dialog box, "**More Options**". When you click on it, you will be presented with the following options:



From here, you can uninstall "**Windows components**", like "Outlook Express", "MSN Explorer", etc. I usually don't use this option, and caution should be used, as a program that is essential for the functionality of your computer could be uninstalled from here.

The second option is to clean up "**Installed programs**". This is the same option that can be accessed through the "Control Panel", "Add or Remove programs".

The third option is "**System Restore**". Selecting this option will delete all "Restore Points" except the most recent. A "Restore Point" allows the computer to later be restored to a it's current state on the day the Restore Point was created. Windows automatically creates Restore Points when you install certain software and/or hardware.

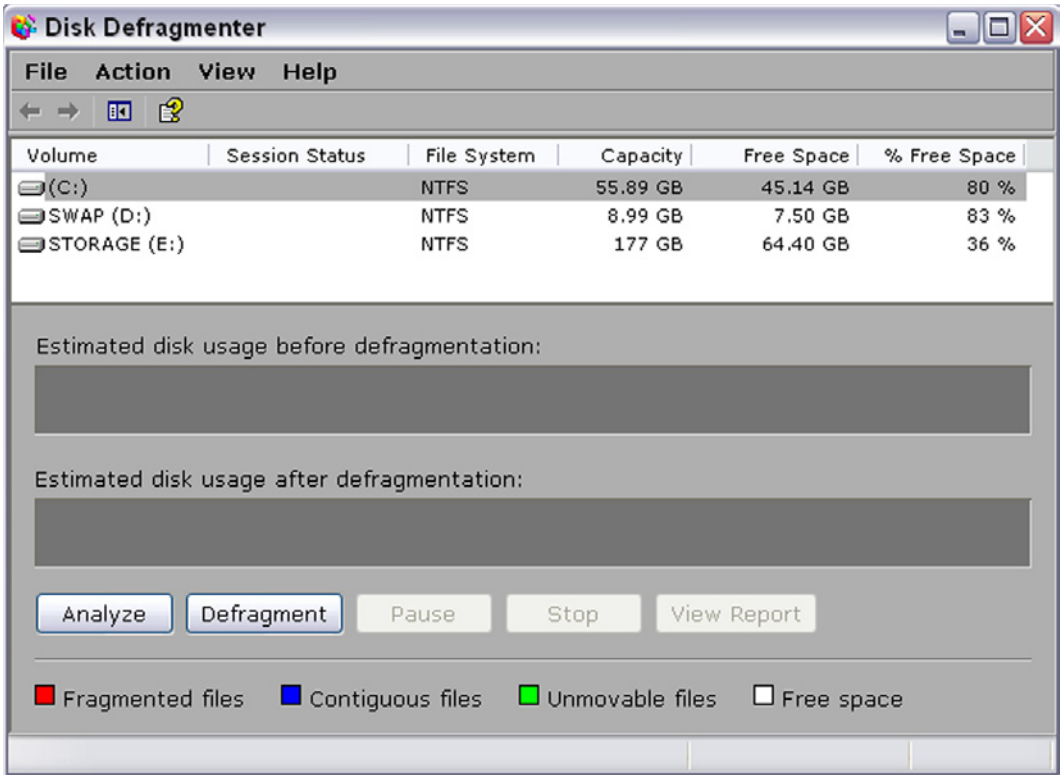
Cleaning up the System Restore will usually free up lots of disk space, and is recommended as long as your computer seems to be functioning normally since the last hardware/software install.

After choosing your selections to be Cleaned Up, click "**OK**", and a message box will appear asking you if you are sure you want to perform these actions, select "**Yes**". Disk Cleanup will automatically close after it performs all requested tasks.

DISK DEFRAGMENTER

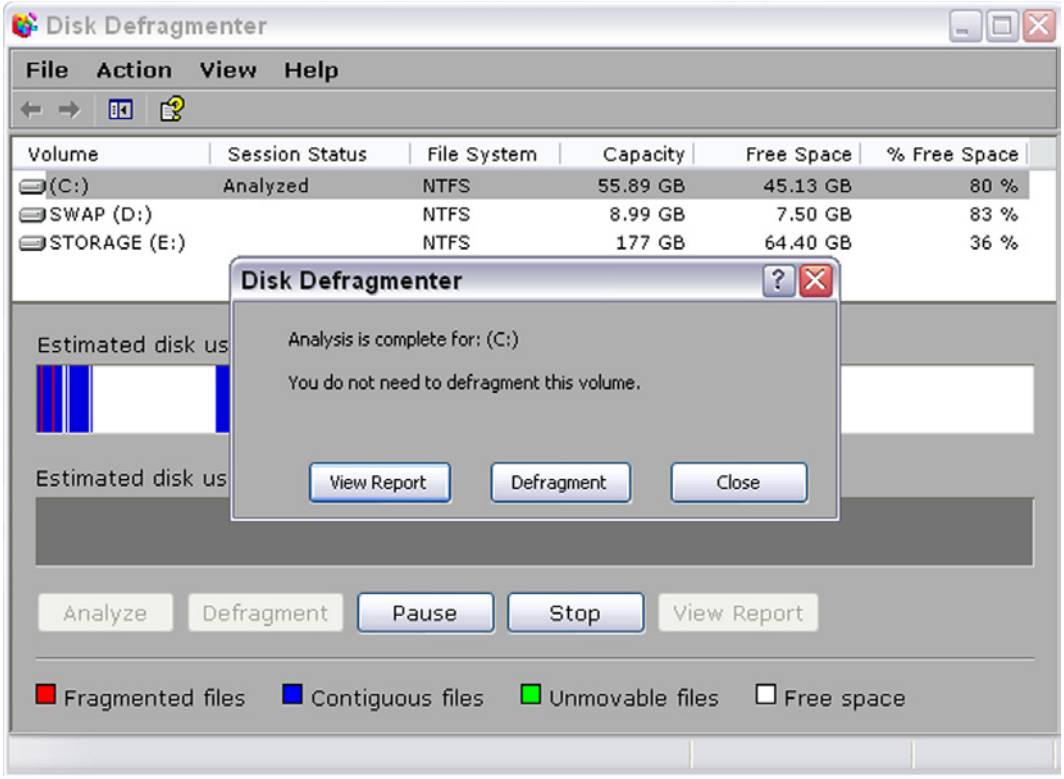
Before performing “Disk Defragmenter”, it is recommended that you run “Disk Cleanup”.

To access Disk Defragmenter, click on the **“Start”** button, select **“All Programs”**, **“Accessories”, “System Tools”**, and select **“Disk Defragmenter”**. This will bring up the following dialog box:



Notice the white section that lists the drives on the computer. This will vary from computer to computer, as the drives and names of drives may vary. For the most part, most computers will only show one drive, and that is (C:), or Local Disk (C:).

Select (C:) by clicking with the mouse, then select “**Analyze**” in the lower left. The computer will then start to analyze the hard drive to see if it does in fact need to be Defragmented. After analyzing the hard drive, the following dialog box will appear:



Note the message that appears: “You do not need to defragement this volume.” You are also given three options. The first, “**View Report**”, will give you a comprehensive look at your hard drive. The second, “**Defragment**”, will start the Degragmentation process. The third, closes the pop-up box and leaves the Disk Degragmenter box open. You can close this by clicking the red “X” in the upper right corner.

Even though the computer doesn’t feel that a hard drive should be defragmented, you can still defragment it anyway, which is what I usually do. As a matter of fact, I usually don’t even Analyze the computer, but instead, select “**Defragment**” from the beginning.

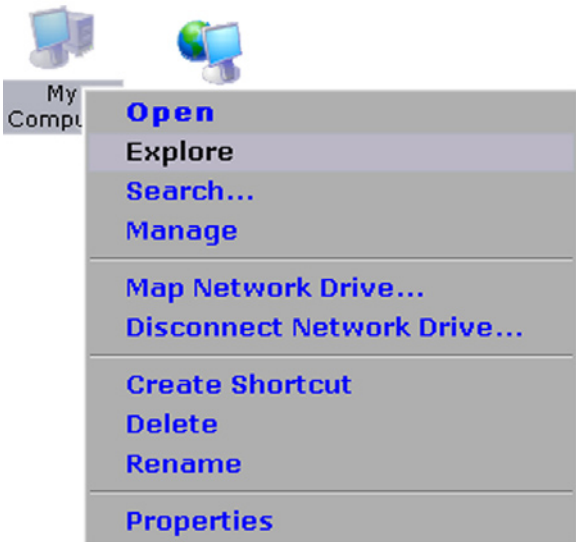
Once defragmentation starts, you should just walk away from the computer and let it perform this task. Depending on the speed of your computer, amount of fragmentation, and size of your hard drive, defragmentation could take any where from fifteen minutes to over an hour.

CHECK DISK

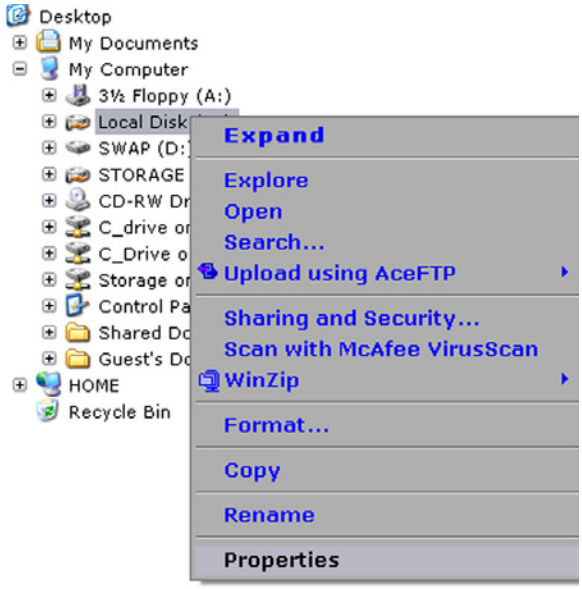
Check Disk performs a scan of the hard drive, and, will attempt to fix problems with files that have become damaged or corrupted. Check Disk is a little different from Disk Cleanup and Disk Defragmenter, because it cannot be run on C: Drive while Windows is running.

Also, Check Disk is accessed differently than other Hard Disk tools.

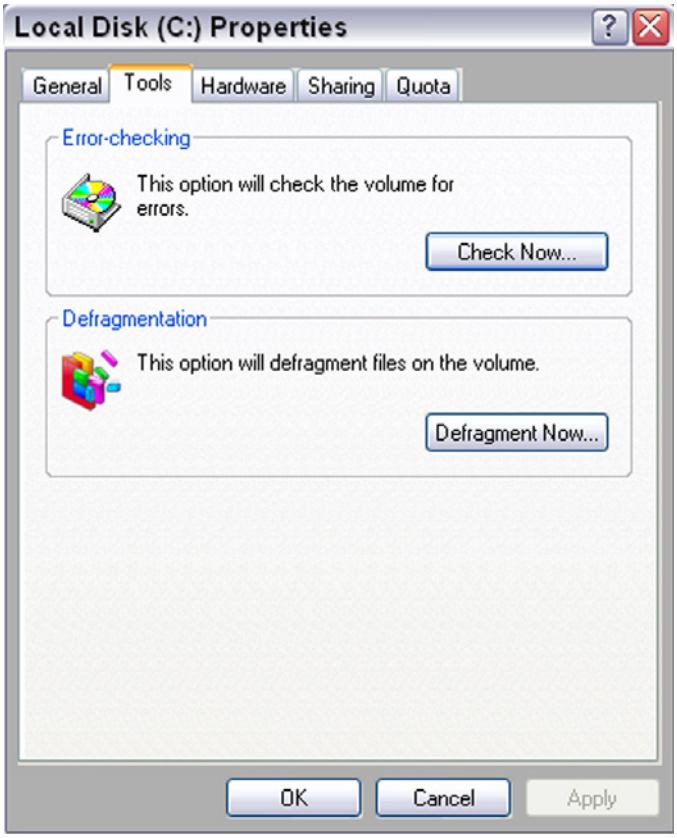
To access, Check Disk, right-click "**My Computer**" on the desktop, and select **"Explore**" by left-clicking on it.



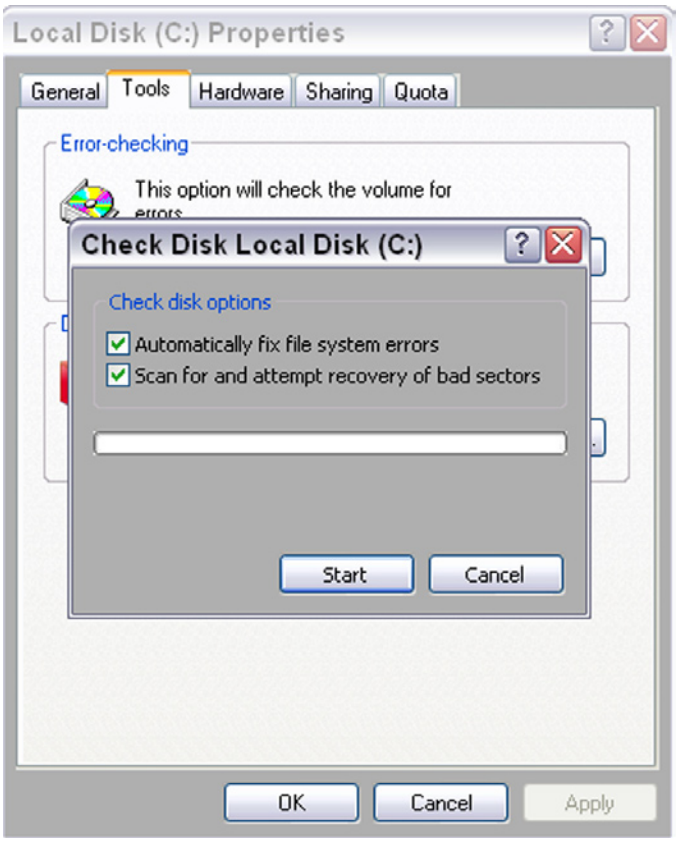
This will open "**Windows Explorer**". Right-click on Local Disk (C:), then select "**Properties**" at the bottom of the Context Menu.



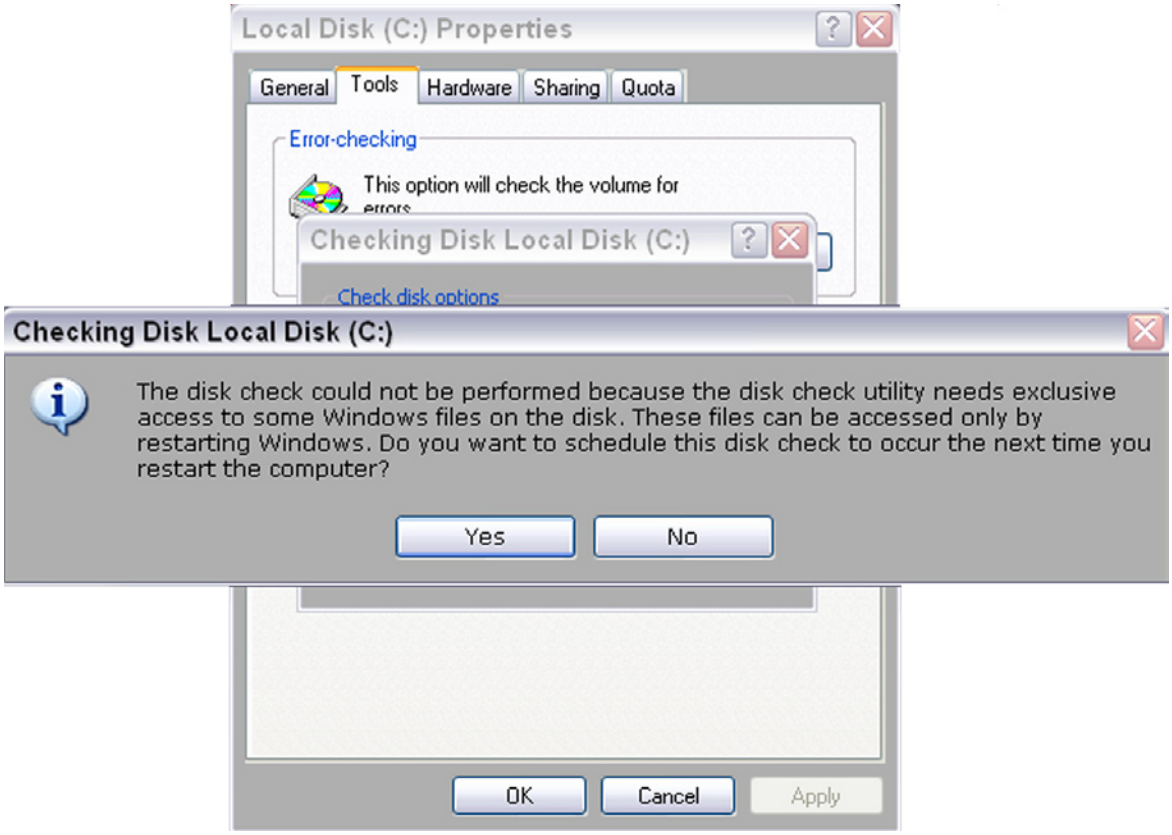
This will open the "**Properties**" dialog box. Click on the second tab, "**Tools**", and the following box will appear:



From here, select "**Check Now...**", under "**Error-checking**". Notice the "**Defragment Now...**" button, another way to defragment. Selecting "**Check Now...**" will bring up this dialog box:



Make sure both boxes are checked, then select “**Start**”. The following message will appear:



This message is pretty straight-forward, and lets you know that Check Disk cannot be ran while Windows is running. Select “**Yes**”, then “**OK**” to close the dialog box. You can restart your computer at this point, or continue to work. But remember, when your computer is restarted, Check Disk will start, and this is a very lengthy process that could last for more than an hour.

For this reason, I recommend that you set the computer to perform Check Disk at a time when you’re not going to use the computer for at least an hour.

DISCLAIMER

While I have tried as thoroughly as possible to describe how to perform certain system maintenance, there is no way I can, without writing a novel, explain every possible detail or scenario you may encounter.

I offer no guarantee that these tools will fix any issue you may have, or won't cause other problems. I cannot be responsibile for any adverse effects your computer may experience while performing these functions, I am only describing how to use the tools already included on your computer.

These tools are meant to help in reducing problems before they occur, and if your computer is already having issues, then having your computer inspected by myself or another Certified Technician is highly recommended.