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## Windows 7 Repairs Your Computer—With a Little Help From You

Once every year or so, I write a column on a topic related to maintaining the health of your computer. This column is about using the system recovery tools that are available in Windows. (All trademarks herein are the property of Microsoft.)

One of my rules of thumb is to avoid purchasing software of any kind until it has gone through at least one version change. I never buy Version 1 of anything. Version 1.1? Now you're talking. Service Pack One? Even better. I figure that by then the bugs have been exterminated.



I decided to make an exception to my usual practice when Windows 7 debuted. That was based primarily on two reasons. First, I had grown very frustrated with Windows Vista, the operating system I had on my PC at that time. Second, I was aware of the unusually thorough beta testing that Microsoft's latest operating system had been put through before it was released. Beta testers were giving the new operating system two thumbs up.

Windows 7 provides new tools that can be used to rescue a computer that has fallen ill. These tools are significantly more sophisticated than the utilities provided in Vista and in other earlier versions of Windows. The primary utilities can be accessed under the "System Recovery Options" menu.

### System Recovery

Some computers that run on Windows 7 already have their system recovery tools installed. If yours is one, there are three quick steps you must follow:

1. Remove all media from your computer. That means that you should ensure that all CDs, DVDs, thumb drives, and external memory chips have been disconnected from your system. Then restart your computer.
2. As the operating system begins its review process, press F8 every second or two. This will cause your system to boot into what is called the "Advanced Boot Options" screen. (If your computer displays the Windows logo, that means you did not press F8 soon enough. You should reboot, limber up your fingers, and try again.)
3. Once you are into the "Advanced Boot Options" screen, press "Enter" and five system recovery options will magically appear on your monitor.

On the other hand, the system recovery tools may not have been previously installed on your computer. If that is the case, you will need to retrieve your Windows 7 installation disc or a Windows system repair disc that you have created in order to access these same recovery options.

1. Insert your disc. Reboot your computer. Boot from the DVD drive by pressing any key when you are prompted to do so. Again, nimble fingers help. You will have only a few seconds within which to choose that option. If you wait too long, Windows will reboot normally and you will have to try again. If it turns out that your computer is not configured to boot from the DVD drive, you will have to enter the BIOS (the "Basic Input/Output System") on your computer and move the drive where the DVD now resides to the top of the boot order. To do that, reboot and press F2 or "Delete" during the boot-up process. If the choice of boot order is not readily apparent from the BIOS menu, check your computer's manual to determine which menu choice sets the boot order.
2. If Windows prompts you to do so, choose a language and then click "Next." Then, it is time to select the "Repair Your Computer" option. (This series of choices may vary slightly according to your Windows 7 version, or it may be slightly different if you are working from a repair disc. Follow any on-screen prompts you see, choosing the installation you would like to repair until you reach the "System Recovery Options" dialogue box described below.)

Two caveats: (1) If you are using a tablet or—as I am—a touch screen desktop system, you will probably need to install a keyboard and a mouse in order to use most of the Windows 7 system recovery tools. (2) You also may need to turn off your anti-virus application, because it might block some of the system recovery tools and prevent them from operating.

Once you have selected the "Repair Your Computer" option, your system will boot into Windows 7 and display a "System Recovery Options" dialogue box. Click "Next" and log on as either a user or an administrator. I recommend that you log on as an administrator; doing so will give you access to all of the system recovery tools that Windows 7 has to offer.

The first option—"Startup Repair"—is often the

most useful recovery tool, because it is the broadest based. If you choose this option, Windows will scan your computer looking for corrupted registry entries or damaged system files. This utility can often repair such problems on its own once it has identified them. By the way, do not be afraid. Your system may need to reboot during this process. Do not panic if a reboot occurs automatically.

“Startup Repair” cannot resolve all computer repair issues, of course, and it may be necessary to pursue other remedies. One of the best of these is what Windows 7 refers to as “System Restore”—a utility that goes back to the days of Windows Me, but that has been vastly improved in Windows 7. By the way, if your system is bootable, you can access “System Restore” from the “Start” menu. Just click “Start,” then “All Programs,” then “Accessories,” and finally, “System Tools.”

“System Restore” has probably been taking care of you without your knowing it. It uses a series of stored restore points to substitute a known reliable earlier version of your operating system when the current version balks. These restore points have been created in the background. Windows automatically creates a restore point whenever a program or a driver is installed and before Windows itself is updated; and, when none of the above has occurred within the last seven days, it creates a new restore point on its own.

To restore your system to a previous operating system version that functioned properly, choose “System Restore” from the “System Recovery Options” dialogue box, then, click “Next.” Windows will present you with a list of restore points that are available on your computer. Choose one that was created before you began having problems. (Be aware that this restoration will cause you to lose updates and applications installed after that date.) That may well resolve your problem.

### Memory Defects

It may be, on the other hand, that your problem is a defective, loose, or corroded memory chip, which can cause your system to boot erratically or to not boot at all. If your system is still capable of operating, you can run the following set of tests to find out if it is the computer’s memory that is causing the problem.

In the “System Recovery Options” dialogue box, choose “Windows Memory Diagnostic.” Click on it and your system will reboot immediately and begin automatically checking the status of your computer’s

memory. This process can take several minutes, so do not be disturbed by the passage of time. Any errors that this diagnostic utility discovers will be noted. When the utility has run its course, you will know whether your chip is good or bad. It is relatively easy to replace a bad memory chip, so rather than monkey around with a chip that has defects, you are probably better off simply replacing it if the diagnostic tells you that it is bad.

### Conclusions

There are other choices in the “System Recovery Options” menu. Space does not allow me to cover all of them here.

If any of the above seems the least bit daunting to you, there is a very attractive alternative.

In the past, I have recommended to all of you that you consider a subscription to [www.support.com](http://www.support.com) if you do not have an Information Technology Department at your beck and call. For a relatively modest flat annual fee, the so-called “solutions engineers” at [www.support.com](http://www.support.com) (all of whom are either Americans or Canadians, and all of whom have degrees in computer science or related fields) will remotely access your computer with your permission and conduct the necessary tests to diagnose and solve computer problems that emanate from a source other than the hardware itself. These technicians are literally an 800 number away and usually there is no waiting time when you call. These gifted technicians can sometimes diagnose even hardware problems.

Once again I call this superlative service to your attention. So, you can have it either way. You can either use the built-in tools that Windows 7 gives you, or you can surrender your autonomy and rely on highly trained and marvelously efficient solutions engineers to do the heavy lifting for you. Myself? I have chosen to rely on [www.support.com](http://www.support.com)—a company that is based in Northern California—for most of my computer problems that require more than a simple reboot.

See you again next month in Cyberia. **TFL**

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**Congratulations to Mike Tonsing on 14 Years of  
Contributing “The Federal Lawyer in Cyberia”**