

Don't clear the paging file on shutdown

If shutting down XP takes too long, you can tell XP not to clear your paging file when it shuts down. The paging file stores temporary files and data, but when your system shuts down, that information stays in the file.

Some people want the paging file cleared at shutdown because sensitive information such as unencrypted passwords sometimes ends up there. But if extreme security isn't a high priority, you can save yourself some time by not clearing it. (If you're on a corporate machine, check with IT before taking this step.)

To shut down XP without clearing your paging file:

1. Open the Registry Editor by typing `regedit` at a command prompt or the Run box.
2. Go to `HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\Session Manager\Memory Management`.
3. Look for the value `ClearPageFileAtShutdown`, and change it to 0.
4. Exit the Registry and reboot.

From now on, your paging file won't be cleared, and shutdowns should be faster.

Make XP more secure

Windows XP's security tools are in serious need of upgrade. A prime example is the XP firewall. It has one very serious deficiency -- it doesn't block potentially dangerous outbound connections.

The solution: Get a free firewall that does that and more. Several are worth trying, but my favorite is [Comodo Firewall Pro](#). It's the top free firewall rated by the independent [Matousec](#) testing site. In addition to offering inbound and outbound protection, it includes a Host Prevention System to stop malware from being installed in the first place.

XP doesn't include antivirus protection, so you'll of course need some kind of antivirus. Rather than using a bloated, big-name security suite stuffed with a firewall, backup software, identity protection and other modules, your better bet is to get an independent, lightweight antivirus program.



Avast keeps you safe from viruses, spyware and rootkits. [Click to view larger image.](#)

Two of the best are [Avast Antivirus Home Edition](#) and [AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition](#). In addition to viruses, AVG protects against spyware, and Avast includes protection from spyware and rootkits - but that extra protection won't weigh down your PC.

Both programs are free for home and noncommercial use, keep you safe, and take up little RAM and few system resources. What more do you need?

Modernize XP's look and feel

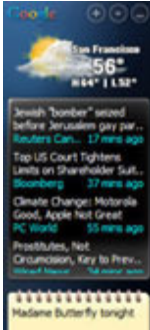
Face it, you may like XP, but it's looking very old and dated these days. It's in some very serious need of eye candy.

A great way to dress it up is with the [ObjectDock](#) from Stardock. It gives XP a Mac-like look with an animated dock that mimics the one in Mac OS X.



Give Windows XP a Mac-like dock with ObjectDock. [Click to view larger image.](#)

With it, you dock your favorite applications and folders at the bottom or side of the screen. It features a slick look, smooth animations, and much more visual appeal than XP.



A sidebar for XP. [Click to view larger image.](#)

The clunky old method of using Alt-Tab to switch between applications in XP could use some help. Yes, it will switch you -- but that's the extent of it.

You can power up Alt-Tab with [TaskSwitchXP](#) from NTWind Software. Use it, and whenever you press Alt-Tab, you'll be able to see previews of all your open windows. From here you can close and minimize applications and their groups as well.

Finally, give your XP desktop a useful sidebar like Vista's, with [Google's Desktop Sidebar](#). It's packed with gadgets, such as a weather tracker, stock checker, and news reader, and there are many other free gadgets you can download for it as well. [Yahoo Widgets](#) similarly offers you a sidebar and plenty of free widgets.