

Recovering Windows NT After a Boot Failure on an NTFS Drive

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Summary

When Windows NT is installed on an Windows NT file system (NTFS) formatted boot drive, recovering from a boot failure can be difficult because you cannot access the NTFS partition without a running Windows NT. If you have both Windows NT 3.1 and 3.5 installed, recovery is even more difficult because Windows NT 3.5 NTFS is not compatible with Windows NT 3.1.

This article covers a few boot-failure scenarios, and how to recover from them, or at least gain access to the partition. This article does not describe how to solve many specific problems, instead it is a general guideline on methods of gaining access to an NTFS boot partition.

More information

Simple (Non-Setup Related) Boot Failures

If you have been running Windows NT successfully, and it fails to boot, you can use the following simple procedure to try and recover from the problem:

1. Verify that the problem has not been caused by changes or failures in the hardware. Loose cables, bad cables, new cards, new drives, and even new settings on existing controllers can all cause boot problems.
2. If Windows NT failed to boot after you installed a new device driver, try pressing the spacebar at the OSLOADER screen and selecting the Last Known Good option. If the boot process failed before you logged on to the system, this should correct the problem.
3. Try creating an NTFS boot disk as described in the article [119467](http://support.microsoft.com/kb/119467/EN-US/) (<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/119467/EN-US/>): Creating a Boot Disk for an NTFS Partition. This will generally only help in a situation where your basic boot files (NTLDR, NTDETECT.COM, NTBOOTDD.SYS) or your BOOT.INI file are corrupted or incorrect.
4. Boot from the Windows NT Setup disk (or run SETUPLDR on a RISC-based machine) and run the emergency repair process. For Windows NT 3.1, this requires an emergency repair disk, for Windows NT 3.5 an emergency repair disk may not be required but can help if the repair directory on the hard drive is damaged. This will solve most boot problems that involve bad system files or a corrupted registry.

If none of the above steps resolves the problem, or if you do not have an emergency repair disk, you may need to try one of the more drastic steps listed at the end of the article.

Setup Related Boot Failures

If you were in installing Windows NT (either a new installation or upgrading from Windows NT 3.1 to 3.5) and Windows NT failed to boot, and Setup was interrupted, the recovery steps listed above will generally not work (unless you aborted setup at a very early stage). If you were upgrading a Windows NT 3.1 installation to Windows NT 3.5, avoid using an emergency repair disk created by Windows NT 3.1 if you reached the point in setup where it was copying files to the drive (as that is when Setup updates your file system to the 3.5 version of NTFS). Assuming that the failure was not some easily correctable problem (bad installation media, incompatible or malfunctioning hardware) there are two methods you can use to gaining access to your drive and data:

1. If you have enough free disk space, try installing Windows NT again into a different directory. This will sometimes work when an upgrade failed, and in any situation where you have to get access to the data but have been unable to get your current installation of Windows NT to boot. This also allows you to fix boot problems that involve bad drivers or other configuration problems that the above methods did not help with. In many cases you can simply boot the alternate Windows NT installation and delete the bad driver in question (unless the driver is required to booting the system).
2. If all other attempts to gain access to an NTFS partition have failed, including installing Windows NT to a new directory, try removing the hard disk drive and install it in a machine that is running Windows NT. The machine you move the drive to must be running a version of Windows NT that is equal to or greater than the one that failed. This allows for changes in the file system drivers. Alternatively, you can install a new boot drive in the machine that is failing to boot Windows NT, and then install Windows NT on that drive. In either case, when you are moving SCSI drives from one machine to another, make sure that both machines use SCSI controllers made by the same manufacturer, and are configured the same way. Different controllers can use different translation schemes and different settings.

In any situation, it may be best to simply re-install and restore from a recent backup. Most of the above instructions are for situations where you do not have a recent backup and must either get your current copy of Windows NT working or gain access to important data. None of the above methods should be a considered a replacement for frequent backups or other methods of ensuring data recoverability (such as strip sets, mirror drives, etc.).

Properties

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