

System Folder Merging and System Folder Switching

One of the most important troubleshooting tools is the clean System re-install — which means giving your Macintosh a brand-new System Folder, straight off your Mac's original CD. Whatever was wrong with your old System Folder — a corruption, a missing file, an out-of-date system file — is left behind in the old System Folder. Your new System Folder, on the other hand, is guaranteed to be free from any such corruption.

Unfortunately, it's also guaranteed to be free of any useful enhancements you've made to your Macintosh. When you do a clean install, you leave behind (in the old System Folder) anything you've installed since the last time the System Folder was installed. Your new System Folder doesn't have any of your customized fonts, sounds, control panels, Apple menu items, and — most time-consuming of all — preference files, which store dozens of settings, access phone numbers, macros, and toolbars for all your favorite programs.

Before Conflict Catcher 8, therefore, the final step in the clean system install process was the tedious business of comparing, side-by-side, the contents of your old System Folder with the contents of your new one. You'd open up the two folders as tall, skinny windows, and manually drag any useful items from the old System Folder into the corresponding places in the new System Folder.

Only after you had performed this time-consuming comparison would your Mac be ready to go with its usual complement of features, fonts, and settings.

Fortunately, Conflict Catcher 8 greatly simplifies and accelerates this post-clean install comparison process. It shows you a list of everything in your old System Folder that isn't already in the new one; you simply check off the items you'd like moved or copied into the new System Folder. In just a few minutes, the deed is done.

When to use the Clean-Install Merge feature

There are two cases in which you'd want to perform a clean system install instead of a normal installation. First, it's always safer to use the clean-install method when installing a newer version of the system software, such as when you upgrade from Mac OS 8.1 to 8.5. And second, you want to perform a clean install when your current System Folder is having problems — and Conflict Catcher's conflict-testing feature can't nail down a culprit.

In the first case — when upgrading to a newer system — you have nothing to lose by using Conflict Catcher's Clean-Install System Merge command. Within minutes, you'll have all your features, preferences, and fonts in place in your new, updated System Folder. You'll be ready to start work.

However, in the latter case — when your old System Folder was giving you trouble — consider reinstalling your fonts and other programs from their original master disks instead of copying them from your old System Folder. (Better yet, install updated versions, if available.) After all, the reason for the clean install is that you were having trouble with your old System Folder. It's conceivable that using Conflict Catcher's Clean-Install System Merge feature could simply reinstate whatever corrupted file was causing the problem to begin with.

On the other hand, there's no need for paranoia. When a System Folder is truly corrupted, the problematic file is frequently the System suitcase file — which Conflict Catcher will never merge into a new System Folder. If you don't have master disks handy, you may well be safe using the Clean-Install System Merge command without having to re-introducing the corruption into your new System Folder.

Tip: Conflict Catcher's Clean-Install System Merge feature works only when the clean System Folder is the same version as, or a newer version than, the old one. For example, you can't use this feature to copy items from a Mac OS 8.5 System Folder into a Mac OS 8.1 System Folder.

(Newer System Folder versions often contain items that don't even work in older versions, so Conflict Catcher is saving you headaches by enforcing this rule.)

How to use the Clean-Install Merge feature

Conflict Catcher's clean-install merging feature works only if, in fact, you have performed a clean installation of your System Folder. (See your Conflict Catcher printed manual for instructions on performing a clean installation.)

Tip: Was your old System Folder updated using an Apple system-update installer — to bring it from Mac OS 8 to Mac OS 8.1, for example? If so, begin by running that same updater on your new, clean System Folder (if, in fact, the newer System Folder isn't already a newer version, such as Mac OS 8.5). Doing so will prevent you from winding up with newer software mixed in with older software. (If you've bought any Apple Language Kits, install them into your new, clean System Folder, too, before using Conflict Catcher's Merge feature.)

Tip: The merging process is much easier if Conflict Catcher is first installed on both the older and newer System Folders. (That way, files will be turned on and off in the new System Folder to match their status in the old one.)

When the clean-install process is over, your Mac will have two different System Folders: the clean one (called System Folder), and the old one (usually called Previous System Folder). It's perfectly safe to have multiple System Folders on the same hard drive. Only one at a time displays the telltale tiny Macintosh icon on it, meaning that it's the currently active System Folder.

Now you're ready to let Conflict Catcher bring over all the useful files from the old System Folder into the new one.

1. Make sure that Conflict Catcher is installed on the new System Folder, and that you have started up the Mac with the new System Folder "in charge."

Remember, Conflict Catcher won't copy files from a newer System Folder into an older one. The newer System Folder must be running your Mac.

2. Restart the Mac. As it's just beginning to start up again, keep the space bar pressed until the Conflict Catcher window opens. From the Special menu, choose Clean-Install System Merge.

A message appears, asking you to confirm that you're now running the newly installed System Folder.

3. Click Yes if you are, in fact, running from the newly installed System Folder.

Now a dialog box appears in which you can specify which System Folder was your original one.

4. Click Select. In the list box that appears, single-click your old System Folder (which is probably called Previous System Folder). Then click the button below the list, which is probably called Select "Previous System Folder."

You return to the previous dialog box, where the name of your older System Folder is now displayed.

5. Click Compare Folders.

Conflict Catcher takes a minute or two to compare the contents of the two System Folders. If it finds any corrupted files, you'll see a message that offers you the chance to fix certain problems on the spot — or to prevent the corrupted file from being copied into your new System Folder. When Conflict Catcher has completed its comparison, you'll see a window listing items from your old System Folder that aren't in your new one.

6.

Scroll through the list of System Folder items. Click the checkboxes of items you don't want brought over from your old System Folder.

If you come across an entire folder whose contents you want to leave behind (in the outgoing System Folder), click its checkbox. Conflict Catcher turns off the folder's check mark and the checkmarks on all items inside the folder.

If you're unsure about the identity of a file, click its name. Conflict Catcher shows you some information about the file, usually including a description of it, to help you understand exactly what you're bringing into your new System Folder.

7. Click the Options button to further customize the merge.

The resulting dialog box offers a few additional options. For example, you can click the appropriate button: Copy Items or Move Items. Unless you're very short of disk space, you'll usually want to copy the selected files into the new System Folder (instead of moving them), so that your previous System Folder remains intact. That way, if, for some reason, the new System Folder isn't as trouble-free as you had hoped, you can switch back to your previous System Folder without any time penalty. To specify whether Conflict Catcher should copy files into your new System Folder or move the original files out of your old System Folder.

This Options box also lets you opt to have certain files colored with a label for future identification. By label, Conflict Catcher is referring to the labels (icon colors and text tags) you can apply to icons in the Finder. Conflict Catcher can apply labels to the items you're moving, exactly as though you had highlighted them and selected a label color from the Labels menu or menu command in the Finder. Conflict Catcher can label either merged items from the previous System Folder, merged items in the new System Folder, or original items in new System Folder. This last case is useful because it tags all original Apple software with a certain color. In the future, you'll always be able to identify the "clean" items that were part of the original installation — they'll always be the labeled ones in your new System Folder. Unlabeled items are items you or your software added to the System Folder — your first suspects when troubleshooting.

Finally, the Merge System File Resources option makes Conflict Catcher transfer certain additional information from your old System File to your new one, such as your name (as you've typed it into the File Sharing control panel), any sounds you'd added to your old System file, and your current choice of printer.

8. When you're finished specifying options, click OK to return to the Clean-Install System Merge Summary dialog box.


9.
Click Merge Systems.

Over the course of a minute or two, Conflict Catcher moves or copies all of the files you selected into the new System Folder.

Now you arrive at the main Conflict Catcher window, where you can look over the results of your System Folder merging.

10.
If everything looks good, click Continue Startup.

The Mac proceeds with its startup process.

As you run each of your programs, you should find that all your preferences, toolbars, and settings are exactly as they were before you installed the new System Folder — thanks to the preference files that Conflict Catcher copied over for you. Your fonts should be the same, your  menu should contain the same items (unless the new version of the System software added additional items), and so on.

If the purpose of your clean install was to eliminate a corruption in your old System Folder, experiment to see if the problem is gone. If so, congratulations.

If not, and if (in step 8) you had applied a label color to the original items in the new System Folder, a quick glance at your new System Folder's contents should give you a head start on figuring out which elements are causing the problem. They're probably among the files without a label.

Switching between System Folders

After performing a clean install, you wind up with two System Folders on your hard drive. In most cases, you should live with your new System Folder for a few days or weeks, just to make sure everything works smoothly and that no important components were left behind in the old System Folder. If

everything checks out after that testing period, throw away the old System Folder.

There may be times, however, when you find it useful to keep two fully functional System Folders on your hard drive at the same time. Maybe you want to keep a duplicate, absolutely pristine, “clean installed” System Folder, which you can switch to if trouble arises in your main System Folder. Maybe you’re experimenting with newer system software (such as Mac OS 8.5), but you want to be able to alternate with your previous System Folder (such as Mac OS 8.1).

Conflict Catcher lets you change active System Folders easily — simply by choosing from a menu. Here’s how. (The following steps assume that you have at least two complete System Folders on your hard drive.)

1.
Open Conflict Catcher.
2.
From the Startup menu, choose the name of the System Folder you want to be in charge. From the Special menu, choose Restart.

The Mac restarts — and when you arrive at the desktop again, you’ll see that the newly selected System Folder is “blessed” and running your computer.

Switching between startup disks

The previous instructions show you how to switch among different System Folders on the same disk. But Conflict Catcher can also let you switch among different startup disks.

Suppose, for example, that you keep a virginal, perfect, “clean installed” System Folder on a Zip disk. And now you want to start up from that Zip disk instead of from your hard drive.

If you didn’t have Conflict Catcher, you’d have to switch startup disks like this: Turn on the Mac. Wait until you arrive at the desktop. Open the Startup Disk control panel, and click the icon for the new Startup disk. Restart the computer.

Conflict Catcher, however, lets you select a different startup disk as the Mac is starting up, saving you one entire starting-up process and the hassle of opening a control panel.

To view Conflict Catcher’s menu of different startup disks (that is, disks

containing complete System Folders), make sure that Conflict Catcher's Startup menu is visible, as directed in Step 2 of the preceding instructions. At this point, the Conflict Catcher Startup menu shows not just the System Folders on your main hard drive, but also the System Folders on any other hard drives, Zip disks, CD-ROM discs, and so on that are currently connected to your Mac.

To switch startup disks as the Mac is starting up, hold down the space bar early in the startup process. When Conflict Catcher's window appears, choose the System Folder that you want — on the System disk that you want — from Conflict Catcher's Startup menu, and then click Continue Startup.

The Mac restarts, with your new startup disk in charge.