

Vision Tech

Windows laptops & PCs **Handbook**

80 free step-by-step guides in plain English

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My computer will not turn on

Do not worry yet. Most computers that seem dead have a simple cause, such as a loose cable, a flat battery or a screen that has simply gone dark. Try these steps in order.

Check the power

- Push the charger in firmly at both ends, and try a different wall socket.
- Plug it into the wall directly, not through an extension lead, in case that is faulty.
- Look for a small light on the charger or the computer. If a light comes on, the power is reaching it.
- Check that the cable has no kinks, splits or hot spots.

Step by step

1. Leave a laptop plugged in for at least 30 minutes. A completely flat battery can take a while before it will start.
2. Unplug everything else: USB sticks, printers, external drives and cables.
3. Unplug the charger. If your laptop has a removable battery, take it out. Otherwise skip this.
4. Hold the power button down for 15 seconds, then let go. This clears any leftover power.
5. Plug the charger back in and press the power button once, firmly.

Is it on but the screen is dark?

Listen for the fan and look for lights. Turn the brightness up. On a desktop, check the monitor is switched on and its cable is pushed in at both ends. If you have a second screen or TV and a cable, trying it can show whether the screen is the problem.

If it starts but shows an error

Note down exactly what the message says, or take a photo with your phone. It helps us work out what has gone wrong.

When to get more help

Please do not open the case yourself. Stop and ask for help if the charger gets hot or smells of burning, the battery looks swollen, there are beeps or flashing lights when you press the power button, or it still will not start after these steps. Your files are usually safe even when the computer will not start, so there is no need to panic. Tell us what you tried and what lights or sounds you saw.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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My laptop will not charge

A laptop that will not charge is usually down to the charger, the socket or a small fault in the charging port. Work through these checks gently before assuming the battery has failed.

Quick fixes to try first

- Try a different wall socket, and plug the charger in directly rather than through an extension lead.
- Push the plug firmly into the laptop. Look at the port for fluff or a bent pin, but do not poke anything metal inside it.
- Check the charger lights up, if it has a light, and that the cable has no kinks, splits or hot spots.
- Make sure you are using the charger that came with the laptop, or one with the same rating printed on it.

Step by step

1. Unplug the charger and remove any USB sticks and other devices.
2. Hold the power button for about 15 seconds to drain leftover power, then let go.
3. Plug the charger back in and wait 10 minutes, even if nothing seems to happen.
4. Press the power button once.
5. Once Windows starts, click the battery icon at the bottom right to see whether it says **Plugged in, charging**.

If that did not work

Some laptops show **Plugged in, not charging** when the battery is very hot. Switch it off, move it to a hard surface and let it cool for 30 minutes.

If you have a second compatible charger to borrow, try it. That quickly tells you whether the charger or the laptop is at fault.

Windows 11: you can see battery health notes under **Settings**, then **System**, then **Power & battery**.

Windows 10: look under **Settings**, then **System**, then **Battery**. The exact wording may differ slightly between versions.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the charger gets hot or smells of burning, the battery looks swollen or the case is bulging, the plug feels loose in the port, or the laptop only works when the cable is held at an angle. Do not open the laptop yourself. Tell us the make and model, what lights you can see, and what you have already tried.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Black screen when Windows starts

A black screen can mean the laptop is on but the display is not showing anything, or that Windows has stopped part-way through starting. Stay calm and try these in order.

Quick fixes to try first

- Check the laptop is actually on. Listen for a fan and look for lights.
- Turn the brightness up using the brightness keys on the top row of the keyboard.
- Unplug any extra monitor, TV or cable. Windows may be sending the picture to the wrong place.
- Unplug USB sticks and other devices, then restart.

Step by step

1. Press the Windows key, Ctrl, Shift and B all at once. This restarts the graphics system and you may hear a beep.
2. Wait 30 seconds. If you see nothing, press Ctrl, Alt and Delete together and see whether a blue menu appears.
3. If nothing changes, hold the power button for about 10 seconds until the laptop switches off.
4. Wait a few seconds, then press the power button to start it again.
5. If you see a mouse arrow on a black screen, press Ctrl, Shift and Esc to open **Task Manager**, choose **Run new task**, type explorer.exe and press Enter.

If that did not work

If Windows fails to start several times in a row, it should open a blue **Recovery** screen by itself. Choose **See advanced repair options**, then **Troubleshoot**, then **Advanced options**. From there you can try **Startup Repair** or **System Restore**. Do not choose any option that says reset or remove everything unless your files are backed up, as it can erase them.

If you can reach **Safe Mode**, our guide on it will help.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the screen stays black after a forced restart, the laptop beeps in a pattern, you see an error about no boot device, or the screen shows a crack or lines. Your files are very likely still safe, so please do not reinstall Windows. Tell us the make, model and anything you can see on screen.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Blue screen error: what to do

A blue screen means Windows hit a problem it could not safely carry on with, so it stopped and restarted. One blue screen is usually nothing to worry about. Repeated ones need attention.

Quick fixes to try first

- Write down or photograph the words on the screen, especially the **stop code** in capital letters, such as a phrase with underscores. This helps us a lot.
- Let the laptop restart on its own and see if it behaves.
- Unplug USB sticks, printers and other devices, then restart.
- Think about what changed recently: a new program, a driver, a Windows update or a new device.

Step by step

1. Once Windows has started, open **Settings**, then **Windows Update**, and install anything waiting. Restart afterwards.
2. Check you have free space. Windows 11: **Settings, System, Storage**. Windows 10: **Settings, System, Storage**.
3. If it began after installing a program, uninstall it from **Settings**, then **Apps**.
4. If it began after an update or change, try **System Restore**. Search the Start menu for **Create a restore point**, then choose **System Restore**. This does not remove your personal files.
5. Run a **Windows Security** scan to rule out unwanted software.

If that did not work

- If the laptop blue screens before you can sign in, it should show a recovery screen after a few failed starts. Choose **Troubleshoot**, then **Advanced options**, then try **Startup Repair** or **System Restore**.
- Try starting in Safe Mode and see whether the problem stops. If it does, a program or driver is the likely cause.

Avoid downloading free driver updaters or repair tools from the internet. They often cause more trouble than they fix.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if blue screens happen more than once or twice, the laptop cannot reach Windows, or you hear clicking from the drive. Please back up what you can first if the laptop will start. Include the stop code, what you were doing, and anything you changed recently.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Laptop gets hot and shuts itself off

Laptops get warm when they work hard, but if yours is too hot to touch or switches off suddenly, it is protecting itself from overheating. Dust and poor airflow are the most common causes.

Quick fixes to try first

- Switch off and unplug the laptop and let it cool for 30 minutes.
- Put it on a hard, flat surface. Beds, sofas and laps block the air vents.
- Look at the vents on the sides and underneath. Make sure nothing is covering them.
- Take it out of its case or sleeve while in use.

Step by step

1. Press Ctrl, Shift and Esc together to open **Task Manager**.
2. Look at the **CPU** column on the **Processes** tab. If a program is using a lot while you are not doing much, choose it and select **End task**. Save your work first.
3. Click the battery icon, or open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Power & battery** (Windows 11) or **Battery** (Windows 10), and choose a more balanced power mode rather than the top performance one.
4. Close extra browser tabs, especially ones playing video.
5. Restart and check whether the fan is quieter.

If that did not work

- A cooling stand can help a little.
- Install waiting updates, as they sometimes fix fans and power behaviour.
- If the fan sounds like it is struggling, the vents are probably clogged with dust. Do not open the laptop yourself or use a vacuum cleaner on the vents, as static can damage the parts. A short burst of canned air from a safe distance on a switched-off laptop is the most you should try.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the laptop switches off repeatedly, the fan is very loud all the time, the case is too hot to hold, or you smell burning. Stop using it in that case. We may recommend a professional clean and fresh thermal paste. Tell us the make, model and when it happens, such as during video calls or games.

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Windows keeps showing Automatic Repair or 'Your PC did not start correctly'

Sometimes Windows tries to fix itself at start-up, fails, restarts and tries again, round and round. This guide shows the safe things to try, in order, without wiping your files.

What is happening

Windows has noticed that it could not start properly a few times in a row, so it opens the blue **Recovery** screen. The cause is usually a bad update, a corrupted system file, a failing drive or a faulty USB device.

Simple checks first

1. Switch the PC off completely. Hold the power button for 10 seconds if needed.
2. Unplug everything except power, mouse and keyboard.
3. Switch on again and wait. Sometimes the loop clears on its own.

Use the repair options

If the blue screen appears again, choose **Advanced options**, then **Troubleshoot**, then **Advanced options**. Try these one at a time, restarting between each:

- **Startup Repair**: lets Windows have one more go at fixing itself.
- **System Restore**: takes Windows back to an earlier working date. Your own files are not touched, but recently installed programs may be removed.
- **Uninstall Updates**: choose to remove the latest quality update first. Your files are not touched.
- **Startup Settings**, then **Restart**, then **4** or **F4**: starts Windows in Safe Mode, if you can reach it.

If you are asked for a recovery key

Some PCs ask for a BitLocker recovery key. This is a long number that is normally saved to your Microsoft account. On another device, go to aka.ms/myrecoverykey and sign in to find it. Do not guess it.

Be careful with Reset

Reset this PC can fix this problem, but if you pick **Remove everything** you will lose your photos, documents and programs. Only choose **Keep my files** if you must, and understand that even that option removes your installed apps. If you have no backup of important files, stop and ask us first.

When to get more help

Get in touch if none of the repair options work, if you hear clicking from the drive, if Windows says the drive cannot be found, or if photos and documents are not backed up. Each restart can make a failing drive worse.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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'No bootable device' or the PC beeps when it starts

If your PC shows a message like **No bootable device**, **Operating system not found** or **Reboot and select proper boot device**, or it makes a series of beeps and nothing appears, it cannot find or start Windows. Here is what the usual causes are and what you can safely check.

Check the simple things

1. Switch off, then unplug every USB stick, external drive, memory card and disc.
2. Switch on again. A forgotten USB stick is a very common cause, because the PC tries to start from it first.
3. Make sure the power cable is firmly in and, on a laptop, that the battery is charged.
4. Hold the power button for 15 seconds to switch off, wait a minute, then try once more.

What the message means

The PC has looked for Windows on its drive and found nothing it can use. This can be because:

- The drive has failed or become loose. This is serious, and the quicker you stop, the more likely your files can be saved.
- Windows start-up files are damaged. These can often be repaired.
- The PC is set to start from the wrong place. This can happen after a power cut or a flat CMOS battery.

Do not reinstall Windows to fix this, because it can wipe your files.

About beeps

Beep patterns are not the same on every make. A repeated series of beeps at power-on often points to memory (RAM), the graphics card or the motherboard, but the exact meaning is in your manual or on the maker's support site. Write down how many beeps you hear, whether they are long or short, and the make and model.

On a desktop, only reseal memory or cards if you are comfortable doing so: switch off, unplug at the wall, and touch bare metal on the case first. Never open a laptop.

When to get more help

Get in touch as soon as the message appears more than once after the checks above. Do not keep restarting if you hear clicking, or if the PC beeps and stays blank. Tell us the make and model, the exact message or beeps, and whether you have a recent backup.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Windows stuck on 'Restarting' or 'Getting Windows ready'

After an update, your PC may sit for a long time on **Restarting**, **Working on updates** or **Getting Windows ready**. **Don't turn off your computer**. Usually the answer is patience, but there is a safe limit.

Why it takes so long

Windows installs big updates in stages, and old or slow laptops with hard drives can take much longer than newer ones. The screen may show 0%, 30% or 100% for a long time, and the spinning dots may seem to freeze while it is still working.

How long to wait

1. Leave the PC plugged in to the mains power. Do not run on battery.
2. Look at the drive light, if there is one. If it flickers, the PC is working.
3. Wait at least an hour, and up to two hours for a big update on an older machine.
4. Do not press keys or move the mouse during this time.

If nothing changes after two hours

If the screen has not changed at all, the drive light is off and the PC feels cool and silent, it is reasonable to force it off:

1. Hold the power button for about 10 seconds until it switches off.
2. Unplug any USB drives and printers.
3. Wait 30 seconds, then switch on.

Windows will usually undo the unfinished update on its own and start normally. You might see the message **Undoing changes made to your computer**. Let it finish, however long it takes.

After it starts again

Go to **Settings**, then **Windows Update** (Windows 10: **Update & Security**, then **Windows Update**) and check for updates again. If the same update fails again, make sure you have at least 20 GB free, restart once, and try again.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the PC loops back to the same screen, goes to a blue **Recovery** or **Automatic Repair** screen, shows a black screen afterwards, or keeps failing the same update. If you force it off, mention it to us. Do not use **Reset this PC** until your files are safely backed up.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Black screen with only a mouse pointer after sign-in

If you sign in and see a plain black screen with a mouse pointer you can move, Windows has started but the desktop (the taskbar, icons and Start button) has not loaded. This is usually fixable without losing anything.

Try these quick things

1. Press **Ctrl + Shift + Windows key + B** together. You may hear a beep. This restarts the graphics driver, which fixes many black screens.
2. Press **Windows key + P** and choose **PC screen only**, in case the picture is going to a screen that is not connected.
3. Unplug any extra monitors, TVs, docks and USB devices, then wait a minute.

Restart the desktop

1. Press **Ctrl + Alt + Delete** and choose **Task Manager**. If it looks small, click **More details**.
2. Click **File**, then **Run new task**.
3. Type **explorer.exe** and press **Enter**.

The taskbar and desktop should come back. This is a Windows program that is meant to be there, so it is safe to start it this way. If it works, restart the PC normally afterwards.

If the desktop keeps failing

- Restart the PC and sign in again. A fast restart does not always clear the problem, so choose **Restart** rather than **Shut down**.
- Try signing in with a different account if you have one. If that works, your own profile may be damaged.
- Start in Safe Mode, then restart to see if it clears. We have a separate guide for this.

Check for a recent change

Think about what you did just before it began: a Windows update, a new graphics driver, a new programme or a new device. Using **System Restore** can undo the last change without touching your files.

When to get more help

Get in touch if **Task Manager** will not open, if the problem returns every time you start the PC, or if it only affects one user account. Tell us whether the screen is black before or after the sign-in screen, and any message you saw. Do not reset or reinstall Windows without backing up first.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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My computer restarts by itself

A PC that restarts without being asked is annoying, and sometimes a sign of a deeper fault. The cause could be an update, overheating, a faulty driver or a failing power supply or memory.

Is it just updates?

Windows will restart to finish installing updates, but should warn you first. Open **Settings**, then **Windows Update**, then **Advanced options** (Windows 10: **Update & Security**, **Windows Update**, **Change active hours**) and set **Active hours** to when you use the PC.

Check for overheating

- Make sure vents are not blocked. Laptops need to sit on a hard surface, not a bed or sofa.
- If the fan is very loud before a restart, dust is a likely cause. See our guide on hot and noisy computers.
- A PC that restarts under heavy load, such as games, often has a heat or power problem.

See what Windows recorded

1. Press the **Windows key**, type **Reliability history** and open it.
2. Look at the chart. Red crosses show crashes. Click one to see what failed.

A note of the stop code or the program named helps us to find the cause.

Stop the automatic restart so you can read the error

1. Open **Settings**, **System**, **About**, then **Advanced system settings** (Windows 10: **Settings**, **System**, **About**).
2. On the **Advanced** tab, click **Settings** under **Startup and Recovery**.
3. Untick **Automatically restart** and click **OK**.

If Windows crashes now, a blue screen stays on screen long enough for you to photograph it.

Other safe steps

- Unplug USB devices you do not need.
- Install pending updates.
- If it began after a new device or driver, use **System Restore**.
- Do not tamper with drivers from unofficial sites.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the PC restarts several times a day, restarts while idle, shows a blue screen, or smells hot. Restarts can damage the drive over time, so back up your important files soon.

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Blue screen stop codes in plain English

A blue screen shows a stop code, which is the name of the problem in capital letters. The code will not tell you for certain what is wrong, but it points to where to start looking. This guide is a decoder, and our separate guide tells you what to do generally.

Getting the code

Take a photo of the screen with your phone. Note the text beside **Stop code**, and a line starting **What failed**, which may name a file. Ignore the QR code.

Common codes and what they hint at

- **CRITICAL_PROCESS_DIED**: an important part of Windows stopped. Often a faulty driver, update or damaged system files.
- **IRQL_NOT_LESS_OR_EQUAL**, **SYSTEM_SERVICE_EXCEPTION** and **SYSTEM_THREAD_EXCEPTION_NOT_HANDLED**: usually a driver or program misbehaving.
- **PAGE_FAULT_IN_NONPAGED_AREA** and **MEMORY_MANAGEMENT**: memory problem, either a faulty memory stick or a software fault.
- **KERNEL_SECURITY_CHECK_FAILURE**: a driver or a failing memory or drive.
- **INACCESSIBLE_BOOT_DEVICE** and **UNMOUNTABLE_BOOT_VOLUME**: Windows cannot read its own drive. This may be an update problem or a failing drive.
- **DPC_WATCHDOG_VIOLATION**: often a driver, sometimes an old drive firmware.
- **WHEA_UNCORRECTABLE_ERROR**: a hardware fault, often heat or a failing component.
- **CLOCK_WATCHDOG_TIMEOUT**: processor trouble, which can be overheating.

Safe steps to try

1. Unplug USB devices, then restart.
2. Install Windows updates from **Settings, Windows Update**.
3. Think about what changed just before the crashes, and use **System Restore** to go back.
4. Run **Windows Memory Diagnostic**: press the **Windows key**, type its name, and choose **Restart now and check for problems**. Save your work first, because the PC restarts. It takes a while.
5. Check the PC is not overheating.

Do not

Do not download "blue screen fixers" or driver packs from search results. Many are scams or contain unwanted software.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the same code appears more than once, if you cannot reach the desktop, or if the PC makes clicking noises. Send us a photo of the screen, and the make and model. Back up your files while you still can.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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How to fix a slow computer

A computer usually slows down because it is short of memory or storage, is doing too much at start-up, or is waiting for updates. Most of these can be put right without any special skills.

Quick fixes to try first

- Save your work, then choose **Restart** (not Sleep or Shut down). A restart clears out temporary problems.
- Close programs and browser tabs you are not using. Every open tab uses memory.
- Check that nothing is downloading or updating in the background.

Step by step

1. Windows: open **Settings**, then **Apps**, then **Startup**, and switch off programs you do not need at start-up. Mac: open **System Settings**, then **General**, then **Login Items**. Older versions of macOS use **System Preferences** and **Users & Groups** instead.
2. Check your free storage. Windows: **Settings**, then **System**, then **Storage**. Mac: **System Settings**, then **General**, then **Storage**. Aim to keep at least 15 to 20 per cent free.
3. Install waiting updates: **Settings**, then **Windows Update** on Windows, or **System Settings**, then **General**, then **Software Update** on a Mac.
4. Run a scan with the security software already on your computer, such as Windows Security.

If that did not work

Very old computers struggle with modern websites, however tidy they are. If it is five or more years old and has a traditional spinning hard drive, a solid-state drive upgrade can make a big difference, but this is best done by a professional.

Do not install "PC cleaner" or "speed booster" programs, especially ones advertised by pop-ups. They often do more harm than good.

When to get more help

Stop and ask for help if the computer is slow all the time even after a restart, makes clicking or grinding noises, shows warnings about the drive, or gets very hot. Also ask if you are unsure which programs are safe to remove. Tell us the make, roughly how old it is, and when the slowness started.

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My computer is frozen

When a computer stops responding, it is often just busy, but sometimes a program has got stuck. Always start with the gentlest fix, because forcing a computer off can lose unsaved work.

Quick fixes to try first

- Wait a full minute. Programs often recover by themselves.
- Check whether the mouse pointer still moves. If it does, the computer is probably still working.
- Try pressing the Caps Lock key. If its light does not change, the whole computer has frozen rather than one program.

Close the stuck program

1. Windows: press Ctrl, Shift and Esc together to open **Task Manager**.
 2. Click the program marked **Not responding**, then choose **End task**.
 3. Mac: press Option, Command and Esc together, pick the program in the list, then choose **Force Quit**.
- Anything you had not saved in that program may be lost, but the rest of the computer should carry on.

If nothing moves at all

Hold the power button for about 10 seconds until the computer switches off. Wait a few seconds and turn it on again. Warning: this can lose anything you had not saved, and in rare cases can upset files that were open, so use it only as a last resort.

Stop it happening again

- Restart your computer at least once a week.
- Keep some free storage space and install updates when offered.
- Try not to have lots of large programs open at once.
- Write down what you were doing when it froze. A pattern can point to the cause.

When to get more help

Stop and ask for help if it freezes several times a day, freezes as soon as it starts, shows a blue or black error screen, or makes clicking noises. Freezing can be a sign of a failing drive, so make sure your important files are backed up. Tell us how often it happens and what you were doing at the time.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

How to free up storage space

When storage fills up, a computer slows down and cannot save new files or install updates. Clearing space is simple, but you should be careful about what you remove.

Quick fixes to try first

- Empty the Recycle Bin (Windows) or Bin (Mac). Warning: this deletes the files for good, so look through first.
- Look in your **Downloads** folder. It often holds installers and old files you no longer need.
- Uninstall programs you no longer use.

Step by step

1. See what is using the space. Windows: open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Storage**. Mac: open **System Settings**, then **General**, then **Storage**.
2. On Windows, you can turn on **Storage Sense** on the same page. It tidies temporary files automatically. Read what it will delete before turning it on.
3. Sort large files. Photos and videos usually take the most room. Copy them to an external drive or cloud storage first, check that they open, and only then delete them from the computer.
4. Remove old downloads and duplicate files by hand.
5. Restart the computer and check how much space you have now.

Be careful with

- Anything in Windows, System32, Library or Applications folders. These belong to the system and programs.
- Files you cannot identify. If you are not sure, leave them alone.
- Photos and documents with no other copy. Back them up before deleting anything.

If you use OneDrive or iCloud, deleting a file from the computer may delete it from the cloud as well. Check how yours is set up first.

When to get more help

Stop and ask for help if the storage is nearly full but you cannot see what is using it, you are asked to buy more storage and are unsure, or you are not sure whether something is safe to delete. Tell us how much space is free and what is using most.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Windows takes ages to start up

If your laptop takes several minutes to reach the desktop, the usual cause is too many programs loading at once, or a drive that is nearly full.

Quick fixes to try first

- Do a proper restart. Click **Start**, then the power icon, then **Restart**.
- Install waiting updates and restart again.
- Unplug USB drives and other devices before you start the laptop, in case it is waiting on them.
- Give it five minutes after sign-in. Windows often does tidying jobs straight after starting.

Step by step

1. Press Ctrl, Shift and Esc together to open **Task Manager**.
2. Click **Startup apps** on the left (Windows 11) or the **Startup** tab (Windows 10). If you only see a small window, click **More details** first.
3. Look at the **Startup impact** column. Right-click programs marked **High** that you do not need straight away, and choose **Disable**.
4. Only disable things you recognise. Leave anything from Microsoft, your security software, and your touchpad or graphics software alone.
5. Restart and see if it is faster.

If that did not work

- Check your free space. Windows 11 and Windows 10: **Settings, System, Storage**. Try to keep at least 15 per cent of the drive free.
- Run a scan with **Windows Security** in case something unwanted is slowing it down.
- Older laptops with a traditional hard drive are naturally slow to start. Replacing it with a solid state drive (SSD) makes a huge difference, but that is a job for a professional.

Disabling a start-up item does not delete the program. You can turn it back on at any time.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the laptop takes more than ten minutes to start, you hear clicking noises from the drive, Windows freezes during start-up, or the slowness started suddenly. Back up your files if you can. Tell us the make, model and approximate age of the laptop.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

Disk 100%, high memory or CPU use in Task Manager

Task Manager shows how hard your laptop is working. If **Disk**, **Memory** or **CPU** sit near 100 per cent and everything feels sluggish, you can usually find the cause.

Quick fixes to try first

- Restart the laptop. This clears most temporary pile-ups.
- Wait ten minutes after start-up. Updates and scans often run in the background and then settle.
- Close browser tabs and programs you are not using. Browsers are often the biggest user of memory.

Step by step

1. Press Ctrl, Shift and Esc together to open **Task Manager**.
2. On the **Processes** tab, click the **Disk**, **Memory** or **CPU** column heading to sort the biggest users to the top.
3. Look for a program you recognise and do not need right now. Click it and choose **End task**. Save your work first, as unsaved changes will be lost.
4. Do not end items you do not recognise or that are from Windows. If unsure, leave them.
5. Open **Settings**, then **Windows Update**, and let any updates finish, then restart.

If that did not work

- Run a **Windows Security** scan. Open **Start**, search **Windows Security**, choose **Virus & threat protection**, then **Quick scan**.
- Check your free space. Windows 11 and 10: **Settings**, **System**, **Storage**. A nearly full drive makes disk use spike.
- Disable unneeded start-up programs from the **Startup apps** or **Startup** tab in Task Manager.
- Older laptops with a spinning hard drive often hit 100 per cent disk use. Fixing that properly usually means an SSD upgrade, which a professional should do.

Avoid free tuning or cleaner programs from the internet.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if disk use stays at 100 per cent after a restart, the same unknown program keeps using lots of CPU, the fan runs loudly all the time, or you hear clicking from the drive. Back up your files if you can. Tell us the name of the program at the top of the list.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

An app keeps crashing or will not open

When a program closes by itself, freezes, or does nothing when you click it, the fix is usually simple. Start gently and work upwards.

Quick fixes to try first

- Wait a minute. Some apps take a while to open, especially after a restart.
- Close the app fully. Press Ctrl, Shift and Esc to open **Task Manager**, find the app under **Processes**, click it and choose **End task**. Then open it again.
- Restart the laptop.
- Check you have free storage space. Open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Storage**.

Step by step

1. Check for updates to the app itself. Many have an update option in their menu, and Microsoft Store apps update from the **Microsoft Store** under **Library** or **Downloads**.
2. Open **Settings**, then **Windows Update**, and install anything waiting. Restart.
3. Windows 11: go to **Settings**, then **Apps**, then **Installed apps**. Windows 10: go to **Settings**, then **Apps**, then **Apps & features**.
4. Click the app, then **Advanced options** (Windows 11: click the three dots first). If you see **Repair**, try it. It keeps your data. The options may differ for different apps.
5. If **Repair** does not help, **Reset** may work for some apps, but it can remove the app's saved data and settings, so do not use it for anything holding important files unless they are backed up.

If that did not work

- Right-click the app and try **Run as administrator**, but only for apps you trust.
- Uninstall the app and reinstall it from its official website or the Microsoft Store. Make sure you have any licence key or sign-in details first.
- Run a **Windows Security** scan.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if several different apps crash, the problem started after an update, you see an error message you do not understand, or the app holds files you cannot afford to lose. Take a photo of any error. Tell us which app, what you were doing, and the Windows version.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

Search, Start menu or taskbar not responding

If clicking **Start** does nothing, the search box will not type, or the taskbar seems frozen, a part of Windows called **Windows Explorer** has usually stalled. It can be restarted safely.

Quick fixes to try first

- Wait a minute, especially just after start-up or an update.
- Press the Windows key on the keyboard to see whether **Start** opens that way.
- Restart the laptop with **Ctrl, Alt and Delete**, then the power icon at the bottom right, then **Restart**.
- Install waiting updates, as they often fix this.

Step by step

1. Press Ctrl, Shift and Esc together to open **Task Manager**. If you only see a small window, click **More details**.
2. On the **Processes** tab, scroll to find **Windows Explorer**.
3. Right-click it and choose **Restart**. The screen may flash and the taskbar will disappear and come back. This is normal.
4. Test the **Start** menu and search again.
5. If it is still stuck, sign out and sign back in. Press Ctrl, Alt and Delete, then choose **Sign out**. Save your work first.

If that did not work

- Open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Troubleshoot**, then **Other troubleshooters**, and run **Search and Indexing**. In Windows 10, you may find it under **Update & Security**, then **Troubleshoot**. Wording may differ slightly.
- For search only, check that nothing odd is running by opening **Task Manager** and looking for a busy program.
- Run a **Windows Security** scan.
- If it began after a recent update or program install, try **System Restore**. It does not remove your personal files.

Please do not follow online guides that tell you to type long commands or edit the registry.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the problem returns after every restart, you cannot open **Settings** or **Task Manager** at all, or you cannot sign in. Tell us your Windows version and when it began.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

How to free up space with Storage Sense

Storage Sense is a built-in Windows tool that clears out temporary files and the contents of your Recycle Bin for you. It is a safe way to make room on your laptop.

Quick fixes to try first

- Empty the Recycle Bin. Right-click it on the desktop and choose **Empty Recycle Bin**. Check first that nothing in there is needed.
- Look in your **Downloads** folder and delete installers and files you no longer need.
- Move large photos and videos to a USB drive or OneDrive.

Step by step

1. Open **Settings** by pressing the Windows key and I together.
2. Choose **System**, then **Storage**.
3. You will see a bar showing what is using your space. Click items such as **Apps**, **Temporary files** or **Documents** to see more.
4. Turn on **Storage Sense** using the switch. Click it for more settings.
5. Choose how often to run it, such as every month, and how long to keep items in the Recycle Bin and Downloads folder.
6. Be careful with the **Downloads** option. If you set it to delete files after a number of days, anything left there may be removed. Move things you want to keep first.
7. You can click **Run Storage Sense now** to clean immediately.

In Windows 10 the same page is under **Settings, System, Storage**. The exact layout may differ slightly.

If that did not work

- Under **Temporary files** on the Storage page, tick the items you are happy to remove and click **Remove files**. Leave **Downloads** unticked unless you are sure.
- Uninstall programs you never use. See our uninstalling guide.
- Back up your photos before deleting any.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the drive stays nearly full even after cleaning, you are unsure what is safe to delete, or Windows says it cannot update because of space. Do not delete folders such as Windows or Program Files. Tell us how much space is used and what the **Storage** page shows.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

How to uninstall programs you do not need

Removing programs you no longer use frees up space and can make your laptop run better. Windows has a safe built-in way to do it.

Quick fixes to try first

- Close the program first and save any work.
- Decide whether you really want it gone. Some programs, such as security software or things from the laptop maker, may be needed. If unsure, leave it.
- Make sure you have any licence key or sign-in details in case you want to reinstall it later.

Step by step

1. Open **Settings** by pressing the Windows key and I together.
2. Windows 11: choose **Apps**, then **Installed apps**. Windows 10: choose **Apps**, then **Apps & features**.
3. Scroll through the list, or use the search box to find the program.
4. Windows 11: click the three dots beside the program, then **Uninstall**. Windows 10: click the program, then **Uninstall**.
5. Confirm, then follow the on-screen prompts. A few programs open their own window and ask questions. The safe answers are usually **Next** or **Uninstall**.
6. Restart the laptop if it asks you to.

You can sort the list by **Size** to find the biggest space users.

If that did not work

- If the **Uninstall** button is greyed out, it is a part of Windows and cannot be removed this way.
- If you see an error, restart and try again.
- Do not drag program folders to the Recycle Bin. That does not remove them properly.
- If a program seems to come back, it may have an update tool, or another program installed it.

Be careful of pop-ups telling you to remove programs because of a virus. Those are often scams. Only use Settings.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if you are not sure whether something is safe to remove, a program will not uninstall, unfamiliar programs have appeared that you did not install, or your browser keeps showing strange adverts. Tell us the names of the programs.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Mouse pointer frozen or jumping, and the keyboard typing the wrong symbols

Two common irritations have simple fixes: a mouse pointer that freezes or jumps about, and a keyboard where the @ and quote marks swap or the pound sign turns into a hash. The second is almost always the keyboard layout set to US instead of UK.

Pointer frozen or jumping

1. Press the **Windows key** and see if the Start menu opens. If it does, Windows is fine and the mouse is the problem.
2. Wireless mouse: replace the batteries, switch it off and on, and check it is not out of range.
3. Plug the receiver or cable into a different USB port, directly on the PC rather than a hub.
4. Clean the underside of the mouse and use it on a plain, non-shiny surface.
5. Laptop: a touchpad can jump if your palm brushes it while typing. Look under **Settings, Bluetooth & devices, Touchpad** (Windows 10: **Devices, Touchpad**) and lower the sensitivity. There is also a function key, often **F6** or **F9**, which switches the touchpad on and off.

To adjust the pointer speed, open **Settings, Bluetooth & devices, Mouse** (Windows 10: **Devices, Mouse**).

Wrong symbols when you type

Your keyboard layout is probably set to **ENG US**. You can see it at the bottom right of the screen, near the clock.

1. Windows 11: open **Settings, Time & language, Language & region**.
2. Windows 10: open **Settings, Time & Language, Language**.
3. Click the three dots beside **English (United Kingdom)** and choose **Language options** (Windows 10: select the language, then **Options**).
4. Under **Keyboards**, click **Add a keyboard** and choose **United Kingdom**.
5. Remove **US** by selecting it and choosing **Remove**.

To swap quickly, press **Windows key + Spacebar**. Windows may also have switched by accident when you pressed **Alt + Shift**.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the pointer still jumps with a different mouse, if keys type the wrong letters even after changing the layout, or if the laptop keyboard is not working at all. Please tell us the make and model.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

'This app can't run on your PC' and programs that will not install

These messages are usually about compatibility: the program was not made for your version of Windows, or something is stopping it from installing. Here is a safe way to work through it.

What the message usually means

- **This app can't run on your PC:** the program was built for a different kind of PC or an older Windows, such as a 32-bit program on a 64-bit PC, or a program for a different processor type.
- **Windows protected your PC:** SmartScreen does not recognise the program. This is a warning, not an error. If you are not certain the program is genuine, do not go on.
- **Installation failed:** there may be no space, the installer is damaged, or you do not have permission.

Easy things to try

1. Download the installer again from the maker's own website. Do not use download sites or links from adverts.
2. Check you have enough free space on the **C:** drive. Aim for several gigabytes spare.
3. Restart, then try again before you open anything else.
4. Right-click the installer and choose **Run as administrator**. You may need an administrator password.

Try compatibility mode

1. Right-click the program or installer and choose **Properties**.
2. Open the **Compatibility** tab, then click **Run compatibility troubleshooter**.
3. Choose **Try recommended settings** and test it.

Windows in S mode

Settings, then **System**, then **Activation** will say if you are in **S mode**. This only lets you install apps from the Microsoft Store. You can switch out of S mode for free in the Store, but it is a one-way change and cannot be undone, so only do it if you need to.

A very old program may no longer be supported. Look for a newer version from the maker.

Never do this

Do not turn off Windows Security, or follow advice telling you to ignore warnings.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the same error appears for a program you need for work, if you are not sure where the installer came from, or if you were told to install something by a caller or a pop-up. We can check it for you.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Microsoft Store will not open, download or update apps

The Microsoft Store is where Windows gets apps such as Photos, Calculator and many programs. If it will not open, shows an error or gets stuck on **Pending**, these steps usually sort it out.

Quick checks

1. Check your internet connection by opening a web page.
2. Check the date and time at the bottom right. If they are wrong, a Store sign-in can fail.
3. Restart the PC, which clears many temporary faults.
4. Make sure you are signed in to the Store with your Microsoft account.
5. Make sure there is plenty of free space on the **C:** drive.

Update Windows

Open **Settings**, then **Windows Update** (Windows 10: **Update & Security**, then **Windows Update**) and install anything waiting. Restart if asked.

Run the troubleshooter

- Windows 11: **Settings**, **System**, **Troubleshoot**, **Other troubleshooters**, then **Run** beside **Windows Store Apps**.
- Windows 10: **Settings**, **Update & Security**, **Troubleshoot**, **Additional troubleshooters**, then **Windows Store Apps**.

Repair or reset the Store

1. Windows 11: open **Settings**, **Apps**, **Installed apps**. Windows 10: open **Settings**, **Apps**, **Apps & features**.
2. Find **Microsoft Store**, click the three dots (Windows 10: click it), and choose **Advanced options**.
3. Click **Repair** first and try the Store again.
4. If it still fails, click **Reset**. This clears the Store's saved data and signs you out, but it does not remove your installed apps. You will need to sign in again.

Sometimes it helps to sign out of the Store, using your profile picture at the top, and then sign in again.

Open **Library** or **Downloads** in the Store and pause, then resume the download. Make sure the PC is not in battery saver mode, which can stop background downloads.

Work or school PCs

Your organisation may block the Store or limit what you can install. Do not try to get around it.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the Store opens and closes at once, if you see a long error code after resetting, or if a paid app will not download. Send us a photo of the error and we can usually tell what it means.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Task Manager explained simply, and how to manage start-up apps

Task Manager shows what your PC is busy doing. It can help you close a stuck program and stop unwanted programs from starting with Windows, making start-up faster.

Opening it

Press **Ctrl + Shift + Esc** together, or right-click the **Start** button and choose **Task Manager**. If it looks tiny, click **More details**.

What the main tabs tell you

- **Processes** lists what is running. The columns **CPU**, **Memory** and **Disk** show how hard each item is working. Click a heading to sort by it.
- **Performance** shows graphs for the processor, memory and drive. A drive stuck near 100% often explains a slow PC.
- **Startup** (called **Startup apps** in Windows 11) shows what runs when Windows starts.

Closing a stuck program

1. In **Processes**, click the app that is not responding.
2. Click **End task**.

Warning: anything you had not saved in that program will be lost. Do not end items you do not recognise, and never end anything whose name includes Windows, Security or Antimalware.

Reducing start-up apps

1. Open the **Startup** tab (Windows 11: **Startup apps**).
2. Look at the **Startup impact** column. Anything marked **High** slows start-up the most.
3. Right-click a program you do not need at start-up, such as a music app, a chat app or a printer helper, and choose **Disable**.

This does not uninstall anything. You can switch it back on at any time, and the program still opens normally when you click it.

You can reach the same list in **Settings**, then **Apps**, then **Startup**.

What to leave alone

Keep anything for your antivirus, your touchpad, your graphics card, your sound, and OneDrive if you use it. If you cannot tell what something is, search its name online or ask us before you disable it.

When to get more help

Get in touch if something you do not recognise is using a lot of CPU all the time, if Task Manager will not open, or if a program keeps restarting after you close it. A slow PC that is still slow after tidying up may need a hardware check.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

A program says 'Not responding': what to do and how not to lose your work

When a window goes white or grey and the title bar says **Not responding**, the program is busy or stuck. Often it recovers if you leave it alone. Here is how to deal with it with the least risk to your work.

First, wait

1. Do not click repeatedly. Extra clicks stack up and make it worse.
2. Wait two minutes. Big spreadsheets, large photos and updates can take a while.
3. If Windows shows **Close the program** or **Wait for the program to respond**, choose **Wait** first.

Check that the PC is not just slow

Look at the drive light and listen to the fan. If the PC is working hard, give it more time. If the whole PC is slow, restart it later, and see our guide on a slow computer.

If it does not recover

1. Press **Ctrl + Shift + Esc** to open Task Manager.
2. In **Processes**, find the program, which is often marked as **Not responding**.
3. Click it and then **End task**.

Anything unsaved in that program will be lost. Word, Excel and PowerPoint save recovery copies, so when you reopen them look for a **Document Recovery** panel on the left. We have a separate guide on recovering unsaved Office files.

Stop it happening again

- Save work often, with **Ctrl + S**.
- Close programs you are not using, and keep the browser's tabs down to a manageable number.
- Install Windows updates and update the program.
- Leave at least 15% of your drive free.
- If it is the same program each time, uninstall and reinstall it from the maker's website.

If everything is frozen

If Task Manager will not open, press and hold the power button for about 10 seconds to force the PC off. This is a last resort, because unsaved work will be lost and there is a small risk of file damage.

When to get more help

Get in touch if one program freezes every day, if a file will no longer open after a crash, or if the PC freezes completely. Note the program name and what you were doing at the time.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

'Your computer is low on memory' and virtual memory basics

Windows can show a message saying **Your computer is low on memory**. This means there is not enough working memory (RAM) for everything you have open. In most cases you can solve it by closing things, without changing any technical settings.

What is RAM?

RAM is the PC's short-term workspace. Every open program and browser tab uses some. When it fills up, Windows borrows space on the drive, called virtual memory, which is much slower. That is why the PC crawls.

Easy fixes

1. Save your work, then close programs you are not using.
2. In your browser, close tabs you do not need. Browsers can use a lot of memory.
3. Restart the PC, which clears a lot of leftover use.
4. Open **Task Manager** with **Ctrl + Shift + Esc**, click the **Memory** column to sort, and see what is using the most.

Reduce what starts with Windows

In **Task Manager**, open the **Startup** tab (Windows 11: **Startup apps**) and disable programs you do not need. This does not uninstall them.

Virtual memory: the safe approach

Windows manages this by itself, and for most people the best choice is to leave it alone. You can look at it to be sure it has not been changed:

1. Open **Settings**, **System**, **About**, then **Advanced system settings**.
2. Under **Performance**, click **Settings**, then the **Advanced** tab, then **Change** under **Virtual memory**.
3. Check that **Automatically manage paging file size for all drives** is ticked.

Do not set the file to tiny values or switch it off. Doing so can cause crashes.

Virtual memory needs spare room on the **C:** drive, so aim to keep at least 15% free.

The real fix

If you see the message often, even with few programs open, you probably need more RAM. Many modern laptops cannot be upgraded, so check the make and model before buying anything.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the message appears all the time, if one program uses nearly all your memory, or if you want to know whether your PC can have more RAM. We can check for you.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Disk Cleanup and Cleanup recommendations: clearing space safely

Windows can list files that are safe to remove, such as temporary files and old installers. Used carefully, this can win back several gigabytes without touching your own photos and documents.

Before you start

Look at what is ticked before you clear anything. Cleaning is permanent for some items. If you are not sure, leave it unticked.

Windows 11: Cleanup recommendations

1. Open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Storage**.
2. Click **Cleanup recommendations**.
3. Open **Temporary files**, **Large or unused files**, **Files synced to the cloud** and **Unused apps**.
4. Read the list, tick only what you recognise as safe, and click **Clean up**.

Windows 10: Storage settings

1. Open **Settings**, **System**, **Storage**.
2. Click **Temporary files**, and tick items such as **Temporary files**, **Thumbnails** and **Delivery Optimization Files**.
3. Click **Remove files**.

The classic Disk Cleanup tool

Press the **Windows key**, type **Disk Cleanup**, and open it. Choose the **C:** drive. After the scan, you can click **Clean up system files** to see more, including old Windows Update files. Click **OK** and confirm.

What to be careful with

- **Downloads**: this folder holds files you chose to save. Windows lists it as an option in some versions. Leave it unticked unless you have checked the folder yourself.
- **Recycle Bin**: emptying it is permanent. Look inside first.
- **Previous Windows installation**: removing this means you cannot go back to the older version of Windows.
- **Large or unused files**: only delete those you recognise, and copy important ones to an external drive.

Uninstall programs you no longer use from **Settings**, **Apps**, and move photos and videos to an external drive or the cloud.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the drive remains almost full even after cleaning, if you do not know what is using the space, or if a cleanup option disappeared or is stuck. A full drive can stop updates from installing.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

OneDrive is using all my storage: Files On-Demand explained

OneDrive can keep your files in the cloud and show them on the PC without taking up space. Many people are surprised when it fills the drive, or worry that deleting a file on the PC removes it everywhere. This guide explains the icons, and how to free space safely.

The three status icons

In File Explorer, look at the **Status** column beside a OneDrive file:

- **Cloud outline:** the file is online only. It takes no space, but needs the internet to open it.
- **Green tick in a white circle:** the file was downloaded when you opened it, and Windows can remove it later if space is short.
- **Solid green tick:** the file is always kept on this PC.

Free up space without losing files

1. Open **File Explorer** and click **OneDrive** on the left.
2. Right-click a folder or file that you do not need on the PC.
3. Choose **Free up space**.

The file stays safe in the cloud and the icon changes to a cloud. To keep something for use offline, choose **Always keep on this device**.

Check Files On-Demand is on

Click the **OneDrive** cloud icon near the clock, then the **Settings** cog (a gear), then **Settings**. Look for **Files On-Demand** under the sync options. The place it appears differs between versions of OneDrive, so look in **Sync and backup** and **Advanced settings** if you do not see it at once.

The warning

Do not delete files from the OneDrive folder just to clear space. Deleting there deletes the file online as well, although it can be recovered from the OneDrive recycle bin for a limited time. Use **Free up space** instead.

A free OneDrive account has limited storage, which may be only 5 GB. A full cloud means new files cannot sync. You can remove files you no longer need, move them to an external drive, or buy more storage.

When to get more help

Get in touch if OneDrive says you are out of space, if files show a red cross, or if you have deleted something in error. Stop deleting and tell us what happened.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

Speeding up an old laptop honestly: when a tidy-up helps and when to upgrade

Nobody can make a ten-year-old laptop feel brand new, but there are cheap changes that really help, and some warning signs that it is time to move on. We would rather tell you honestly than sell you something you do not need.

Free things to try first

1. Restart regularly. A PC left on for weeks slows down.
2. Uninstall programs you do not use, in **Settings, Apps**.
3. Turn off start-up apps you do not need in **Task Manager**.
4. Make sure at least 15% of the drive is free.
5. Install Windows updates and run a scan with **Windows Security**.
6. Close browser tabs and take out extensions you do not use.

Check the two parts that matter most

Open **Task Manager** with **Ctrl + Shift + Esc**, then **Performance**.

- **Disk**: if it shows as an **HDD** (hard disk) and often sits near 100%, a solid-state drive (SSD) would transform it. This is the best upgrade for an older laptop. Newer versions show the type under the drive's name.
- **Memory**: if it is nearly full during normal use, more RAM helps. 8 GB is a sensible minimum today, and 16 GB is comfortable.

Upgrades

- Many laptops allow an SSD swap, and some allow extra RAM. On thin laptops the RAM is often soldered to the board, and cannot be changed.
- Do not open the laptop yourself unless you know how. Back up first, because swapping a drive involves copying or reinstalling Windows.
- An old battery can also be replaced on many models.

When replacing is the better choice

- The PC is not eligible for Windows 11 and you need security updates.
- The upgrade would cost nearly as much as a new machine.
- The screen, keyboard or hinges are damaged.
- The processor is very old and struggles even after a clean-up.

Do not

Do not buy "PC speed booster" software. It is rarely helpful and often unwanted.

When to get more help

Get in touch with the make, model and age of the laptop, and we will tell you plainly whether an upgrade is worth it. Back up your files first.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

No sound from my computer

No sound is usually caused by muted volume, the wrong speakers being selected, or a loose cable. It is often a quick fix.

Quick fixes to try first

- Turn the volume up on the computer and on any speakers, and check that nothing is muted.
- Check the volume of the video or website you are playing too. Many have their own volume slider.
- Unplug headphones and any Bluetooth devices. Sound may be going to something other than your speakers.
- Restart the computer.

Step by step

1. Windows: click the speaker icon at the bottom right and check the volume slider and the output device. You can choose a different one from there.
2. Open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Sound**. Under **Output**, choose the right speakers or headphones. Windows 11 and Windows 10 look similar here, but the wording may differ slightly.
3. Still on that page, select your output and use the **Test** button, if there is one, to play a sound.
4. Mac: open **System Settings**, then **Sound**, and choose the right device under **Output**. Check that **Mute** is not ticked.
5. Check that cables are pushed in firmly, and that external speakers are switched on and plugged into power.

If that did not work

- Try headphones. If they work, the speakers or the cable may be at fault.
- Install waiting updates, as these sometimes fix sound problems.
- Try a different program or website to see if it is just one that is silent.

When to get more help

Stop and ask for help if the sound icon shows a red cross or says no device found, the sound crackles or cuts out, or you hear nothing after trying headphones. Please do not download "driver fixer" programs. Tell us the make and model and what you have already tried.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

My computer is hot or the fan is very loud

Computers get warm when they work hard, and fans spin faster to cool them. But constant heat or a loud fan can be a sign of blocked vents or a program using too much power.

Quick fixes to try first

- Put the computer on a hard, flat surface. Beds, sofas and laps block the vents underneath.
- Make sure the vents on the sides and back are not covered or pushed against a wall.
- Close programs and browser tabs you are not using, particularly video and games.
- Take it out of direct sunlight and away from radiators.

Step by step

1. Windows: press Ctrl, Shift and Esc together to open **Task Manager**. Look at the **CPU** column in **Processes** and see which program is using the most.
2. If one program is using a lot and you do not need it, select it and choose **End task**. Warning: unsaved work in that program will be lost.
3. Mac: open **Activity Monitor** from Spotlight, and look under the **CPU** tab for busy programs.
4. Restart the computer, and check for waiting updates.
5. Switch it off, unplug it, let it cool, and gently clean dust from the outside vents with a soft brush.

Be careful

Do not open the case, and do not spray anything into the vents. Compressed air can spin the fan too fast and damage it. If the vents are dusty inside, it is best handled by a professional.

Never put a laptop in a bag while it is warm or running.

When to get more help

Stop using it and unplug it if there is a burning smell, the case is too hot to touch, it shuts down suddenly, or the battery looks swollen. Ask for help if the fan is loud even when you are doing very little, or it is hot every day. Tell us the make, age and what you were doing when it got hot.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Laptop battery drains fast

If your laptop battery used to last all day and now struggles for a couple of hours, something is either using too much power or the battery is getting old. You can check both.

Quick fixes to try first

- Turn the screen brightness down. The screen is usually the biggest drain.
- Close programs and browser tabs you are not using.
- Disconnect USB devices you do not need, such as external drives and dongles.
- Turn on Battery Saver from the battery icon at the bottom right of the screen.

Step by step

1. Open **Settings**.
2. Windows 11: choose **System**, then **Power & battery**, then **Battery usage**. Windows 10: choose **System**, then **Battery**, then look at which apps use most power.
3. If one app is using a lot and you do not need it, close it. Consider uninstalling it if you never use it.
4. Open **Task Manager** by pressing Ctrl, Shift and Esc together. Look at the **Startup apps** (Windows 11) or **Startup** (Windows 10) tab and disable things you do not need at start-up.
5. In the same Power settings, check the **Power mode** is not set to the highest performance setting while on battery.

If that did not work

- Install any waiting updates, as they sometimes fix power problems.
- Restart the laptop fully. A restart can clear a program that is stuck using lots of power.
- Remember that batteries wear out. After two to four years of regular use, a shorter life is normal.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the battery life drops suddenly from hours to minutes, the laptop shuts off at 30 or 40 per cent, the case feels swollen, the underside gets very hot while charging, or the trackpad has started to lift. A swollen battery can be dangerous, so stop using it and unplug it. Tell us the make and model and roughly how old the laptop is.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Touchpad not working on my laptop

When a touchpad stops responding, it is often switched off by accident, or Windows has a minor glitch. It is usually quick to fix.

Quick fixes to try first

- Plug in a USB mouse, if you have one, so you can click around while you fix it.
- Look at the top row of keys for one with a touchpad symbol, often a small rectangle with a line. Press it, or hold the **Fn** key and press it.
- Make sure your fingers are clean and dry, and that nothing is stuck to the pad.
- Restart the laptop.

Step by step

1. Open **Settings** by pressing the Windows key and I together.
2. Windows 11: choose **Bluetooth & devices**, then **Touchpad**. Windows 10: choose **Devices**, then **Touchpad**.
3. Make sure the **Touchpad** switch at the top is **On**.
4. Look for an option about leaving the touchpad on when a mouse is connected. Turn it on if you want it to keep working with a mouse plugged in.
5. If you have no mouse, press the Windows key, type Touchpad, press Enter and use the Tab and arrow keys to move to the switch, then press the spacebar.

If that did not work

- Open **Settings**, then **Windows Update**, and install any updates, then restart.
- Try the troubleshooter. Open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Troubleshoot**, then **Other troubleshooters**. Menu names can differ slightly between versions.
- Check for water spills or recent drops. Those can damage the pad.

Avoid downloading touchpad drivers from unfamiliar websites. If a driver is needed, we can help you get the right one from the laptop maker.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the touchpad still does nothing after a restart, the cursor jumps about on its own, the pad clicks but does not move the cursor, or the pad or case looks raised. Tell us the make and model and whether a USB mouse works.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Keyboard keys not working or typing the wrong characters

If pressing a key gives you the wrong symbol, or some keys do nothing, the cause is often a setting rather than a broken keyboard.

Quick fixes to try first

- Restart the laptop.
- Check that **Caps Lock** and **Num Lock** lights are what you expect.
- Gently turn the laptop over and tap it to dislodge crumbs, or use a soft brush on the keys.
- If you can, test with a USB or wireless keyboard to see whether the problem is the laptop or the keyboard itself.

Step by step

If the quote mark and the at sign are swapped, or the pound sign gives a hash, Windows is probably using the wrong keyboard layout.

1. Hold the Windows key and press the spacebar. A small menu pops up. If it shows **ENG US**, press the spacebar again with the Windows key held to switch to **ENG UK**.
2. For a lasting fix, open **Settings**, then **Time & language**, then **Language & region** (Windows 11) or **Language** (Windows 10).
3. Make sure **English (United Kingdom)** is your language, and remove any keyboard layouts you do not use.
4. If many keys seem to type numbers instead of letters, try pressing **Fn** with **Num Lock**, as some laptops have a number pad overlaid on the letters.
5. If keys seem to stick or repeat, open **Settings**, then **Accessibility**, then **Keyboard**, and check that **Sticky keys** and **Filter keys** are off.

If that did not work

- Install updates from **Windows Update** and restart.
- Make sure the keyboard is not damaged by liquid. If it has been spilt on, switch it off at once.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if only some keys are dead, there has been a spill, the keys are physically stuck, or the problem comes back after changing the settings. Do not prise the keys off yourself. Tell us the make and model and exactly which keys misbehave.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Microphone not working on Windows

If people cannot hear you on calls, the microphone is usually muted, switched off in privacy settings, or not chosen as the input device.

Quick fixes to try first

- Look for a mute key on the keyboard, often with a microphone symbol. Check it is not on.
- If you use a headset, make sure the plug is fully in and any mute switch on the cable is off.
- Check the call app, such as Teams or Zoom, has its own mute button turned off.
- Restart the laptop and the app.

Step by step

1. Open **Settings** by pressing the Windows key and I together.
2. Choose **System**, then **Sound**.
3. Under **Input**, pick the microphone you want to use. Speak and watch the bar or level meter move. If it moves, Windows hears you.
4. Check the volume slider for the microphone is not turned down to zero.
5. Windows 11: go to **Privacy & security**, then **Microphone**. Windows 10: go to **Privacy**, then **Microphone**. Make sure microphone access is **On**, and that the app you want is allowed. The exact wording may differ slightly.

If that did not work

- Try the troubleshooter. In the Sound settings, look for **Troubleshoot common sound problems** or similar.
- Unplug and re-plug a USB or Bluetooth headset, and select it again under **Input**.
- For a Bluetooth headset, remove it under **Bluetooth & devices** and pair it again.
- Install waiting updates from **Windows Update**.
- Close other apps that may be using the microphone.

Please do not download audio driver tools from random websites.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if no input device is listed at all, the level meter never moves with any microphone, or the problem began after a spill or drop. Tell us the make and model, the program you are using, and whether a headset works.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

External monitor or second screen not detected

When you plug in a monitor, TV or projector and nothing appears, the fault is usually the cable, the input setting on the screen, or a Windows display mode.

Quick fixes to try first

- Check both ends of the cable are pushed in firmly.
- Use the buttons on the monitor or TV to choose the right input, such as HDMI 1 or HDMI 2.
- Try another cable or another port on the laptop if you have one.
- Make sure the monitor is switched on and plugged in.
- Restart the laptop with the screen connected.

Step by step

1. Hold the Windows key and press P. A small menu appears.
2. Choose **Extend** to use the screen as an extra desktop, or **Duplicate** to show the same thing on both.
3. If nothing appears, open **Settings** with the Windows key and I, then choose **System**, then **Display**.
4. Windows 11: scroll to **Multiple displays** and click **Detect**. Windows 10: scroll down and click **Detect**. If **Detect** is not there, the wording may differ slightly.
5. If the screen shows but looks blurry, choose the monitor in the list and pick the **Recommended** resolution.

If that did not work

- Open **Windows Update** and install updates, which often include graphics updates, then restart.
- If you use a dock or adapter, unplug it and plug it back in, and try connecting the screen directly.
- Some laptop USB-C ports do not carry video. The exact symbol varies by maker, so check the laptop's manual.
- Do not download graphics driver tools from unfamiliar websites.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the monitor works on another device but never on this laptop, the port feels loose or damaged, or the picture flickers or shows lines. Tell us the make and model of both the laptop and the monitor, and what kind of cable or adapter you are using.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

Screen flickering or brightness controls missing

A flickering screen, or brightness keys that do nothing, are both often down to the display driver or a setting. A few steps will tell you whether it is a software problem.

Quick fixes to try first

- Restart the laptop.
- Plug in the charger. Some laptops dim the screen automatically on battery.
- Unplug any external monitors or docks and see whether the flickering stops.
- Try the brightness keys on the top row. You may need to hold **Fn** as well.

Step by step: flickering

1. Press **Ctrl**, **Shift** and **Esc** to open **Task Manager**.
2. Watch it. If **Task Manager** flickers too, the cause is probably the graphics driver. If it stays steady while other things flicker, a program is likely the cause.
3. Open **Settings**, then **Windows Update**, and install all updates. Restart.
4. Open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Display** and check the **Refresh rate** under advanced display options is set to a higher choice that is marked recommended.

Step by step: brightness

1. Open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Display**.
2. Look for the **Brightness** slider at the top. Move it.
3. If there is no slider, you may be using a desktop PC where brightness is changed with buttons on the monitor itself. That is normal.
4. On a laptop, install updates from **Windows Update**, including any optional driver updates under advanced options, and restart.

If that did not work

- Close recently installed programs that may cause flicker, and uninstall any you do not need.
- Try a different monitor if you have one to see whether it is the screen.

Avoid downloading driver tools from random sites.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the flicker has coloured lines, patches or cracks, it flickers even in the start-up screen before Windows loads, or brightness never works. Those can mean a hardware fault. Tell us the make and model and when it began.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

How to check battery health and use Battery saver

All laptop batteries wear out gradually. Windows can show you how much capacity yours has lost, and Battery saver can make a charge last longer.

See your battery's health report

Windows keeps a hidden report, and the usual way to produce it uses a short command. If you are comfortable doing so:

1. Right-click **Start** and choose **Terminal** or **Windows PowerShell**.
2. Type **powercfg /batteryreport** and press **Enter**.
3. It tells you where the report is saved. Open that file in your browser.

Look at **Design capacity** and **Full charge capacity**. If the second is well below the first, say under 60%, the battery has worn down. If you are not comfortable with this, you can ask us to do it.

Use Battery saver

Windows 11: **Settings, System, Power & battery**. Windows 10: **Settings, System, Battery**.

- Click **Battery saver** and turn it on. In Windows 11, you can choose to turn on automatically below a level, such as 20%.
- It dims the screen a little and pauses some background activity.
- You can also click the battery icon at the bottom right of the screen and choose **Battery saver** or **Energy saver**, depending on your version.

More ways to save power

1. Turn the screen brightness down.
2. Close programs you are not using, especially video calls and games.
3. Under **Screen and sleep**, make the screen switch off sooner when on battery.
4. Switch off Bluetooth and keyboard lights when not needed.

Looking after the battery

- Heat is the biggest enemy, so avoid leaving the laptop in a hot car.
- Many laptops have a battery care or charge limit in the maker's app. This can help if the laptop is usually plugged in.
- Do not let it sit at 0% for weeks.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the battery lasts under an hour on a full charge, if it shows as not detected, or if it looks swollen, hot or smells odd. In those cases switch off, unplug and stop using the laptop. Never open it yourself.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Sleep, hibernate, Fast Startup and what happens when you close the laptop lid

Windows has several ways of switching a PC off or pausing it. Knowing what each one does helps you pick the right one and fix problems where the PC will not wake or start.

The differences

- **Sleep**: the PC pauses but stays on. It wakes in seconds, but still uses a little power, so a laptop battery can run flat.
- **Hibernate**: your open work is saved to the drive and the PC switches off fully. It takes longer to wake, but uses no power. It may not appear in the Power menu until it is switched on.
- **Shut down**: closes everything. With **Fast Startup** on, Windows keeps some system information to start faster.
- **Restart**: closes everything and starts afresh. It does not use Fast Startup, so it is the best fix for odd behaviour.

Choose what the lid does

1. Press the **Windows key**, type **Choose what closing the lid does**, and open it.
2. For **When I close the lid**, choose **Sleep**, **Hibernate**, **Shut down** or **Do nothing**. You can choose a different option for battery and for plugged in.

Do not close a laptop in a bag while it is set to **Do nothing**, because it will get hot.

Set how soon it sleeps

Windows 11: **Settings, System, Power & battery, Screen, sleep & hibernate timeouts**. Windows 10: **Settings, System, Power & sleep**.

Fast Startup

On the same **Choose what closing the lid does** page, click **Change settings that are currently unavailable**. Under **Shutdown settings**, you can tick or untick **Turn on fast startup**. If your PC has update problems or odd faults that survive shutting down, try unticking it. This is safe and changes nothing in your files.

Hibernate option

The same list shows **Hibernate**, if available. Ticking it adds Hibernate to the Power menu.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the PC will not wake from sleep, wakes by itself in your bag, or the battery drains overnight while asleep. Please tell us the make and model.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Making Windows easier on the eyes: dark mode, Night light, text size and Magnifier

Windows has built-in settings to make the screen more comfortable, whether you want bigger text, a warmer colour in the evening or the screen read aloud.

Dark mode

- Windows 11: **Settings, Personalisation, Colours**, then **Choose your mode** and pick **Dark**.
- Windows 10: **Settings, Personalisation, Colours**, then **Choose your colour** and pick **Dark**.

It changes Windows and many apps, but not all websites.

Night light

This makes the screen warmer and less blue at night. Open **Settings, System, Display**, then **Night light**. Switch it on, and open **Night light settings** to choose a schedule and strength. The same setting is in Windows 10 and 11.

Bigger text

- Windows 11: **Settings, Accessibility, Text size**. Slide the bar and click **Apply**.
- Windows 10: **Settings, Ease of Access, Display, Make text bigger**.

To make everything bigger, including icons, use **Scale** in **Settings, System, Display**. This is covered in our scaling guide.

Windows 11: **Settings, Accessibility, Mouse pointer and touch**. Windows 10: **Settings, Ease of Access, Cursor & pointer**. Pick a size and colour that is easy to see.

Magnifier

Press **Windows key + Plus (+)** to zoom in, and **Windows key + Minus (-)** to zoom out. Press **Windows key + Esc** to close it. You can set it up in **Settings, Accessibility, Magnifier**, or **Ease of Access** in Windows 10.

Narrator

Narrator reads out what is on screen. Press **Windows key + Ctrl + Enter** to turn it on and off. It is helpful if you have sight problems, but needs some practice, so try it when you are not in a hurry.

In the same **Accessibility** area (**Ease of Access** in Windows 10), you can find **Colour filters** and **Contrast themes**, which help with colour blindness and glare.

When to get more help

Get in touch if text is still hard to read, if a setting you changed has made the screen unusable, or if you would like help choosing accessibility tools for a family member.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

Blurry text, wrong-sized screen and projecting with Windows key + P

If everything looks fuzzy, too big, too small or stretched, the screen settings are usually the cause. The fix is a quick visit to the display settings.

Set the right resolution

Open **Settings, System, Display**. Under **Display resolution** (Windows 10: **Display resolution** too), choose the option marked **Recommended**. This matches the screen's real pixels, and anything else looks soft.

Fix the size with Scale

Under **Scale** in the same page, choose a percentage such as 100%, 125% or 150%. Larger values make text and icons bigger without making them blurry. Laptops often default to 125% or 150%.

Some programs still look blurry

After changing scale, older programs may look fuzzy. Try this:

1. Close the program and open it again, or sign out and in.
2. Right-click the program, choose **Properties, Compatibility**, then **Change high DPI settings**, and try **Override high DPI scaling behaviour**.
3. In the display page, look under **Advanced scaling settings** for **Fix scaling for apps**, and switch it on. The wording may differ slightly.

Graphics driver

Go to **Settings, Windows Update**, and install any optional or driver updates.

Projectors and extra screens

Press **Windows key + P**. Four choices appear:

- **PC screen only**: the external screen is off.
- **Duplicate**: the same picture on both. Best for presentations.
- **Extend**: the external screen is an extra desktop to the right.
- **Second screen only**: the laptop screen is blank.

If a projector shows nothing, check the cable is pushed in, try **Duplicate**, and make sure the projector is on the right input. For wireless projection, press **Windows key + K**.

Use the correct HDMI, DisplayPort or USB-C cable. See our separate guide on cables.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the **Recommended** resolution is missing, if the screen goes black when you change it (wait 15 seconds and it will usually return), or if a projector will not connect.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

What to look for when buying a Windows laptop or PC for everyday use

For email, browsing, video calls, documents and photos you do not need a top-of-the-range machine, but a few specifications decide whether it will still feel good in five years. This guide is general, with no prices, because those change quickly.

The processor

Look for a current mid-range chip, such as an Intel Core i5 or Core Ultra 5, or an AMD Ryzen 5. Very cheap, entry-level processors are fine for light use, but slow down sooner. Avoid anything several generations old unless it is a well-priced refurbished business model.

Memory (RAM)

- 8 GB is the minimum we would suggest today.
- 16 GB is a better choice if you keep lots of tabs open, work with large files or want the PC to last.
- Check whether it can be upgraded. In many laptops it is soldered in place.

Storage

- Insist on an SSD, which is far faster than a hard disk.
- 256 GB is tight, and 512 GB is comfortable. Beware of very small, cheap drives called **eMMC**.
- Cloud storage and external drives can make up the difference.

The screen and build

- Full HD (1920 x 1080) is plenty. A brighter, higher-quality screen is easier on the eyes.
- Check the keyboard and trackpad in a shop if you can. You use them all day.
- Check the weight and battery claims, and look for independent reviews.

Windows version

New PCs come with Windows 11. If you buy second-hand or refurbished, make sure it is eligible for Windows 11, because Windows 10 is no longer the version to build on.

- Enough ports, such as USB-A, USB-C, HDMI and a headphone socket.
- Wi-Fi 6 or newer, and a webcam if you take video calls.
- A proper warranty and a seller who can support you.
- You do not need to pay extra for AI features for ordinary use.

When to get more help

Get in touch before you buy, and send us the link to the model you like. We can tell you whether it is a good fit, and set it up when it arrives.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Typing with your voice in Windows

You can speak and have Windows type for you, which is useful if typing is tiring, difficult or slow. It works in most places you can type, such as emails, documents and web forms. It is available on Windows 10 and Windows 11.

Start voice typing

1. Click in the box where you want the text to appear.
2. Press **Windows key + H**.
3. A small microphone box appears. Wait for it to say **Listening**, or click the microphone.
4. Start speaking clearly at a normal pace.
5. Press **Windows key + H** again, or click the microphone, to stop.

Speak the punctuation

Say the punctuation as you go, for example:

- "full stop", "comma", "question mark", "exclamation mark"
- "new line" and "new paragraph"
- "open bracket" and "close bracket"

In many versions there is an **auto punctuation** option, in the settings cog on the voice typing box, which adds some for you. Check what it does before you rely on it.

If nothing happens

- Check your microphone is plugged in and not muted. See our guide on microphones.
- Voice typing normally needs an internet connection, because the speech is processed online.
- Go to **Settings, Privacy & security, Microphone** (Windows 10: **Privacy, Microphone**) and make sure apps can use it.
- Make sure the language is right, under **Settings, Time & language**.
- Move closer to the microphone, and reduce background noise.

Privacy

Online speech recognition sends what you say to Microsoft for processing. If you would rather not, you can look in the **Speech** privacy settings to see what is switched on. Do not dictate passwords, card numbers or very private information.

Voice access in Windows 11

Windows 11 also has **Voice access**, which lets you control the whole PC by voice, not just type. Search for it in **Settings, Accessibility, Speech**. It takes practice, but can be a great help if using a mouse is hard.

Read back what you have written. Dictation can hear names and unusual words wrongly.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the microphone is not detected, voice typing keeps cutting out, or you would like help choosing a headset for dictation.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

Wi-Fi or Bluetooth option missing on my laptop

If the Wi-Fi or Bluetooth buttons have vanished from the taskbar, Windows may have switched them off, or the hardware has stopped being detected. Start with the simple settings.

Quick fixes to try first

- Check **Airplane mode** is off. Click the network icon in the bottom right and look at the quick settings.
- Look for a key on the top row with an aeroplane or aerial symbol. Press it, or hold **Fn** and press it.
- Restart the laptop fully.
- Move closer to your router and check other devices can connect.

Step by step

1. Open **Settings** by pressing the Windows key and I.
2. Windows 11: choose **Network & internet** and check Wi-Fi is on. For Bluetooth, choose **Bluetooth & devices** and check the switch is on. Windows 10: choose **Network & Internet** for Wi-Fi, or **Devices** for Bluetooth.
3. Run the troubleshooter. In Windows 11, open **System**, then **Troubleshoot**, then **Other troubleshooters** and run **Network and Internet** or **Bluetooth**. In Windows 10, look under **Update & Security**, then **Troubleshoot**. Wording may differ slightly.
4. Open **Windows Update** and install anything waiting, including any optional driver updates listed under advanced options. Restart afterwards.

If that did not work

As a last resort for Wi-Fi only, you can use **Network reset**. Windows 11: **Settings, Network & internet, Advanced network settings, Network reset**. Windows 10: **Settings, Network & Internet, Status, Network reset**.

Be aware this removes saved Wi-Fi networks and passwords, so make sure you know your Wi-Fi password first. It will restart your laptop.

Please do not download driver programs from unfamiliar sites, and do not change anything in the BIOS.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the option has gone completely, Wi-Fi works on other devices but never on this laptop, or the problem began after a drop or spill. The wireless part may need replacing. Tell us the make and model and whether you can connect with a cable.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

How to transfer files between two PCs

Moving your photos and documents to a new or different PC is easy if you use the right method. The safest ways need no technical skill.

Quick fixes to try first

- Work out roughly how much you need to move. Open **File Explorer**, right-click the folder, and choose **Properties** to see its size.
- Make sure both PCs are charged or plugged in.
- Copy, do not move. Keep the originals until you have checked the files arrived.

Step by step: USB drive

1. Plug a USB stick or external drive into the old PC. Make sure it is bigger than what you are copying.
2. Open **File Explorer** by pressing the Windows key and E.
3. Right-click the folder you want, choose **Copy**, open the drive in the left-hand list, right-click in empty space and choose **Paste**.
4. When finished, right-click the drive and choose **Eject**, then unplug it.
5. Plug it into the new PC and copy the files to the **Documents** or **Pictures** folder.

Step by step: OneDrive

1. Sign in to OneDrive on the old PC with your Microsoft account and let your folders sync.
2. Sign in with the same account on the new PC. Your files appear automatically once synced. This is handy when you have a decent internet connection and enough storage.

If that did not work

- If the drive does not show up, try a different USB port.
- If a file is too big, the drive may be formatted in a way that cannot hold it. Try a different drive.
- Nearby sharing can send files between Windows PCs. Open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Nearby sharing**, though wording and availability may differ between versions.
- Remember that emails, browser bookmarks and saved passwords are kept separately. Most browsers can sync them if you sign in.

Do not use unknown file transfer programs.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if you are not sure what to copy, the old PC will not start, files are missing after copying, or your files are on a drive you cannot read. Do not wipe the old PC until you are sure everything has arrived.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

Wi-Fi says 'Can't connect to this network': forgetting a network and resetting

When your laptop refuses to join Wi-Fi, a few steps in order solve most cases. Some of them, such as a network reset, have side effects, so go in order.

Easy checks

1. Check **Airplane mode** is off. Click the network icon near the clock, or press the function key with the aeroplane symbol on the laptop. If it is stuck on, restart the PC and check **Settings, Network & internet, Airplane mode**.
2. Check whether your phone connects to the same Wi-Fi. If not, restart the router (see our router guide).
3. Move closer to the router.
4. Restart the laptop.

Forget the network and reconnect

This clears bad saved details. Have the Wi-Fi password to hand.

1. Windows 11: **Settings, Network & internet, Wi-Fi, Manage known networks**. Windows 10: **Settings, Network & Internet, Wi-Fi, Manage known networks**.
2. Click your network and then **Forget**.
3. Click the Wi-Fi icon, choose the network, and enter the password again. Check the password's capital letters carefully.

Run the troubleshooter

Windows 11: **Settings, System, Troubleshoot, Other troubleshooters**, then **Network and Internet**.

Windows 10: **Settings, Update & Security, Troubleshoot, Additional troubleshooters**.

Network reset: the last resort

Warning: this removes all saved Wi-Fi networks and passwords, and any VPN settings and virtual adaptors. Make sure you have your Wi-Fi password and any work VPN details first.

1. Windows 11: **Settings, Network & internet, Advanced network settings, Network reset**.
2. Windows 10: **Settings, Network & Internet, Status, Network reset**.
3. Click **Reset now**. The PC restarts.
4. Reconnect to your Wi-Fi.

Work laptops

If the laptop belongs to work, do not reset the network without asking your IT team.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the Wi-Fi option is missing, if only one laptop cannot connect while others can, or if you see the message again after a reset. Tell us what the error says.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Adding and removing a printer in Windows

Windows can usually find a printer by itself. These steps help when the printer is not listed, or you want to take an old one off the list.

Before you start

- Switch the printer on, and make sure it is on the same Wi-Fi as the PC, or plugged in with a USB cable.
- For a new wireless printer, finish its set-up on its own screen first, as in our guide on setting up a wireless printer.

Add a printer

1. Windows 11: open **Settings, Bluetooth & devices, Printers & scanners**, then click **Add device**.
2. Windows 10: open **Settings, Devices, Printers & scanners**, then click **Add a printer or scanner**.
3. Wait while Windows searches. When your printer's name appears, click it and then **Add device**.
4. If it does not appear, click **Add manually** (Windows 11) or **The printer that I want isn't listed** (Windows 10) and follow the choices. You can add by name or by network address if you know it.

Print a test page

Click the printer in the list, then **Printer properties**, then **Print test page**.

Set a default printer

Click the printer and choose **Set as default**. In some versions, you may first need to turn off **Let Windows manage my default printer**.

Remove a printer

1. Open the same **Printers & scanners** page.
2. Click the printer you want to remove.
3. Click **Remove**, then **Yes**.

This takes it off the list but does not harm the printer, and you can add it again later. If you remove it to reinstall, our guide on reinstalling a printer driver covers what to do next.

If you see names ending with **(copy 1)** or old models, remove the ones you do not use. This stops documents going to the wrong one.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the printer never appears, if it works for one user but not another, or if it needs a driver download. Only download drivers from the printer maker's own website.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

Quick Assist: letting someone you trust help you remotely

Quick Assist is a free tool in Windows 10 and 11 that lets a helper see your screen, and with your permission take control, to fix a problem. It is useful with family or your IT support. But it is also used by scammers, so you must be strict about who you let in.

The golden rule

Only use Quick Assist when you contacted the helper yourself, and you know and trust them. Never use it if someone phoned you, emailed you, or a pop-up told you to call a number, even if they say they are from Microsoft, your bank or your broadband company. They will not ask you to do this. See our guide on remote access scams.

How it works

1. **The helper** opens Quick Assist: press **Windows key + Ctrl + Q** in Windows 11, or search for **Quick Assist** on any PC. They sign in with a Microsoft account and choose **Help someone**.
2. They are given a 6-digit code that works for a short time, about ten minutes.
3. **You** open Quick Assist, and choose **Get help**. Type the code in.
4. You will be asked whether to let them **view the screen** or **take full control**. Check the name they show, and choose only what you are comfortable with.
5. Click **Allow**.

While you are connected

- Watch what they do. If you did not ask for it, stop.
- Do not open your online banking, or type passwords while they are watching.
- If a security prompt appears that needs an administrator password, think carefully before entering it.
- You can use **Pause** to freeze the control for a moment.

End the session

Click **End** or **Leave**, or close the Quick Assist window. This disconnects them immediately. You can do it at any time, with no need to be polite.

When to get more help

If you let someone in who you now suspect was not genuine, switch off the PC's internet connection, change your passwords from another device, and call your bank straight away if money was involved. Then get in touch with us.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

How to install updates safely

Updates fix security problems and bugs, so installing them is one of the best things you can do. Doing it safely just means being prepared and getting them from the right place.

Before you start

- Plug a laptop into power. Updates can take a long time and you do not want the battery to run out.
- Save your work and close your programs.
- Make sure your important files are backed up. Updates rarely cause problems, but it is a good habit.

Step by step

1. Windows: open **Settings**, then **Windows Update**, and choose **Check for updates**. In Windows 10, **Windows Update** is under **Update & Security**.
2. Mac: open **System Settings**, then **General**, then **Software Update**. On older macOS versions, look in **System Preferences**.
3. iPhone: open **Settings**, then **General**, then **Software Update**. Android: open **Settings** and look for **Software update**, which may sit under **System** or **About phone** depending on the make.
4. Choose **Install** or **Restart now** when prompted, and leave the device alone until it has finished.

Staying safe

Only install updates from your device's own settings, never from a pop-up on a website or a link in an email or text. Fake update messages are a common way of spreading unwanted software.

Do not switch the computer off during an update, even if it seems stuck. Screens may go black or restart several times. This can take 30 minutes or more.

Turning on automatic updates is a good idea for most people.

When to get more help

Stop and ask for help if an update has been stuck for more than two hours, you see an error code, the device will not start afterwards, or an update asks for payment or a phone number. Tell us the device, what the screen says and any error code.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

How to back up your files

A backup is a second copy of your files kept somewhere else. If your computer is lost, broken or locked by a virus, a backup means your photos and documents are not gone for ever.

The simple rule

Keep your important files in at least two places, and make sure one of them is not in your home. This could be an external drive plus cloud storage.

Option 1: external drive

1. Plug in an external hard drive or large USB stick.
2. Windows 11: open **Settings**, then **Accounts**, then **Windows Backup** to back up folders to OneDrive. Windows 10: open **Settings**, then **Update & Security**, then **Backup**, and choose **Add a drive** to use File History.
3. Mac: open **System Settings**, then **General**, then **Time Machine**, and choose **Add Backup Disk**.
4. Let it finish and disconnect the drive afterwards, ideally storing it away from the computer.

Option 2: cloud storage

Services such as OneDrive, iCloud and Google Drive copy your files online. Sign in, choose the folders to save, and check the files appear on another device or on the service's website. Free space is limited, so you may need to pay for more.

Keep it working

- Check once a month that the backup is still running and that you can actually open a file from it.
- Take care with a drive that only holds the one copy of your files. A single drive is not a backup.
- Do not leave your only backup plugged in all the time, as a virus can damage it too.

When to get more help

Stop and ask for help if you see an error saying the backup has failed, your drive is not recognised, you have a lot of files and are unsure what to include, or you are about to wipe or sell a computer and have not saved your files. Please do not reset or reinstall the computer until we have talked.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

Windows stuck on updating or update fails

Windows updates can take a long time, and sometimes they stall or fail with an error. The key is knowing when to wait and when to act.

Quick fixes to try first

- If you see **Working on updates** or **Do not turn off your computer**, wait. Big updates can take an hour or more, and the percentage may sit still for a long time.
- Keep the laptop plugged in and leave it alone for at least two hours before worrying.
- If the screen is on but nothing seems to happen, check whether the drive light is flickering or the fan changes speed. That means it is still working.

Step by step

If it has clearly been stuck for several hours with no activity:

1. Hold the power button for about 10 seconds to switch off. Be aware this is a last resort.
2. Wait a minute, then turn it on again. Windows will often undo the update and start normally.
3. Once in, open **Settings**, then **Windows Update**, and choose **Check for updates**.
4. If it fails again, run the troubleshooter. Windows 11: **Settings, System, Troubleshoot, Other troubleshooters**, then **Windows Update**. Windows 10: **Settings, Update & Security, Troubleshoot, Additional troubleshooters**. The exact wording may differ slightly.
5. Make sure you have plenty of free storage. Updates need several gigabytes.

If that did not work

- Unplug extra devices such as USB sticks, printers and docks, then try the update again.
- Restart and try again later. Many failures clear on a second attempt.
- Note any error code shown in **Windows Update**, such as one starting 0x.

Do not use update fixing tools from random websites, and do not turn off your security software.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the laptop will not start after a forced shutdown, it loops through restarting repeatedly, the same error appears after several attempts, or you are worried about losing files. If the laptop does start, copy your important files to a USB drive or OneDrive first. Tell us the error code and which version of Windows you have.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

How to start Windows in Safe Mode

Safe Mode starts Windows with only the basics. It is useful when something is stopping Windows working normally, because it helps us tell whether a program or driver is to blame. It will look plain, with a low-quality screen. This is normal.

Quick fixes to try first

- Restart normally first. Many problems vanish after a restart.
- If you can get into Windows normally, there is no need for Safe Mode.
- Make sure the laptop is plugged in, and unplug USB devices.

Step by step: if Windows opens

1. Open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Recovery** (Windows 11). In Windows 10, choose **Update & Security**, then **Recovery**.
2. Next to **Advanced startup**, click **Restart now**. Save your work first.
3. On the blue screen, choose **Troubleshoot**, then **Advanced options**, then **Startup Settings**, then **Restart**.
4. After the restart, press **4** or **F4** for Safe Mode, or **5** or **F5** for Safe Mode with Networking, which lets you use the internet.

Step by step: if Windows will not open

1. Switch the laptop on, and as soon as you see the logo or spinning dots, hold the power button until it switches off. Do this two or three times.
2. On the next start, Windows should show a **Recovery** or **Automatic Repair** screen.
3. Choose **See advanced repair options** (or **Advanced options**), then follow the same path as above.

If that did not work

- Once in Safe Mode, you can uninstall a recently installed program, or use **System Restore**.
- To get out of Safe Mode, just restart normally.
- If you are asked for a **BitLocker recovery key**, it is usually linked to your Microsoft account at account.microsoft.com/devices/recoverykey. Do not guess or try to bypass it.

Do not choose any option that says reset or remove everything without a backup.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if you cannot reach the blue recovery screen, you are asked for a key you do not have, or Safe Mode loops back to the same problem. Tell us what you have tried and what you can see.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

How to use System Restore to undo a problem

System Restore takes Windows back to an earlier point, before a problem began. It is like an undo button for system changes. It does not delete your photos or documents, but it can remove programs and updates installed since that point.

Quick fixes to try first

- Restart the laptop first, in case it is only a passing glitch.
- Think about when the problem began, so you can pick a restore point from before that.
- Save open work and connect the charger.
- As a precaution, copy important files to a USB drive or OneDrive. System Restore is designed to be safe, but backups protect you.

Step by step

1. Click **Start**, type Create a restore point and press Enter.
2. In the **System Properties** window, click **System Restore**.
3. Click **Next**. You will see a list of restore points with dates and descriptions.
4. Choose one from before the problem began. Click **Scan for affected programs** to see what would be removed.
5. Click **Next**, then **Finish**, and confirm. The laptop will restart and may take a while. Do not switch it off.
6. When Windows starts, a message will say whether it worked.

If that did not work

- If the list is empty, protection may be turned off. Back on the **System Protection** tab, you can select your main drive and click **Configure** to turn it on for the future.
- If it will not complete, try a different, earlier restore point.
- If Windows will not start, you can reach **System Restore** from the blue recovery screen, under **Troubleshoot**, then **Advanced options**.

System Restore works the same way in Windows 10 and Windows 11, though some wording may differ.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if there are no restore points, the restore fails, the problem comes back, or you are not sure which point to pick. Please do not use the reset option as an alternative without a backup. Tell us what changed before the problem started.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Advanced | 2 min read

How to reset this PC (and keep your files safe)

Reset this PC reinstalls Windows. It can fix serious problems or prepare a laptop for a new owner, but it is a big step and can erase your files and programs if you choose the wrong option.

Back up first

Before you start, copy everything you care about, such as photos, documents and downloads, to a USB drive or OneDrive. Check you can open the copies. Make a note of your Microsoft account sign-in, your Wi-Fi password, and any licence keys for programs. Plug in the charger. You will need to reinstall your programs afterwards.

Step by step

1. Open **Settings** by pressing the Windows key and I together.
2. Windows 11: choose **System**, then **Recovery**. Windows 10: choose **Update & Security**, then **Recovery**.
3. Under **Reset this PC**, click **Reset PC** (Windows 11) or **Get started** (Windows 10).
4. Choose **Keep my files** to remove apps and settings but keep personal files. Or choose **Remove everything** to erase all. Pick **Keep my files** unless you are selling or giving the laptop away.
5. Choose **Cloud download** or **Local reinstall**. Either is fine. Cloud download needs the internet and uses a few gigabytes of data.
6. Read the final summary carefully, then click **Reset** and leave the laptop plugged in. It restarts several times. Do not switch it off.

If that did not work

- If you cannot reach Settings, hold the power button to switch off during start-up two or three times to bring up the blue recovery screen, then choose **Troubleshoot**, then **Reset this PC**.
- If the reset fails and rolls back, try again with **Keep my files**, or make more space first.
- Afterwards, run **Windows Update** and reinstall your apps from their official websites.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if you do not have a backup and cannot make one, you are asked for a recovery key, the laptop belongs to work or school, or the reset fails more than once. Please do not use **Remove everything** if there is any doubt about your files. Tell us what is on the laptop and what problem you are trying to solve.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

How to back up your folders with OneDrive

OneDrive is Microsoft's cloud storage. It can automatically keep copies of your Desktop, Documents and Pictures folders online, so that you do not lose them if your laptop is lost, stolen or broken.

Quick fixes to try first

- Check you have a Microsoft account. It is the same sign-in you may use for Outlook or Hotmail.
- Check your internet connection is working.
- Know that free accounts include limited space, often 5 GB. Check how much you need before you start.

Step by step

1. Click the white or blue cloud icon at the bottom right of the screen. If you do not see it, click the small arrow to show hidden icons.
2. Sign in if asked.
3. Click the gear icon, then **Settings**.
4. Windows 11: choose **Sync and backup**, then **Manage backup**. Windows 10: choose the **Backup** tab, then **Manage backup**. The exact wording may differ slightly.
5. Choose which folders to back up, such as **Desktop**, **Documents** and **Pictures**.
6. Click **Save changes** or **Start backup**. Your files begin uploading, and a cloud tick appears on files once they are safe.

If that did not work

- If it says your storage is full, you can free some space by choosing fewer folders, or consider a paid storage plan. Do not turn backup off in a panic, as files may seem to disappear from your folders.
- If the cloud icon is missing, open the Start menu and search for **OneDrive**.
- If syncing seems stuck, click the cloud icon and look for the message, then try a restart.

Remember that OneDrive is a sync service. If you delete a file on the laptop, it is deleted online too, though you can restore it from the OneDrive recycle bin for a limited time. For extra safety, keep a second copy on a USB drive.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if you are unsure what happens to your files, you see errors about conflicts, or files appear to be missing. Do not delete anything until we have spoken. Tell us what the OneDrive icon says.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Windows 10 end of support: what it means for you

Microsoft stopped providing regular support for Windows 10 on 14 October 2025. Your laptop did not stop working that day, but the rules for staying safe changed.

What has actually changed

- Windows 10 no longer gets free regular security updates, bug fixes or technical help from Microsoft.
- Your PC still starts and your programs still run.
- Over time, new weaknesses will be found and not fixed, so risk goes up, especially for banking, email and shopping online.
- Some programs and browsers will eventually stop supporting Windows 10 too.

Step by step: what to do

1. Check what you have. Open **Settings**, then **System**, then **About**, and read the Windows version.
2. Open **Settings**, then **Update & Security**, then **Windows Update**. If the PC is able to move up, a notice about Windows 11 appears. Upgrading is free, and your files and apps are normally kept, but back up first.
3. If it says your PC cannot run Windows 11, you can use Microsoft's official **PC Health Check** to see why.
4. Back up your files now. See our OneDrive guide.
5. Make sure **Windows Security** is on and up to date.

Other options

- Microsoft has offered an Extended Security Updates scheme for home users on Windows 10, as a temporary measure. Reports on the end date and terms have varied, so check Microsoft's own Windows 10 support page for the current details and do not rely on third-party websites.
- If your PC cannot upgrade, a new PC may eventually be the sensible choice. You do not need to rush to buy.

If that did not work

- Be careful of emails or pop-ups claiming that you must pay or click now. Microsoft does not chase people this way.
- Avoid unofficial tricks to install Windows 11 on unsupported PCs.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if you are unsure whether your PC can be upgraded, you rely on old software or a printer that may not work on Windows 11, or you would like advice on a replacement. Please send the make, model and age of your PC and what you use it for.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

'Windows is not activated' message: what to do

A message such as **Windows is not activated**, or a small watermark in the corner of the screen, means Windows cannot confirm that your copy is genuine. It does not usually stop the PC working, but it can limit personalisation and will keep nagging you.

Check the status

Open **Settings**, then **System**, then **Activation** (Windows 10: **Settings**, then **Update & Security**, then **Activation**). It will say **Active** or give an error with a number.

Things to try first

1. Make sure you are connected to the internet, then restart the PC.
2. Check the date and time are right, since a wrong clock can break the check.
3. Click **Troubleshoot** in the Activation page, if it is shown, and follow the prompts.
4. Run **Windows Update**, then try again.

After new hardware or a repair

Windows links its licence to your PC's parts. If the main board was replaced, it may need to be activated again. Sign in with the same Microsoft account you used before, then choose **Troubleshoot**, then **I changed hardware on this device recently**. This is the official way to carry the licence over.

About product keys

- Most modern PCs have a digital licence built in, so no key is needed.
- If you bought Windows, the key is on the box or in the email receipt.
- Beware of very cheap keys on auction sites and marketplaces. They are often invalid, cancelled later or stolen, and some come with software that you should not run.
- Do not download tools that claim to activate Windows. They are a common way to catch malware.

Business PCs

A work PC may be activated through your organisation, and the message can appear if it cannot reach the company network. Ask your IT team first.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the error code remains after the steps above, if the PC is second-hand and was sold to you with Windows already installed, or if you are not sure the copy is genuine. Please send us a photo of the Activation page.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Where did my file go? Finding and recovering deleted files

Losing a file is stressful, but there are several places to look, and often it can be brought back. The most important rule is to stop saving new things to the drive, because this can overwrite what you are trying to recover.

Find a file that is not where you left it

1. Press **Windows key + E** to open File Explorer.
2. Click the search box at the top right and type part of the name. Searching from **This PC** looks at all drives.
3. Try **Recent** or **Quick access** on the left, for files you opened lately.
4. In Word or Excel, choose **File**, then **Open**, then **Recent**.

Check the Recycle Bin

1. Double-click **Recycle Bin** on the desktop.
2. Find the file, right-click it and choose **Restore**.

It goes back to where it was. Files deleted from a USB drive, a network drive or by holding **Shift** while deleting do not go to the Recycle Bin.

Restore an earlier version

If you saved over a file, or a folder has lost items:

1. Right-click the file or folder and choose **Properties**.
2. Open the **Previous Versions** tab.
3. If versions are listed, select one and click **Open** to check it, or **Restore**.

Versions appear only if File History or System Restore was switched on. **Restore** replaces the current file, so use **Copy** instead if you are unsure.

Look online

- **OneDrive**: sign in at onedrive.live.com and open **Recycle bin**. Deleted files are held for a limited time.
- **Email attachments, downloads and messages** may still be in your email or browser.

What not to do

Do not install "recovery" programmes from search results and adverts. Many are scams or malware, and some demand payment for what you already own.

When to get more help

If the file was on a drive that has stopped working, was lost after a crash, or is important and not in any of the places above, stop using the PC and get in touch. The sooner a professional looks, the better the chance. Tell us the file name, type and when you last saw it.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Backing up with File History and the Windows Backup app

A backup is a second copy of your files somewhere else. Windows has two built-in options for ordinary users: File History, which saves to an external drive, and Windows Backup, which saves to OneDrive on Windows 11.

File History (Windows 10 and 11)

It saves copies of your Documents, Pictures, Music, Videos and Desktop at regular intervals, and keeps older versions.

1. Plug in an external hard drive that is larger than the files you want to save. Make sure it has nothing on it that you need, because it will be used for backups.
2. Press the **Windows key**, type **File History settings** and open it. Another route is **Control Panel, System and Security, File History**.
3. Select your drive and turn on **Back up my files automatically**. In Windows 11, you may reach it from **Settings, System, Storage, Advanced storage settings, Backup options**.
4. Click **More options** to choose which folders are included and how often to save.

To get something back, search **Restore your files with File History** and browse through the saved versions.

Windows Backup app (Windows 11)

Search for **Windows Backup**. It can save your folders, settings, app list and some passwords to your Microsoft account's OneDrive, so a new PC can be set up like the old one. This needs enough OneDrive space. It is not a full image of the whole computer.

System image

Windows 10 and some Windows 11 PCs still have **Backup and Restore (Windows 7)** in **Control Panel**, which can make a full image. Microsoft treats this as an older tool, so ask us if you need one.

Good habits

- Keep the external drive unplugged when not in use. A permanent connection can be affected by ransomware too.
- Look occasionally to confirm backups are updating.
- Keep one copy away from home. The 3-2-1 rule is three copies, two kinds of storage, one off-site.

When to get more help

Get in touch if File History says the drive has been disconnected for a long time, if your files are very large, or if you are not sure whether your backup actually works. Test a restore of one file now and then.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

Wiping a PC safely before you sell or give it away

Deleting files or emptying the Recycle Bin does not really erase them. Before you pass on a laptop or PC, you must remove your files and accounts properly. Take your time, because this is permanent.

Step 1: save what you want to keep

Copy photos, documents, saved passwords, browser bookmarks and licence keys to an external drive or OneDrive. Check that the copies open on another device. Once you reset, there is no undo.

Step 2: sign out of things

- Sign out of Microsoft 365, and deactivate any paid programmes that limit the number of PCs.
- Turn off **Find my device** in **Settings, Privacy & security** (Windows 10: **Update & Security**).
- Remove the device from your Microsoft account at account.microsoft.com, under **Devices**.
- Unlink any work accounts.

Step 3: reset the PC

1. Windows 11: open **Settings, System, Recovery**, then **Reset PC**. Windows 10: open **Settings, Update & Security, Recovery**, then **Get started**.
2. Choose **Remove everything**.
3. Choose **Cloud download** or **Local reinstall**. Cloud download needs internet and fetches a fresh copy; either is fine.
4. Click **Change settings** and switch **Clean data** to **Yes**. This overwrites the drive so that your files are far harder to recover. It takes much longer, sometimes several hours.
5. Click **Next** and then **Reset**.

Keep the laptop plugged in the whole time. Do not switch it off partway through.

Step 4: check

When it restarts, you should see the first-time setup screen, such as **Let's start with your region**. Do not sign in. Switch it off and hand it over.

If the PC has a faulty or dead drive

If the PC will not start, you cannot reset it. Do not sell it with your drive inside. Ask us about removing the drive or wiping it properly.

Do not put it in the household bin. Take it to a recycling point and ask about safe data destruction if it held sensitive information.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the reset fails or loops, if the PC belonged to a business, if it had customer data on it, or if you are unsure the wipe was thorough.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Upgrading from Windows 10 to Windows 11, step by step

Windows 11 is a free upgrade for PCs that meet its requirements. The only safe way to do it is through the official routes from Microsoft. This guide takes you through checking, preparing and upgrading.

Check if your PC qualifies

Open the **PC Health Check** app from Microsoft, or look in **Settings, Update & Security, Windows Update** in Windows 10. If your PC is eligible, you will see **Upgrade to Windows 11 is ready**.

Windows 11 needs, among other things, a 64-bit processor, 4 GB of memory, 64 GB of storage, UEFI with Secure Boot and a TPM 2.0 chip. Many PCs from about 2018 onward qualify, but not all. Our guide on checking your version covers this.

If it says no

Do not use tricks or downloads that claim to bypass the checks. These can leave you without security updates and cause instability. You can keep using Windows 10 for a while, but plan a replacement PC.

Prepare

1. Back up your files to an external drive or OneDrive. This is the most important step.
2. Plug the laptop into the mains.
3. Install all Windows 10 updates first and restart.
4. Make sure you have at least 20 GB free.
5. Check that your antivirus and important programs support Windows 11.

Upgrade

1. Go to **Settings, Update & Security, Windows Update**.
2. Click **Download and install** under the Windows 11 notice.
3. Wait. It can take an hour or more, and the PC will restart several times.
4. Sign in and check your files and printers.

Going back

For a short period, about 10 days after the upgrade, you can go back to Windows 10. Open **Settings, System, Recovery** and look for **Go back**. After that time, going back means a clean reinstall.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the upgrade fails with an error code, if the notice is missing but you believe the PC qualifies, or if you would like us to do it for you. Do not start the upgrade without a backup.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Windows 11 compared with Windows 10: what is different?

If you move from Windows 10 to Windows 11, most things work the same way, but several are moved around. Here are the changes beginners notice first.

The look

- The **Start** button and the taskbar icons are in the middle of the screen. You can move them left: open **Settings, Personalisation, Taskbar, Taskbar behaviours**, and change **Taskbar alignment**.
- Windows are rounded and the design is cleaner.
- The Start menu shows pinned apps and recommended files instead of the live tiles in Windows 10.

Settings and menus

- The **Settings** app is organised in a list on the left, and looks different from Windows 10.
- Many things that were in **Control Panel** are now in **Settings**, although Control Panel still exists.
- Right-click menus are shorter. Click **Show more options**, or press **Shift + F10**, to see the old, longer list.
- Network and sound controls are in a **Quick Settings** panel by the clock, with Wi-Fi, volume and brightness.

New features

- **Snap layouts**: hover over the maximise button to arrange windows neatly.
- **Widgets**: a panel for weather and news, opened from the taskbar.
- Better virtual desktops, and a revised **Notification centre** with the calendar.
- **Windows Backup** and an updated **Snipping Tool** and **Notepad**.

What has gone or changed

- The taskbar is harder to resize and in some versions cannot be moved to the top or sides.
- **Cortana** is no longer a main feature.
- The File Explorer ribbon is replaced by a simpler toolbar.

Is it worth it?

If your PC is eligible, Windows 11 gets security updates and new features. If your PC is not eligible, you can stay on Windows 10 for a limited time, but should plan ahead. Always back up before changing.

When to get more help

Get in touch if you cannot find a setting you used all the time, if the taskbar looks wrong after an upgrade, or if you are choosing between upgrading and buying a new PC. We can show you or do it for you.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Windows Update error codes: what to try safely

When an update fails, Windows shows a code beginning with 0x, such as **0x80070002** or **0x800f0922**. The numbers look scary, but the first fixes are similar for most of them, and none of them need you to touch the registry or anything risky.

What the codes often mean

- **0x80070002** or **0x80070003**: update files are missing or damaged.
- **0x80070005**: access denied, sometimes caused by security software.
- **0x800f0922**: often a lack of space on a small system area, or a VPN connection interfering.
- **0x8024...** codes: Windows could not talk to the update service, often an internet problem.
- **0x80070070**: the drive is full.

These are general guides and not guarantees.

Safe steps in order

1. Restart the PC and try again, plugged in to the mains.
2. Check you have at least 20 GB free on the **C:** drive. See our guide on freeing up space.
3. Unplug USB drives, docks and extra devices.
4. Disconnect any VPN, and make sure your date and time are correct.
5. Run the troubleshooter. Windows 11: **Settings, System, Troubleshoot, Other troubleshooters, Windows Update**. Windows 10: **Settings, Update & Security, Troubleshoot, Additional troubleshooters**.
6. Go to **Settings, Windows Update** and click **Check for updates**. Look at **Update history** to see what failed.

Do not

- Do not download "update fixer" programs from adverts.
- Do not turn off your security software.
- Do not interrupt an update that is installing.

Waiting can help

A fault at Microsoft's end sometimes clears in a day or two, so try again later.

Back up before more serious fixes

If the problem persists, repairs may involve system file checks or an in-place repair. Back up your files first.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the same code appears after the steps above, if the PC loops at start-up, or if the failing update is a security update on a PC that handles customer information. Send us a photo of the code and the name of the update.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Forgot my Windows password or cannot sign in to Microsoft account

Being locked out is stressful, but there are safe official ways back in. Which one you use depends on whether you sign in with a Microsoft account (an email address) or a local account.

Quick fixes to try first

- Check Caps Lock is off and Num Lock is on if you use numbers.
- Click the eye icon to reveal what you are typing.
- Try the password you use for your Microsoft email, such as Outlook or Hotmail.
- If you normally use a PIN, click **Sign-in options** and try the password instead, or the other way round.

Step by step: Microsoft account

1. On another device, open a web browser and go to account.live.com/password/reset, which is Microsoft's own page.
2. Enter the email address you sign in with.
3. Follow the steps to verify your identity by code to a phone number or backup email.
4. Choose a new password.
5. Back on the laptop, connect to the internet and sign in with the new password.

If you only forgot your PIN, click **I forgot my PIN** under the PIN box on the sign-in screen and follow the prompts.

If that did not work

- If you cannot reach your recovery phone or email, Microsoft has an account recovery form on its website. It asks for details only you should know and can take a few days.
- Local accounts: if you set security questions, a **Reset password** link appears after a wrong attempt. If not, there is no simple safe way to get in, and you may need to reset the PC, which erases your files. Do not use password cracking tools or boot discs from the internet. They are often malware.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if you cannot prove ownership of the account, the laptop belongs to a work or school, or you are unsure whether your files are backed up. Please do not reset Windows until we have talked, as that can permanently delete photos and documents.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

How to run a virus scan with Windows Security

Windows comes with free protection called Windows Security. It checks your laptop for viruses and other unwanted software, and it runs by itself, but you can also run a scan whenever you are worried.

Quick fixes to try first

- Make sure you are using the real Windows Security, which you open from the Start menu. Ignore pop-ups in a web browser claiming that you have a virus.
- Install any waiting updates, as they keep the protection up to date.
- Save your work. A scan can slow the laptop a little.

Step by step

1. Click **Start**, type Windows Security and press Enter.
2. Check the first screen. Green ticks mean all is well. A yellow or red mark means action is needed. Click it to see the suggested fix.
3. Choose **Virus & threat protection**.
4. Click **Quick scan**. It checks the common places and usually takes a few minutes.
5. When it finishes, it tells you whether it found anything. If it did, click **Start actions** or **Clean threats** and follow the advice.
6. For a deeper check, click **Scan options**, choose **Full scan**, then **Scan now**. This takes longer, so do it when you are not busy.

If that did not work

- If you suspect something is hiding, in **Scan options** choose **Microsoft Defender Offline scan**. It restarts the laptop and checks before Windows loads, so save your work first.
- If the protection is turned off, switch it back on. Do not disable it, even for a moment.
- If you have other security software, it may be managing protection instead.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the scan finds threats that keep returning, you cannot switch protection on, Windows Security will not open, or you have entered passwords or card details into a suspicious site. Change your passwords from a different, safe device in that case. Tell us any messages shown.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

PIN, fingerprint or face sign-in not working on Windows

Windows lets you sign in with a PIN, a fingerprint or your face. These are called Windows Hello. They are shortcuts, and your Microsoft account password still works behind the scenes. If a shortcut stops working, you can get back in and set it up again.

Get in first

1. On the sign-in screen, click **Sign-in options** (a small key or grid icon).
2. Choose the **password** icon and enter your Microsoft account password.
3. If you do not remember the password, use **I forgot my PIN** and follow the steps. You may be sent a code by email or text.

If you see 'Something went wrong'

This message, sometimes with a code such as **0x80090016**, usually means Windows cannot use your saved PIN any more, often after an update or hardware change. Restart the PC first. If it is still there, sign in with your password and set up the PIN again.

Set up the PIN again

1. Open **Settings**, then **Accounts**, then **Sign-in options**.
2. Click **PIN (Windows Hello)**, then **Remove** (Windows 10 also says **Remove**).
3. Click **Set up**, confirm your password and choose a new PIN.

Fingerprint or face not working

- Clean the fingerprint reader with a soft, dry cloth, and make sure your finger is clean and dry.
- Face recognition needs a compatible infrared camera. Not every laptop has one, and bright sunlight behind you can confuse it.
- Go to **Settings**, then **Accounts**, then **Sign-in options**, click the fingerprint or face option, then **Remove**, and then **Set up** to scan it again.
- Check **Settings**, then **Windows Update**, for driver updates.

Work and school PCs

If the PC belongs to your employer, the PIN rules are set by them and you may need to ask your IT team. Do not try to bypass the sign-in.

When to get more help

Get in touch if you cannot sign in with any method, if you have forgotten your Microsoft account password and cannot get a code, or if the fingerprint reader is not listed at all. Do not reset the PC, because that can delete your files.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Microsoft account or local account? Adding another user to your PC

When you set up Windows, you choose how you sign in. Knowing the difference helps when you share a PC or want to keep things private.

Microsoft account

This is your email address and password with Microsoft (Outlook, Hotmail, Xbox or a work account). It lets you:

- Sync settings, and sign in to OneDrive and the Microsoft Store.
- Find a lost laptop and recover a forgotten password.
- Keep your drive recovery key safe.

It is the usual choice, and Windows 11 Home normally needs one when you set up the PC.

Local account

This exists only on that one computer, with a username and password that Microsoft never sees. It cannot sync, and there is no online way to reset a forgotten password. That is why a Microsoft account is safer for most people.

Check which one you use

Open **Settings**, then **Accounts**, then **Your info**. If you see an email address, it is a Microsoft account. It will say **Local account** if not.

Add another person

Give every person their own account, so documents and passwords stay separate.

1. Windows 11: open **Settings**, **Accounts**, **Other users**, then **Add account**.
2. Windows 10: open **Settings**, **Accounts**, **Family & other users**, then **Add someone else to this PC**.
3. Enter their Microsoft account email, or choose the option to add them without one if you are offered it.
4. Leave them as a **Standard user**. Only change someone to **Administrator** if they genuinely need to install software.

Remove an account carefully

In the same menu, you can remove a user. Warning: this deletes that person's files from this PC, including their Desktop, Documents and Pictures. Copy anything important first, and make sure they agree.

Your info may offer **Sign in with a local account instead**, or **Sign in with a Microsoft account instead**. Your files stay where they are, but you will need to sign in to OneDrive and other apps again.

When to get more help

Get in touch if you cannot remember which account you used, if the sign-in screen shows accounts you do not recognise, or if you need to move files between accounts. Always back up before removing an account.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Family Safety: parental controls on a Windows PC

Microsoft Family Safety lets a parent set screen time limits, filter websites and see what a child does on their Windows PC. It needs each child to have their own Microsoft account, which can be free.

Before you start

- You need a Microsoft account of your own, as the parent or organiser.
- Each child needs their own sign-in to the PC. Do not let a child use your account.
- Children who are under 13 normally need a parent's consent when their account is created.

Add a child

1. Open **Settings**, then **Accounts**, then **Family** (Windows 10: **Family & other users**).
2. Choose **Add someone** or **Add a family member**.
3. Create a child account, or enter their existing Microsoft account email.
4. They accept the invitation by email, and you manage everything from your own account.

Set the rules

Sign in at **family.microsoft.com** with your account, or use the Microsoft Family Safety app on your phone. For each child you can:

- Set a screen time limit and when the PC can be used.
- Block certain apps and games, and set age ratings.
- Turn on web and search filtering, and see activity reports.
- Ask to approve purchases from the Microsoft Store.

What to know

- Web filtering works in Microsoft Edge. When it is on, other browsers can be blocked on that PC, because they are not covered.
- The rules only apply while the child signs in with their own account on a device that is part of the family group.
- Talk with children about the rules. Filters help, but they are not perfect.

Local accounts

If you would rather not use a Microsoft account, you can still create a standard user on the PC, but the screen time and filtering tools will not be available.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the child account is not appearing in your family group, if blocked sites are still opening, or if you want help setting up controls on a router for the whole home. We can talk you through it step by step.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

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Windows Security: scans, exclusions and ransomware protection

Windows Security is the free protection built into Windows 10 and 11. Most of the time it looks after itself. Here is how to run a scan, what exclusions are and why you should avoid them, and how to turn on extra protection for your files.

Open it

Press the **Windows key**, type **Windows Security** and open it. A green tick on each item means all is well. If you installed another antivirus, Windows Security may show that the other one is in charge.

Run a scan

1. Click **Virus & threat protection**.
2. Click **Quick scan** for a fast check.
3. For a thorough check, click **Scan options**, choose **Full scan**, and click **Scan now**. It can take an hour or more, so leave the PC plugged in.
4. If you suspect something nasty is hiding, choose **Microsoft Defender Antivirus (offline scan)** and click **Scan now**. The PC restarts and scans before Windows loads.

Exclusions: please be careful

An exclusion tells Windows Security to ignore a file, folder or program. It is under **Virus & threat protection, Manage settings, Exclusions, Add or remove exclusions**.

Only add an exclusion if the software's maker tells you to, and you are certain the software is genuine. Never add one because a website, a pop-up or a caller tells you to. That is a common trick to let malware in.

Ransomware protection

Ransomware locks your files and demands money.

1. In **Virus & threat protection**, scroll to **Ransomware protection** and click **Manage ransomware protection**.
2. Switch **Controlled folder access** on.

It stops unknown programs from changing files in folders such as Documents and Pictures. Sometimes it will block a program you trust. If that happens, use **Allow an app through Controlled folder access** and add that program. If you have OneDrive, there is also an option to recover files after an attack.

Do not switch off real-time protection.

When to get more help

Get in touch if a threat is found and cannot be removed, if Windows Security will not open or is switched off and cannot be turned on, or if files have become unreadable or renamed. In that case switch off the PC from the network and contact us at once.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Medium | 2 min read

Removing adware and unwanted toolbars, and resetting your browser

If your browser has a home page you did not choose, extra toolbars, endless adverts or searches that go to strange sites, you probably have adware or an unwanted extension. This can usually be cleaned up safely.

Step 1: remove unfamiliar programs

1. Windows 11: open **Settings, Apps, Installed apps**. Windows 10: open **Settings, Apps, Apps & features**.
2. Sort by **Install date**. Look at recent items you do not recognise or did not install on purpose.
3. Click the program, then **Uninstall**.

If you are unsure, search the name online first, or ask us. Do not remove things you need, such as drivers, Microsoft items or your antivirus.

Step 2: remove browser extensions

- **Microsoft Edge**: click the three dots, then **Extensions**, then **Manage extensions**. Remove ones you do not recognise.
- **Google Chrome**: click the three dots, then **Extensions**, then **Manage Extensions**, and click **Remove**.

Step 3: stop notifications from websites

In Edge or Chrome, open **Settings**, then **Privacy** (or **Cookies and site permissions**), then **Notifications**, and remove sites you do not know.

Step 4: scan the PC

Run a **Full scan** in **Windows Security**, as in our guide on virus scans.

Step 5: reset the browser

This puts the browser's settings back to normal.

- **Edge**: **Settings, Reset settings, Restore settings to their default values**.
- **Chrome**: **Settings, Reset settings, Restore settings to their original defaults**.

Your bookmarks and saved passwords are normally kept, but extensions are turned off and the start page and search engine go back to default. Check the details on the screen before you confirm.

Download only from the maker's website, untick extra offers during installation, and never click **Allow** on a notification you did not expect.

When to get more help

Get in touch if adverts or pop-ups return after the reset, if you entered a password or card details on a suspicious page, or if a warning page gives a phone number. Do not ring it.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Browser profiles in Edge and Chrome: keeping work and personal separate

A browser profile is a separate set of bookmarks, passwords, history and settings. It is like having a different browser for each person or purpose, without needing a separate Windows account.

Why use profiles?

- Keep work and personal browsing apart.
- Share a PC with a partner or child, each with their own bookmarks.
- Stop work logins mixing with personal ones.

Add a profile in Microsoft Edge

1. Click your profile picture at the top right of the browser window.
2. Click **Add profile**, then **Add**.
3. Choose to sign in with an account or to continue without one.
4. A new window opens. It is a fresh browser with its own look.

Add a profile in Google Chrome

1. Click the profile picture or icon at the top right.
2. Choose **Add Chrome profile**, or **Add** at the bottom.
3. Sign in with a Google account, or choose to continue without an account.
4. Give the profile a name and colour, so that you can tell them apart.

Switch profiles

Click the profile picture and choose the one you want. Each profile opens in its own window, and the picture at the top shows which one you are in.

If you sign in with an account, the browser can sync bookmarks, passwords and more across your devices. You choose what to sync in **Settings**, then **Profiles** in Edge or **You and Google** in Chrome.

Removing a profile: a warning

Removing a profile deletes its saved bookmarks, history and passwords from this PC. If it is synced, a copy stays in the account, but if not, they are gone. Check the details on screen, and export anything important before you remove it. To remove one, click the profile picture, then the settings cog or **Manage profile settings**, and choose **Remove** or **Delete**.

Both browsers have a **Guest** option for someone borrowing the PC, which leaves no history behind.

When to get more help

Get in touch if you lose bookmarks or passwords after a change, if a work profile asks for an administrator, or if you want help moving bookmarks onto a new PC.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

How to check your Windows version, PC specs and Windows 11 readiness

Knowing what Windows you have and what your PC is made of helps when buying software, getting support, or deciding whether you can upgrade to Windows 11.

Quick fixes to try first

There is nothing to fix here. This is just about finding out information. Nothing on this page changes your computer.

Step by step: Windows version and specs

1. Open **Settings** by pressing the Windows key and I together.
2. Choose **System**, then scroll to the bottom and click **About**.
3. Under **Device specifications** you will see the **Processor**, installed **RAM** (memory), and whether it is 64-bit.
4. Under **Windows specifications** you will see the **Edition** (such as Home or Pro) and **Version**.
5. The laptop's make and model are often shown at the top of the same page.

Step by step: can it run Windows 11?

1. Windows 10 users: open **Settings**, then **Update & Security**, then **Windows Update**. If your PC is eligible, a notice says so.
2. You can also download **PC Health Check** from Microsoft's official website and run it. Do not use copies from other sites.
3. Click **Check now** next to the Windows 11 banner. It tells you whether your PC meets the requirements, and why not if it does not.
4. Windows 11 needs, among other things, a modern 64-bit processor, 4 GB of memory, 64 GB of storage, **TPM 2.0** and **Secure Boot**. Many PCs from about 2018 onwards pass.

If that did not work

- If **PC Health Check** says no, do not try tricks or workarounds to force Windows 11 on, as it may not get updates reliably.
- Free space, or add memory, if only storage or RAM is the problem. Some fixes need a professional.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if you are unsure what the results mean, the PC says it cannot run Windows 11 and you are not sure what to do, or you are planning to buy a new PC. Send us a photo of the **About** page and the **PC Health Check** result, and tell us what you use the PC for.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

How to set up a new Windows laptop safely

A few careful steps in the first hour make your new laptop safer, faster and easier to look after.

Quick fixes to try first

Before you begin, have these ready: your Wi-Fi name and password, your Microsoft account email and password if you have one, and the charger. Plug the laptop in.

Step by step

1. Switch on and follow the setup screens. Choose your country as **United Kingdom** and the **UK** keyboard layout.
2. Connect to Wi-Fi when asked.
3. Sign in with your Microsoft account, or create one. Write down your password somewhere safe. Use a password only you know, and consider a password manager.
4. When asked about privacy options, read them and choose what suits you. You can change them later in **Settings**.
5. Once you reach the desktop, open **Settings**, then **Windows Update**, and click **Check for updates**. Install everything and restart, repeating until it says you are up to date. This can take a while on a new laptop.
6. Open **Windows Security** from the Start menu and check it shows no red warnings. Windows includes free protection, so you may not need extra.
7. Turn on a backup. See our guide on OneDrive.
8. Create a PIN or fingerprint sign-in under **Settings**, then **Accounts**, then **Sign-in options**, if you want it.

If that did not work

- If setup demands an account you do not have, create a free one using another device.
- If Wi-Fi will not connect, restart the router and try again.
- Be cautious about pre-installed trial programs. Remove ones you do not want from **Settings**, then **Apps**. Leave anything you are unsure of.
- Only download programs from official websites or the Microsoft Store.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if you are stuck on a setup screen, asked to pay for something you did not expect, see warnings you do not understand, or cannot sign in. Do not enter payment details on pop-ups. Tell us the laptop's make and model and what the screen says.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Windows shortcuts, screenshots and screen recording

A few keyboard shortcuts can save you a lot of clicking. They also let you capture what is on your screen to show someone else, which is helpful when asking for support.

Everyday shortcuts

- **Ctrl and C** copies, **Ctrl and V** pastes, and **Ctrl and X** cuts.
- **Ctrl and Z** undoes your last action.
- **Windows key and E** opens File Explorer.
- **Windows key and D** shows the desktop.
- **Windows key and L** locks the laptop. Handy when you step away.
- **Alt and Tab** switches between open programs.
- **Ctrl, Shift and Esc** opens Task Manager.
- **Windows key and V** shows your clipboard history, if turned on.

Step by step: screenshots

1. Press **Windows key, Shift and S** together.
2. Your screen dims and a small bar appears at the top. Choose a rectangle, window or full screen option.
3. Click and drag over what you want to capture.
4. A notification appears at the bottom right. Click it to open the picture and draw or save it. You can also paste it straight into an email or document with **Ctrl and V**.
5. Pressing **Print Screen (PrtScn)** alone captures the whole screen. Pressing **Windows key and PrtScn** saves it automatically in your **Pictures** folder, in a **Screenshots** folder.

Screen recording

- Windows 11: open the **Snipping Tool** from the Start menu. Newer versions have a record option. If you do not see it, install updates.
- Press **Windows key and G** to open the **Xbox Game Bar**, which can record the app you are using. It does not record the desktop or File Explorer.

If that did not work

Make sure your keyboard shortcuts are not being blocked by an Fn key. Some laptops need **Fn** held for the **PrtScn** key. Features and wording can differ between Windows 10 and 11.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if shortcuts do nothing, the Snipping Tool will not open, or you need to send us a recording and cannot. Be careful not to share screenshots showing passwords or bank details.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

How to change your default browser or default apps

Default apps are the programs Windows uses automatically, for example to open a web link, a PDF or a photo. If the wrong one opens, you can change it in a few clicks.

Quick fixes to try first

- If a single file opens in the wrong program, right-click it, choose **Open with**, then **Choose another app**, pick the one you want and tick **Always** if offered.
- Make sure the program you want is actually installed. Install it from its official website or the Microsoft Store if not.
- Do not worry if Windows asks you to confirm a change. It is usual.

Step by step: change the default browser

1. Open **Settings** by pressing the Windows key and I together.
2. Choose **Apps**, then **Default apps**.
3. Windows 11: find your browser, such as Chrome or Edge, in the list and click it. Click **Set default**.
Windows 10: scroll down to **Web browser** and click the current one, then choose a different one.
4. You may need to confirm the change. The exact wording may differ slightly.
5. Open a link from an email or document to check it works.

Step by step: other file types

1. In the same **Default apps** page, find the program you want, or type a file type such as .pdf in the search box.
2. Click the file type and choose the program you prefer.
3. Repeat for any other types, such as photos, music or video.

If that did not work

- If it keeps switching back, an update may have reset it. Repeat the steps.
- Use the browser's own **Settings** and look for **Make default**.
- If a pop-up urges you to change your browser, be careful. Only change it in **Settings**.
- Avoid installing browsers or PDF readers from adverts or unknown sites.

When to get more help

Stop and email us if the browser opens strange pages, you did not install the program that is taking over, or links open nothing at all. This could be unwanted software. Tell us your Windows version and which program keeps opening.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Customising the taskbar and Start menu

You can make Windows easier to use by putting your favourite programs where you can reach them. Changes here are safe, and you can always undo them.

Pin a program to the taskbar

1. Click **Start**, then **All apps** (Windows 10: scroll the list).
2. Right-click the program.
3. Choose **Pin to taskbar**. In Windows 10 you may need to choose **More** first.

If a program is already open, right-click its icon on the taskbar and choose **Pin to taskbar**.

Remove a pin

Right-click the icon and choose **Unpin from taskbar**. This does not uninstall the program.

Pin to Start

Right-click a program in the **All apps** list and choose **Pin to Start**. In Windows 11, pinned items sit at the top of Start, and you can drag them into the order you want. Windows 10 shows tiles, which can be resized by right-clicking.

Tidy the taskbar

- Windows 11: open **Settings, Personalisation, Taskbar** to switch on or off **Search, Task view, Widgets** and more.
- Windows 10: right-click an empty part of the taskbar and choose **Taskbar settings**. Right-click also lets you hide **Cortana** and **News and interests**.
- To move the Start button to the left in Windows 11, use **Taskbar behaviours**, then **Taskbar alignment**.

Change what Start shows

Windows 11: **Settings, Personalisation, Start**. You can show more pins or more recommendations, and choose folders to appear next to the power button. In Windows 10: **Settings, Personalisation, Start**.

The little icons by the clock can be hidden under an up arrow. Drag them into the arrow or out of it. To control which are shown, look under **Taskbar corner icons** or **Select which icons appear on the taskbar**.

Pinned items are easy to re-pin, and nothing here deletes your files.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the taskbar vanishes, freezes or shows blank icons, or if Start will not open. We have a separate guide on Search and Start problems.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Snap layouts and virtual desktops: working with several windows

If you have a lot of windows open, Windows can arrange them neatly side by side or in separate workspaces. It saves a lot of clicking.

Snap two windows side by side

1. Click on a window's title bar.
2. Press **Windows key + Left arrow** to push it to the left half, or **Windows key + Right arrow** for the right.
3. Choose another window to fill the other half, if Windows offers it.

You can also drag a window to the left or right edge of the screen until you see an outline, then let go.

Snap layouts in Windows 11

Hover your mouse over the **maximise** button, the square at the top right of a window, and a small box of layouts appears. Click the area where you want the window to go. Press **Windows key + Z** for the same menu. Windows 10 does not have the layout box, but has the arrow and drag methods above. It also has four-corner snapping.

Turn Snap on or off

Open **Settings, System, Multitasking**, and switch **Snap windows** on or off. This is where you can control the suggestions as well.

Virtual desktops

A virtual desktop is a separate screen of windows, handy for keeping work and personal tasks apart.

1. Press **Windows key + Tab** to open Task View.
2. Click **New desktop** (in Windows 10, **+ New desktop** at the top).
3. Move between desktops with **Windows key + Ctrl + Left or Right arrow**.
4. To close one, hover over it in Task View and click the **X**. Open windows move to the next desktop and are not closed.

Move a window to another desktop

In Task View, drag the window onto the desktop you want, or right-click it and choose **Move to**.

- **Windows key + D** shows the desktop and brings the windows back.
- **Alt + Tab** flips between open windows.

When to get more help

Get in touch if snapping does not work, if windows vanish after you close a desktop, or if you want a layout set up for a second monitor.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Clipboard history and everyday copy-and-paste shortcuts

You probably know **Ctrl + C** to copy and **Ctrl + V** to paste. Windows can also remember the last things you copied, so you can paste an older item. A few other shortcuts save a surprising amount of time.

Turn on clipboard history

1. Press **Windows key + V**.
2. If asked, click **Turn on**.

To check or change it later, open **Settings, System, Clipboard**. This feature is in both Windows 10 and Windows 11.

Use it

1. Copy several items one after another, as normal, with **Ctrl + C**.
2. Click where you want to paste.
3. Press **Windows key + V**. A list of recent items appears.
4. Click one to paste it.

Click the pin icon to keep an item in the list, or the **X** to remove it. Use **Clear all** to wipe the list.

A note about privacy

The history keeps copied text, which could include a password or bank details. Clear it after copying anything private. By default, the history is wiped when the PC restarts, apart from pinned items. Be careful about turning on syncing across devices, unless you want it.

Shortcuts worth learning

- **Ctrl + X**: cut. **Ctrl + Z**: undo. **Ctrl + Y**: redo.
- **Ctrl + A**: select everything.
- **Ctrl + F**: find a word on a page or document.
- **Ctrl + S**: save.
- **Alt + Tab**: flip between open windows.
- **Windows key + D**: show the desktop.
- **Windows key + L**: lock the PC when you walk away.
- **Windows key + E**: open File Explorer.
- **Windows key + full stop (.)**: open the emoji and symbols panel.

On a laptop, some shortcuts use the **Fn** key too. Try them in a safe document first.

Paste without the formatting

Use **Ctrl + Shift + V** in many programs to paste plain text only, without the fonts and colours.

When to get more help

Get in touch if **Windows key + V** does nothing, if copied items vanish or the wrong one pastes, or if shortcuts behave differently on your laptop. We can look at the keyboard settings with you.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Snipping Tool: capture, mark up and share part of your screen

The Snipping Tool lets you capture just the part of the screen you want, such as an error message, then draw on it and send it. It is easier than a full screenshot, and it is built into Windows 10 and 11.

The quickest way

1. Press **Windows key + Shift + S** together.
2. The screen dims and a small bar appears at the top. Choose the shape: **Rectangle**, **Freeform**, **Window** or **Full screen**.
3. Drag across the part you want.
4. The picture is copied. You can paste it straight into an email or document with **Ctrl + V**.

A small message appears in the corner of the screen. Click it to open the picture in the Snipping Tool, where you can edit and save. If you miss it, open the **Notification centre** from the clock.

Open the app instead

Press the **Windows key**, type **Snipping Tool** and open it. Click **New** (Windows 11 may show **Rectangle** options). There is also a **Delay** option, which lets you capture menus and pop-ups that disappear when you click. Windows 10 may open it as Snip & Sketch, which works much the same way.

Mark up and save

- Use the **pen** or **highlighter** to circle the problem.
- Use the **crop** tool to remove anything unneeded.
- Click the **save** icon, or press **Ctrl + S**, and choose a folder. A name like **Error message** helps you find it later.
- Click the **share** or **copy** icon to send it.

Screen recording in Windows 11

The Windows 11 Snipping Tool also has a **Record** option for short videos of what is on screen.

Check before you share

Screenshots can show names, email addresses, account numbers or passwords. Crop them out or cover them before you send the picture, especially to a stranger or on social media.

Some versions save a copy automatically in **Pictures**, then **Screenshots**. Check in File Explorer if you cannot find one.

When to get more help

Get in touch if the shortcut does nothing, if the bar does not appear, or if a screenshot comes out black. That sometimes happens with protected video. We can help you capture it another way.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.

Windows laptops & PCs | Easy | 2 min read

Focus assist and Do not disturb: stop notifications getting in the way

Pop-up banners and sounds can interrupt a video call, a presentation or just some quiet work. Windows can hold them back until you are ready to see them.

Names to know

In Windows 10 and the earlier Windows 11 versions, this feature is called **Focus assist**. In newer Windows 11 updates, it has been replaced by **Do not disturb** in the notification settings. If one of the names below is missing, try the other.

Turn it on quickly

- Windows 11: click the **bell** or the date and time at the bottom right, to open the notification area, and use the **Do not disturb** bell or button. You can also press **Windows key + N**.
- Windows 10: click the **Notification** icon at the far right of the taskbar, and click the **Focus assist** tile. Each click changes the mode.

Settings

- Windows 11, newer versions: **Settings, System, Notifications, Do not disturb**.
- Windows 11, earlier versions and Windows 10: **Settings, System, Focus assist**.

In **Focus assist**, you have three choices:

- **Off**: you get all notifications.
- **Priority only**: you only see people and apps on a list you choose.
- **Alarms only**: you see only alarms.

Automatic rules

You can have Windows turn it on for you, for example:

- When you duplicate your screen, which is useful in presentations.
- When you are playing a full-screen game or app.
- During set hours, such as in the evening.

Use **Customise your priority list** to pick which people or apps are still allowed through, such as your alarm clock.

After a quiet period

Windows can show a summary of what you missed when you finish. You can find the details in the notification area.

Alarms and calls from apps you added to the priority list may still come through, so check them before relying on silence in a meeting. Notifications from your security software are best left allowed.

When to get more help

Get in touch if notifications still pop up in presentations, if you stop getting messages you need, or if the setting seems to turn itself on and off. We can look at your rules with you.

Still stuck? Email admin@visiontech336.com and tell us what you can see on the screen. Menus and button names can differ slightly between versions and makes. If something does not match, stop and ask rather than guess. Please never send passwords or card details.