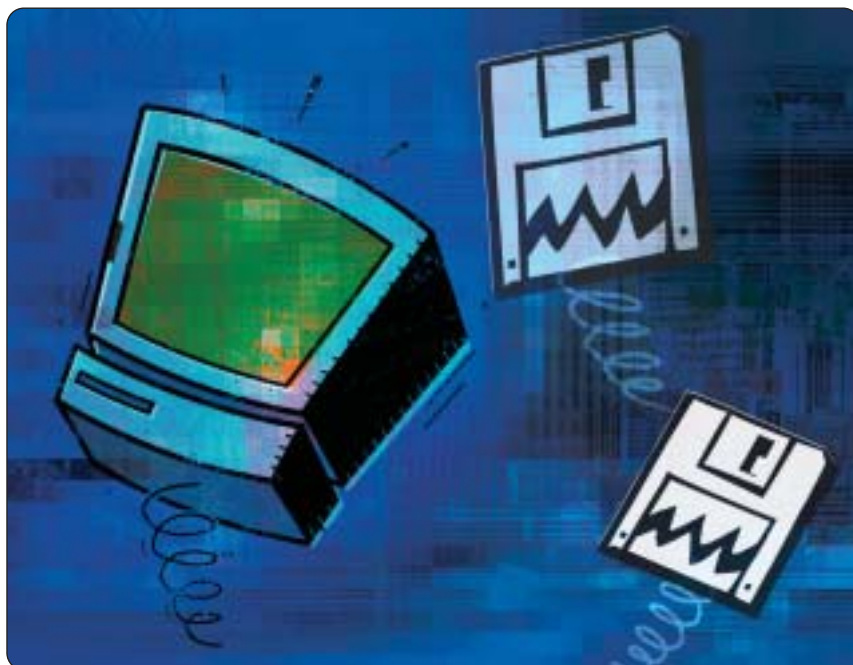# Windows ^{xp} Q&As

Learn to read and write

Q **Whenever I try to write to or format a floppy disk in Windows XP Home it says that the disk is write-protected. I replaced the floppy drive but the problem persists. Can you help?**

A First you have to establish whether this is a Windows problem or a hardware problem. Boot the system from an MS-DOS system boot disk (an old Windows 9x recovery disk will do). Then try to delete a file from the disk or create one from the A prompt. If you still have the problem, then since you've replaced the drive, it can only be that either the cable or the controller on the motherboard is faulty.

If the problem occurs only under Windows XP then you need to establish what software is preventing write access to the floppy drive. You might be using antivirus software that has an option to prevent writing to the A drive as a virus prevention measure. Unfortunately, if it isn't something as simple as that, there isn't an obvious solution. We've seen this problem before but haven't found a fix – only the suggestion that Windows XP may have a compatibility problem with some floppy disk controllers.

One user reported solving the problem by replacing the diskette drive, though it would work perfectly in another PC running Windows 98. So perhaps you were just unlucky enough to replace your drive with another of a type that XP doesn't like.

Command and conquer

Q **When I open a command prompt, the window isn't themed even though my other applications are. Is there a way to fix this?**

A Unfortunately not. Command prompt windows run under something called the 'client server runtime system' which cannot be themed.

Open for business

Q **When I open Windows Explorer the first folder I see is the desktop, followed by My Documents and all its subdirectories. I would prefer Explorer to open showing the C drive root directory. The only way to do this seems to be to open My Computer, then right-click the C drive and click Explore. I'm sure it opened showing the C drive when I first got the PC so I suppose I've changed something. How can I change it back?**

A We don't think the usual ways of opening Explorer (via the Programs menu, the QuickLaunch toolbar icon or running explorer.exe) would ever have shown the C drive root directory as

← You can have Windows Explorer open showing your C drive folder instead of the desktop

Explorer is supposed to start up showing the desktop by default. This is because users are supposed to keep all their files under the My Documents folder, which is unique for each user.
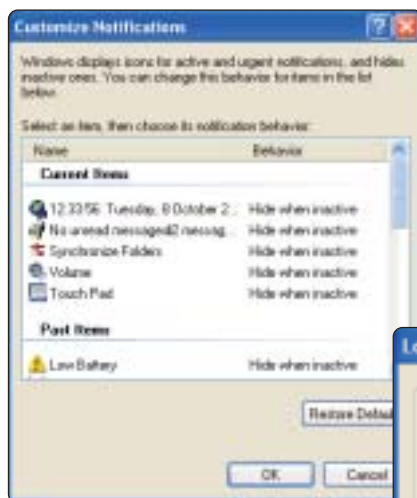
The other directories on the hard disk are supposed to be managed by the system – for example, when you add or remove an application – and so there is no good reason for users to explore there. But this method of working is not to the taste of many experienced users who are used to seeing the C drive and creating their own folders under it, nor those who just like tinkering with their PC setup.

It's possible to override the default behaviour, though, by modifying the shortcuts that you use to start Explorer so that they specify the drive or folder you want to be open when it starts.

To do this, right-click the shortcut and click Properties. Select the Shortcut tab. In the Target field, which probably just reads '%systemroot%\explorer.exe' at the moment, append a space followed by '/e,C:\' (without the quotes and with no spaces between any of the characters.) Then click Apply.
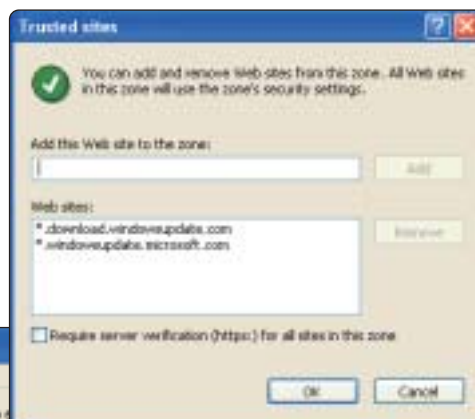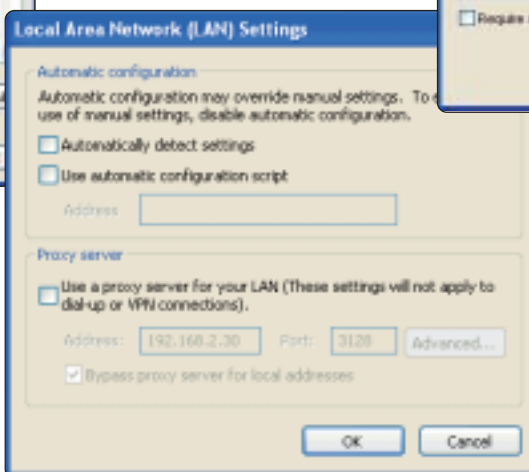
You should now find that launching Explorer from this shortcut will result in it opening showing the C drive root folder expanded instead of the desktop.

← Use the Past Items list to change the behaviour of icons for programs that aren't currently running

↓→ If you're having trouble with Windows Update, try disabling the proxy server settings. Alternatively, try adding Windows Update to the list of trusted sites

Lost icon

My wife and I both use Windows XP and Internet Explorer 6.0 and have both had trouble disconnecting from the internet. I finally discovered the icon that looks like two computer monitors in the notification area. When right-clicked it allows me to select Disconnect. But my wife's computer doesn't have this icon. She is usually given a choice of 'Stay connected' or 'Disconnect now' when she closes a program but, on occasions, this choice doesn't appear and she has to pull the modem lead.

When I right-click the Taskbar of my computer and click Properties, Customize, I see two lists of icons: Current Items and Past Items. My two monitors icon appears under Past Items. What is the difference between these two lists and can I add this icon to my wife's computer?

Your wife's PC probably doesn't have the option to display an icon when connected to the internet enabled. To display the icon, click on Start, Connect to and your ISP's name. When the Connect dialog box appears, click Properties, then tick 'Show icon in notification area when connected' and close the Properties box. If the icon still doesn't appear reliably, try following the advice we gave for the disappearing icon problem in the August 02 issue of Helpline (page 176).

The difference between the two icons, Current Items and Past Items, is that Current Items are icons for programs or services that are currently running on the system. Past Items are icons of programs that have run but are now closed. By changing the option to hide or show past items you can change how a program's icon will appear the next time the program is run.

Keep on running

Windows Update has stopped working on my PC running Windows XP. It scans for the latest updates but when I press the Install button nothing happens. The Windows Update Log has no errors. I've tried changing my Internet Explorer settings, downloading the latest Windows Scripting and cleaned out my cache. Does anyone know how to fix it?

Many people appear to experience problems with Windows Update, but we've yet to find a definitive solution for them. Here are some of the things that have been tried, though there's no guarantee that they'll work for you. First of all, Windows Update uses Java rather than Windows Scripting, so to be certain you have all the necessary components make sure you have the latest Java runtime.

Proxy servers are a common cause of trouble with Windows Update so if you have configured Internet Explorer to use one, try disabling it. From Control Panel open Internet Properties, select the Connections tab, click on the entry for your connection and choose Settings. Untick all the checkboxes on the Settings dialog box then click ok. (If you're using a network to access the internet click LAN Settings instead.)

Another suggestion is that the problem is caused by security settings. From Internet Explorer click Tools, Internet Options, select the Advanced tab and scroll down to Security. You'll need to clear the checkbox beside 'Check for server certificate revocation'.

The following suggestion may reduce the security of your browser, so undo the changes if they have no effect. Select the Security tab then click on Trusted sites. Clear 'Require server verification (https://) for all sites in this zone'. Then add the following two addresses to the list of sites: '*.windowsupdate.microsoft.com' and '*.download.windowsupdate.com'.

There's an article in the Microsoft Knowledge Base: 'Problems When Viewing or Downloading From Windows Update', which may be some help. Its number is Q193385 and you can read it at http://support.microsoft.com. ■