



- Microsoft At Home
- Articles
- Product Information
- Downloads
- Support
- Community
- Get The Newsletter
- RSS Feed
- Popular Destinations**
- Office At Home
- Security At Home
- Microsoft At Work
- Microsoft At School
- The Microsoft Store
- Key Resources**
- Microsoft Update
- Templates
- Clip Art
- Training
- MSN
- Office Tips & Tricks
- ¿Habla español? Visite Office Online para Latinoamérica

[Microsoft At Home](#)

Fix common PC problems

By [Scott Steinberg](#)



Having trouble with your computer? You've come to the right place. Even if you don't know a computer language (or don't want to), you can solve several common PC problems on

your own, using the resources listed here.

On This Page

- ↕ [Introduction](#)
- ↕ [First steps \(the basics\)](#)
- ↕ [Locating the problem](#)
- ↕ [Software errors](#)
- ↕ [Hardware trouble](#)
- ↕ [System failure](#)

Introduction

Today's Windows-based PCs make life easier than ever for both home enthusiasts and working professionals. But every piece of hardware and each software application you introduce to your system comes with its own unique requirements, and unfortunately, they don't always "play well" together.

From time to time, we've all encountered obstacles-devices that don't appear on your desktop, applications that won't run, or computers that refuse to start up. Luckily, there are several simple rules anyone can follow to quickly get back to speed with a minimum of frustration. Here are several easy step-by-step guides that may help you solve most common dilemmas. Hopefully, you'll be happily clicking away again in minutes.

↕ [Top of page](#)

First steps (the basics)

- Before adding any major hardware or software to your system, make sure you've recently [backed up your PC](#) as a safeguard. [Automatic backup functions](#) let you schedule regular upkeep for maximum convenience.

Related Links

- [Microsoft Update](#)
- [Microsoft Help and Support](#)
- [Microsoft Answers](#)
- [Security At Home](#)

These lists may help you narrow down the type of trouble you are experiencing:

Software

- Programs won't install, don't appear on your computer, or hang when you run them (or randomly crash to desktop).
- Conflicts between devices appear in [Windows XP](#) or [Windows Vista](#).
- Technical glitches mar programs' performance, causing frustration or preventing you from completing tasks.
- You are unable to connect to the Internet.
- You experience a severe [system slowdown](#).

Hardware

- Printers, monitors, keyboards, mice, scanners, faxes, graphics cards, sound cards, or additional equipment won't function properly.
- Devices aren't receiving electrical power.
- Equipment fails to be recognized by your PC before, during, or after installation.
- Hardware refuses to run at some point after initial setup.



Fix common PC problems

- Write down the contact information for [Microsoft Customer Service and Support](#), should you need to consult an expert. Take a second to print the below instructions as well, and keep them handy as you walk through the troubleshooting process.

[↑ Top of page](#)

Locating the problem

Many issues can be resolved by simply checking to be sure that all of your plugs are connected properly. Once you are sure of that, try rebooting your system. Turn your computer off, and then back on a few seconds later. If the problem continues, follow the steps listed here.

Ask yourself if the problem is related to hardware, software, or the [operating system](#) (such as Windows XP or Windows Vista). Below are some common indicators that can help you decide which is the right answer.

If you're uncertain, don't worry. Just start at the top by determining if your software is working, using the [Software errors](#) section that follows. If the issue persists, proceed to the [Hardware trouble](#) section and then to the [System failure](#) section.

You can also find really helpful information at [Microsoft Help and Support](#). If you'd like to search by individual program, try the [Product Solution Center](#). Or check the columns and blogs found on the [Windows Community](#) Web site, where you can find helpful input from experts and fellow computer users.

The lists on the right side of this page may help you narrow down the type of trouble you are experiencing.

[↑ Top of page](#)

Software errors

If programs refuse to install, won't appear on your desktop, can't seem to [run without freezing](#), don't load at a decent speed or function properly, or Internet access is unavailable, here's how to troubleshoot:

General issues

1. Confirm that your PC meets the software's minimum [system requirements](#). If it doesn't, you'll be unable to run the program without upgrading your computer's hardware. Note that PCs which barely meet or just slightly exceed these minimums may run the software more slowly and can be less reliable. Windows Vista users can reference the [Windows Experience Index](#) to quickly gauge their PC's general capabilities.
2. [Check for compatibility](#) with Windows Vista.
3. Close open programs and windows that you're not currently using. These can eat up system memory and processing power, slowing your PC or preventing additional software from running. Try running the program again.
4. Check available hard drive space. Roughly 5 to 10 percent of your hard drive's total storage allotment should be left free to ensure [optimum system performance](#), prevent crashes, and keep Windows running at top speed. To free more space, use Disk Cleanup in [Windows Vista](#) or [Windows XP](#).
5. Check for program updates and information on frequently encountered issues at the software manufacturer's Web site. For Microsoft products, you can also load [Windows Update](#) or visit the [Microsoft Download Center](#). If you install an update, reboot and attempt to run the program again.
6. [Uninstall or delete unwanted programs](#) to cut down on clutter and remove any drain on your system's resources.

Operating system

- Your PC won't start up or shut down.
- The computer randomly hangs and crashes.
- The system shuts down or reboots without warning.

Fix common PC problems

drain on your system's resources.

7. Disable programs you don't use to [prevent them from automatically loading](#) when Windows starts. Reboot and try the program again.
8. [Defragment](#) your hard drive in [Windows Vista](#) or [Windows XP](#) to improve performance.
9. Scan for [viruses](#) and [spyware](#). [Windows Defender](#) and [Windows Live OneCare](#) can help detect and prevent threats, along with preventing annoying pop-up notices and unauthorized home network intrusions. You can [scan your PC for free](#).
10. Reboot your computer and try loading the program again. If it still won't load or work correctly, you may need to uninstall the software and then reinstall it from scratch and reboot again. Advanced users can also try [these advanced troubleshooting tricks](#).
11. Consult [Microsoft Help and Support](#) and the [Windows Community](#). If live assistance is required, first contact the software manufacturer's customer support department. For additional assistance, try [Microsoft Customer Service and Support](#).

Internet Connectivity

Whether you have a [modem](#) or a [home network](#), answers to common Internet access and online networking problems can be found at [Microsoft Help and Support](#). Quick references include:

- [Dropped signals](#)
- [Finding wireless networks](#)
- [Internet connection problems](#)
- [Network connection issues](#)
- [Slow speeds](#)
- [Using Internet Explorer](#)

↑ [Top of page](#)

Hardware trouble

Should equipment fail to turn on, be recognized by your system, or function properly, follow these steps to address some of the most common hardware issues:

1. Determine that equipment has been assembled correctly, by consulting your product manual or referencing the manufacturer's Web site.
2. Confirm that your device is securely plugged in and receiving power. For equipment that relies on an A/C (wall outlet plug) power adapter, you can double-check that the outlet is functioning correctly by plugging in another device and observing if it starts up or begins charging.
3. Check to see whether equipment is properly connected to your PC by making sure all cables are securely plugged into the correct ports.
4. Verify that hardware is turned on.
5. Look for error messages displayed on either the equipment itself (commonly found on a small LCD screen) or on your desktop. Solutions for many of these can be found in your product manual or by checking [this comprehensive database](#).
6. [Install or reinstall drivers](#) for the device. Windows automatically searches for

Fix common PC problems

drivers when new devices are connected and notifies you of any available updates. It may be necessary to manually install them yourself, if these files are contained directly on the device, on a CD/DVD sold with the equipment, or on the manufacturer's Web site. To activate setup, just double-click on the driver installation program. You may need [advice](#), if the installation program fails to run.

7. Confirm that you're using the latest drivers for your hardware. Manufacturers routinely issue patches to correct errors and inconsistencies that users encounter. To do so, simply use [Windows Update](#), visit the [Microsoft Download Center](#), or check the Download or Support section of the manufacturer's Web site.
8. Reboot your system and test the device again.
9. Consult [Microsoft Help and Support](#), the [Windows Community](#), or the manufacturer's Web site for assistance. The following resources also offer solutions to common problems with popular devices, including:
 - [Audio and sound cards](#)
 - [CD or DVD drives](#)
 - [Digital cameras](#)
 - [Speech recognition](#)
 - [Keyboards](#)
 - [Mice](#)
 - [Monitors and video cards](#)
 - [Network adapters](#)
 - [Printers](#)
 - [Recordable media](#)
 - [Scanners](#)
 - [TV tuners](#)
 - [USB devices](#)
 - [Webcams](#)
10. If all else fails, contact the hardware manufacturer's customer support department. You can also try your [computer manufacturer's customer support](#) group or [Microsoft Customer Service and Support](#) for additional assistance.

[↑ Top of page](#)

System failure

Can't get your PC to start up or shut down? Is Windows stalling out, randomly turning your computer off, or rebooting without warning? Follow these step-by-step instructions to restore system health.

1. Confirm that your PC is plugged into an electrical outlet and receiving power. If so, reboot and see whether the problem persists.
2. Try restoring your system.
 - To do so for Windows Vista, see [here](#).

Fix common PC problems

- [Windows XP](#) users can click [this link](#) instead.
3. Check to see if you have a [memory problem](#).
 4. [Scan your hard drive](#) for errors.
 5. Look for [driver problems](#).
 6. Try [advanced boot options](#) and working in [safe mode](#).
 7. Did you just install a new hardware device or [driver](#) before Windows stopped working? [Determine the cause](#) and address the problem.
 8. Repair your PC using the [Startup Repair](#) function.
 9. [Reinstall](#) Windows.
 10. If troubles remain, consult [Microsoft Help and Support](#) or the [Windows Community](#). If you still need help, contact [Microsoft Customer Service and Support](#).

Hard drive failure

In a worst-case scenario, system failure may be caused by a damaged or corrupted hard drive. There are many warning signs that may indicate this problem:

- Your system won't boot.
- No operating system is detected.
- The computer hangs during startup.
- Your PC is making strange noises.

If you are concerned about the safety of your files, try the following options before paying to send it to a [data recovery specialist](#):

- [Resurrect](#) your hard drive.
- Retrieve files [using a boot CD](#).
- Employ [free system recovery tools](#).



Scott Steinberg

[Get Rich Playing Games](#) author, freelance writer, and radio/TV host Scott Steinberg has covered technology for 400+ outlets from CNN to the *LA Times*, *NY Times*, *Playboy*, *Rolling Stone*, and *TV Guide*. For more of his insights, visit him at [scottsteinberg.com](#) or [gadgetexpert.net](#), where he highlights the hottest new gadgets and games.

[↑ Top of page](#)

Was This Information Useful?

3/18/2009

Fix common PC problems

© 2009 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. [Contact Us](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Trademarks](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)