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Windows XP is now the predominant consumer OS of both gamers and power users. Sure, many of us still dual-boot with Win9x, because it is faster for many games, but the joy of a true 32-bit operating system with full consumer support is too much for many of us to remain loyal to NT 4.0 or Windows 2000. Now that Windows XP has matured past its infancy and many (but by far not all) of the bugs have been shaken out of it, Ars Technica brings you the first in a series of tweak guides for this illustrious and yet somewhat finicky OS.

This first guide aims to cover two main areas of contention: the boot process (sans the system services, which are an entire guide of their own) and a mishmash of general computing tweaks. The boot tweaks will be comprised of not only system settings, but also several under-utilized applications that can dramatically reduce load time. The general performance tweaks are simply various tweaks that do not quite fit in with the theme of this article, but still have a significant effect on system startup performance (because most any tweaks that one performs should have some kind of effect on the startup time of the system).

Before we begin, several pieces of laundry need to be aired out. To begin with, if you have already tweaked the services on the computer in question, please return them to the default settings. One of the applications I am recommending requires that several systems be enabled that most power users frequently disable (e.g., Task Scheduler). Once you have completed the tweaks mentioned in this guide, feel free to return said services back to your preferred settings, as they only need to be enabled for a short time.

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<http://arstechnica.com/tweak/win2k/xp/sgp-tweaks-1.html>