

Solve Problems with MS-DOS Programs in Windows XP

Although MS-DOS was more visible in earlier versions of Windows, MS-DOS programs are still used in the background of Windows XP. The majority are special applications which have not yet been ported into the newer 32-bit Windows format, or old programs that are no longer supported by the manufacturer but are still useful. In practice, using MS-DOS programs in XP often leads to problems: the programs either do not run at all or crash at the most inopportune moments.



What to do when DOS programs won't work.

The Windows XP Program Compatibility Wizard

MS-DOS programs use particular functions from the operating system. If you want to test whether your old MS-DOS program will run under XP, then run the Program Compatibility Wizard. You can run the wizard as follows:

1. Click **Start > All Programs > Accessories > Program Compatibility Wizard**.
2. Select the program whose compatibility you wish to establish. Enter the path and program name, or select it from a list of all programs in Windows XP.
3. The next step is to select which version of Windows the old program is meant to run in. You can choose from: Windows 95, Windows NT 4.0 (from Service Pack 5), Windows 98/Me, and Windows 2000.
4. Select the colour depth and screen resolution for the old program that you want to run.
5. After the parameters are all configured, the program will then start up in the selected compatibility mode. Test the program. If it runs without any problems, end the program.

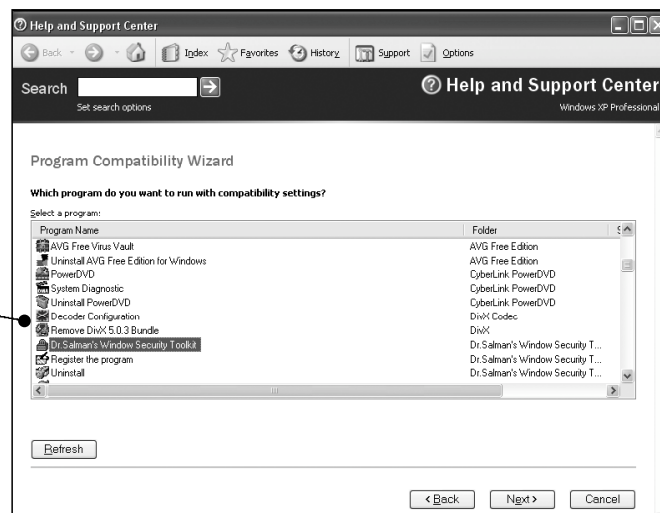


The Program Compatibility Wizard.



- Confirm that the program worked correctly with the settings, by selecting Yes, set this program to always use these compatibility settings and clicking Next.

The wizard lists all the programs that can be forced to use MS-DOS compatibility.



Using the Program Compatibility Wizard in Windows XP

The Program Compatibility Wizard is a quick and easy way to see whether older programs will run on Windows XP. If your MS-DOS programs do not work with it, then it is likely that they are completely incompatible with XP and cannot be used.



You may need to edit the MS-DOS configuration files.

Checking the Settings in AUTOEXEC.NT and CONFIG.NT

If the MS-DOS program does not work in compatibility mode, then check your settings in the AUTOEXEC.NT and CONFIG.NT files. First of all, make sure that the two files contain the line from the table on the following page. Open the AUTOEXEC.NT and CONFIG.NT files with Notepad. You can find these in the C:\Windows\System32 folder.

Some MS-DOS programs will also need their own settings to be added to the AUTOEXEC.NT and CONFIG.NT. Check the documentation that came with your program, and if this is the case, use Notepad to add the relevant settings.

AUTOEXEC.NT	CONFIG.NT
1h C:\Windows\System32\Mscdexnt.exe	Dos=high, umb
1h C:\Windows\System32\Redir	Device=C:\Windows\System32\Himem.sys
1h C:\Windows\System32\Dosx	Files=20

Configure Individual MS-DOS Program Settings



Some programs require special settings or drivers which are loaded through the AUTOEXEC.NT and CONFIG.NT files. The documentation that comes with the program will usually tell you any special configuration steps that you need to take. In this case you should not use the standard AUTOEXEC.NT and CONFIG.NT files in the C:\Windows\System32 folder, but create your own just for the particular program. You can create new configuration files as follows:

1. Double-click on My Computer, and navigate to the folder containing your old MS-DOS program.
2. Right-click on a blank space in the right-hand side of the window and choose **New > Text Document**.
3. Right-click on the new document and choose **Rename**. Call the file **AUTOEXEC.NT**
4. Double-click on the file and choose to open it in Notepad.
5. Add any specific settings for your program as specified in its documentation, then click **File > Save**, then **File > Exit**.
6. Repeat steps 2–5 for the CONFIG.NT file instead of AUTOEXEC.NT.



Create your MS-DOS configuration files.

You now need to tell your old MS-DOS program to use the new settings files that you have created rather than the

system-wide ones. To do this you have to create a shortcut as follows:



1. Right-click on a blank space on the desktop and select **New > Shortcut** from the pop-up menu.
2. Click the **Browse** button and locate your old MS-DOS program, then click **Open**.
3. Give this shortcut a name and end the process by clicking **Finish**.
4. Right-click on the shortcut that you have just created and choose **Properties** from the pop-up menu.
5. Click on the **Program** tab and click on the **Advanced** button. Enter the full path and file name to the **AUTOEXEC** and **CONFIG** files that you have just created.
6. Click **OK** to confirm the settings then **OK** again to finish.

Your MS-DOS program will now use its own settings files.

When you want to start the MS-DOS program use the new shortcut. The **AUTOEXEC** and **CONFIG** files that have been set up for it will be run. These files will have the necessary settings to run the program.



Your final solution may be to install a copy of MS-DOS.

Running MS-DOS Programs Without XP

If none of these steps have helped, then you will probably not be able to run your old MS-DOS programs on Windows XP. A lot of old MS-DOS software will expect to have full access to your PC's hardware, which Windows XP prevents. This will inevitably lead to errors, and mean that the program doesn't run properly. If this is the case, then your only option will be to install MS-DOS on a separate partition on your hard drive and use this to run the program.