

Handy Tips, Solutions and Answers to Common PC Questions

Do you have a question about a recent article, or need help with a computing problem? If you do, just drop us a line by email and we'll do our level best to help! You'll find our email address and contact details on the inside back cover of your update.

When you write, please remember to include your customer number, your postcode, and the version of Windows you use (Windows 11, Windows 10, Windows 8.1 or Windows 7). Give us as much detail as you can about the problem to help us understand what's happening, and feel free to attach a screenshot or document if you think it would help to illustrate the problem or error.

Contents:

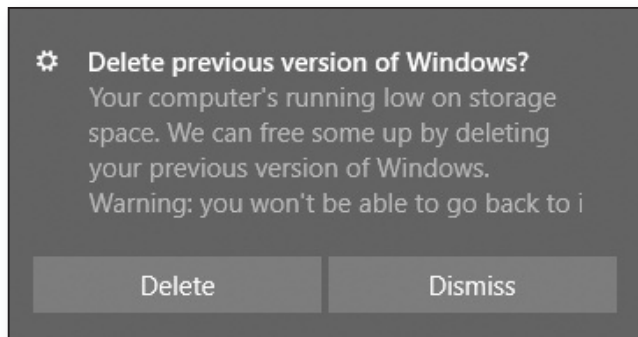
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1. Windows 10: Delete Previous Version of Windows?

What previous version of Windows?

Question: *I just switched on my PC and a pop-up box asked if I want to delete my previous version of Windows to free up some space. As far as I know, I don't have a previous version of Windows. What's this all about?*

Stephen Forte



Your PC is lacking in disk space

Answer: You're most likely to see this message on a tablet computer or on a budget-priced notebook PC – in short, on a Windows 10 computer that came with a comparatively small amount of storage space. (It's just possible you'd see it on a pricier PC whose hard disk was getting full, but you'd have to work hard to fill the huge hard disk on most modern PCs!)

You've recently received a feature update for Windows 10

At some point in the recent past, your PC has received and installed a 'feature update' for Windows 10. This might have been the update named '21H2', released last autumn, or it might just be a newer update named '22H1' if Microsoft decides to release one (which, at the time of writing, is unclear).

A copy of the old version was kept

These major updates are regarded as new versions of Windows 10. During the process of installing one of these updates, a copy is made of the version of

Windows 10 you're currently using, just in case you have problems with this update and need to revert to that slightly-older one.

If you do need to remove the recently-installed update and go back to that older version of Windows 10, open the Settings app and go to **Update & Security**, click **Recovery** at the left, and then click the **Get started** button in the section headed **Go back to the previous version of Windows 10**.

As you'd expect for an entire copy of Windows, that old version takes up a fair bit of space on your hard disk. In the normal run of things, it's kept for 30 days and then quietly deleted (upon which, the option to go back to the previous version of Windows mentioned above also disappears from the Settings app).

On most PCs, the temporary loss of that space won't make any difference to anything. But on the budget-priced PCs I mentioned earlier, this copy of Windows might be taking up most of your remaining space and potentially slowing down your PC. In this case, you'll see that message box asking whether you'd like to get rid of the old version and regain that lost space straight away rather than waiting 30 days.

In almost all cases, the best choice is to click the **Delete** button in that message box and let Windows delete that old version of Windows (which happens quickly and silently, without asking you any further questions).

The only reason not to do that is if the recently-arrived update is causing you such serious problems that you intend to follow the tip above to switch back to the previous version, in which case you'd click the **Dismiss** button to make this message go away. Just remember, if you do plan to do that, you only have a limited time before that old version will disappear for good!

The old copy is usually kept for 30 days...

... but your PC is short of space

It's best to delete the old copy now

Only keep it if you think you'll need it!

2. Is There a Safer Way to Select Multiple Files?

Windows unexpectedly makes copies of files

Question: *I'm always nervous if I have to select two or more files in a folder. Without warning, I can suddenly find that I've created copies of all the files I've selected so far. Why does it happen, and how can I stop it?*

Richard Morrow

To select, you hold Ctrl and click

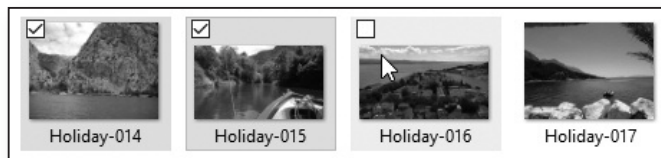
Answer: The usual way of selecting multiple files is to click one file in the normal way, and then to hold down the **Ctrl** key as you click the others. However, as you've discovered, that carries a risk. If you drag one or more files while holding down the **Ctrl** key, Windows creates copies of them.

If you drag accidentally, copies are made

Although you're not intending to drag anything anywhere, it's all too easy to do it by accident. You've selected several files, you hold down **Ctrl** to select one more, and as you're clicking it you move the mouse slightly. You might have moved it an imperceptible distance, but Windows interprets it as dragging and makes copies of everything you've just selected.

The easier way: select files by ticking boxes instead

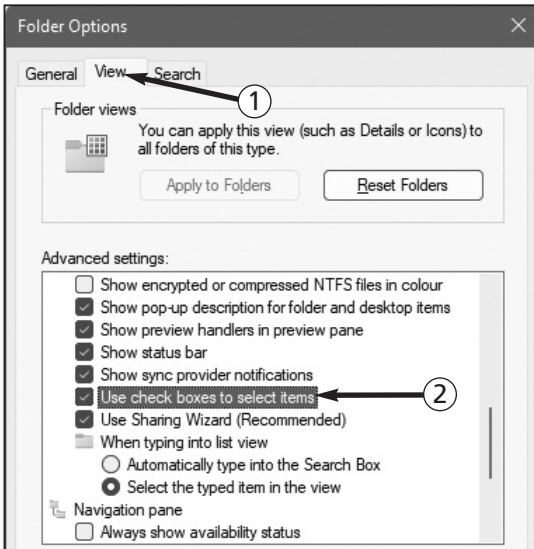
It's hard to avoid, especially if your hands are a bit shaky, but there's an alternative available in all versions of Windows. You can tell Windows to display checkboxes in the top-left corners of every file and folder. You then select files by simply moving the mouse over them and ticking their boxes: you don't hold down the **Ctrl** key, so there's no risk of making accidental copies.



To switch this feature on, just do the following:

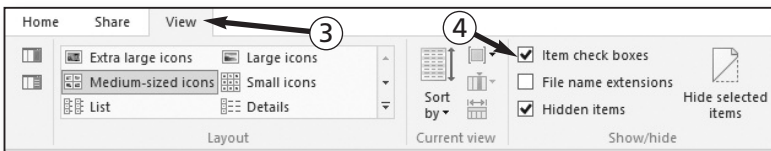
- **Windows 11:** press **Win+E** to open File Explorer. Click the ... button on the toolbar and choose **Options**. In the dialog that opens, switch to the **View** tab ①, scroll to the bottom of the 'Advanced settings' list and tick the box beside **Use check boxes to select items** ② and click **OK**.

Enable this option in Windows 11



- **Windows 10 and 8.1:** press **Win+E** to open File Explorer. Switch to the **View** tab on the Ribbon ③ and tick the box beside **Item check boxes** ④.

Enable this option in Windows 10/8.1



You only need pay attention to these checkboxes when you want to select two or more items. The rest of the time, just click or double-click icons in exactly the same way you normally would.

You can still work with single files in the usual way

3. Is My New External Hard Drive a Rip-off?

Less space than you were led to believe?

Question: *I've just bought an external hard drive to gain some extra storage space for my files. It was sold as a 500 GB drive, but after connecting it to my PC Windows tells me the drive has 465 GB available. Have I been short-changed?*

Jamie Glover

A sneaky practice of drive manufacturers

Answer: Technically the answer is no, you haven't been ripped off, but when I explain the reason why your new drive seems to offer less space than it should, you might feel that the drive's manufacturer was being less than honest with you! However, it would be unfair to single out that one manufacturer – the whole industry behaves this way.

Decimal vs. binary systems

It comes down to different ways of counting and measuring things. We humans like to use the decimal system – base 10 – in which things are counted in tens, hundreds and thousands. Computers use the binary system – base 2 – in which things are counted in twos, fours, eights, sixteens, and so on.

The usual way computers measure sizes

To a computer, then, a kilobyte isn't a thousand bytes, it's 1024 bytes. A megabyte is 1024 kilobytes, and a gigabyte is 1024 megabytes. So, when you buy a 500 GB drive, you might reasonably expect to be getting 500 of those gigabytes – 512,000 megabytes.

Drive capacities are given using the decimal system

In fact, though, manufacturers of disk drives sneakily switch to using the decimal system to state the capacities of drives, so every advertised 'gigabyte' is actually 1000 megabytes, not 1024 megabytes. It may seem a small difference, but those lost 24s add up, and when you look at the drive's capacity in Windows (which does measure things the correct computer way), you'll see they've added up to a loss of 35 gigabytes: your '500 GB' drive is really a 465 GB drive.

Incidentally, there's another thing that can cause an apparently-empty drive to offer less space than it should. When you format a disk, which prepares it for use in a PC, the formatting process has to create a kind of 'table of contents' on the disk which enables Windows to find the files stored on the disk. This table of contents varies in size according to the type and size of the disk, but even on an apparently-empty disk the table of contents will occupy a small percentage of the space and will result in your having still less available space than the advertised capacity.



4. Are There Any Programs for Currency Conversion?

Question: *Every so often I need to convert amounts in US dollars into pounds. I can find the exchange rate in the newspaper and use the calculator, but it occurred to me there might be a program (ideally free) that can do all this for me. Do you know of such a thing?*

A free currency converter?

Maia Byrd

Answer: You don't need a separate program for this, you just need the Internet. Specifically, all you need is Google (www.google.co.uk), which counts currency conversion among its other skills. You can approach it in two ways:

Use Google!

Method 1: visit Google and search for **currency conversion**. You'll arrive at a results page (which you might like to add to your browser's Favourites or bookmarks for quick access in future), but above the results you'll see the conversion panel pictured in the following screenshot:

Find and use the currency converter



Choose your 'From' currency (set to 'British Pound Sterling' in the screenshot above) and your 'To' currency (currently 'United States Dollar'), then type a figure into the box to the left of the 'From' currency (I've typed '200') and as you type it will be converted automatically, showing you the equivalent in the 'To' currency in the box below (here, 256.9 dollars).

*Open and convert
in one go*

Method 2: visit Google and type into the search box the currency conversion you want to look up. For example:

200 pounds in dollars

850 euros in pounds

22.95 USD in GBP

40 swiss francs in PLN

Google recognises this type of query, and it will take you to the same currency-conversion panel pictured above, but with the appropriate values already inserted and the conversion displayed.



Incidentally, although I've suggested that you 'visit Google' in each of the two methods above, you may not even need to do that. If your web browser's own search box or address box is set to use Google, you can simply type the query into that box and press **Enter**.