PC Advisor is a natural place to turn when you've got a thorny computing problem. For our part, we find that similar queries come up time and again – so we asked our very own troubleshooter, Julian Moss, to compile a cut-out-and-keep Q&A of the most commonly asked questions

01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50

TOP 50 HELPLINE QUERIES
ANSWERED

Computers may be as much a part of our everyday lives as the TV and the microwave, but they're a long way from being as trouble-free. We know this more than anyone because, each month, hundreds of readers contact *PC Advisor* asking for help with technical matters.

Month after month, the same Helpline questions crop up again and again. Some are perennial favourites, like problems with inaccurate system clocks or concerns over whether that new computer really has the processor you paid for. Others come and go with the release of new software and hardware – a current favourite is the spellchecker not working in Outlook Express under Windows XP.

We've collected 50 of the questions currently asked most frequently and provide the answers in this handy troubleshooting guide. Cut it out and keep it by your PC because you never know when you'll need it.

If you don't find what you're looking for in these pages, try our online Helproom forum, which has a searchable database of successfully answered queries. We've recently expanded this section of the site, giving you an even better chance of finding the answer you need. If you don't find the answer (unlikely, with over 100,000 postings in the database) pose your question in the Helproom forum where there's a good chance it will be seen by someone who knows the solution. If you haven't visited the site recently, give it a try. Registration is free: simply log on to www.pcadvisor.co.uk.

General gremlins

01 PROBLEM **You want to change some Bios settings but the Bios wants a password and you don't know it.**
01 SOLUTION Try a 'backdoor' password. With an Award Bios try (in upper- and lowercase): award sw, award_sw, award?sw, biostar. With an AMI Bios try ami, a.m.i., aaammmiii, bios, password. For a Phoenix Bios try phoenix, cmos, bios. For more suggestions see www.labmice.net/articles/bios_hack.htm.

02 PROBLEM **You run a system information tool on your new PC and it tells you the processor is inferior to the one you specified.**
02 SOLUTION Unless your information tool is as new as your PC it may not be able to correctly identify the new processor. If the computer displays the correct CPU type on the screen at startup, it's probably right. For an unbiased second opinion download the latest version of Cpu-Z from www.cpuid.com (see opposite, top right) or access it from this month's cover disc.

03 PROBLEM **A system monitor tells you there is no free memory and the processor is often 100 percent used. You are not sure if you need a more powerful PC.**
03 SOLUTION If you're content with the performance of your PC, don't bother upgrading the system. Windows improves performance by making use of all available memory, so it's usual for no memory to be free (see how much RAM is available by clicking on the Performance tab in the Windows Task Manager –

as shown below, left). A faster processor will speed up computing-intensive processes but it will make little difference to tasks that are dependent on disk speed, internet access times or you, the user.

04 PROBLEM **You have a new printer. It's connected to the printer port via a T-Switch so you can use another device, but problems occur and printouts are corrupted.**
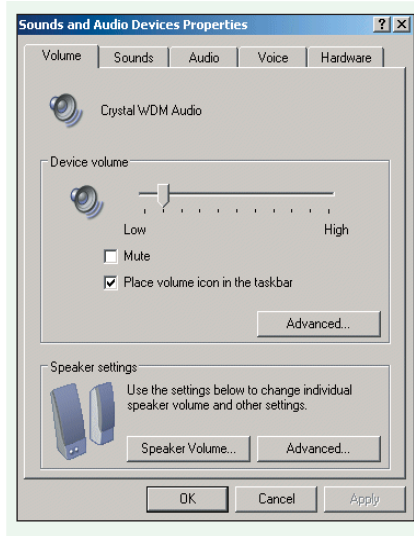**04 SOLUTION** Don't use a T-Switch. The drivers for modern printers like to be in constant communication with them and the presence of another device on the same parallel port usually causes trouble. Buy an add-in parallel port so that each device can have its own permanent connection.

05 PROBLEM **You have added a second hard disk to your PC setup. It has become D, making your old D partition E. This is causing some applications to display errors.**
05 SOLUTION You created a primary partition; these are always allocated drive letters before extended partitions. When running Fdisk on a second drive make the

↓ Don't worry too much about what performance monitors say

↑ Use Cpu-Z for reliable identification of your computer's processor

← If there's no sound from the speakers, check the Windows volume settings

Sounds and Audio Devices Properties

whole disk an extended DOS partition then create one or more logical DOS drives within it. These drives will be given letters after your existing ones.

06 PROBLEM You can't get any sound from your speakers.
06 SOLUTION Check the following: speaker connections, speaker power supply, Windows volume control settings, Multimedia (or Sounds and Audio Device as shown above) Properties in Control Panel, sound card drivers in Device Manager.

07 PROBLEM You can hear computer-generated sounds, but you can't play audio CDs.
07 SOLUTION Open the volume controls and check that the CD Audio slider on Master Out isn't turned down or muted. Check inside the PC to see whether the thin cable between the CD drive and the sound card is connected.

08 PROBLEM You archived a number of files to CD-RW media. When you try to read them there is a lot of drive activity followed by a read error.
08 SOLUTION Bad luck – there are no end-user recovery tools for rewritable CD media. A recovery service like Ontrack (www.ontrack.co.uk) might get the data back, but that's an expensive solution. In future, make two archive copies of any file before you delete the original.

09 PROBLEM Your PC has begun crashing periodically. There is no obvious pattern to the crashes.

09 SOLUTION If a PC crashes due to a software problem, the crashes are usually predictable and even reproducible. Random crashes are generally caused by overheating, faulty memory or other failing hardware. Check that the fan(s) are working: it isn't unusual for them to fail. Try an overnight run of a good memory tester, such as Memtest86 from www.memtest86.com, which is also available on this month's cover disc.

10 PROBLEM Your PC clock runs slow.
10 SOLUTION PC clocks aren't inherently accurate and the or gain of a few seconds a day isn't unusual. If you're running Windows 95, 98 or Me and time loss is corrected when you reboot, disabling Power Management in Start, Settings, Control Panel may solve the problem. If you're running Windows NT, 2000 or XP, or the time loss isn't corrected on reboot, the system clock is slow. If the PC is old and kept good time until recently the backup battery may need replacing. If not, a utility such as Get Global Time from www.get-time.org or this month's cover disc, or the Time service in Windows XP, should help keep it accurate.

11 PROBLEM You've upgraded to a new version of Windows and there's no driver for your old printer. Windows won't accept the old driver.
11 SOLUTION Check the manual to see if your printer can emulate a common generic printer type like HP LaserJet, HP DeskJet or IBM Proprinter. If so, enable the emulation mode and install a driver for the emulated printer. You may lose some features that you had when the correct driver was used, but it's better than nothing.

Windows woes
12 PROBLEM The thumbnail preview of image files in Explorer folders has stopped working.
12 SOLUTION You need to reinstate some key values in the Registry. This is hard to do manually, so double-click the file thumbnail.reg from this month's cover disc, which will merge in the required values.

TOP HELPLINE TIPS

Fed up with your PC's minute hard disk capacity, but don't want to update your system? Our handy hints will solve this and other niggling problems.

13 Increase disk size on your old PC
To add a new hard drive to an older PC that can't handle drives larger than 8GB, use an add-in Ultra ATA controller. This has its own Bios which enables the PC to use the whole drive and benefit from its higher performance.

14 Turn back time
To restore an earlier Registry backup under Windows 98 or Me, boot to a command prompt (you can use the Emergency Recovery Disk for this) and type Scanreg. Use the menus to restore one of the Registry backups Windows makes each day. Under Windows XP click Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools, System Restore.

15 Personalise your fonts
To change the font used by default when you create a new document in Microsoft Word, open a new document and click on Format, Font. Select the font, size and style you want, then click Default. Click Yes when Word warns that this change will affect all new documents.

16 Hang on to Word settings
To preserve Word macros and default document settings when moving to a new computer or making a fresh installation, back up normal.dot from your Templates folder and copy it over the default one on the new system.

17 Back up on the web
To back up your internet connection settings in Windows 95, 98 and Me, open the Dial-Up Networking folder in My Computer and drag the connection icon – using the right mouse button – to your backup location, then select Copy here. The Dial-Up Networking file you create can be copied to another DUN folder to recreate the connection. Before using it, open its properties and reselect the modem.

18 Get organised

To organise your Start menu so that the submenus are at the top and everything is listed in alphabetical order, right-click the menu and select Sort by Name. This tip works for your Internet Explorer Favorites menu, too.
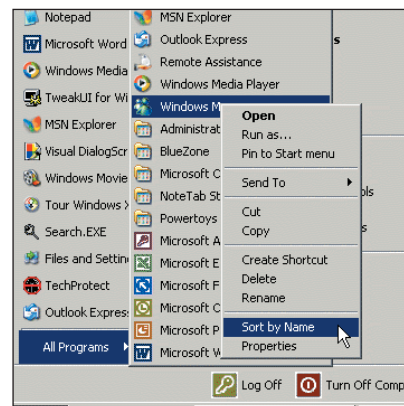
↑ Sort your Start menu into alphabetical order

19 PROBLEM After installing a new graphics program, image files always open in it. You'd prefer them to open in the program you used before.
19 SOLUTION Reinstall the program you want to use. This will reinstate the necessary Registry associations.

20 PROBLEM You've installed Windows XP and it halts on the 'It is safe to turn off the computer at shutdown' screen instead of actually switching off.
20 SOLUTION In Control Panel open Power Options and select the APM tab (as shown right). If it shows that your computer supports APM, enable it. This allows Windows to turn off the PC after shutdown.

21 PROBLEM You're trying to run ScanDisk or defrag your hard disk but the tasks won't work due to changes to the disk.
21 SOLUTION Shut down every program, including all System Tray applications, and disable the screensaver before starting. If that doesn't do the trick, run ScanDisk or Defrag after starting Windows in Safe Mode.

22 PROBLEM You have uninstalled an application from your computer, but there is still an entry for it in the Add/Remove Programs list.

22 SOLUTION Using the Registry Editor, open Hkey_Local_Machine, Software, Microsoft, Windows, CurrentVersion, Uninstall. A folder in Uninstall should contain a value named DisplayName containing the name of the application. Delete that folder. For an easier way to do this, use Tweak UI, available from www.microsoft.com/windowsme/guide/tweakui.exe, or our Download Directory at www.pcadvisor.co.uk.
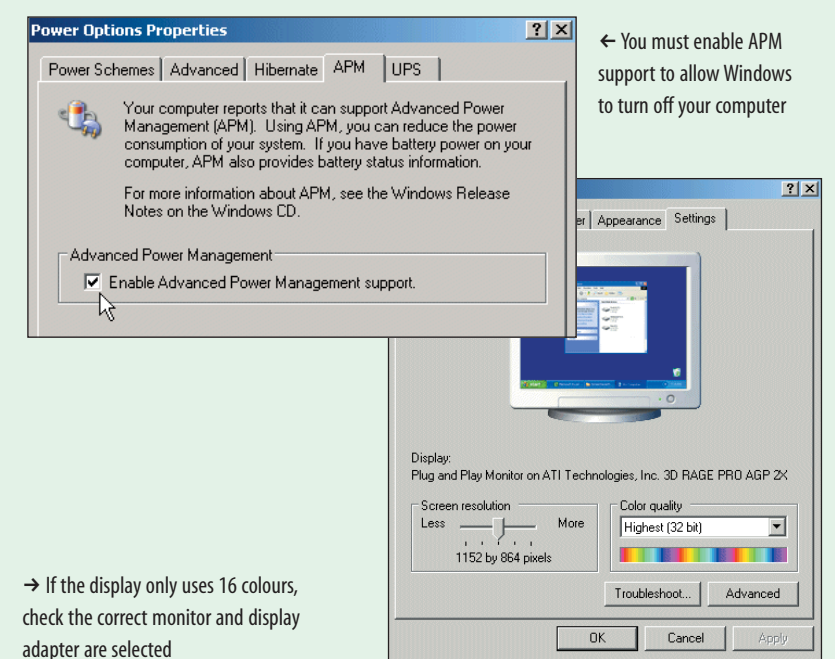
23 PROBLEM Windows requires a password when it starts up.
23 SOLUTION Open Control Panel, Network and ensure that Windows Logon is selected in the drop-down list for Primary Network Logon. If it still asks for a password, open Control Panel, Passwords and set the password to blank.

24 PROBLEM Windows often hangs with a blue screen error just as the desktop is displayed at startup.
24 SOLUTION Try disabling the Windows Startup sound from Control Panel, Sounds. If that doesn't cure it the culprit is probably one of your System Tray applications. Find out which one by a process of elimination.

25 PROBLEM Your computer display is only using 16 colours and you can't change it from this setting.

Power Options Properties

← You must enable APM support to allow Windows to turn off your computer

25 SOLUTION Right-click the desktop, select Properties, then Settings (as shown below, right). Check that the monitor and display adapter shown match your hardware. If either or both of these is wrong, click Advanced, select the appropriate tab, then click Update Driver to load the correct driver for the display device.

26 PROBLEM CDs don't start automatically when you insert them.
26 SOLUTION Check your CD-ROM drive is using a Windows driver rather than a DOS one. Check in the Windows driver properties to see that Auto insert notification is selected. Using Regedit, open Hkey_Current_User, Software, Microsoft, Windows, CurrentVersion, Policies, Explorer and check that the value NoDriveTypeAutoRun is 95 00 00 00 (91 for Windows XP.) In Explorer's Folder Options, check the entry for the AudioCD file type. It should have an entry named Play, which is selected by default and runs a multimedia playback application such as Windows Media Player.

27 PROBLEM When your PC plays sound, it seems to stutter.
27 SOLUTION Your processor may be overworked, so try disabling your virus scanner and other system utilities. Also try reducing graphics acceleration (from Display Properties, Settings, Advanced).

→ If the display only uses 16 colours, check the correct monitor and display adapter are selected
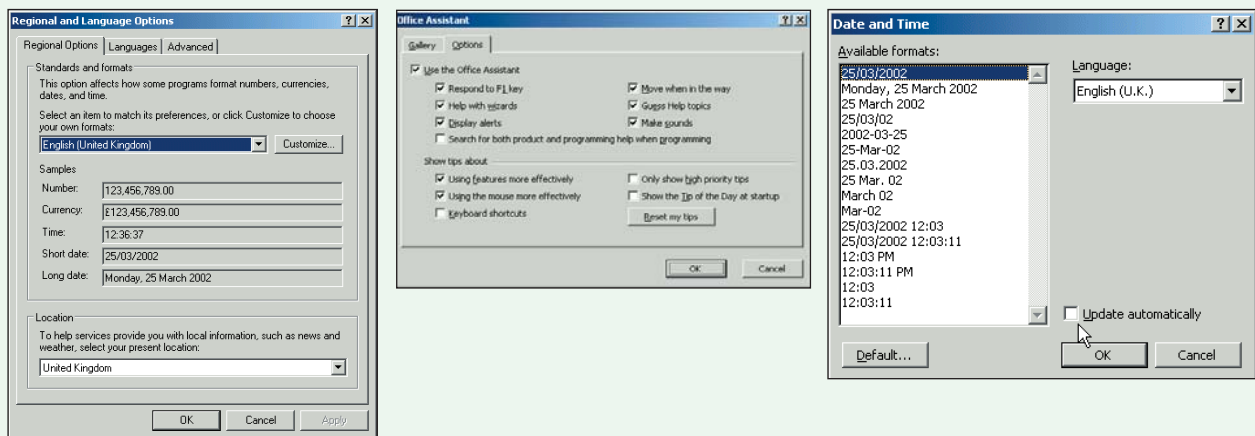
↑ Control Panel's Regional Settings tell applications what nationality to assume

↑ To silence the Office Assistant, right-click the pesky object and change its Options

↑ To preserve a Word document's date, don't select Update automatically

Application angst

28 PROBLEM When you have several applications open at once, you receive a message saying the system is out of memory or out of resources.
28 SOLUTION You must be running Windows 95, 98 or Me, which allocate a fixed amount of space for certain types of memory object regardless of how much memory your computer has. You can either close any files and applications you aren't actually working on or upgrade to XP, which has better memory management.

29 PROBLEM Your application defaults to American English for dates, currency and spellchecking whenever it starts up.
29 SOLUTION Check the Regional Settings in Control Panel and ensure that the correct UK settings are in force (shown above, far left).

30 PROBLEM The Microsoft Office Assistant that always pops up when you don't need it irritates you.
30 SOLUTION Show the Office Assistant from the Help menu (if it isn't already present), then right-click it and select Options (shown above, centre). Clear the checkbox beside Use the Office Assistant.

31 PROBLEM The date in a Microsoft Word document changes to today's date when you load it, so you can't reprint it with the original date.
31 SOLUTION When using Insert, Date and Time, don't check Update Automatically (shown above, far right). When using

Insert, Field, Date and Time, choose an appropriate field type, such as the date the document was created or last saved.

32 PROBLEM Your hard disk is rapidly filling up with scanned image files. Your scanner software complains of insufficient memory.
32 SOLUTION Try scanning at a lower resolution. Halving the resolution reduces file size by a factor of four. You could also save images as Jpegs, which offers varying levels of compression, although this is accompanied by reduced image quality.

33 PROBLEM You opened an infected Word document and now your computer has a virus. You can't seem to get rid of it.
33 SOLUTION A good antivirus program should solve this problem. If not, search for and delete all copies of normal.dot. Next time you start Word, it will create a clean default version of the file.

34 Look for Office documents elsewhere

To change the list of places to look for Office documents (the row of icons on the left of the Open File dialog box) use the WOPR Place Bar Customizer from www.wopr.com. There is also a link on this month's cover disc.

→ Yes, you can change the list of places to look for Office documents

35 PROBLEM Someone sent you a file in a format that Windows doesn't know how to open. You need to be able to read the file.
35 SOLUTION Your computer doesn't have a copy of the application that created the file. See if a package like QuickView Plus is able to display it. If not, you will have to either obtain a copy of the application the sender used to create the file. Alternatively, ask them to resend the file in a format your own software supports.
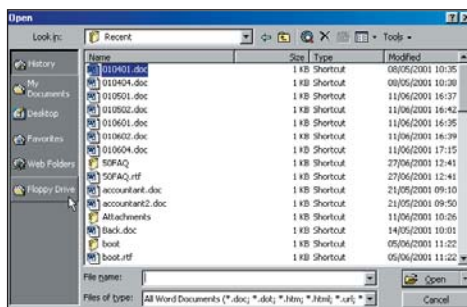
36 PROBLEM After you installed a software utility your computer crashes more often.
36 SOLUTION Uninstall the software you recently installed and see if that solves the problem. Security and monitoring tools are common causes of software conflicts. If you find this is the case, see if the vendor has a fix for the problem. Let us know, too, so we can alert other readers to the existence of the conflict.

Internet iniquities

37 PROBLEM In Windows XP, you receive an error when you try to spellcheck a mail message in Outlook Express.
37 SOLUTION Spellchecking only works in Outlook Express if you have a recent version of Microsoft Office installed on your system. Even if you do, it may not work in XP because a vital file is missing. Get a copy of csapi3t1.dll from this month's cover disc and put it in the folder Program Files\Common Files\Microsoft Shared\Proof.

38 PROBLEM An ISP has customised your copy of Internet Explorer, but you'd prefer the 'vanilla' version.
38 SOLUTION Click Start, Run, type 'rundll32.exe iedkcs32.dll,Clear' then click ok and restart Internet Explorer. Alternatively, you could try using Internet Explorer Personalizer, a free utility from http://accesscodes.hypermart.net, which is also available on this month's cover disc.

39 PROBLEM The titlebar of Outlook Express has been customised by an ISP. You want to remove the customisation.
39 SOLUTION Start the Registry Editor, then open the folders: Hkey_Current_User, Identities, { id-number }, Software, Microsoft, Outlook Express, 5.0. In the righthand pane, double-click the value named WindowTitle and edit the text. Or try Outlook Express 5.0 Tweak'r (as shown below), which is available from http://accesscodes.hypermart.net or this month's cover disc. (This works on later versions of Outlook Express, too.)

40 PROBLEM You want to change the Internet Explorer startup page but the necessary buttons are disabled.

← Use Outlook Express 5.0's Tweak'r utility to customise your copy of Outlook Express
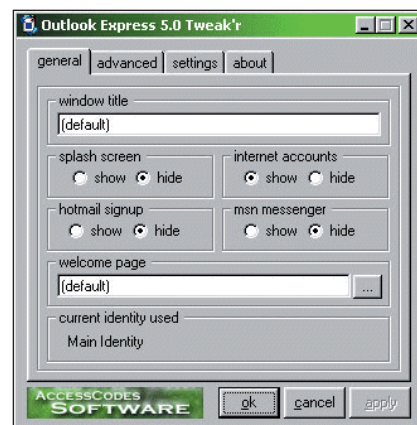
Search PC Advisor's online Helpline

The monthly *Helpline* section of *PC Advisor* contains an indispensable set of answers to common questions, regarding all aspects of PC software. Topics range from general Windows issues to using specific applications. It covers all types of PC hardware, including system components and peripherals.

Alternatively, you can ask for help from one of the visitors in our online forums. Sign up as a registered user (which is free) and then browse to one of the Discussion Forums. In the Helproom your first stop should be the searchable database of frequently asked and successfully answered queries. With over 100,000 postings, you'll almost certainly find the answer you need in this archive of queries, simply by entering a couple of keywords.

If our online database can't solve your problem try posting a question in our support forum, where more than 100 queries are answered every day. The forum is manned by our team of Helproom angels who are ready and willing to lend a hand with anything from system crashes to virus alerts. Don't let the gremlins get you down – check out our Helproom instead.

www.pcadvisor.co.uk/registered

40 SOLUTION Start the Registry Editor, then open the folders Hkey_Current_User, Software, Policies, Microsoft, Internet Explorer, Control Panel. Double-click the value named HomePage in the righthand pane and change it to all zeroes.

41 PROBLEM You want to disable Content Advisor or change its settings but you've forgotten the password.
41 SOLUTION Start Registry Editor, then open Hkey_Local_Machine, Software, Microsoft, Windows, Current Version, Policies. Select the Ratings folder, then look for a value named Key and delete it. This will set the Content Advisor password to blank.

42 PROBLEM There's a very large message in your ISP mailbox. You don't want to spend hours downloading it, but you can't get at your other mail until you do.
42 SOLUTION If your ISP provides a web-based mail interface use this to preview and delete the unwanted

message. If it doesn't, use the one at Twigger (www.twigger.co.uk, or access it from this month's cover disc) instead. Alternatively, create a message rule that leaves messages above a certain size on the server or deletes them.

43 PROBLEM When you try to send and receive email you often receive an error message saying that the connection to the server has failed.
43 SOLUTION If your web connection is still up when this occurs, a likely culprit is firewall software or an antivirus package that filters email. Try disabling the protection you use to see if this eliminates the error.

44 PROBLEM You've cancelled your account with an ISP and now want to uninstall the ISP software.
44 SOLUTION All you need to do is to remove the connection details. Under Windows 95, 98 and Me, open My Computer, Dial-Up Networking and then delete the ISP icon. Alternatively, you can open Control Panel, Internet Properties, select Connections, highlight the ISP and click Remove.

← Only TCP/IP is needed to access the internet
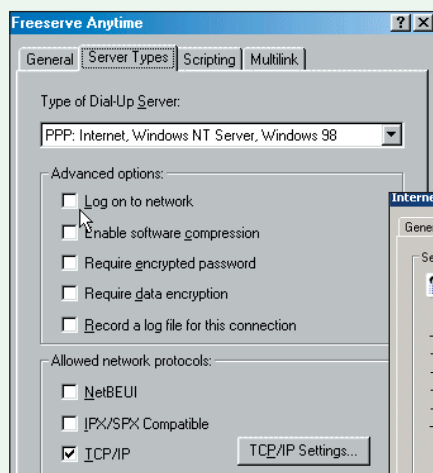
→ Too high a privacy level can stop Internet Explorer from remembering passwords by blocking cookies
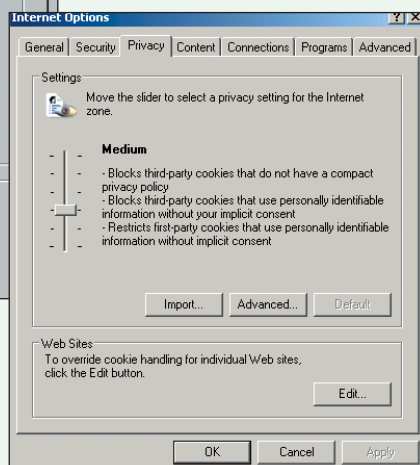
45 PROBLEM Whenever you try to access sites on the internet you receive a message saying 'The page cannot be displayed' or 'Cannot find server'.
45 SOLUTION If this occurs irregularly it may be an ISP problem. Firewall software like ZoneAlarm could also be interfering with the connection. Try disabling or uninstalling it temporarily.

Use System File Checker to restore the correct wsock32.dll to your Windows System folder and check that no other copies of this file are present. If there's a Hosts file in your Windows folder, delete it. Disable Automatic settings and Proxy Server in your ISP connection settings. Check the properties of the TCP/IP protocol for your dialup adapter and ensure that 'Obtain DNS address automatically' is selected.

46 PROBLEM It takes more than a minute to establish a connection each time you log on to the internet.
46 SOLUTION If most of this waiting occurs after the hissing and warbling noises have finished coming from your modem (assuming you haven't silenced it) then the problem is due to you having unnecessary network protocols selected. Open the properties for your ISP connection, select Server Types and ensure that all the checkboxes except TCP/IP are deselected (as shown above left).

47 PROBLEM Internet Explorer doesn't remember the usernames and passwords of websites you visit, even though you ticked a box to ask it to.
47 SOLUTION Personal information like this is stored in cookies, so either you've been deleting cookies or you've told your web browser not to accept them. Use the Privacy tab of Internet Options (as shown above, right) to select a lower privacy level or to override cookie handling for the sites you wish to remember your personal details.

48 PROBLEM You have set up Internet Connection Sharing on your home network and want to be able to close the connection from the computer that doesn't have the modem.
48 SOLUTION Internet Connection Sharing was designed to close the connection after a period of inactivity. To disconnect manually from a remote computer, use Twiga Remote Disconnection Utility (www.twiga.fsbusiness.co.uk), which is available from this month's cover disc.

49 PROBLEM Windows won't remember your internet access password.
49 SOLUTION First of all, don't hit Esc when the password dialog box appears at startup. You can avoid being prompted for a password by opening Control Panel, Passwords and changing the password to blank.

It's possible the <username>.pwl file in the Windows folder is corrupt: try deleting it. Use Regedit to inspect Hkey_Local_Machine, Software, Microsoft, Windows, CurrentVersion, Policies, Network. The value of DisablePwdCaching, if present, should be zero.

50 PROBLEM You have a new computer and want to transfer to it all the emails stored in Outlook Express on the old system.
50 SOLUTION First, determine the location at which the messages are stored (do this by going to Tools, Options, Maintenance, Store Folder). Once you've done this copy the folder to a suitable backup medium such as a zip disk. Then just transfer the copy to the new computer, where you can import them into your new Outlook Express (go to File, Import Messages.) ■

ON THE COVER DISC

Glossary: technical jargon explained

It's easy to get confused with all the jargon and acronyms used in the world of computing. Here at *PC Advisor* we aim to demystify the technical terms and talk to you in plain English, so if you can't tell your CPU from your PCI, then check out our searchable glossary, which is featured on the cover disc every month. It covers everything from software and hardware to networking and the web and is arranged alphabetically so you will be able to find the term you are looking for quickly.