

review by Pete Burkindine

.0 Stars — 1 Star Poor, 5 Stars Excellent

**Title:** Norton Utilities

**Version:** 4.01

**Developer:** Symantec, Inc.

**Price:** \$99, \$49 upgrade from previous versions

**Contact Info:** <http://www.symantec.com/>

**Genre:** Disk Maintenance and Repair Tool Suite

**Requirements:** PowerPC, 16 MB of RAM, 12 MB free disk space, Mac OS 7.5 or later.

## Introduction

Norton Utilities, the long-time leader in disk recovery and maintenance software, fell slightly behind early this year when Mac OS 8.1 brought the world something marvelous called HFS Plus, a new disk format now used by many Macs around the world. The problem was, Norton Utilities was not designed to fix disks in this format. As months wore on, Mac users grew tired of Symantec's numerous delays. Other utilities, like MicroMat's TechTool Pro, hastily tried to fill the gap, with limited success (and more than a few problems).

For fans of Norton Utilities, though, none of the replacements had the same benefits — an easy-to-use, attractive interface, reliable results from an industry leader, and (perhaps most important) an established, tested, and relatively bug-free program.

Old and new users alike can enjoy the newest version of Norton Utilities, version 4.01. Featuring important new features like PowerPC-native code, HFS Plus compatibility and a new interface, this version promises to address and surpass most users' expectations.

## he Tools

### Norton Disk Doctor

The key piece of the Norton Utilities suite, Norton Disk Doctor empowers you to fix a host of problems with disks, from serious problems (errors in the B-Tree) to minor things (mis-set custom icon bits). If you don't know what either of those mean, don't worry — Norton Utilities can tell you. You really don't need to know anyway — that's why Disk Doctor exists. It seamlessly and painlessly fixes almost any of the problems your precious disks can encounter.

The new version has been completely overhauled, featuring a new look, PowerPC-native code, HFS+ compatibility, and multithreaded tasks:

While I have to admit I miss Dr. Norton spinning the platters (the old look of Disk Doctor), the new look (and more importantly the newfound speed) is very nice indeed. I was able to check all of my partitions and my extra

internal drive in less than half an hour. It's still not a process I would sit and watch from beginning to end, but there's no reason to — Disk Doctor can fix things automatically, and it can do all your disks with one click.

While the job of a disk maintenance tool is not a glamorous or interesting one, it is very important, and Disk Doctor correctly identifies and fixes a large number of problems that could lead to data loss or even drive failure. It is a must-have utility.

### Norton Speed Disk

Perhaps the second-most-often-used part of the Norton Utilities suite, Speed Disk is a major player in the Mac disk-defragging market. This important process, which speeds up access to information on your disk by placing it in logical (and consecutive) order on the disk, is for some reason much more noticeable and available on operating systems other than the Mac OS. Defragmenting utilities are built into Windows 95 and 98, and most flavors of UNIX have a means for defragmenting disks as well.

Most Mac users are not aware of the importance of this simple preventative maintenance procedure, and you may be shocked the first time you open Speed Disk and see how badly your information has scattered across the drive.

Speed Disk will take your files and arrange them so that:

- All the data included in each file is written in one continuous string on the disk. This speeds up disk access considerably because the mechanical arm that reads data from the drive surface doesn't have to skip from place to place simply to read a single file.
- All data of the same type (i.e. document files, system files, application files) is written on the same portion of the disk.

The new version is PowerPC-native, HFS Plus-compatible, and features a slightly refined version of its excellent interface. No other disk optimization utility I've seen, for the Mac or otherwise, does a better job displaying the current order (or disorder) of your drives.

ditor's Note: We hope to have a review of Alsoft's disk defragmenting utility, DiskWarrior, next month.

### Crash Guard and File Saver

These two background utilities run as system extensions and help keep you sane in the face of an ugly crash.

File Saver works by keeping a catalogue of what files are on your disk and where they are, and can be scheduled to update its records as often or infrequently as you like. The data collected by File Saver can be used by the UnErase utility, discussed below, to restore files after a crash or accidental deletion, virtually without fail.

Crash Guard allows you to recover from some kinds of crashes and occasionally save your work. It runs in the background and, when a crash occurs, gives you options beyond a force quit. You can either:

- Quit Application — a safer and more reliable way of getting out of the application so you can try to save files, restart or continue working if you're extremely brave.
- Restart — safer than the three-finger salute.
- Try to Fix — not the safest thing you could do, but if you crash on page 399 of your 400 page graduate thesis, you probably won't care about much else besides trying to recover. This process may allow you to continue working for the few seconds required to save, quit and restart.

### UnErase

You may never need this utility, but you will be glad it's there when you hit Empty Trash five seconds before you realize you just dragged your life's work to the trash instead of your backup disk. In conjunction with File Saver, UnErase can save your files almost every time. It can also use scanning methods to try to recover the data if you choose not to run File Saver, but I think you'll probably wish you had been willing to wait those few extra seconds at Shutdown for File Saver to recatalogue your drives when you lose something.

## Volume Recover

The first time you let a ten-year-old relative play with your Mac and they unwittingly erase a drive, you'll figure out why this utility is nice to have around. It brings dead drives back to life. 'Nuff said.

A few more incidental utilities included in the suite:

- Wipe Info — Deletes data permanently so that it absolutely cannot be recovered by any utility.
- System Info — Tells you lots of things about your machine, including lots of benchmarks.
- Fast Find — It's still better than Apple's Find tool, even in Mac OS 8.5. Although you can't search by content, it does allow you to view and even edit files from inside the application. And it's unbelievably fast — it took about three seconds to find all the files whose names contained "la", while Mac OS 8's Find File took about eight seconds.
- Disk Light — Flashes a small icon on the menubar whenever a disk is accessed. Oh so cool (though I don't find it terribly useful).
- Disk Editor — Way over the head of the average user (me), this tool allows manual editing of the disk to recover badly damaged data.

## he Bottom Line

If your work is important, you need something more than Apple's Disk First Aid to ensure your data is safe. Although backups are essential, you can't backup your files every few minutes, and sometimes you wish you had. Norton Utilities is the best solution I've found for day-to-day data protection needs. I discovered no problems (though cautious readers should always visit MacFixIt at <http://www.macfixit.com/> before using any new disk software) during my testing on a variety of drives. Any previous problems with data loss seem to have been solved.

If your data is important, I cannot recommend Norton Utilities highly enough. You'll thank yourself.

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