How to dual-boot Vista with XP (with XP installed first) - step-by-step guide with screenshots

Want to install Vista on your PC but don't want to get rid of XP just yet? Here's how to install it so you can dual-boot between them, in an easy-to-follow, step-by-step guide.

Page 1 - Intro

Scenario: You want to install Vista on your PC alongside your XP installation, on the same drive. You have already installed XP. (If you installed Vista first, see our other tutorial on How to dual-boot Vista and XP - with Vista installed first.)

Tutorial Summary: We're going to shrink the Windows XP partition on the hard disk and create enough space for an installation of Vista. There are two easy methods of doing this - using the GPartEd Live CD and the DISKPART utility on the Vista DVD. On some systems, depending on the primary storage controller, We'll then install Vista and use the EasyBCD utility to modify Vista's bootloader to get XP loading properly.

Updated September 2008: This is an updated tutorial,based on our first Windows XP/Vista dual-booting workshop. The main differences are that we are now using Windows Vista SP1, Windows XP SP3 and the latest version of EasyBCD.

This tutorial was tested on a VMWare Workstation 6 virtual machine.

Page 2 - Get Started - Using GParted
We assume that before you start this tutorial, you have backed up the drive (partitions and data) that will host the two operating systems.

Your first step will be to modify the Windows XP system partition to make space for Vista using GParted

The GParted Live CD ISO is available **here** – burn it to CD and boot the system from the disc. The version we used was 0.3.7-7.

When you boot from the GParted LiveCD, depending on your system, you should just need to select the auto-configuration boot option.
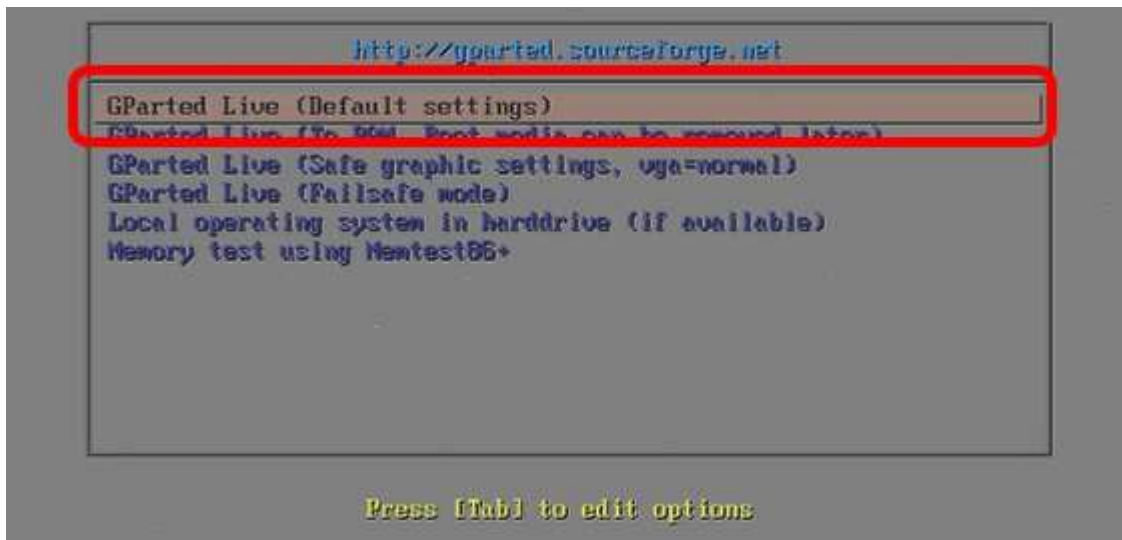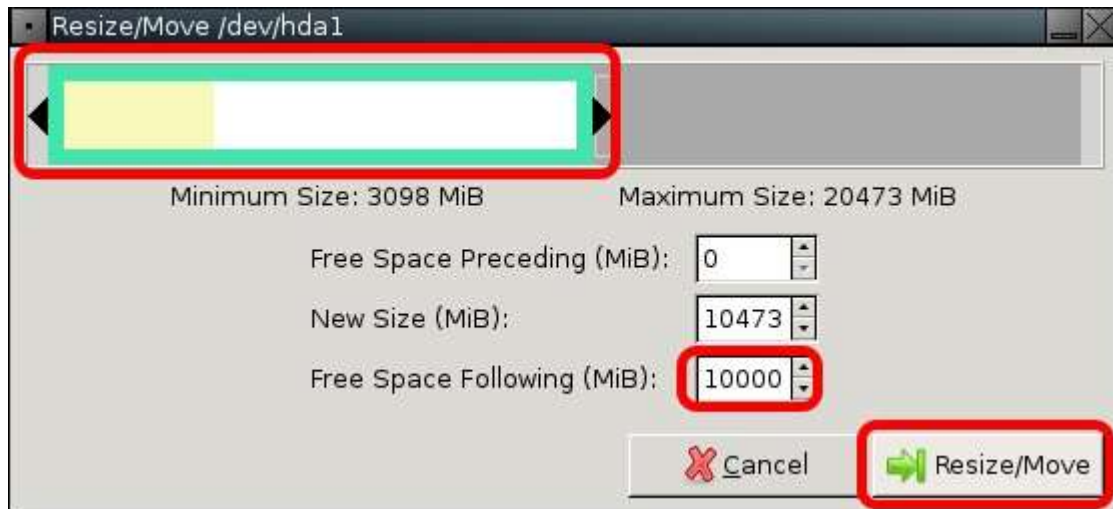
During boot, press Enter twice when prompted to select the keymap and language settings.

When the main GUI loads, right-click on the main Windows XP NTFS partition (depending on your setup, probably /dev/hda1) and select Resize/Move.
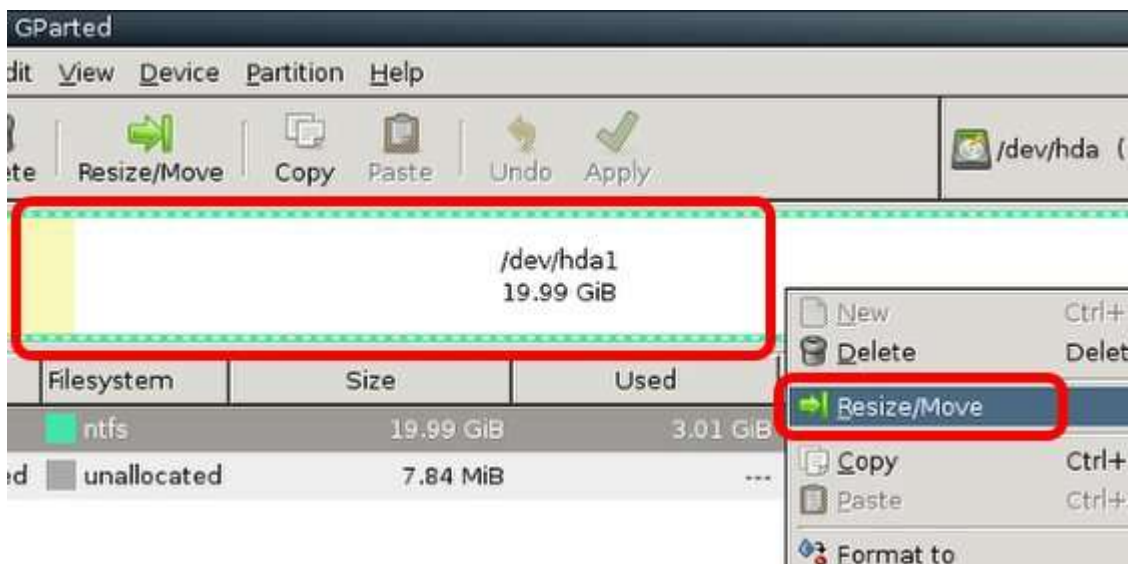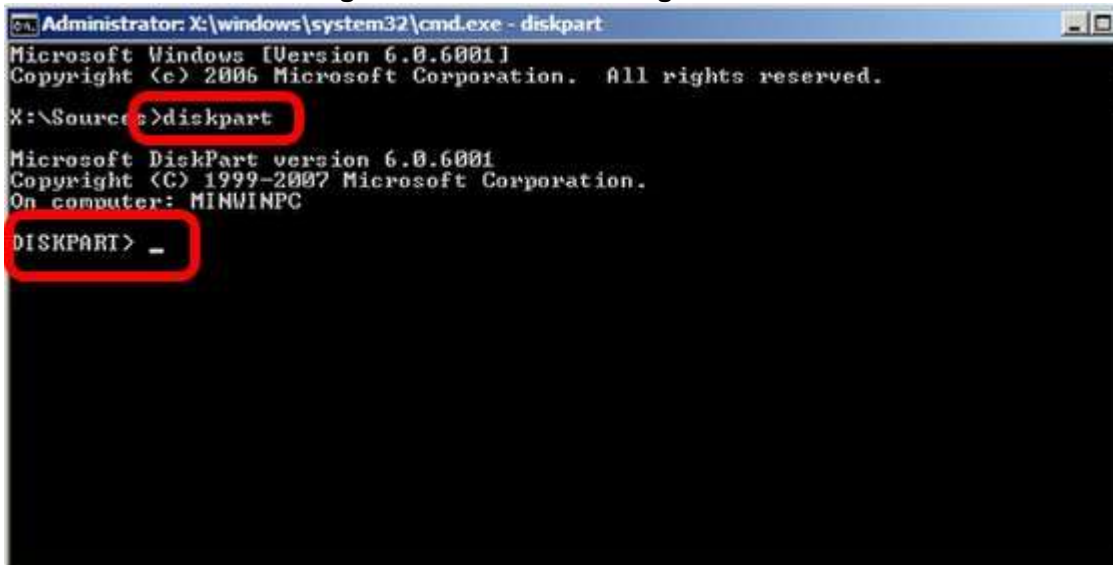

Use the slider to reduce the partition size and free up enough room to install Vista (at least 10GB) and click Resize/Move.

The changes haven't actually been made, they've just been scheduled to run. To commit the changes and resize the partition, click Apply. GParted will ask to confirm the changes – hit OK and away you go.

Page 3 - Get Started - Using DISKPART

Boot the machine from the Vista DVD. Select the appropriate language and then "Install Now".

On the product key page, press SHIFT + F10 to launch a Windows PE 2.0 command window. Then type in DISKPART and press enter to get into the DISKPART utility.

Now type in LIST VOLUME - this gives you a readout of the volumes available on the system. Select the main Windows XP volume by typing in SELECT VOLUME 0 (in most cases it will be Volume 0 - in our lab in was Volume 1).

Now type in SHRINK. Vista will reduce the size the selected Volume by around 50%.

Page 4 - Now Install Vista
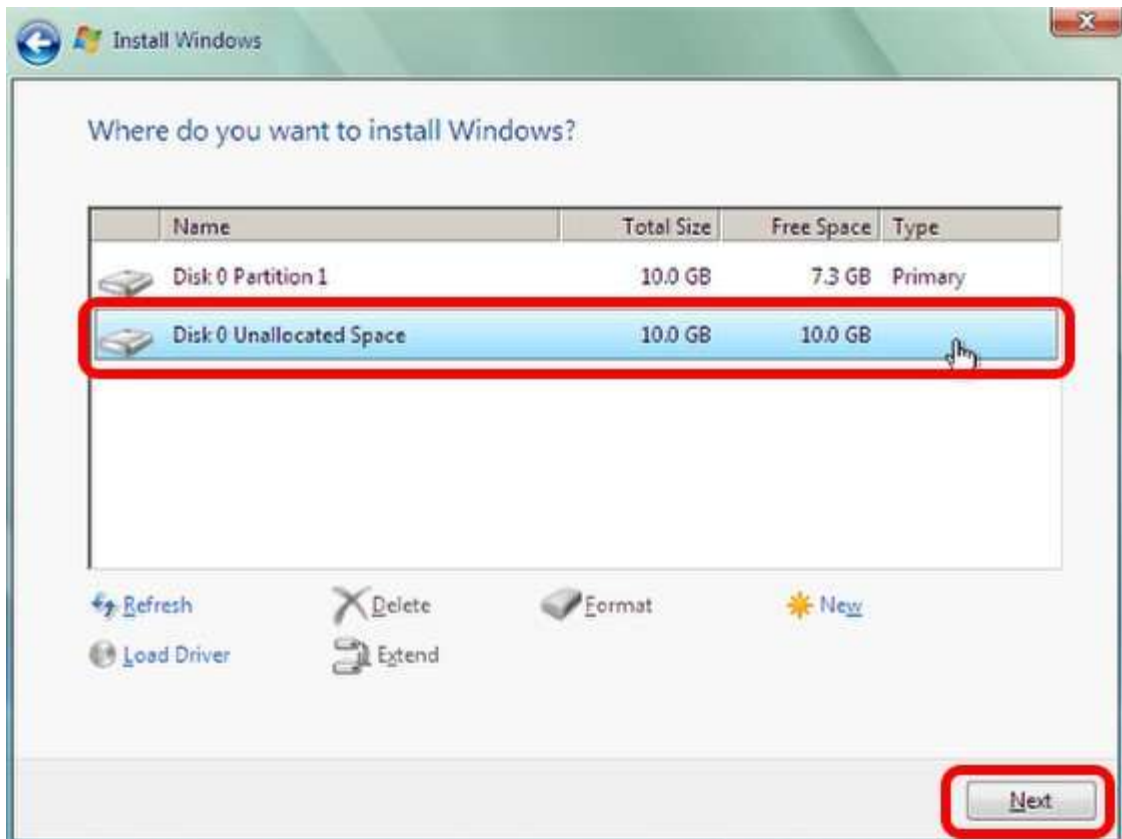
If you used the GParted LiveCD to shrink the XP partition, you'll need to reboot the system from the Vista install DVD. If you've used DISKPART then you just need to continue the installation. Once the install gets to the install location, there should be at least two options: a partition marked as Primary and unallocated space. Select the unallocated space and click Next. The install will then commence.

The Vista boot manager will take over the system completely, and Windows XP effectively loads via Vista. It's all pretty seamless though, and you shouldn't encounter any technical problems.

Page 5 - Modify Vista's Bootloader
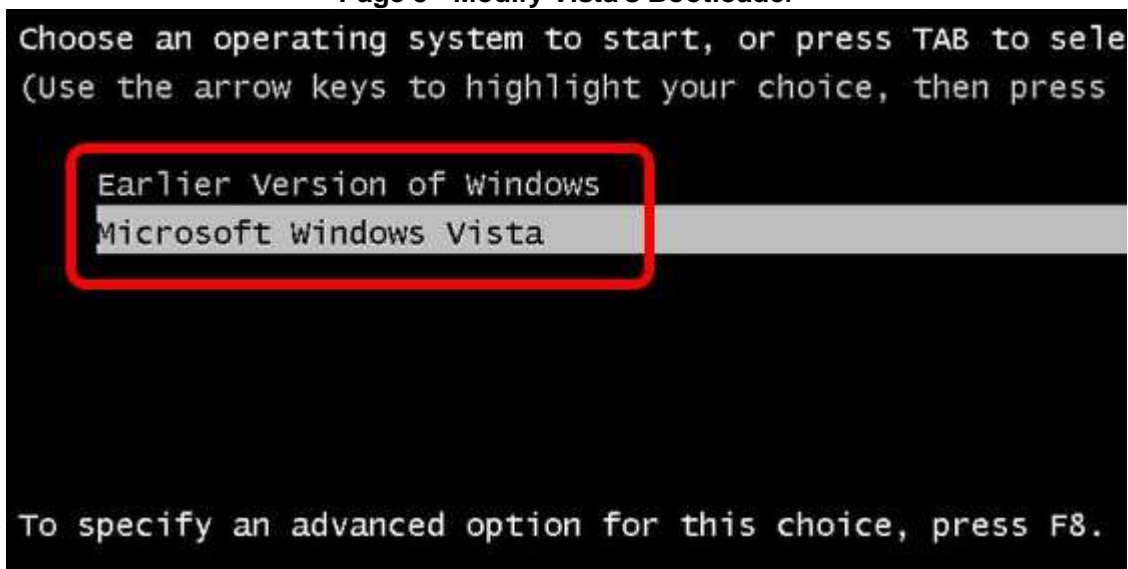
Once Vista is installed and the system reboots, you'll be presented with a boot menu with two options: "Microsoft Windows Vista" and "Earlier Version of Windows".

This is perhaps a little bit bland, so you'll probably want to change it. Here's where one of the new features of Vista comes in, and it's not so terrific. In Windows XP if you want to modify the bootloader, just right-click on My Computer, select Properties, go to the Advanced Tab, and click Settings under Startup and Recovery, then click Edit. This opens a local file – boot.ini. It's just a standard text file and you can change pretty much anything. Unfortunately it's not that easy in Vista – you can still navigate to the Startup and Recovery settings, but all you can do is select which operating system is the default and modify the timeout settings.

To edit Vista's boot manager you have to use the command line BCDEDIT utility. To access BCDEDIT, run the Command Window as an administrator and type in BCDEDIT.

Unfortunately BCDEDIT isn't an easy tool to come to terms with, especially as it's purely command line-driven. So, a great tool to use here is EasyBCD by NeoSmart Technologies. EasyBCD offers a GUI frontend to BCDEDIT, and makes life much easier.

Once Vista is installed, call up the browser and navigate to the **EasyBCD download page** - download the latest version (1.7.2 at the time of writing), install and launch the application.
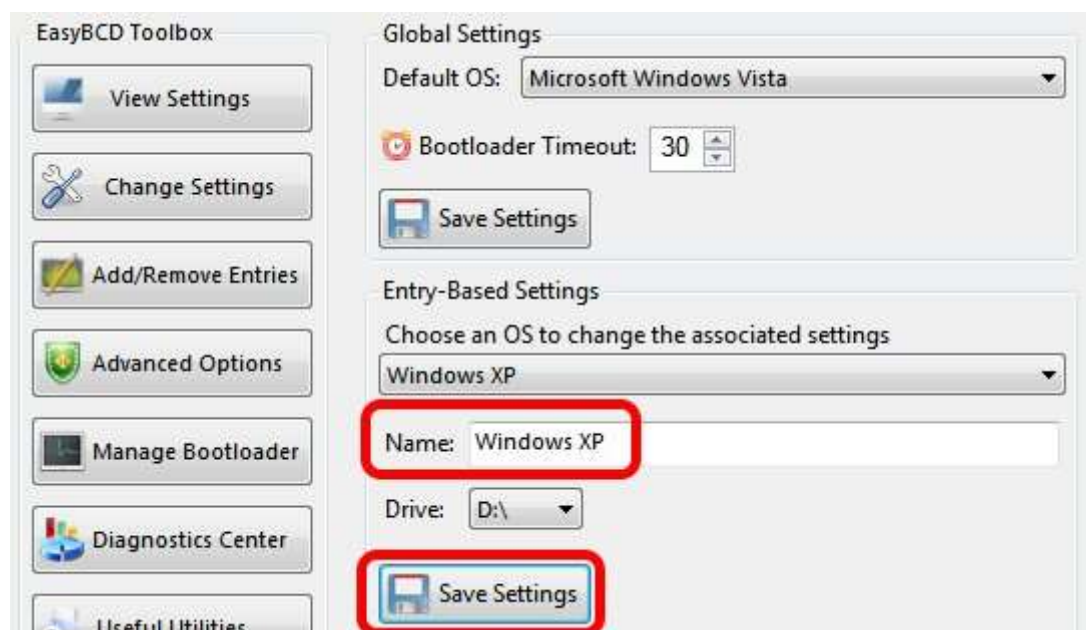
To configure the bootloader go to "Change Settings". Here you can change the default OS if you prefer to boot into XP first. Under "Entry-Based Settings" you'll see the field which refers to the the XP partition. Overwrite "Earlier Version of Windows" with "Windows XP" and click "Save Settings".

Reboot the system and the changes are visible. You have a dual-booting Vista and XP system. That's all there is to it.

Open up Windows Explorer and there's two hard drives – the primary disk running Vista and the secondary disk with XP installed. Restart the system and load up Windows XP, and the XP disk is now the primary, with the Vista partition running on the secondary D: drive

If you decide that dual-booting Vista and XP is not for you, EasyBCD lets you wind back the clock.

All you have to do is remove Vista's boot manager – go to "Manage Bootloader", select "Uninstall the Vista Bootloader" and then "Write MBR". Restart the machine and that's it – the XP boot loader is the

only one left on the system and XP loads. You can then delete the Vista partition and use GParted to re-extend the partition to take up the entire disk, or the Extend command in Vista DISKPART.