



Steve Maurer Publications Newsletter

Computer, Software, and Internet Tips and Tricks!

January 22, 2004

Note from the editor

“Hello” from Arkansas! Sorry for not getting this out sooner, there has been a lot of things happening around here lately, both good and not so good. I don’t want to burden you with the bad, so let us talk about the good. For example, I bought my first new computer in almost 30 years in December. Up until now I have gotten “hand me down”, used computers from friends and family.

It has been fun to take an old computer and work on it, tweak it, make it my own. But it is rather nice to get one “out of the box” and not have to do anything with it. And for the first time, I actually have the current operating system. I am now the proud owner of a PC with Windows XP Home Edition. I skipped from Windows 98SE right into the new system. I did not think I would like it, but so far it has been a very reliable system. Of course, if I do get lonesome for the old 98SE, I can use my wife’s computer, which is actually my old computer. We have them networked together so that we can share files and printers, get on the Internet at the same time and such.

I also have a real treat for you this time. After I give you a short tip on speeding up Scandisk and Defrag, I am handing over the next article to a new friend of mine, Judy Vorfeld, the WebGrammar expert. She will be discussing “homonyms”. Being from Arkansas, I thought she meant “hominy”, which is a food around here and also what we sing in the choir, but it turns out she is talking about words that sound the same. Go figure. Seriously, though, I found the article very interesting and it made me scurry to my web site to make sure everything was alright (or is it all right). Be sure to visit her web site at <http://www.webgrammar.com> .

Steve Maurer

Speeding up Scandisk and Defrag

As you know, running Scandisk and Defrag on your computer on a regular basis can often improve the performance of your machine. But you also may agree that sometimes it take a long, long, long, long time (did I mention a long time?) for these two programs to complete their tasks. At times I have even considered going on vacation while Scandisk and Defrag were running. But I have found a little trick that may just speed the process along for you. But let us take a look at these two helpful, albeit frustrating programs.

Scandisk

Scandisk is a tool that checks your hard drive for errors. It checks for incorrect filenames, file dates and a host of other file problems. It also can check for damages spots on your drive, mark them to that they are not used for files, and tries to move files from these damaged places to another, undamaged area. Scandisk can also check some removable media, such as floppy disks.

Note: If you have updated your system to Windows XP or purchased a new computer with XP already installed, you may discover that you can not find Scandisk. It has been replaced with “Error Checking”. To use error checking, use the following steps:

1. Double-click My Computer, and then right-click the hard disk drive that you want to check.
2. Click Properties, and then click Tools.
3. Under Error-checking, click Check Now.
4. Click Start.

Defragmentor tool

The Disk Defragmentor tool is used to place files on your computer back in order. A disk can become fragmented during software installations and as files are saved, modified, and deleted on your disk. Think of your computer hard drive as a large room full of filing cabinets. As each drawer in a cabinet gets full, you might start placing files in another cabinet. If you have several files for one task on your desk, you might accidentally place a file in the wrong drawer. It is still there, just not in the place it needs to be. If you are really busy, you might place a file in a cabinet that it is not to go in. When you need to find that file again, you must go through all the cabinets and drawers until you find the file you need.

The defragmentor tool is similar to someone coming in and moving all your files back to the right location in your file cabinets. If the files are fragmented on your drive, Windows must search all over the drive to find what it needs. Defragmenting will improve the speed at which your files can be found.

Speeding Up Scandisk and Defrag

So Steve, you ask, how do I speed up Scandisk and Defrag? There are actually several ways. If you are using the “Quick Launch” tool bar, as I do, closing it will help some. Closing programs that are running (the old Ctrl+Alt+Del) will shut down programs that interfere with these tasks. But by far the easiest is to boot your computer up into “Safe Mode”. You will need to get to the start up menu that gives you the boot options, including “Safe Mode”. There are several ways of doing this, depending on your system. Some are:

- Reboot your computer and hold the CTRL key down after the computer finishes it’s POST (Power On Self Test). If you get a “stuck key” error message, don’t worry. That is to be expected.
- Insert a non-bootable or blank floppy in your “A” drive before you boot up. This will cause an error message. At the message, remove the floppy and press F8, usually twice.
- On some systems pressing and holding the F8 button down during the boot (usually as you get the message “Windows is starting” or something similar) will get you to the start menu, where you can choose “Safe Mode”.

After you have started up in Safe Mode, you are now ready to run Scandisk and Defrag. After completing these tasks, reboot your computer normally and start computing!

To find out how to start Windows 98 in Safe mode, go to the following link:

<http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;EN-US;180902>

For more information on Scandisk for Windows 98 and ME go to the following link:

<http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us;287914&Product=w98>

For more information on the Defragmentor tool, go to the following address:

<http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;EN-US;286263>

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Homonym Heaven

Have you ever visited a visually attractive site and then spotted phrases such as, "If your interested in learning more about our Websight, e-mail us," or "This product comes with an unconditional guarantee. It's high quality will make you're life better!?" How about, "Body fat problems? We can help. Of coarse you need patients when it comes to reducing the access around you're waste."

You have just entered the puzzling world of homonyms (same: homo - name: nym). A homonym is a word with the same pronunciation as another but with a different meaning and origin and usually, different spelling as well. These little critters run rampant through cyberspace, especially on Websites, often turning away potential clients/customers.

Rather than rip apart people who use homonyms in their text, I want to offer some friendly help. We'll use some of the most common mistakes and offer alternatives according to Webgrammar's Style!

ALL RIGHT vs. ALRIGHT

All right: all right means okay, satisfactory, agreeable, safe, good, well.

Alright: While alright is used often in fictional dialogue, and is still preferred by some writers of journalistic and business publications, we'll merely say that it is outdated for daily use.

ITS vs. IT'S

Its: The possessive form of the pronoun *it*. NEVER written with an apostrophe. Since most possessives have apostrophes, this confuses many people.

It's: contraction of it is and it has. Examples: It's time to go ... It's been great ... It's a well-designed site.

YOUR vs. YOU'RE

Your shows ownership: it's your choice ... it's your money ... it's your website.

You're is a contraction of "you" and "are." Example: You're heading in the right direction.

Both words: "You're taking a big risk with your animated graphics."

THEIR vs. THEY'RE vs. THERE

Their: possessive form of the word "they." As with the possessive of it, you do NOT use an apostrophe for this word. You say, "Their site is colorful, crisp, and clear."

They're: Contraction of the words "they" and "are." Example: They're giving away powerful prizes.

There: at or in that place, e.g., "Now there is a sound system to die for."

All three: They're eating their hot fudge sundaes before heading over there.

PRINCIPAL vs. PRINCIPLE

Principal: first in authority; main participant; amount of a debt, investment, minus the interest, or on which interest is computed. Examples: She is a high school principal ... K. A. Simpson is a principal in the firm ... he still owes \$5,000 on the principal.

Principle: basic truth or assumption. His ethics and principles are lower than a skinny snake slithering on its stomach.

If you're a website owner who has problems with homonyms, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or just plain writing, don't be discouraged! You have a number of choices:

- Ignore the fact and hope no one notices. After all, you have a great product or service!
- Keep a good dictionary on your desk at all times, use it frequently, and guard it with your life.
- Ask a friend to proof your words. But beware! If your friend isn't tactful and you're rather sensitive, you may end up with one less friend and a hole in your heart.
- Hire a copyeditor to proof your words.

More on homonyms at <http://www.EditingAndWritingServices.com/homonyms.html>

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Judy Vorfeld (aka Webgrammar®), of Peoria, Arizona is an Internet old-timer who launched her first website in 1996. Today she offers copy editing and copy writing, Web site analysis and makeovers, as well as Web development. Find her business site at:

<http://www.EditingAndWritingServices.com>

Quote-ables

Anyone can do any amount of work provided it isn't the work he is supposed to be doing at the moment. -Robert Benchley, humorist, drama critic, and actor (1889-1945)

Cool Links

Need a bit of help with spelling, grammar, homonyms, punctuation, capitalization, etc.? Or information in the areas of writing, education, typography, academic research, or Web development? Slip on over to Judy Vorfeld's site at <http://www.webgrammar.com> . I guarantee that you will find enough great information and ideas there to keep you busy for hours! Be sure to check out the Education, Reference, and Web Building sections, as well as the "Writing Center". Great stuff, excellent resources, and a really nice lady, too.

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