

Upgrading a Drive to NTFS

A supplement to Chapter 21 of “Windows Vista: The Missing Manual”

File Systems

A file system is a scheme of formatting your hard drive, a system of dividing up its surface into little parking spaces for data. It’s a very technical issue, and, mercifully, one that’s largely invisible to you except for the day you install the operating system.

Windows XP offered a choice of two file systems, geekily named FAT 32 and NTFS. FAT 32 (file allocation table) is the descendant of the original DOS formatting scheme. NTFS (NT file system) is far more advanced and modern; it was introduced with Windows NT in 1993.

A Windows Vista drive, however, must be formatted using NTFS.

NTFS offers a long list of attractive features:

- It can handle bigger hard drives than FAT—in fact, it can handle drives with capacities up to two terabytes (that’s 2,048 gigabytes). No, drives that big aren’t available today, but it’s only a matter of time.
- It offers automatic file compression, conserving disk space.
- It makes your hard drive much more immune to corruption (of the sort that used to require the old ScanDisk program to scurry around, cleaning up glitches).
- It lets you take advantage of a long list of advanced hard drive and file features, including mounted drives and private folders that nobody else on the network can see. Both of these features are described in *Windows Vista: The Missing Manual*.

Windows Vista is perfectly content, however, to recognize external drives that use the FAT 32 scheme—flash drives, external hard drives, and so on.

Tip: You can never convert an NTFS drive to the older FAT system, but you can convert a FAT drive to NTFS at any time.

Here's how to format a drive, if indeed Windows Vista doesn't offer to format it for you:

1. **Choose Start→All Programs→Accessories→Command Prompt.**

The Command window opens.

2. **Type `convert D: /FS:NTFS` and then press Enter.**

Of course, replace D: with whatever drive letter you're trying to reformat.

That's all there is to it!