

TOP 50 HELPLINE QUERIES

Every day we receive dozens of pleas for help from readers with technical questions. Whether you want to get more from your PC, understand the inconsistencies of hardware or fix an irritating problem in your Windows operating system, Helpline guru Julian Moss is here to assist with 50 solutions to recently asked questions

The PC is now as much a part of our lives as the TV, the phone and the fridge. But despite claims by Microsoft and PC makers that hardware is now plug and play and software is intuitive, PCs are still a long way from being as easy to use as these common domestic appliances. For proof, we need only look at all the pleas for help that pour in to our mailbox every month – more than there's space to answer in the magazine – or the volume of postings in our online Helproom forum.

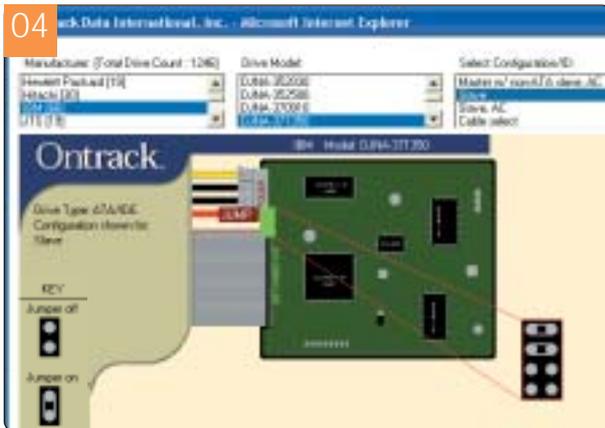
Among the questions that Helpline receives, many old favourites turn up time and again. So we've selected 50 of the most common questions and provided the solutions in one easy-to-use troubleshooting guide. Although some of the questions answered here have been featured before, readers still ask them on a regular basis. But many of the questions are brand new, reflecting the growing interest in applications such as digital photography and video editing and growing concerns about security as more and more people start to use always-on broadband internet connections. Far from making PCs easier to use, Windows XP has generated a whole new set of problems of its own, so this time we've given it a section to itself.

If you've got a problem with your PC, the chances are that you'll find a solution in the next few pages. But even if everything is working fine, don't skip this feature. Cut it out and keep it in a safe place with your computer manuals, because there's a fair chance that one day it's going to come in handy.



01 Help! My newly built PC crashes all the time – seemingly at random. Why is this?

You'll have to try to pin down the cause of the crashes by a process of elimination. Does the computer crash running a clean installation of Windows or in Safe Mode? This could indicate a software problem.



← OnTrack's online JumperViewer will show the jumper settings for your hard drive

If nothing else in your system configuration has changed – for example, the processor or graphics card – you

can copy everything from the old drive to the new one. Install it temporarily as the Slave drive then transfer the files using Explorer's drag-and-drop facility.

If you experience problems while trying to copy the Windows swap file, ensure that Explorer is showing hidden and system files then hold down Ctrl while selecting what to drag and drop. This will allow you to copy everything except the swap file.

05 Can I install an UDMA/100 hard drive in my PC?

Yes, this is possible. UDMA drives are backwards-compatible with ordinary IDE drives but you won't get any extra performance out of your PC by using a standard IDE controller.

If your PC doesn't have built-in support for UDMA/100 and you want faster data transfers you should disable the motherboard's IDE controllers and install an UDMA/100 controller card such as the one made by Promise. You must use the 40-pin, 80-wire cable supplied with the controller.

06 After upgrading my hard drive, can I copy everything from the old drive to the new one or must I reinstall the software from scratch?

07 I want to give my PC more memory. Can I mix modules of different makes and types?

Generally yes, as long as the memory is of the same type. For example, you can mix PC100 and PC133 (different speeds of SDRAM) or PC1600, PC2100 and PC2700 (speeds of DDR). Some motherboards support both SDRAM and DDR modules

but in many cases you must fit either one or the other to ensure compatibility.

If you install a module that's slower than the memory bus (front side bus) then all the memory may be accessed at the lower speed, causing a performance loss.

08 When capturing video using a capture card I always get dropped frames. How can I fix this?

Optimise your system's performance. Check in Device Manager that your hard disk is using DMA and the fastest transfer rate it supports. Put the hard disk on a separate IDE cable from your CD and DVD drives. If your system has a Via chipset ensure you have the latest drivers and Bios version. Shut all other apps including system utilities and virus checkers during video capture. Try capturing using Mpeg-2, I frames only, then use TMPGEncoder (from www.tmpgenc.net or on our CD) to convert to the desired format.

09 My new printer can't properly share the parallel port with another device, whereas the old model could. Why is this?

Newer printer drivers expect to be in constant communication with the printer in order to report on their status. Errors will occur if another device shares the parallel port. Try installing a parallel port card or using a USB-to-parallel adapter so each device has its own dedicated port.



10 I can't seem to defragment my hard drive. The defragmenter continually restarts because the drive contents have changed.

Run Defrag when nothing else is running and any screensaver has been disabled. The easiest way to ensure this is to start Windows in Safe Mode and then run it.

11 Windows always asks for a password when it starts up but I don't want it to.

To correct this, open Control Panel, Network and select the Configuration tab. Select Windows Logon from the Primary Network Logon drop-down list then click ok. Open Control Panel, Passwords and select the Change Passwords tab. Click Change Windows Password. Enter the old password (if any) and leave the new password fields blank then click ok.

12 Windows tries to access the floppy drive when it starts or when I launch an application.

To prevent this, try the following steps. Check your system for viruses. Delete the contents of the Recent subfolder

of Windows. Go to Start, Run and type regedit.exe to access the Registry Editor. Open Hkey_Current_User\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer. Now select the folder RunMRU and delete all the values except (Default).

Open Control Panel, double-click System, select Device Manager, expand Disk Drives and delete the Generic floppy disk entry then restart Windows.

13 The registered username and company name stored in the Registry are incorrect. How do I change them?

Start the Registry Editor and open Hkey_Local_Machine\Software\Microsoft\Windows. Select the folder CurrentVersion. Double-click the value RegisteredOwner to

change the username. Double-click RegisteredOrganization to change the company name.

14 I've done something that made undesirable changes to the Windows Registry. Can I undo the changes?

Yes, if the changes occurred recently. Windows 98 and Me both make a backup of the Registry every day. You can restore from one of the five most recent backups by running the command 'scanreg.exe/restore'.

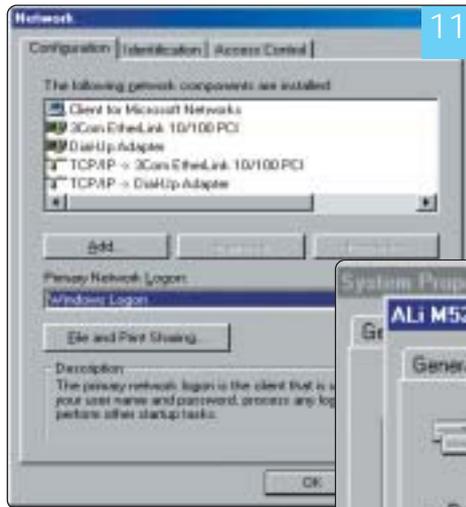
Under Windows 98 you must shut down Windows and choose Restart in MS-DOS Mode before you do this. Before making Registry changes, force a backup: click Start, Run and type scanregw.exe.

15 I installed Windows from the relevant CD but now it can't access the CD-ROM drive.

Windows 98 sometimes doesn't properly configure controllers with dual IDE channels. To remedy this, open Control Panel, System and select the Device Manager tab. Expand the Hard Disk Controllers entry, right-click the IDE Controller and click Properties then select the Settings tab. Under Dual IDE Channel Settings select Both IDE Channels Enabled then click ok.

16 Windows Explorer no longer displays thumbnail previews of image files when I select them. How do I get them back?

Some program has broken the links in the Registry to the preview software. It's hard



← To avoid typing a password at startup, use the Windows Logon

↓ Windows 98 doesn't always configure controllers properly; reset them in Device Manager

to fix manually, but running the file thumbnail.reg from the cover disc should correct the problem. Note that this fix should not be used on Windows XP.



17 When I shut down Windows the computer hangs before switching off or displaying the 'It is safe to turn off the computer' screen.

There are many possible reasons why Windows may hang during shutdown so we can't advise a solution. Point your browser to <http://support.microsoft.com> and click on Knowledge Base Article ID Number Search. For Windows 98 navigate to the article 202633; for Windows 98 SE it's 238096; while Me's article number is 273746. Follow the steps described to resolve the shutdown error.

Windows 98 SE users should also check that they have installed the Windows 98 SE Shutdown Supplement

which is available from the Microsoft site at www.microsoft.com/windows98/downloads/contents/wurecommended/s_wufeatured/win98se.

18 My computer seems to be stuck in MS-DOS Mode. After I type Exit it still reboots to MS-DOS.

This situation can occur if you have reset or reboot the computer while it is in MS-DOS Mode instead of typing the command exit. Type the command below (all on one line) and then restart the computer.

```
echo C:\Windows\win.com /wx >
C:\autoexec.bat
```



19 Does Windows XP Product Activation involve sending personal information to Microsoft?

WPA (Windows Product Activation) is a system used by Microsoft to prevent retail copies of Windows XP from being installed on more than one PC. OEM copies of XP (those that come preinstalled on a PC) don't use it. Information sent to Microsoft is simply a 'fingerprint' of the hardware and contains no data that identifies you.

A description of WPA can be found at www.licenturion.com/xp. Here you can also obtain a tool called XPIInfo that shows which items of hardware were used to fingerprint your system and which have changed since activation.

↓ Check what hardware has changed since you activated Windows XP with XPIInfo



20 I've lost the product key that came with my Windows XP CD. What can I do?

If Windows XP is installed and running it is possible to retrieve the product key. A clever Russian called Serge Kandakov has written an application called ViewKeyXP (there's a trial version of it on the cover disc) that will find and display it.

21 I'm trying to use the Recovery Console to fix a problem.

Windows won't accept the administrator password but I'm sure I've typed it correctly. Any thoughts? In certain circumstances, Windows XP may store passwords in a way that is incompatible with the Recovery Console login routine. That may be what has happened here. Microsoft has produced a fix for this. For XP Home go to www.microsoft.com/downloads/release.asp?releaseid=33290. For XP Pro go to www.microsoft.com/downloads/release.asp?releaseid=33291.

22 Windows XP unexpectedly restarts when I'm in the middle of my work. Why is it doing this?

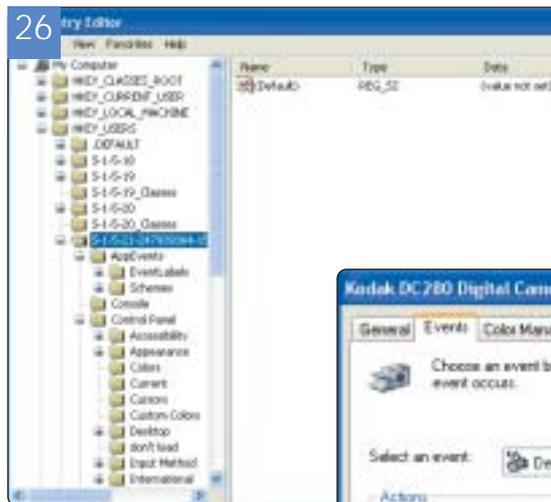
Windows XP will normally restart if an error occurs that would crash it completely. To prevent restarting, right-click My Computer and click on Properties. Select the Advanced tab, click the Settings button for Startup and Recovery and clear the checkbox under System Failure captioned Automatically restart.

23 When I start Windows XP, the Found New Hardware Wizard appears and claims to have detected my printer but it is already installed and working.

This behaviour is caused by a fault in the printer driver. To stop the wizard appearing, allow it to complete rather than clicking Cancel. If the problem recurs, obtain new printer drivers from the manufacturer.

24 I have just upgraded to Windows XP and it doesn't recognise some of my peripherals. What's the problem?

You can't use a device under Windows without drivers and drivers for earlier versions of Windows generally won't work



under Windows XP. To locate drivers, check the hardware manufacturer's site first. The website www.windowsxp-drivers.com also has links to all known Windows XP drivers. You may be lucky and manage to install drivers for Windows 2000 or Me, but using uncertified drivers can sometimes cause Windows XP to become unstable.

25 The Help and Support Center doesn't open.

You have probably used a Registry cleaner that deleted some vital information. Recreating the missing data by hand is difficult, so we've provided a fixxphelp.reg file on the cover CD to do it for you.

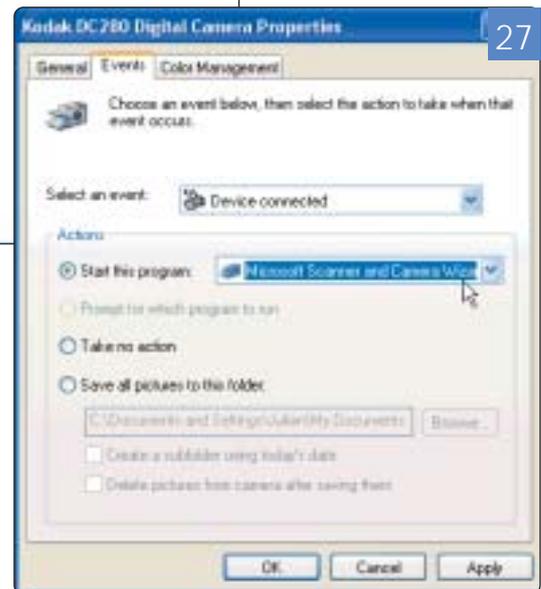
This fix will only work if Windows XP has been installed in the usual location – that is, in the C:\Windows directory. If it's installed in a different folder, you'll have to edit the REG file using Notepad before running it. Note the use of double backslashes to represent a single backslash in the pathname.

26 My Windows sounds – Start Windows, Exit and so on – don't play. I've checked that they are properly set up and they play when I test them.

An application may have damaged a Registry value. Start the Registry Editor and select the folder Hkey_Users. If the value (Default) in the righthand pane isn't of type REG_SZ with data (value not set), select (Default) then right-click and delete

← Editing the Registry may restore lost Windows sounds

↓ Specify the action to take when your digital camera is connected



it. Perform the same check on the subfolders with names starting S-1-5-21- in Hkey_Users.

27 When I connect my digital camera to my computer the Camera and Scanner Wizard no longer runs.

Start the Registry Editor and expand Hkey_Current_User\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Policies. Select the Explorer folder and check that the value NoDriveTypeAutoRun is of type Reg_Dword and has a value of 0x00000091. If it's the wrong type, delete the value, then use the fixautorun.reg file from our cover disc to recreate it.

Connect the camera. If the wizard doesn't start, open My Computer, right-click your digital camera, click Properties and select the Events tab. Select event 'Device connected' and action 'Start this program: Microsoft Scanner and Camera Wizard'. If your camera is listed as a removable drive, select the AutoPlay tab, select Pictures from the drop-down menu then select the action 'Copy pictures to a folder using the Scanner and Camera Wizard'.

28 How do I check system resource usage under Windows XP?

There's no need to worry about system resources under Windows XP. Windows 98 and Me only had five fixed tables of 16,384 elements each to keep track of resource usage, but the number of resources Windows XP can theoretically manage is more than a billion.

In practice, therefore, Windows XP resources are limited only by available disk space and memory. If you see reports of insufficient resources under Windows XP, check the Virtual Memory settings (right-click My Computer, choose Properties, then go to the Performance section under then Advanced tab) to ensure that there's no upper limit on the size of the paging file and verify that there is enough free disk space for it.



29 My mailbox is bombarded with spam. How can I avoid downloading it?

You could change to an ISP that offers spam filtering or subscribe to a service like SpamCop (www.spamcop.net). But since spam can't be identified with 100 percent accuracy, you'd still have to check periodically to ensure that no wanted emails have been caught by the spam filters. It's actually easier to do this if the filtering is done after downloading the mail to your computer.

You can't eliminate spam effectively using mail rules or sender blocking: the only way is to use a proper spam filter. The best free one we've tried is SpamPal (get it from www.spampal.org or load it up from the cover disc) but for a powerful alternative look at McAfee's SpamKiller (www.mcafee.com).

30 Is there a way to block ads and those irritating pop-up windows that appear when you visit certain websites?

As with spam, there are several ways to rid yourself of these nuisances. Personal firewalls such as ZoneAlarm Pro 3.1 (which you'll find on the cover disc) have an ad-blocking option. On the whole, though, it's easier to use a dedicated ad blocker.

If you use Internet Explorer 5.0 or 6.0 we highly recommend AdShield (www.adshield.org). It runs in the browser and blocks anything from an easily maintained list of sites. It's read-ahead cache speeds up surfing, too. To get you started, we've put a block list on the CD called adservers.txt for you to import.

31 When I add an attachment to an email in Outlook or Outlook Express, it shows the correct size. When I send the email, it appears that I've sent about twice the amount of data.



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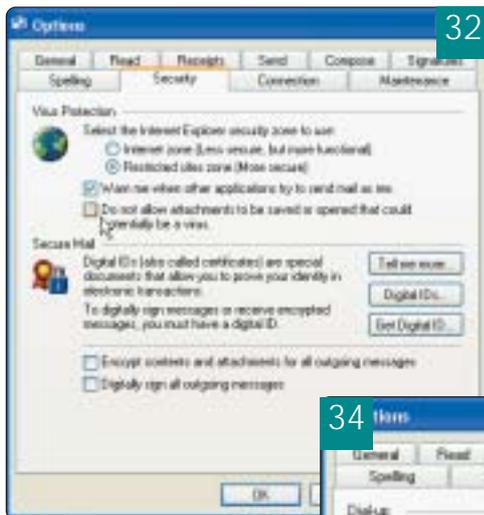
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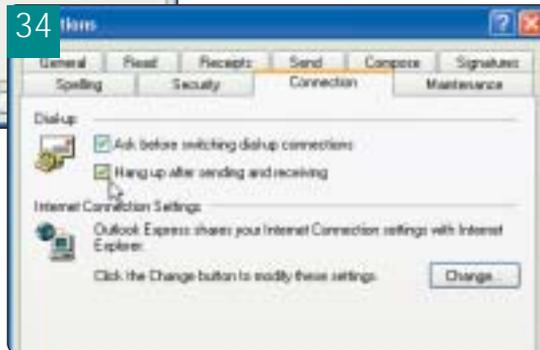
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← You must disable Outlook Express virus protection to regain access to mail attachments

↓ If Outlook Express won't hang up after sending and receiving mail, try creating a new dialup connection



34

When a file other than a text file is attached to a mail message it typically doubles in size. Internet mail was designed with plain text in mind. Non-text files must be converted to a form that uses only valid text characters and the encoding method can generate two characters for each byte.

32 Someone sent me a file as an attachment to an email but Outlook Express claims that the attachment is unsafe and has removed access to it.

For a quick solution to Outlook Express' file-hiding tricks simply click the Forward button. You will find that you are now able to access the attachment in the forwarded message.

Doing this every time might drive you mad, so for a more permanent fix click Tools, Options, select the Security tab and disable 'Do not allow attachments to be saved or opened that could potentially be a virus'. There's no harm in doing this if you use a good viruschecker that you keep up to date.

33 Spellchecking doesn't seem to work in Outlook Express. How do I fix this?

Outlook Express uses the Microsoft Word spellchecker to do its checking, so your system must have a copy of Word or Office installed. Outlook Express also needs a file named csapi3t.dll which may be missing if you're using Windows XP. If present, you'll find it in C:\Program files\Common files\Microsoft shared\Proof. If you don't have the file, get a copy from www.dll-files.com or the cover CD.

34 Outlook Express doesn't hang up after sending and receiving mail, even though I've selected the option to do so.

Try creating a new dialup connection with the same details as the old one and set Internet Explorer and Outlook Express to use this as the default connection.

35 What's the best way to back up my Outlook Express mail and settings?

Use the free utility Outlook Express Freebie Backup from www.oehelp.com.

36 My computer asks for a password when I dial the internet and the Save Password option is disabled.

For password saving to work, Microsoft Family Logon or Client for Microsoft Networks should be installed or user profiles must be enabled. If presented with a logon dialog box at start up you must not dismiss it with Esc or Cancel. Check Control Panel, Network to see whether Family Logon or the Network Client are present. If not, install them from your Windows OS disc.

37 When I try to connect to certain secure websites I receive the error Page cannot be displayed.

This problem can arise after installing Internet Explorer 6 SP1 or Windows XP SP1. To resolve it, you need to install an updated version of the file wininet.dll. To do this, download and run the file q811383.exe which you will find on the Microsoft website at www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?familyid=bbef5ea6-c4ba-4b9a-ad60-b03fbd2a1ae&displaylang=en.

38 How can I save and print out an image from a website?

Right-click on the image then select Save Picture As. Using the Save Picture dialog box, select the folder in which you would like to save the image (such as My Documents), change the name of the image file if it isn't appropriate but don't change the file type. Click Save. You can now open the saved file in an image editor such as Paint Shop Pro (www.jasc.com) to print it.

39 My firewall regularly reports intrusion attempts. How can I find out who the intruders are and put a stop to their activities?

These intrusions are carried out by wannabe hackers – usually youngsters using dialup internet accounts. If you look up the address using a site such as www.broadband-help.com/cm_diagnoserdns.asp all you'll get is the

name of the ISP modem or router they are currently dialled into.

If you log the exact date and time and have proof of their activity you could send the details to the ISP's 'Abuse' email address, but there's no evidence that service providers act on such reports. It's better to just relax and view these intruder reports as evidence that your firewall is doing the job you bought it for.



40 How can I safeguard against worm viruses?

Consider using a non-Microsoft mail client such as The Bat (www.thebat.co.uk), IncrediMail (www.incredimail.com) or Pegasus Mail (www.pmail.com). These are less of a target for virus writers. If that's too drastic a step, always use the latest version of Microsoft Outlook or Outlook Express, a good antivirus package and check Windows Update frequently for critical updates to Internet Explorer.

41 Microsoft has sent me an email containing a patch that claims to fix all known security problems in Internet Explorer. Is it genuine?

Whoever sent this patch to you, it wasn't Microsoft. You've received a copy of the W32.Gibe worm and should delete it immediately. No reputable company sends unsolicited software or patches by email. Microsoft doesn't even send out security alerts unless you've subscribed to emails. Treat with suspicion any unexpected email containing an attachment that you're exhorted to open and you'll avoid being tricked into activating a worm virus.

→ To stop Messenger spam, use a firewall

**42** A friend sent me a warning about a new virus. I thought you should know about it.

It is almost certainly a hoax. Fake virus warnings become like viruses themselves, except that it's people who spread them. Therefore, before passing on any virus warning check one of the major vendors' antivirus sites like Symantec's (www.symantec.com/avcenter/hoax.html) or Trend Micro's (www.trendmicro.com/vinfo/hoaxes/hoax.asp) to see if the alert is a genuine one.

43 I'm receiving pop-up messages headed Messenger Service, but containing advertising messages.

This is a new type of web nuisance known as Messenger Spam because it is unsolicited advertising delivered using the Windows Messenger Service. If you're receiving it, that means your computer is unprotected against internet intruders and you should be worried.

Disabling the Messenger Service (not the same thing as the Windows Messenger application, incidentally) will put a stop to the pop-ups, but it won't secure your PC against other intrusions. Our advice is to use a personal firewall such as ZoneAlarm, which is on the cover disc or, if you're using Windows XP, enable the built-in Internet Connection Firewall.

**44** Microsoft Word is playing up.

If the problem seems related to document styles or macros, locate and rename normal.dot to try default settings. For user interface problems, start Registry Editor and expand Hkey_Current_User\Software\Microsoft\Office\\Word, then select and delete the Data folder.

45 I've transferred vinyl records to CD but the quality is poor.

We suggest you go to www.delback.co.uk/lp-cdr.htm where you'll find a lot of practical advice on transferring LPs to recordable CDs. For help with the basics, such as how to connect your stereo to the PC, take a look at Clive's Audio on a PC FAQ at www.delback.co.uk/pcaudiofaq.htm.

46 When I try to capture an image from a DVD movie using Print Screen all I get is a black box.

A software-based player like PowerDVD lets you capture images, but the image quality will be poorer. Try HyperSnap-DX (www.hyperionics.com), which can take screenshots of games and capture web pages too large for the browser window.

47 How do I make a DVD movie?

Covering this topic in detail would take the entire magazine. Visit www.dvdrhelp.com or buy February 03's DVD recording guide from our *click&buy* service (see page 180 for more information).

48 I have burned a movie to Super Video CD but when I play it on the TV the quality is poor.

The quality you get depends both on the quality of the original and how much time and disk space you use rendering it to Mpeg. DVD will give higher quality, but you can still get acceptable results for home use with SVCD if you don't skimp on rendering and use a block-noise filter.

49 Why does an 800KB Jpeg image downloaded from my digital camera become 6MB when opened in my image editor?

The downloaded image has been compressed to save space on the camera's memory card. The image must be decompressed to its full size to allow editing and it's this size that the image editor is displaying.

50 I want to uninstall an application but Add/Remove Programs failed when I tried it.

Use the following method only if the Add/Remove uninstaller fails, as it's not as effective as using a proper uninstaller. Locate the program's folder, which will probably be stored within the C:\Program files folder then select and delete it. Right-click the entries referring to the program on the Start menu and select Delete. This is all you can safely do by hand.

If you're concerned about leaving references to the software in the Registry, use a tool like RegCleaner (www.jv16.org) to remove them. ■