ace centrenorth
Giving people a Voice...

Making Windows XP work for you…

With each version of Windows that has been released over the past several years, Microsoft and other developers have been made aware of the issues surrounding accessibility and ease of use on the PC. The latest version of Windows XP includes a number of settings and options that can be relatively easily configured to make it more accessible to users. It is surprising to learn just how many people are unaware of many of these features and also, importantly, many of them are free.

Optimising appearance and action of the Desktop features

Organising Your Desktop

PC desktop displays can often appear very colourful and busy; they can contain seemingly random spread icons and fanciful patterns, which whilst looking nice, do not necessarily make things any easier for a user.

Files can be easily tidied away within Windows, in much the same way that you might do on a real desk top, they can be organised into a manner that suits the user.

Backgrounds and screen savers are attractive, but can also serve as a distraction to many users, it may be a better option to set the desktop so that the background and screen saver are both blank. These can be set using the **Display Properties** which can either be found in the Control Panel, or with a right click of the mouse anywhere on the desktop screen (select **Properties**):

- Click Start and Control Panel;
- From the Control Panel double click on the Display icon (alternatively, right click on the desktop and select Properties);
- From the Display Properties window select the Desktop tab;
- From the Background section choose the None option;
- Click Apply;
- Then click on the Screen Saver tab;
- From the drop down menu underneath Screen Saver select None;
- Click Apply;
- Finally click OK

Creating Desktop Shortcuts

Program files can be easier to find and access from the desktop, rather than having to search for them through the Start Menu. You may find it easier to use a desktop shortcut for those programs that are used more commonly, which helps to avoid clutter and unwanted desktop items. An icon can be created on the desktop which an individual can easily access by a double click of the mouse, switch or head pointer access, or using a keyboard shortcut.

To create a shortcut

- Locate the program for which you want to make a shortcut using the Start Menu
- Click Start, then Programs and move the mouse pointer to the program until it is highlighted in blue;
- Click the right hand mouse button. A menu will appear;
- From this menu choose the **Send To** item by moving the mouse pointer over it.
- Move across to the right and chose the option that says Desktop (create shortcut). Your shortcut should now appear on the desktop.
- You can also use the **Pin to Start Menu** option which will move an icon to the first level of the Start menu (on the left), so that you do not need to go in to Program Files and search for it.

Launching a program from the desktop using a keyboard shortcut

- Locate the program for which you want to make a keyboard shortcut, from your desktop.
- Right click on the icon and select **Properties**;
- In the **Shortcut Key** box, hold the **Alt** key - you will notice that it now reads ctrl + alt in the box, this is because there are already a number of keyboard shortcuts within Windows that already use **Alt** + something else and so to operate the shortcut, **Ctrl + Alt + your assigned key** must be used.
- Whilst holding the **Alt** key, assign a letter or number to use as the keyboard shortcut e.g. **Ctrl + Alt + W** to launch Microsoft Word.
- Now when this combination of keys are pressed, that piece of software should be launched.

Turn off the Auto-Arrange function

The Auto-Arrange function within Windows XP and in other versions of Windows causes the icons on your desktop to automatically arrange themselves, snapping to the left hand side of the screen, in line. You may not want this feature as it does not allow you to place items where you would like them. To turn it off:

- Move the mouse pointer to an empty part of the Desktop and click the right mouse button;
- From the drop-down menu choose **Arrange Icons By**;
- Check to see if there is an tick adjacent to Auto Arrange.
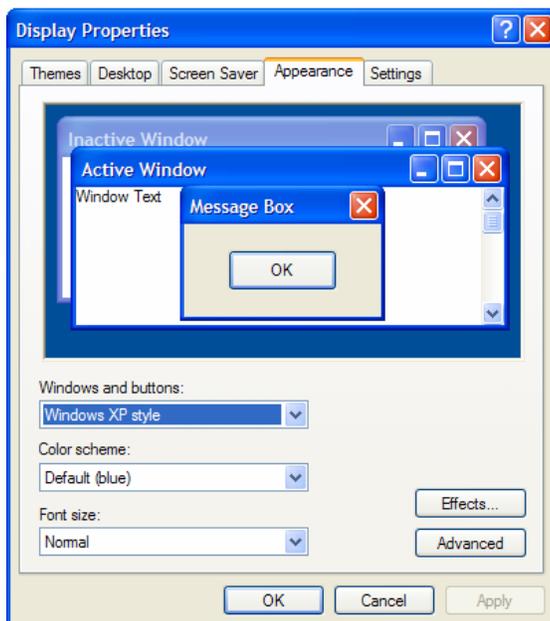- If there is, click on Auto Arrange to turn this function off

- You should now be able to drag your shortcuts and icons etc and drop them where you want them to be.
- In Windows XP, there is also an option to **Align to Grid**, with this selected, any icons on screen will automatically line up neatly with any other icons they are placed alongside, above or below.

If you wish to delete a shortcut, there are several ways you can achieve this. You can either drag it straight to the Recycle Bin; right click on it with the mouse and choose the Delete option; or left click on the icon and press the delete key on the computer keyboard.

Display Settings

Display settings (available in the Control Panel) can be use to change the way in which "Windows" appears. Changes are global and will be applied to all Windows opened after the change has been made.
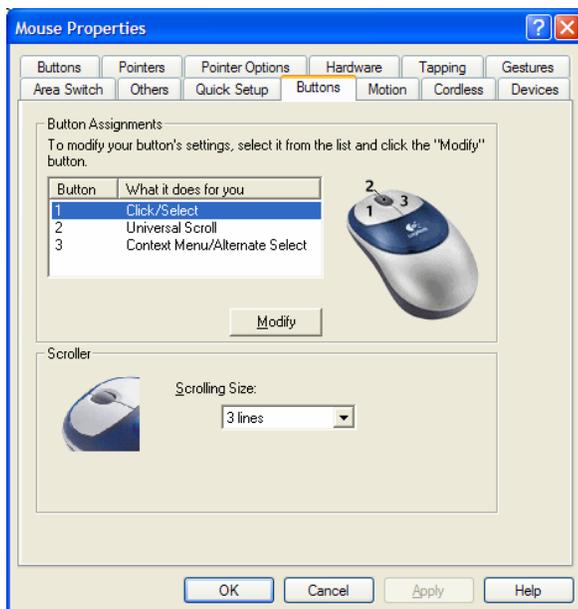
- Click Start, Settings, Control Panel and from the Control Panel Window double click on Display
- From the Window that opens you will see that it has 5 tabs
- Click on the Appearance tab to see the following:

- You can use the various drop down menus that are shown on the Appearance tab to change various colours and select different themes e.g. to change the style of the buttons. Many more of these themes can be freely downloaded from the Internet.

Mouse Properties

- Click on Start and Control Panel, Mouse to see the Mouse Properties Window (this may vary slightly depending on the mouse you are using and whatever software may have come with it):

Most modern mice have a number of different options for you to change for ease of use and to make them more personal to a particular individual.

Buttons

The Buttons tab allows you set the mouse for left or right-handed use. The double click speed sets how fast you have to double click to select an item.
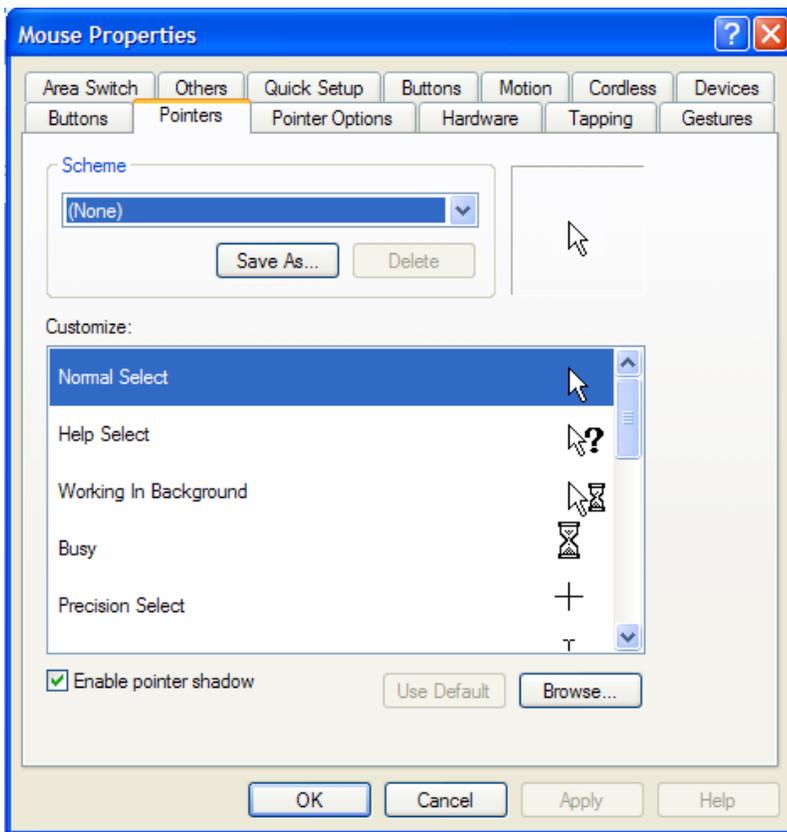
You can find out more information about each setting by clicking on the '?' in the top right corner, then on the setting you want to know about.

Pointers

The standard mouse pointer available via Windows 95/98/Me/XP is small, white and sometimes difficult to pick-up from what is often a busy background. A larger, more visible pointer can be of benefit to many users and many types of pointer are available.

From the Mouse properties Window

- Select the Pointers tab. You will see that there is a drop down menu indicating which Scheme is currently being used.
- Click on the down arrow to see alternative schemes.
- Select the scheme you find most appropriate, examples of the various mouse icons in that scheme will be displayed in the preview window.
- Then click Apply
- And then OK.

Finding pointers from the internet

Several websites exist, which contain a number of freely downloadable mouse pointers, if you are unable to find anything appropriate already with Windows. The best way to look for sites is to go to a search engine such as Google (**www.google.com**) and type in a search term such as *high+visibility+cursors*. This should result in several possible sites to investigate.

Some sites will provide you with a file to download which will then automatically install itself into the correct folder in the Windows operating system i.e. c/windows/cursors. Others will simply provide you with a folder of alternative pointers, which you will then have to move into the cursors folder.

- This is achieved by opening the Window containing the pointers and using the Select All;
- Copy command
- Pasting into the Cursors folder contained within the Windows folder of C.
- Open up the Mouse properties Window via the Control Panel
- Click on the Pointers tab and click Browse;
- This will open up a Window showing all of the pre-existing pointers available and the ones you have just copied and pasted into the Cursors folder.
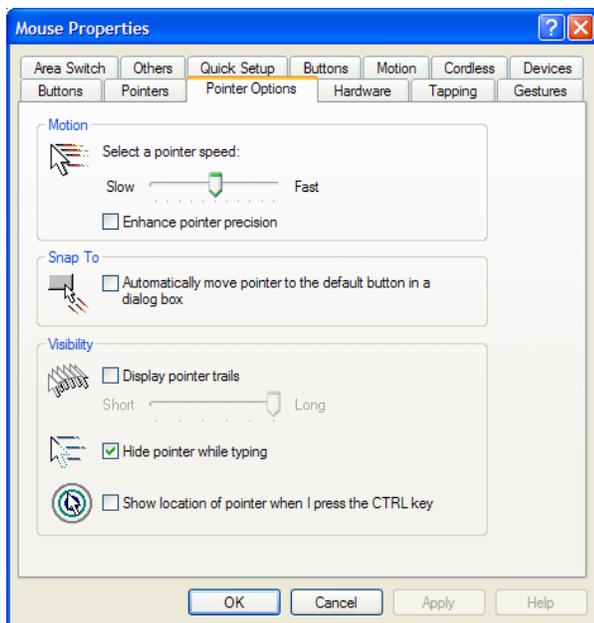- Double click on the one you want to select.

Other Mouse Settings

Slow down the movement of the pointer in relation to the movement of the mouse.

The speed that the pointer moves, in response to the movement of the mouse, is set by Pointer Speed available on the Pointer Options tab. If you have difficulty controlling the mouse pointer accurately, try slowing the speed down.

Pointer Trails leaves a 'trail' behind the pointer as it moves. This can make the pointer more visible on screen and can be altered with the Visibility option.

With some mice you may also have options such as Snap To, which automatically moves the pointer to a default button in the dialog box. There may also be options to hide the pointer whilst you are typing and to show its location by pressing the Ctrl key on the keyboard.

Use MouseKeys

Some individual's find using a mouse or rollerball difficult, but can operate the keyboard effectively. With MouseKeys, the numeric keypad can move the mouse pointer around the screen, and perform mouse button clicks. MouseKeys is usually slower and more awkward than using a mouse or rollerball, but it can provide a very straightforward way to control the mouse pointer.

MouseKeys is in the Accessibility Options Control Panel.

- Use the number keys with the **arrows** to move the pointer;
- Press number **5** to click the mouse;
- Press **0** (**Ins**) to lock the mouse click for dragging;
- Press **Del** to release the drag;
- **/** selects the left button for clicking;
- **-** selects the right button;

- **b** selects both buttons;
- Use the **Num Lock** key to toggle the MouseKeys control pad back to the numeric keypad and vice versa.
- In Windows XP, pressing **Left Shift + Alt + Num Lock**, acts as a shortcut, switching MouseKeys on and off.

Changing the operating characteristics of the keyboard

Keyboard Control Panel

Using a standard keyboard can prove difficult for some people. It can be easy to hit the wrong key or type several letters on the screen instead of just one.

To adjust the keyboard settings, open the Control Panel from the Start Menu and click on Keyboard. From the Keyboard Control Panel, you can adjust:

Speed

You can set the keyboard to have a longer repeat rate so that if you hold a key down, it will take longer to repeat the button that is being pressed.
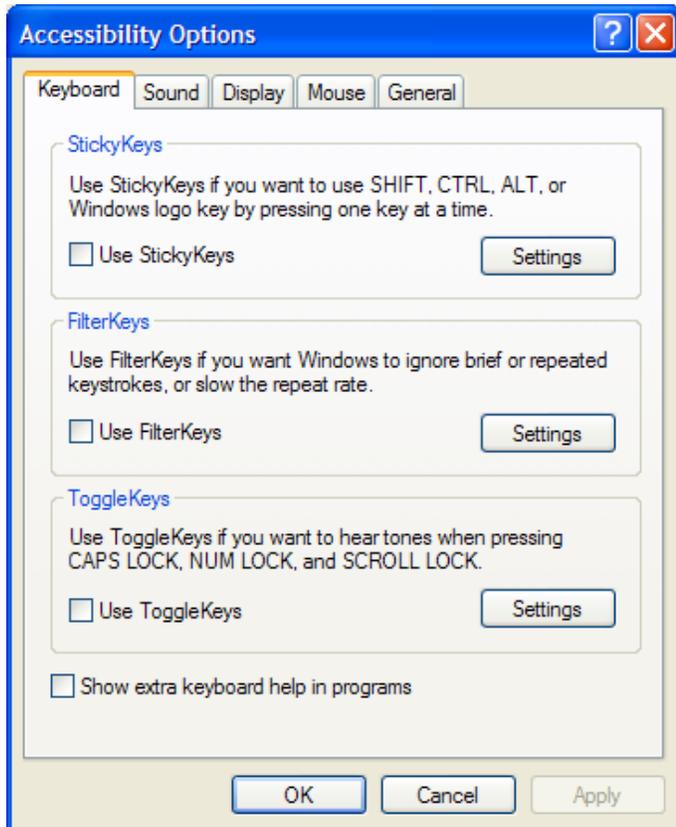
Regional and Language Settings

Often when you buy a new computer or if you are experiencing difficulties with certain key presses bringing up the wrong symbol, it may be because the keyboard's language settings are set on English US. You can adjust the language settings by going to:

- Start
- Control Panel
- Regional and Language Settings
- Click on the **Languages tab**
- Click on the **Details** button
- On here you will see a drop down menu on which you can change the language and keyboard settings for your computer.
- Select the preferences you desire.

Accessibility Options

Within Control Panel, there is also an icon called **Accessibility Options**. In here, you can change many of the settings that have already been mentioned, as well as those described below:

Keyboard

To adjust the keyboard response you can use the Keyboard tab. Note that you can also use the standard Keyboard Control Panel to adjust the repeat rate, or to re-define keys to generate different letters and characters. The settings available via the Accessibility Options dialogue box allow for several other types of adjustment.

StickyKeys - If an individual has difficulty holding down two keys at once; for example, when holding down the shift key and a letter to capitalise it. The settings let you adjust the operation and switch Sticky Keys on and off easily with a keyboard 'short cut'.

FilterKeys has two groups of settings. Click the tick box to select the feature and then click Settings:

Ignore repeated keystrokes sets the computer to ignore keys pressed after the first one; for example, if the user tremors on the key.

Ignore quick keystrokes and slow down the repeat rate has two effects;

One is **SlowKeys**, which lets you set the keyboard to ignore a quick accidental key press. Set this delay so that the key must be held down for a short time before it is accepted.

The other is **RepeatKeys**, which lets you turn off or adjust the key repeat rate.

ToggleKeys gives sound support for certain key presses.

 are connected to the net, will automatically update itself.