



IT SELF-HELP & ESCALATION GUIDE

Your step-by-step reference for resolving common computer issues

How to Use This Guide

1. Find your issue in the Table of Contents below.
2. Follow the numbered steps in order — do not skip steps.
3. If the issue is resolved after any step, you can stop there.
4. If you reach the end of a section and the problem persists, move to the 'When to Call IT' checklist.
5. Keep this document somewhere easy to find (desktop, printed copy, or email to yourself).

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Section 1: The Golden Rules — Try These First (Always)

Before doing anything else, these three steps resolve the majority of common computer problems. Always start here.

The Big Three — Do This Before Anything Else

Step 1: Save any open work, then RESTART your computer (Start Menu > Power > Restart).

Step 2: Wait 60 seconds after it comes back on before testing the issue again.

Step 3: If connected via Wi-Fi, also unplug your router/modem, wait 30 seconds, and plug it back in.

If the problem persists after a restart, move on to the relevant section below.

Section 2: Internet & Wi-Fi Not Working

Symptoms: No internet, pages won't load, 'No Connection' message

Step-by-Step Fix

1. Check if other devices (phone, tablet) can connect to Wi-Fi. If they cannot, the issue is with your router — not the computer.
2. Unplug the router/modem from the wall. Wait 30 seconds. Plug it back in. Wait 2 minutes for it to restart fully.
3. On your computer, click the Wi-Fi icon in the bottom-right corner of the taskbar. Check that Wi-Fi is turned ON and that you are connected to the correct network name.
4. If Wi-Fi shows 'Connected' but pages still won't load: open your browser and try going to a different website (e.g., google.com).
5. Try 'Forget' the Wi-Fi network and reconnect: Settings > Network & Internet > Wi-Fi > Manage known networks > select your network > Forget. Then reconnect and enter the password.
6. Restart your computer.

Call IT if:

- The internet works on other devices but not on this computer after a restart.
- You see error messages like 'DNS Server Not Responding' or 'No Valid IP Configuration'.
- The Wi-Fi adapter does not appear in Settings at all.

Section 3: Computer Is Running Slowly

Symptoms: Programs take long to open, spinning wheel, freezing

Step-by-Step Fix

7. Restart your computer first. This clears memory and often resolves slowness.
8. Close programs you are not using: right-click the taskbar at the bottom > Task Manager. Look at 'CPU' and 'Memory' columns. If any program is using over 80%, click it and press 'End Task'.
9. Check how much storage is left: open File Explorer > This PC. Your main drive (usually C:) should have at least 10-15% free space. If it is nearly full, delete files you no longer need or move them to an external drive.
10. Check for Windows Updates: Start > Settings > Windows Update > Check for updates. Install any pending updates, then restart.
11. Run Disk Cleanup: search 'Disk Cleanup' in the Start Menu. Select your C: drive. Check all boxes and click OK.

Call IT if:

- The computer is still extremely slow after a restart and closing all unused programs.
- The computer is very hot to the touch (fan running loudly at all times).
- Task Manager shows 100% CPU/Memory usage even when nothing is open.

Section 4: Computer Won't Turn On or Is Frozen

Symptoms: Black screen, won't start, completely unresponsive

If the Computer Is Frozen (Screen Is On but Nothing Responds)

12. Wait 2 minutes — sometimes the computer is processing something.
13. Press and hold the Power button for 10 seconds until the computer turns off.
14. Wait 30 seconds, then press the Power button once to turn it back on.
15. If it asks 'Start Windows Normally' — select that option.

If the Computer Won't Turn On at All

16. Check that the power cable is firmly plugged in at both ends.
17. If using a laptop, plug in the charger and wait 5 minutes, then try again.
18. Try a different power outlet.
19. Press the Power button and listen: do you hear any sounds or see any lights?
20. If a laptop: try removing the power cable, then hold the Power button for 30 seconds (drains residual power). Reconnect power and try again.

Call IT if:

- The computer will not turn on after trying the above steps.
- You hear clicking or grinding sounds when it tries to start.
- The screen shows error text or a blue screen with a sad face (Blue Screen of Death).
- The computer turns on but cannot get past the startup logo.

Section 5: Email Problems (Outlook / Gmail)

Symptoms: Can't send/receive emails, can't open Outlook, inbox not loading

Outlook Not Opening or Crashing

21. Close Outlook fully. Wait 30 seconds and reopen it.
22. Restart your computer.
23. Try opening Outlook in Safe Mode: hold the Ctrl key while clicking the Outlook icon. Click Yes when prompted. If it opens, an add-in may be the issue — go to File > Options > Add-ins and disable all add-ins.

Not Sending or Receiving Emails

24. Check your internet connection (see Section 2).
25. In Outlook, look at the bottom status bar. If it says 'Disconnected' or 'Working Offline', click Send/Receive > Work Offline to toggle it off.
26. Try sending a test email to yourself.
27. Check your Outbox folder — emails stuck there may be blocking new ones.

Gmail Not Working (Browser)

28. Try a different browser (e.g., switch from Chrome to Edge).
29. Clear your browser cache: press Ctrl + Shift + Delete > select 'All time' > check all boxes > Clear data.
30. Try opening Gmail in an Incognito window (Ctrl + Shift + N in Chrome).

Call IT if:

- Outlook asks for your password repeatedly and won't accept it.
- You get an error saying your account is disconnected or your mailbox is full.
- Emails are missing from your inbox and you did not delete them.

Section 6: Printer Not Working

Symptoms: Documents won't print, printer shows offline, print jobs stuck

Step-by-Step Fix

31. Check the printer: is it turned on? Does it have paper? Are there any error lights or messages on the printer screen?
32. Check the cable (if wired): make sure the USB cable is firmly connected to both the printer and the computer.
33. If wireless: make sure the printer is connected to the same Wi-Fi network as the computer.
34. Clear the print queue: search 'Printers & scanners' in the Start Menu > click your printer > Open print queue > cancel all jobs.
35. Set the printer as default: Printers & scanners > click your printer > Set as default.
36. Restart the print spooler: search 'Services' in Start Menu > scroll to 'Print Spooler' > right-click > Restart.
37. Restart both the printer and the computer.

Call IT if:

- The printer does not appear in Printers & scanners at all.
- The printer shows as offline even when turned on and connected.
- You get a 'Driver unavailable' error.

Section 7: Screen or Display Issues

Symptoms: Blurry screen, wrong resolution, black screen, display flickering

Screen Resolution Looks Wrong / Blurry

38. Right-click on the desktop > Display settings.
39. Under 'Display resolution', select the option that says '(Recommended)' next to it.
40. Click Keep changes.

Screen Flickering

41. Check the cable connecting the monitor to the computer — unplug and firmly reconnect.
42. Try a different cable if available.
43. Right-click desktop > Display settings > Advanced display settings > Check if refresh rate is set appropriately (60 Hz is standard).

Black Screen but Computer Is On

44. Press the Windows key + P and cycle through display options (PC screen only, Duplicate, Extend, Second screen only).
45. Try moving the mouse and pressing any key first — the screen may just be asleep.
46. Check the monitor's own power button and input source button.

Call IT if:

- The screen has physical cracks, dead pixels, or permanent discoloration.
- Display issues remain after trying all steps above.
- The computer has no display output at all even after cycling display modes.

Section 8: Sound Not Working

Symptoms: No audio, volume won't adjust, sound distorted

47. Check the volume: click the speaker icon in the bottom-right corner. Make sure it is not muted and the volume is turned up.
48. Check the application volume: right-click the speaker icon > Open Volume Mixer. Make sure the specific app's audio is not muted.
49. Check headphone or speaker connections. Unplug and re-plug any audio cables or headphones.
50. Right-click the speaker icon > Troubleshoot sound problems. Follow the prompts.
51. Check the correct output device: right-click speaker icon > Sound settings > Output device. Make sure the correct speaker or headphone is selected.
52. Restart your computer.

Call IT if:

- The speaker/audio device does not appear in Sound settings at all.
- You get a 'No audio output device is installed' error.

Section 9: Software / App Won't Open

Symptoms: Program crashes on startup, error messages, won't respond

53. Close the program completely. Open Task Manager (Ctrl + Alt + Delete > Task Manager), find the program, right-click > End Task. Then reopen it.
54. Restart your computer and try again.
55. Check for software updates within the app (usually under Help or About menu).

56. Check for Windows Updates (Start > Settings > Windows Update).
57. Try running as Administrator: right-click the program icon > Run as administrator.
58. Uninstall and reinstall the program: Start > Settings > Apps > find the program > Uninstall. Then reinstall from the official website.

Call IT if:

- You receive a license or activation error when opening the software.
- The program was working before and you have not made any changes.
- Business-critical software (e.g., accounting, CRM) will not open or crashes repeatedly.

Section 10: Forgot Password / Can't Log In

Symptoms: Wrong password error, locked out, account disabled

Windows Login Password

59. On the login screen, click 'I forgot my PIN' or 'Reset password' if available.
60. If your account is a Microsoft account (email), go to account.microsoft.com/password/reset on another device to reset it.
61. If your account is a local account, you will need IT assistance to reset it.

Website / Application Password

62. Use the 'Forgot Password' or 'Reset Password' link on the login page.
63. Check your email for a reset link (including the Spam/Junk folder).
64. If you use a password manager, check there for the stored password.

Call IT if:

- Your Windows/computer account is locked and you cannot reset it yourself.
- You suspect your account has been accessed by someone else.
- You are locked out of a critical business application and cannot reset it.

Section 11: Pop-Ups, Viruses & Suspicious Activity

Symptoms: Unusual pop-ups, warnings, computer acting strangely

IMPORTANT — Do Not:

- Do NOT call any phone number shown in a pop-up warning.
- Do NOT click 'Fix Now' or 'Download' on unexpected pop-ups.

- Do NOT allow anyone remote access to your computer unless you initiated the call with IT.
- Legitimate companies (Microsoft, Apple, Google) will NEVER call you unsolicited about your computer.

If You See Suspicious Pop-Ups

65. Close the pop-up by pressing Alt + F4 or clicking the X. If it will not close, open Task Manager and end the browser task.
66. Do NOT click anywhere inside the pop-up window.
67. Run a virus scan: search 'Windows Security' in Start Menu > Virus & threat protection > Quick Scan.
68. If you believe you clicked something suspicious, disconnect from the internet (turn off Wi-Fi) and call IT immediately.

Computer Acting Unusually (Slow, Opening Programs on Its Own)

69. Run a full Windows Security scan: Windows Security > Virus & threat protection > Scan options > Full Scan.
70. Check for programs you do not recognize: Start > Settings > Apps. If you see something unfamiliar, do not uninstall it without asking IT first.

Call IT immediately if:

- You clicked on a suspicious link or downloaded something you should not have.
- Files have strange new extensions or you see ransom messages.
- Your computer is sending emails on your behalf that you did not write.
- Someone claims to have access to your computer or accounts.

Section 12: Files Missing or Can't Be Found

Symptoms: File not in expected location, appears deleted, can't open

71. Search for the file: click the Search bar in the taskbar (magnifying glass icon) and type the file name or part of it.
72. Check the Recycle Bin: double-click the Recycle Bin icon on the desktop. If the file is there, right-click > Restore.
73. Check if the file is sorted differently in the folder: open the folder, right-click on an empty area > Sort by > Date modified. This will show recently changed files at the top.
74. Check if the file was saved to a different location (e.g., Documents instead of Desktop, or Google Drive vs. local storage).

75. If files were on Google Drive, log in to drive.google.com in your browser to see if they are still there.
76. Check the Trash in Google Drive: drive.google.com > Trash (on the left sidebar). Files stay here for 30 days before being permanently deleted. Right-click a file > Restore to recover it.
77. Search Google Drive directly: at the top of drive.google.com, type the file name into the search bar. Google Drive searches all folders including ones that may not be synced to your computer.
78. If you use the Google Drive desktop app (the folder that syncs automatically), check that it is running: look for the Google Drive icon in the bottom-right taskbar. If it shows a sync error, click it and follow the prompts to reconnect.

Call IT if:

- Important files are missing and you cannot find them anywhere.
- You believe a drive or storage device has failed.
- You need to recover files from before a specific date (backup restore).

Section 13: Routine Computer Maintenance

Keeping your software and drivers up to date prevents many common problems before they start — slowness, connectivity issues, crashes, and security vulnerabilities. Aim to run these tools once a month.

A note on administrator's access

Some of these updates require administrator permissions to install. If you are the only user on your computer and set it up yourself, you should have full administrator access and can run these updates on your own without any issues. However, if your computer was set up or managed by an IT company, they may have restricted certain permissions — in that case, the update tool may ask for a password or simply not allow the installation to proceed. If that happens, this is not something to work around on your own. Contact your IT provider and let them know you would like to run routine maintenance updates, and they can either grant temporary access or run the updates for you remotely.

What are drivers?

Drivers are small programs that allow your computer's hardware (printer, Wi-Fi card, screen, etc.) to communicate with your operating system. When they go out of date, things stop working correctly. Your computer manufacturer provides a free tool to check and update them automatically — no technical knowledge required.

If you have a Dell computer — Dell SupportAssist

Dell SupportAssist is likely already installed on your computer. To use it:

79. Search 'SupportAssist' in the Start Menu and open it.
80. Click Get Drivers & Downloads or Run All.
81. Let it scan your system — this may take a few minutes.
82. Review and install any recommended updates.
83. Restart your computer when prompted.

If SupportAssist is not installed, download it at dell.com/support.

If you have an HP computer — HP Support Assistant

84. Search 'HP Support Assistant' in the Start Menu and open it.
85. Let it scan your PC for available updates.
86. Review the list of driver, firmware, and software updates.
87. Click Install and allow your computer to restart if needed.

If it is not installed, download it at hp.com/go/hpsupportassistant.

If you have a Lenovo computer — Lenovo Vantage

88. Search 'Lenovo Vantage' in the Start Menu, or download it from the Microsoft Store.
89. Go to Device > System Update.
90. Click Check for Updates.
91. Select and install available updates.
92. Restart when prompted.

If you have a Mac

Macs handle most updates automatically — your system checks daily and applies updates in the background, notifying you when they are ready to install. To check manually:

93. Click the Apple menu (top-left corner) > System Settings > General > Software Update.
94. Install any available updates.

A note on Mac security

Macs have built-in protection called XProtect that works similarly to antivirus software and updates automatically in the background. The long-held belief that Macs are immune to viruses is no longer accurate — Mac-specific malware has increased significantly in recent years. Keeping macOS fully up to date is your most important line

of defense. If your organization handles sensitive data, ask your IT provider whether additional protection is recommended for your specific setup.

For all other computer brands (Acer, Asus, Toshiba, Samsung, etc.)

Most computer manufacturers have their own version of a support and update tool. To find yours:

95. Open your browser and search for "[your computer brand] driver update tool" — for example, "Acer driver update tool" or "Asus support assistant."
96. Go to the official manufacturer's website (look for the brand's name in the web address, e.g., acer.com or asus.com).
97. Download and run their support tool, then follow the same general steps: scan, review updates, install, and restart.

If you are unsure what brand your computer is, look for a sticker on the bottom or back of the laptop — it will show the brand name and model number.

How Often Should You Do This?

Once a month is a good routine. A helpful habit is to run your manufacturer's update tool at the same time you check for Windows Updates (Start > Settings > Windows Update).

Section 14: When to Call IT — Escalation Checklist

Use this checklist to decide whether to contact your IT provider. If you check ANY box below, it is time to call them.

Category	Call IT When...	Do NOT need IT for...
Hardware	Screen is cracked, keyboard keys broken, laptop won't charge at all, hard drive making noise	Adjusting screen brightness, cleaning the keyboard, plugging in accessories
Internet	No internet on computer only, after restart and router reboot, with error codes	Router needs rebooting, wrong Wi-Fi password, basic reconnecting
Software	License expired or invalid, software corrupted, business app won't open after reinstall	App is slow, need to update, need to reinstall
Security	Potential virus, suspicious remote access, ransomware warning, account breach suspected	Closing pop-ups, running a Windows Security scan, spam emails
Login	Windows account locked with no reset option, corporate account disabled	Personal website passwords, resetting a Microsoft account online

Category	Call IT When...	Do NOT need IT for...
Email	Mailbox full and cannot clear it, account disconnected from server, email lost	Junk mail, sorting inbox, basic Outlook settings
Files	Data loss from drive failure, need backup restore, files encrypted by malware	Misplaced files, wrong folder, searching for documents
Performance	Computer unusable slow after restart with nothing open, 100% disk constantly	Normal slowness, too many programs open, needs restart

Section 15: What to Tell IT When You Call

Having this information ready will help IT resolve your issue faster. Try to answer as many of these as possible before calling:

Question to Answer	Example
What is happening?	"The computer won't connect to the internet."
When did it start?	"It started this morning / after I installed an update."
What were you doing when it happened?	"I was trying to open Outlook when the screen went black."
Have you tried restarting?	"Yes, I restarted twice and the issue persists."
Are there any error messages?	"It says 'DNS Server Not Responding'."
Has anything changed recently?	"Windows updated last night / I plugged in a new device."
What is your computer model/name?	"It's a Dell laptop, the label says Model XPS 15."
Is it just this computer or others too?	"Just mine — my phone connects to Wi-Fi fine."

Quick Reference Card — Print & Keep Handy

Fixes to Try Before Calling IT (Works for Most Problems)

1. RESTART the computer | 2. CHECK cables & connections | 3. REBOOT the router
4. CHECK for Windows Updates | 5. CLEAR browser cache (Ctrl+Shift+Delete)
6. Run Windows Security scan | 7. Close unused programs in Task Manager
8. Search online for the exact error message you see

Always Call IT For These — Do Not Attempt Alone

- Blue Screen of Death (BSOD) with error codes
- Hard drive clicking/grinding noises
- Suspected virus, ransomware, or security breach
- Computer totally won't power on after all basic steps
- Lost critical business data or files
- Software license or activation problems

End of Guide — You've got this!