

Using Windows 98 System File Checker



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I: Introduction

Ever install or uninstall a program only to find that some other component of your system isn't functioning properly? Does your system freeze more often? Is the dreaded blue screen of death becoming a regular part of your computing experience? And how about sluggish performance? Ever wonder if there wasn't a way to check DLL, VXD, DRV, INF, OCX, COM, & HLP files for corruption and file version conflicts?

Windows System File Checker (SFC) is a utility which first appeared in Windows 98 which promises a solution to all the above through providing the following two functions:

- Scan Windows System files for corruption and version conflicts.
- Replace "bad" files with the original as found on the Windows 98 installation CD-ROM.

Important Notes: SFC should be used with caution! Although it was designed to keep your system running smoothly, if used carelessly, it has the potential of causing problems. Because of this, I STRONGLY SUGGEST taking note of the log file that SFC generates, and taking note of the folder where replaced files are backed up to, both of which are pointed out below.

Concerning DLL Error Messages: I STRONGLY SUGGEST that Windows 98 users use SFC to resolve such problems. Win95 users, on the other hand, do not have SFC and should, indeed, use "Driver Resources" as found in right sidebar.

II: SFC Settings

Open SFC as follows:

1. Click **start** | **Programs** | **Accessories** | **System Tools** | **System Information**. This opens the Microsoft System Information dialogue.
2. Click **Tools** | **System File Checker**. This opens SFC.

One will notice that SFC offers two types of action:

- Scan for altered files
- Extract one file from installation disk

But before that I suggest the following SFC settings regardless of the action one wants to perform:

1. Click the **Settings Button | Settings Tab** and select as follows:
2. **Backup file before restoring:** Select **Always backup before restoring**.

Note: SFC keeps a backup of the files it replaces in the Default backup location indicated: C:\WINDOWS\Helpdesk\SFC. This location is fine.

3. **Log file:** Select **Append to existing log**.

Note: the SFC log does not list all the files SFC scans. Rather, it simply lists those files for which SFC has performed some action. Files designated as "added" are newly installed files which SFC has added to its scan. Files marked as "updated" are files which have been over-written, for example, during the installation of a Service Pack. Here, SFC simply updates the information it keeps for the file. A file restored off the Windows 98 CD will be listed as restored, etc.... The location of the SFC log file is: C:\windows\sfclog.txt.

4. Because I like to keep abreast of system file changes I check both the boxes, **check for changed files**, and **check for deleted files**. Doing so, however, results in the flagging of a large number of files which SFC can handle internally. Because of this, one might want to check both boxes only if interested in checking out some things that most need not worry about.
5. The default settings under the **search Criteria Tab** and the **Advanced Tab** are fine
6. Click **Apply | Ok**.

III: Scanning For Altered Files

Do this every month or so to keep your system well tuned.

1. Click **start | Programs | Accessories | System Tools | System Information | Tools | System File Checker** and designate SFC Settings as described above.
2. Insert Windows 98 installation CD-ROM.
3. Select **scan for altered files** and click **start**.
4. SFC will run and one will likely be prompted any of the following:

- a. **SFC identified that the following file has CHANGED:**

When SFC identifies a Changed file, it displays the name of the file, its location, and a table listing the Date and Time, Size, and Version of the Previous and Current file. Here are my guidelines for dealing with a Changed file:

Important Note: If you follow my guidelines, you do so entirely at your own risk.

- **If the Version # of the Previous and Current files are the same:**
If the Previous file has the newer Date and Time select **Restore**. If the Current file has the newer Date and Time select **Update Verification Information**.
- **If the Version # of the Previous and Current files are different:**
If the Previous file has the higher Version # and the newer Date and Time select **Restore**. If the Current file has the higher Version # and the newer Date and Time select **Update Verification Information**.

■ **If the Version # and the Date and Time of the Previous and Current files are in conflict:**

Generally speaking, files of higher Version # should have newer Date and Time stamps. When this is not the case select **Ignore**.

Note: **Update verification information** tells SFC to use the Current file's data as the basis for future scans. Data regarding the Previous file is deleted. No system file changes are made.

When SFC identifies a file has Changed it always defaults to Update verification information. Make sure this is what you want to do before clicking OK.

Restore results in a dialogue with the following prompts: a.) Restore from, and b.) Save file in.

Restore from refers to the location of the file on the Windows 98 installation CD-ROM. By default SFC should automatically enter x:\WIN98\, where x is the CD-ROM drive. If x:\WIN98\ does not appear, type it in or point to it using the Browse function.

Save file in refers to the location of the file on your Hard Disk. By default SFC should enter the correct path. If not, one can find the file on Hard Disk by clicking **Start | Find | Files or Folders | type in the name of the file | click Find Now**. To restore click **Restore | OK | OK**.

As alluded to above, I never choose **Update verification information for all changed files**. If one selects **Update verification information for all Changed files** the data corresponding to the Current files is used as the basis for future SFC scans, and the data corresponding to the Previous files is deleted. No system files changes are made.

b. **SFC identified that the following file is CORRUPTED:**

When SFC identifies that a file is Corrupted it displays the name of the file, its location, and a table listing the Date and Time, Size, and Version of the file that is Corrupted. Here are my guidelines for dealing with a Corrupted file.

Important Note: If you follow my guidelines, you do so entirely at your own risk.

■ I always select **Restore**.

Note: **Restore** results in a dialogue with the following prompts: a.) Restore from, and b.) Save file in.

Restore from refers to the location of the file on the Windows 98 installation CD-ROM. By default SFC should automatically enter x:\WIN98\, where x is the CD-ROM drive. If x:\WIN98\ does not appear, type it in or point to it using the Browse function.

save file in refers to the location of the file on your Hard Disk. By default SFC should enter the correct path. If not, one can find the file on Hard Disk by clicking **start | Find | Files or Folders | type in the name of the file | click Find Now**. To restore click **Restore | OK | OK**.

c. **SFC identified that the following file has been DELETED:**

When SFC identifies that a file has been Deleted it displays the name of the file, its location, and a table listing the Date and Time, Size, and Version of the file that has been deleted. Here are my guidelines for dealing with a Deleted file.

Important Note: If you follow my guidelines, you do so entirely at your own risk.

- **If the file is a Windows file;** for example, if it is located in C:\Windows\System\, select **Restore**.
- **If the file is not a Windows file;** for example, if it is located in C:\Program Files\Common Files\Symantec Shared\VirusDefs\, select **update verification information**.

IV: Extracting A File From The Windows Installation Disk

Do this to resolve system crashes and the like resulting from error messages pointing to a particular Windows file.

1. Click **start | Programs | Accessories | System Tools | System Information | Tools | System File Checker** and designate SFC Settings as described above.
2. Insert the Windows 98 installation CD-ROM.
3. Select **Extract one file from installation disk**.
4. Type in the name of the file you want to replace. If easier, use the Browse function to locate the file.
5. Click **start**.
6. **Restore from** refers to the location of the file as found on the Windows 98 installation CD-ROM. By default SFC should automatically enter x:\WIN98\, where x is the CD-ROM drive. If x:\WIN98\ does not appear, type it in or point to it using the Browse function.
7. **save file in** refers to the location of the file on your Hard Disk. By default SFC should enter the correct path. If not, one can find the file on Hard Disk by clicking **start | Find | Files or Folders | type in the name of the file | click Find Now**.
8. Click **OK**.

V: Additional Reading

- [Using System File Checker](#) (thanks T)
- [Description Of The System File Checker Tool \(Sfc.exe\) \(185836\)](#) (Microsoft)
- [How The System File Checker Baseline Is Determined \(188186\)](#) (Microsoft)
- [System File Checker Is Not Included In Windows Millennium Edition \(274090\)](#) (Microsoft)
- [Description Of The Windows 2000 System File Checker \(Sfc.exe\) \(222471\)](#) (Microsoft)
- [Description Of Windows XP And Windows Server 2003 System File Checker \(Sfc.exe\) \(310747\)](#) (Microsoft)
- [Description Of The Windows File Protection Feature \(222193\)](#) (Microsoft)

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