

DVD WRITING: 6 TIPS FOR THAT PERFECT BURN



Tech Tip 39 – DVD Writing: 6 Tips for that Perfect Burn

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For many, DVD writing (or “burning,” as it is commonly called) can end up being an expensive trial and error process, especially when burning video for playback on set-top DVD players. This Tech Tip is intended to eliminate the need to spend that hard earned money in order to achieve that “perfect burn.” Please note, as with many things computer-related, many people hold strong opinions of certain subjects, and this is definitely one of them. This tip simply enumerates what we have found to work for many people. While this Tech Tip deals largely with DVD video playback compatibility, we at Geeks.com (<http://www.geeks.com>) encourage you to use your DVD burner responsibly and to observe all copyright laws for the area in which you live.

Tip #1 – It all starts with media



The bane of the DVD burning enthusiast is “coasters.” This is what bad DVD burns are commonly referred to because this is about the only use left for a DVD disc that suffered a bad burn. With high quality media, you are apt to get less “coasters” per pack of media. The consensus of many is that one of the best brands of media available are the discs made by a company called Taiyo Yuden. Many also have success with “major brand” media such as Memorex, Maxell, TDK, Verbatim, etc. They might cost slightly more than standard or “no name” media, but if you are seriously after the highest write quality and playback performance, it pays to at least consider purchasing them. Not only will higher quality media burn better initially, but they will better retain their burn down the road. A note about Taiyo Yuden is that it is frequently blank (that is, it is not branded on the non-writing side as “Taiyo Yuden”).

Most manufacturers, “major brand” and “no name” alike, usually do not actually make their own media, but they contract out to third party manufacturers to make their media and print their brand name on it. This may actually result in your having two spindles of media with the same name printed on them and actually have them made by two completely different companies. Because of this, many prefer to buy their media based on the actual manufacturer of the media (by a method known as “Media ID”). Two recommended ways of checking the media ID, or “manufacturer ID,” (<http://www.digitalfaq.com/media/dvdmedia.htm>) of your media is to use Nero’s (<http://www2.nero.com/enu/index.html>) InfoTool or the excellent third-party tool, DVDInfoPro (<http://www.dvdinfo.com/>). Something else to consider, is that many have found that DVD burning drives are quite finicky when it comes to media, particularly cheap, no-name media. What this means in practical terms is that the more inexpensive media may not work in their drive or may burn at a reduced speed. For example, you may find that a spindle of 16x DVD discs that you bought may only write at 4x or 8x on certain 16x drives. Sticking to higher quality brands helps you to achieving the best possible write speeds while maintaining the highest level of burn quality.

Tip #2 – Check your drive manufacturer’s website for firmware updates



Many users, especially those who may be more technically challenged, may neglect to upgrade their current DVD drive with newer firmware. Firmware is special instructions written onto a built-in chip on the drive that tells it how fast to burn, how to work with certain media, etc. The nice thing about firmware is that it can be upgraded to newer versions to enhance the features of the drive.

Manufacturers commonly release new firmware for many reasons, such as media compatibility or better/faster drive performance. As an example, BenQ (<http://www.benq.com/>) has released newer firmware for their DW1620 drive (<http://www.benq.us/ServiceAndSupport/Drivers/drivers.cfm?product=647>) to improve the compatibility with certain 16x media (among other things). For newer firmware for your drive, check the manufacturer’s website. Firmware is generally very easy to apply and can improve your drive’s overall performance. Note that if you purchased a system with a DVD burner already installed, it may be an OEM version, and firmware may be difficult to find for this type of drive. There is one caveat on updating your firmware as well: be sure to use the firmware designed for your drive because if you use the wrong firmware, you can kill the drive and invalidate your warranty.

Tip #3 – If burning video, be sure the format you use is supported by your standalone DVD player



Not all standalone players support both DVD-R/RW and DVD+R/RW formats. Check your player's manual to see exactly what formats it supports before you spend money on media. Generally, older players have more readability issues than newer players. Videohelp.com (<http://www.videohelp.com/>) is an excellent website for finding such information as your player's model number, what media to use, what formats your player can use. You will also find many great guides and excellent software. One word of caution: no matter the player, for video you want to generally avoid using a re-writable (DVD-RW/DVD+RW) media. This type of media is best suited for data (although many standalone players do support this kind of media, some people have still encountered video playback issues).

Tip #4 – Nero is your friend

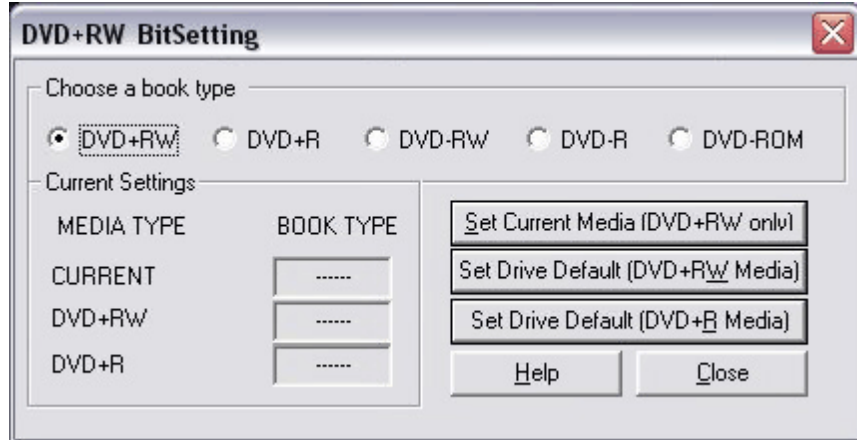


When it comes to DVD media, the consensus is that Taiyo Yuden is the best media to use. Just like media, the consensus of many is that Nero's (formerly Ahead Software) Nero Burning ROM is the best burning software you can currently use for your DVD burner. The good news is that the standard version of Nero is packaged with many burners and is usually fine for most burning needs. Nero also offers a more advanced version called Nero 6 Ultra Edition with features such as video authoring for users who want to get the most out of their burner

(http://ww2.nero.com/enu/Nero_6_Reloaded.html). Because of Nero's popularity, many third party software packages automatically tie into Nero's burning engine for making actual burns on the DVD drive. Other companies also offer excellent software packages as well (such as NTI (<http://www.ntius.com/default.asp>) and Roxio (http://www.roxio.com/en/index.jhtml;jsessionid=KG3W445VVHRVHLAQAQHCM4Q?_requestid=5373869)), but Nero has quickly taken the lead in this area in the last couple of years.

Tip #5 – Advanced tip: Bitsetting

This advanced tip is for those who may be having video playback problems with DVD+R/RW media playing properly on a DVD standalone player. When a DVD standalone player plays back a disc, it looks at a set of “low level”



information to tell it what kind of disc it is (for example: DVD-ROM; DVD+R, etc.). Some older standalone players will only play back discs marked in this area as DVD-ROM. They may physically have no problems playing back a burned disc with video, but their firmware instructions are telling them not to (because it is not marked as a DVD-ROM in this area). There are two work-arounds for this type of issue. The first is to actually update your standalone player’s firmware (see the [videohelp.com](http://www.videohelp.com) website we mentioned earlier for information on how to do this and if an update is available). The second is to have the burned disc report that it is a DVD-ROM rather than a DVD+R/RW disc. You can do this with a nifty feature called bitsetting

<http://www.dvdplusrw.org/Article.asp?mid=0&sid=2&aid=42>). Many drive manufacturers do support bitsetting or “booktype change” on +R/RW media. The method of changing the booktype of your media depends on the manufacturer of the drive. Some offer a utility to manually change it, while others will automatically change the booktype to DVD-ROM prior to actually burning your files onto the disc when using the proper burning software. While this tip may be more advanced than what you may be looking for, it does help solve some of those nagging compatibility issues some may still face.

Tip #6 – Advanced tip: When all else fails, burn your DVD in Nero using UDF 1.02

This is a tip some have found to help with many playback issues. If the video DVD you burned does not play, or you get a "Disc Error", try burning the disc using UDF (Universal Disc Format) (<http://www.videohelp.com/glossary?U>) 1.02. If you have a somewhat older standalone DVD player, there may be a chance that it cannot properly support the newer versions of UDF (burning software, such as Nero usually uses the newer version of UDF when burning DVD video). This “last resort” tip has helped many with seemingly insurmountable DVD video playability issues.

Final Words

Following these tips, and taking the initiative to do some research on the subject, will ensure that you'll be quite satisfied with both your DVD writer as well as anything you create with it. While we have found that some people may be quick to blame the DVD drive or the DVD media as the source of a problem, this may not necessarily always be the case as we've seen with tips 5 and 6. It is our hope that these Tech Tips will help you make that "perfect burn."