

## Peripherals

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# Printer Problems

## Tips To Get Your Printer Back On Track



Printers can be your best friends. How else would you convert all those bits and bytes into something you can read in bed? Sometimes there's just no substitute for getting it down on paper. Of course, the other side of the coin is that few things are as frustrating as printer problems. Normally, when you print something it's because you need the information, on paper, right now. And, of course, printers always refuse to cooperate when you need them most. Never fear, though. With this handy guide to solving Windows 98

and Windows Me printer problems, you'll have your job hot off the presses in no time at all.

**Learn The Ropes.** Windows has several built-in tools to help you manage printers and print jobs. The first is the Printer window, which you can access by clicking Start, selecting Settings, and clicking Printers. The window that appears lists all installed printers and their statuses. Grayed-out devices are disabled or offline. If your printer is missing entirely, you probably need to reinstall it. Right-click any printer to view its context menu. In Win98, use the context menu to Pause or Resume Printing, or to Purge the entire queue. In WinMe, you can't control the queue from the context menu, but you can take the printer offline or try to reconnect it. You can also Share, Rename, or Delete the printer from either OS (operating system). If you do need to reinstall the printer, or if you just want to start from scratch, the Add Printer Wizard will walk you through the process.

A specific printer's dialog box provides you with more detailed information and control. In the Printer window, double-click the name of your printer. You can also double-click the printer icon in your System Tray when you have a job pending. The resulting dialog box lists all queued print jobs along with the status, owner, and progress of each. From the Printer menu, Pause or Clear the print queue, and in WinMe you'll check your printer's online status. Using the Document menu, you can pause or cancel individual documents.

A printer's Properties dialog box is perhaps your most valuable troubleshooting tool. To access this dialog box, right-click the printer in the Printer window and click Properties, or click Start, Settings, Printers, then double-click your printer in the Printer Window to open a dialog box and select Properties from the Printer menu. The General tab defines basic information about your printer, such as its name and description, and most importantly it

includes a button for printing a Windows test page. Other tabs control port and driver details, Sharing (if Printer Sharing is enabled), Color Management profiles, and Advanced or manufacturer-specific options.

Many companies also bundle special control and configuration tools with their driver software. Some integrate with the printer's Properties dialog box, and others install separate applications on your PC. Check your Programs listing under the Start menu and look for program groups named after your printer or manufacturer. These utilities often include enhanced troubleshooting, cleaning, and color management features.

■ **First Things First.** There are a few general troubleshooting steps you should take first, regardless of your printing problem. These will help solve most everyday printing issues.



*The Printers window helps you manage settings and statuses of all your printers.*

**Reboot.** You'll be amazed at how many printing problems simply disappear after you restart your computer. Also, reboot your printer. Sometimes, for no good reason, a printer will become wedged (it just stops communicating with the computer). Turning your printer off for a few seconds, and then back on, will usually get you going again.

**Read the printer's lights.** Doing this can provide you with very useful clues. Is the power light on? Is the paper feed light blinking? Don't be afraid to press buttons on the printer: Turn it off and on, reset the paper feed, and take the printer offline and bring it online again.

**Check your physical connections.** Is the power cord loose? Does the cable from the printer to the PC have a secure connection at both ends? Look at the connector pins on your cable. Are they bent? Try another cable if you have one. Check the print cartridges and printing mechanism. Is anything blocking the printer? Are the cartridges firmly in place?

**Print a Windows test page.** Access your printer's Properties dialog box (follow the directions given above). Select the General tab and click the Print Test Page button. If nothing else, you can find out a good deal about your printer's problem. If the test page prints, you have a problem with your application, not with Windows. Answer the questions as prompted and work through Windows' Print Troubleshooter as needed.

**Drivers.** Verify drivers on the Details tab in the Printer Properties dialog box. Make sure the installed driver corresponds with your actual printer. Check the manufacturer's Web site for updated drivers and browse the support pages on the site while you're there.

## ■ No Response

When your printer doesn't respond. First, check the power and connections to and from your printer. Is everything securely connected and turned on? Your printer cable can easily come loose from the back of your PC. For parallel port printers, fasten the thumbscrews to the back of the machine to avoid loose connections.

Also, check your port settings in Windows' Device Manager. Right-click My Computer on

your Desktop (or click System from the Windows Control Panel), click Properties, and select the Device Manager tab. Click the plus sign (+) to expand the Ports menu item and view Properties for your Printer Port (LPT1). Verify that the port is working properly and it is enabled, and that you have the appropriate drivers installed. USB (Universal Serial Bus) printer cables can also come loose, and they often conflict with other devices. Remove any USB peripherals and try again. Next, check your printer status by right-clicking its name in the Printer window. Is it online? Is it your default printer? If another printer (or even a printing program, such as a virtual fax printer or Adobe Acrobat distiller) has taken over the default role, you may be printing to the wrong place without realizing it.

**I'm getting a lot of error messages.** Update drivers or change settings. Improper or out-of-date printer drivers cause most error messages. The first thing to do is visit your printer manufacturer's Web site where you can download the most recent drivers for your combination of hardware and OS. If you receive drive space errors, clear some room on your hard drive. When Windows prints a file or document, it creates an image of the print job on your hard drive and sends that image to the printer. If there is no room, you can't print. If you see a "Not enough memory to render page" error, your job is either too big for your hardware or the PC didn't detect the printer's onboard memory correctly. Try printing a smaller job and, if that fails, remove and reinstall the printer.

"Spool32" messages are another common printer error users encounter. These messages mean a computer is having trouble **spooling** (writing printer output to a local file and then sending it to the printer queue) your print job. After updating drivers and rebooting, close all your other programs and print again. Some applications can interfere with the spooling process; use trial and error to find them. As a last resort, skip spooling completely and set your PC to send raw output directly to the printer. Open your printer's Properties dialog box, choose the Details tab, click Spool Settings, and select the Print Directly To The Printer radio button. In the Spool Data Format field, choose RAW and click OK.

### ■ Print Queue Problems



***Most printer manufacturers include special configuration utilities for Windows.***

The print queue is backed up. Then clear it out. If your printer dialog box lists a bunch of documents, but none of them prints, there are two possible problems. One is that your printer is offline or disconnected. View its status in your Printer window and check your connections. See if the printer tells you anything with its lights and screens: Is there a paper jam? Is there paper in the tray? Does the print head slide back and forth if you open the lid? If there are no obvious physical problems, check the print queue. Double-click either the printer icon in the System Tray (it usually appears when you have jobs pending) or the name of the printer in question from the Printer window. Unclog the queue by canceling the first document listed. Often, if there is an error printing a document, all jobs behind it will wait in vain. Right-click the job and select Cancel Printing. If that doesn't work, clear the entire queue. From the

Printer menu, select Purge Print Documents. If you successfully clear the queue, try printing again. If you can't clear the queue, turn off the printer, shut down your PC, turn the printer on again, and then boot up.

**A program won't print.** Try a test print from other applications first. If you can print from

other programs, or if you can print a Windows test page, then you know the problem lies with the program. Check any page or printer properties found in the menu bar (normally under File, Tools, and Settings, or something similar). You may need to change default printers for the application or modify print settings in order to print successfully. Check the software's help files (usually accessible from the Help menu or by pressing F1) for printing advice specific to the application.

## ■ Poor Printing

My printer is excruciatingly slow. The primary cause of slow printing is the printer itself. Each printer has a rated ppm (pages per minute) speed; some printers are just slower than others. But you may be able to get some relief by updating your printer's driver. In some instances, updating a driver helps your computer and printer work together more efficiently.

Make sure you have enough memory on your PC. If a slow computer is the bottleneck, upgrading your memory can help speed things up. If you happen to have a printer with upgradeable onboard memory, help yourself out by adding more.

Print resolution (measured in dpi, or dots per inch) also affects your printer's speed. Printing at a higher resolution takes more time. You can lower your dpi or quality setting (from Standard or High to Draft) by adjusting the settings in the printer's Properties dialog box or in a specific application. You'll sacrifice quality, but for many print jobs, speed takes priority.

**Printed jobs suffer from banding, inkblots, and other blemishes.** There are several things that can cause your jobs to print incorrectly. Clogged or misaligned print cartridges are the primary culprits, especially if you haven't used your printer in awhile. Most printers include software utilities that let you clean and align cartridges and print heads. You can usually access these utilities from an Advanced or manufacturer-specific tab in the printer's Properties dialog box. Run both utilities several times if necessary. If ink has clotted or is old, replace the print cartridge.

The wrong type of paper can also create problems, including paper jams. When you print photographs and other ink-heavy jobs, use thicker or even specialized sheets. Some custom paper types (glossies, for instance) will only print correctly on one side of the page. And very low-quality sheets often don't hold ink very well. Make sure the Paper Type setting in your printer's Properties dialog box (and in any application-specific settings) is correctly set. You may just need to lower your print resolution; some printers and papers just don't handle high-resolution jobs well.

**Colors look funny or washed out.** Color problems stem from your print cartridge or from your printer settings. Obviously, as a cartridge runs out of ink, colors will fade or disappear. Nozzles can also clog. As noted in the previous paragraph, your printer's Properties dialog box probably contains a utility to clean the nozzles. If you're sure the cartridge isn't to blame, make sure you have updated drivers and the correct paper type for your job. Next, check the print quality and paper type settings in your printer Properties dialog box and in your application's print settings. Printing Draft quality jobs can often result in strange color output. Your printer's configuration utilities may also have color management controls. Find them either as part of your printer's Properties dialog box (click the Color or Advanced tabs) or in a separate application installed as part of the printer setup process. Use these to adjust Tone, Brightness, Levels, and other settings.

■ **When All Else Fails.** Of course, you read the manual before you even got to this point. Right? If not, go back and pick it up. Each printer is unique and interacts with Windows in slightly different ways. Most manufacturers provide troubleshooting guidance in their documentation and on their Web sites. Additionally, use Microsoft's Knowledge Base (<http://support.microsoft.com>) for your Win98 and WinMe printing problems. Search specifically for article 128345, "Troubleshoot Printing Problems in Windows 95, Windows 98, and Windows Millennium Edition." Between your own common sense, the advice given here, and resources Microsoft and your printer's manufacturer provide, you should be able to overcome anything your "best friend" throws at you. ■

*by Gregory Anderson*

## Share With Others

Printer sharing in Windows 98 and Windows Me has a set of problems and solutions all its own.

### How To Share A Printer

- Connect and set up your printer on the host PC. Make sure you can print to it.
- Install and enable Printer Sharing. Right-click Network Neighborhood (My Network Places in WinMe) and select Properties. Select the File And Print Sharing button in the Properties dialog box. Select the option that lets others use your printers and click OK. Click OK again.
- In the Printers Control Window, right-click the printer and select Sharing. Name the printer you want to share and set a password (if desired) and click OK.
- Leave the host computer running.

### How To Connect To A Printer From Other PCs

- Set up your network; make sure PCs are in the same workgroup.
- Go to the Printers Control Window (click Start, select Settings, and click Printers) and double-click Add Printer.
- Select Network Printer in the Add Printer Wizard and click the Next button.
- Enter the path to the printer with two leading backslashes, the name of the host computer, another backslash, and the name of the printer share (as set above). For example, \\moms\_pc\hp\_deskjet is the path to the printer named hp\_deskjet on the machine named moms\_pc. Click Next to proceed.
- If you don't know the path or it doesn't work, browse for the printer. From the

browser window, select the entire network, choose your workgroup, find the host PC, and select the printer.

- Complete steps in the wizard.
- Install printer drivers on remote machine, if prompted.

### **Common Problems**

- Can't map to network printer: Either the network connection isn't working or Printer Sharing isn't enabled. Make sure you can access shared files on the host PC and that you can find it in Network Neighborhood (My Network Places in WinMe). If everything but printing works, make sure Printer Sharing is enabled on the host and the printer in question has been specifically shared.
- Won't print to network printer: The connection to the printer is down or the printer itself isn't working. Make sure both the printer and host computer are turned on. Print from the host PC. If that works, make sure you can connect to the host across the network. Clear your print queue and reboot if necessary.