

The Safe, Easy Steps for Removing Unwanted Software from Your PC

This article shows you how to:

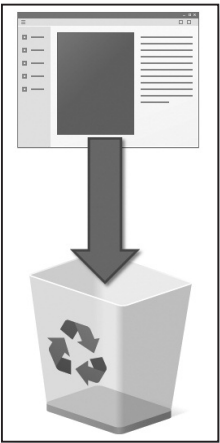
- See a list of the programs installed on your computer
- Easily remove any programs and apps you don't want
- Deal with any questions that crop up along the way

Perhaps you've installed an app from the Microsoft Store, or a program you downloaded from a website, and you've decided it's not good enough to keep. Or perhaps you've been told to uninstall your old version of a program before you can install the new version. Or possibly you just want to clean up your PC and regain some disk space by removing programs you never use.

Whatever the reason, it's important to follow the right steps when uninstalling programs, and in this article I'll explain what to do. I'll also help you answer the questions you may be asked during the process of uninstalling a program.

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Installing and Uninstalling: What's It All About?

Programs and apps: what's the difference?

Let's start by answering a question that may be puzzling you already: what's the difference between 'programs' and 'apps'?

First of all, if you use Windows 7, apps needn't trouble you at all: you don't have any! Every item of software installed on your PC is what we refer to as a 'program'.

If you use Windows 10 or 8.1, you have both types of software, and it's useful to know the difference between them:

Apps come from the Windows Store

- **Apps** are items of software you find and install from the Microsoft Store, using the Store app found on your Start menu or Start screen. They've been checked and vetted by Microsoft to ensure they're safe to use. Windows also comes with about 20 apps of its own, such as News, Weather, Calendar and Photos.

Programs come from shops or websites

- **Programs** are the type of software we've been using on PCs for decades, buying them from computer shops or downloading them from websites. If it comes from anywhere other than the Microsoft Store, it's a program, and that includes all the famous software like Microsoft Office, VLC Media Player, Adobe Acrobat Reader and Google Chrome.

Both appear on your Start menu

In fact, the distinction is a narrow one: you'll find both apps and programs mingled together on your Start menu (in Windows 10) or Start screen (in Windows 8.1), and most of the time there's no reason to know or care what's what. You just click one to start it, use it and then close it. However, they do behave differently when you install or uninstall them, so we'll begin with a general look at how that works.

Installing and uninstalling apps

As I mentioned, you'll only find apps by visiting the Microsoft Store, where you can read about them, check users' reviews and ratings and see screenshots. If an app takes your fancy, it takes just one click to download it and install it (with a couple of extra steps if it's an app you have to pay for).

Apps are installed with one click

From here, the Microsoft Store handles the whole job for you. Rather than stepping through a series of questions and options about how and where to install the program, you simply twiddle your thumbs for a few seconds and it's done. You'll find the new app on your Start menu (or in the 'Apps' section of Windows 8.1's Start screen).

Uninstalling an app is equally straightforward: besides confirming that you really do want to remove it, there are no steps to follow or questions to answer. Within a few seconds, the unwanted app is completely removed from your PC.

Removing an app is just as simple

The neat thing about apps is that there's really no way to do any of this 'wrong'. Since there's only one way to install an app, and one way to uninstall it, you can be sure of always getting the result you want with no fuss or bother.

Installing and uninstalling programs

Installing a program is rather different. You follow the steps through a 'setup program', choosing options and repeatedly clicking **Next** until you arrive at the final step. Here you click an **Install** button, leading to a flurry of activity while your new program is being installed. During this flurry, quite a few things are happening:

Programs can make a lot of changes to your PC

- The program is copied to a new folder on your hard disk (usually inside a folder named 'Program Files').

- Other files required by the program may be copied to this folder too, and perhaps into other folders on your computer.
- Shortcuts to your new program are added to your Start menu (or Start screen), and perhaps to your desktop.
- Extra 'helper' programs may be installed, such as something that regularly checks for newer versions of the program you're installing. This may involve adding settings to Windows to make this 'helper' program run every day or so.
- Various other settings will often be added to Windows as well. For instance, there may be settings to specify which types of file this new program can open. If it's a shareware program, which can be used free of charge for a few weeks, hidden settings will be added to keep track of how much of your trial period remains.

The wrong way to 'uninstall' a program...

Most PC users know about the first point above – that the program was installed into a new folder – and some assume that if they find and delete that folder they'll uninstall the program. Not so! All that does is to remove any possibility of using the program again, but all the extra files, settings and shortcuts scattered around your PC are left behind.

Even worse, as far as Windows is concerned, the program hasn't been uninstalled, but it's somehow disappeared, and that could lead to all sorts of problems and error messages. From your own point of view, the program still appears on your Start menu (even though it can no longer be started), which could lead to some confusion!

... and the correct way

The correct way to uninstall a program is to reverse each and every change and addition that was made when it was installed. During the installation, the setup program

created a log of all the changes it made, and when you want to uninstall the program, that same log is used to undo every change with the intention of removing every trace of the unwanted program.

But, since the installation was a rather complex process, the removal can be complex too. Although it should all happen automatically once you've started it, you may have to deal with the odd question along the way, and later in this article I'll explain how to handle the most common questions and messages that appear.

First, though, I'll show you the basic steps to follow whenever you want to uninstall an app in Windows 10 or 8.1, or a program in any version of Windows. The steps vary according to which version of Windows you're using, so I'll deal with each version separately.

You may have to answer extra questions

Windows 10: Uninstalling Programs and Apps

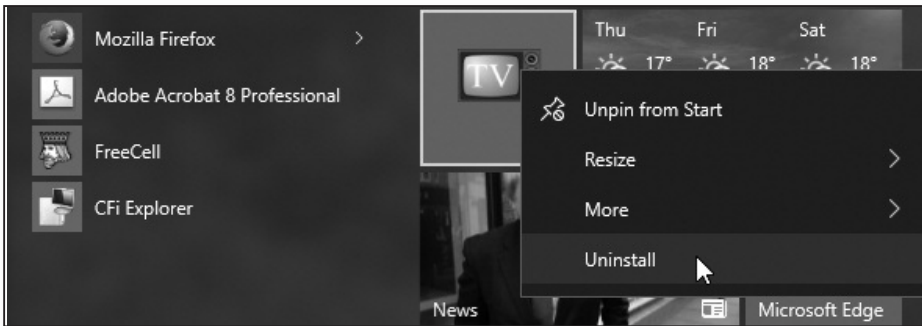
In Windows 10, there are two different approaches you can use when you want to uninstall a program or app. The first is to find the unwanted software on your Start menu; the second is to pick from a list of all the programs and apps installed on your computer (some of which don't appear on the Start menu). Let's run through both methods:

Two ways to begin uninstalling

Method 1: Uninstall by using the Start menu

1. Open the Start menu and find the program or app you want to uninstall. It could be a tile on the right-hand side of the menu, or you can look through the alphabetical 'All apps' section on the left (where you'll find items that don't necessarily appear as a tile on the right).
2. When you find the unwanted program or app, right-click it. On the menu that appears, click on Uninstall.





*Apps are
uninstalled with
one click*

3. Perhaps at this stage you're not sure if the unwanted item is an app or a program, but you're about to find out!

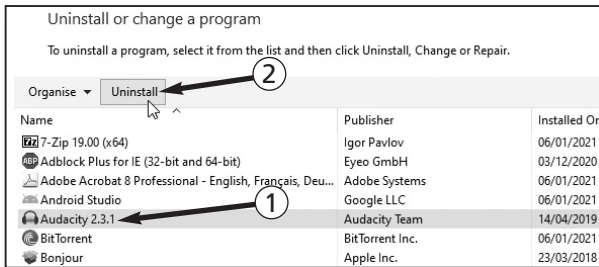
- If it's an app, you'll see a little message like the one pictured to the right, telling you that this app will be uninstalled. Click the **Uninstall** button and you're done: within a few seconds, the item you clicked will disappear from your Start menu, indicating that the app itself has been removed from your PC. You can ignore the remaining steps below.

This app and its related info will be uninstalled.

Uninstall

*Programs appear
in a list*

- If it's a program, you'll see the window pictured in the next screenshot. This window lists all the programs (but not the apps) installed on your PC. Rather unhelpfully, even though you specified which program you want to uninstall in step 2, you're given no help to locate it in this list: you'll have to scroll through the list to find it yourself. When you've found it, click it once to select it ① and then click the **Uninstall** (or **Uninstall/Change**) button ② on the grey bar just above the list.



4. What happens next will vary from one program to another. In most cases, you'll see a message asking if you're sure you want to remove this program, in which case you'll obviously choose **Yes** or **OK**. From here, you may just see a progress bar which keeps you posted on how much longer the job will take, followed by a final confirmation that the program has been uninstalled. In some cases, however, you may be asked extra questions along the way, and we'll deal with the most common of those on page 13.

Follow the steps to remove the program

Method 2: Choose from a list of programs and apps

Perhaps the item you want to uninstall doesn't appear anywhere on your Start menu, or perhaps you'd like to see a complete list of all the programs and apps installed on your PC and choose what to uninstall from there? If so, follow these steps:

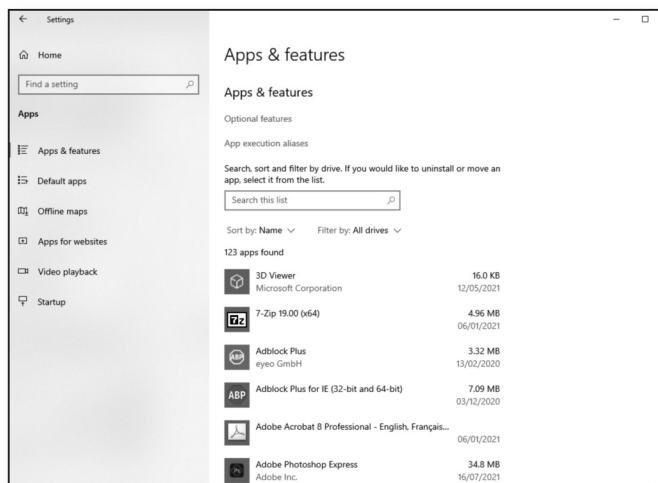
1. Press **Win+I**, or open the Start menu and click the **Settings** (cog) icon near the bottom-left corner.
2. In the Settings window that opens, click the **Apps** icon.
3. At the right of the window, below the 'Apps & features' heading, you'll find a list of all your apps and programs. To the right of each item's name, you'll see how much space it's occupying on your hard disk and the date it was installed.



See a list of your programs and apps

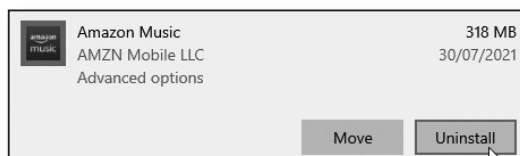
You can sort the list in different ways

- At the moment, the list is probably shown in alphabetical order (which is often the most useful), and you'll see **Sort by: Name** just above the list. If you prefer, you can arrange the list by size (with the largest programs first), or by the date they were installed (with the most recent first): just click the word 'Name' and choose **Size** or **Installation date** respectively.



Right-click the program's icon

- Now look through the list to find a program or app you want to uninstall. When you find it, click it once. A grey box will appear around it and you'll see an **Uninstall** button below its details: click that button.



- A little message will appear saying that this app and its related info will be uninstalled: click the **Uninstall** button in this message.

7. What happens next depends on whether it's an app or a program you're uninstalling: *Uninstall the app or program*
- If it's an app, you'll briefly see the word 'Uninstalling' in that grey box, and then the app's name will disappear from this list, indicating that it's now been uninstalled.
 - If it's a program, the program's own uninstall routine will start, and things will progress in the way I explained in step 4 on page 7.

Windows 8.1: Uninstalling Programs and Apps

As in Windows 10, there are two approaches you can take when you want to uninstall something in Windows 8.1. The first and best is to find the unwanted program or app on your Start screen; the second is to pick from a list. Unfortunately, though, Windows 8.1 doesn't have a complete list of all apps and programs. Instead, there's one list of apps and another list of programs, meaning that you need to know in advance whether it's a program or an app you want to uninstall.

Two ways to begin uninstalling

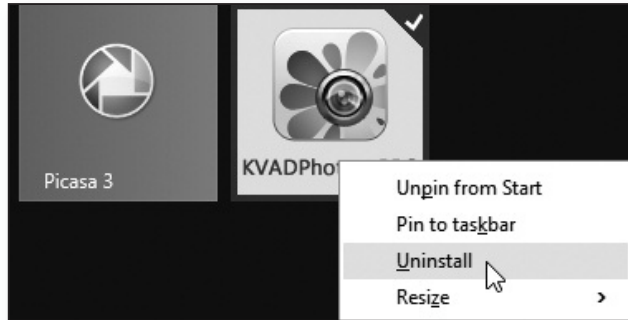
Method 1: Uninstall by using the Start screen

1. Click the Start button or press the **Win** (Windows flag) key on your keyboard to open the Start screen.
2. Now look for the tile of the program or app you want to uninstall. If you can't see it here, click the circled arrow near the bottom-left of the Start screen (or press the key combination **Ctrl+Tab**) to go to the 'Apps' section where all your apps and programs are arranged in alphabetical order.
3. When you find the unwanted program or app, right-click it and choose **Uninstall** from the menu.



*Right-click and choose **Uninstall***

Click the
'Documents' icon



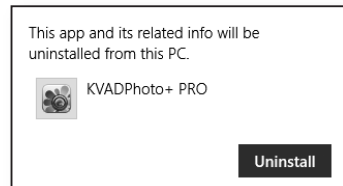
Apps are
uninstalled with
one click

4. What happens next depends on whether the item you're uninstalling is a program or an app:

- If it's an app, you'll see a little message like the one pictured to the right, telling you that this app will be uninstalled.

Click the **Uninstall** button and you're done: within a few seconds, the item you clicked will disappear from your

Start screen, indicating that the app itself has been removed from your PC. You can ignore the remaining steps below.



Programs appear
in a list

- If it's a program, you'll see the window pictured on page 7. This window lists all the programs (but not the apps) installed on your computer. However, even though you've just specified which program you want to uninstall, Windows doesn't locate it for you in this list: you'll have to scroll through the list to find it yourself. When you've found it, click it once to select it and then click the **Uninstall** (or **Uninstall/Change**) button on the grey bar above the list of programs. From here, things will progress in the way I explained in step 4 on page 7.

Method 2: Choose from a list of apps or programs

As I mentioned earlier, Windows 8.1 doesn't have a single list of all your apps and programs. Instead, there's a separate list of each. Let's start by looking at the list of apps:

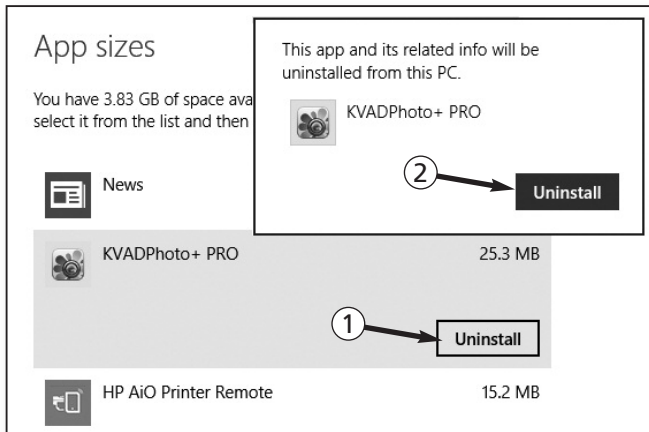
See a list of your apps or programs

1. Press **Win+C** to open the Charms bar at the right of the screen, then click on **Settings** followed by **Change PC settings** to open the Settings app.
2. At the left of the Settings window, click on **Search and apps**, then, also at the left, choose **App sizes**.
3. The main section of the window now lists all the apps (but not the programs) installed on your PC, arranged in order of size with those taking up the most space on your hard disk at the top.
4. To uninstall an app, click its name and an **Uninstall** button ① will appear: click that button. A little message will appear saying that this app will be uninstalled: click the **Uninstall** button ② in this message. Within a few seconds, the app you chose will disappear from this list, indicating that it has been uninstalled.



A list of installed apps

Uninstall an app with two clicks



If you'd like to see a list of the programs installed on your PC and choose what to uninstall, here's what to do:



*A list of
installed programs*

1. Right-click the Start button to open the 'power user' menu and choose **Programs and Features** from the top of the menu.
2. This opens the window pictured on page 7, which lists all the programs (but not the apps) installed on your computer. Look through this list to find the program you want to uninstall. When you find it, click it once to select it and then click the **Uninstall** (or **Uninstall/Change**) button on the grey bar above the list.
3. From here, things will progress in the way I explained in step 4 on page 7.

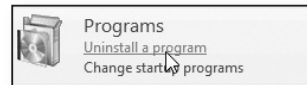
Windows 7: Uninstalling Programs

In Windows 7, as I mentioned earlier, you don't have 'apps' as such, so there's only one place to look when you want to uninstall something. To uninstall a program in Windows 7, here are the steps to follow:



*A list of all
your programs*

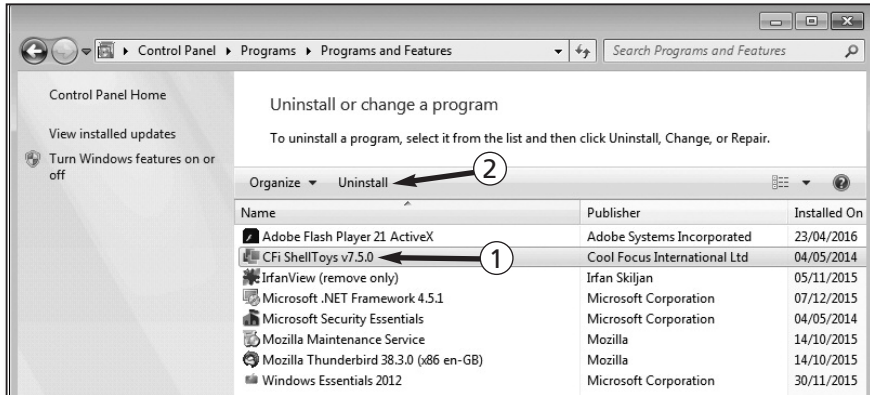
1. Open the Start menu and click on **Control Panel**.
2. In the Control Panel window, just below the **Programs** heading, click the link that reads **Uninstall a program**.



3. Now you'll see the window pictured in the next screenshot, which lists all the programs installed on your PC in alphabetical order. Look through the list to find the program you want to uninstall.
4. When you find the unwanted program, click it once to select it ①, and then click the **Uninstall** (or

*Select the program
and click **Uninstall***

Uninstall/Change) button ② on the bar above the list.



5. What happens next will vary from one program to another. In most cases, you'll see a message asking if you're sure you want to remove this program, in which case you'll obviously choose **Yes** or **OK**. From here, you may just see a progress bar which keeps you posted on how much longer the job will take, followed by a final confirmation that the program has been uninstalled. In some cases, however, you may be asked extra questions along the way, and we'll deal with the most common of those below.

Follow the steps to remove the program

Deal with Questions and Errors when Uninstalling

Uninstalling an app should always be a quick and pain-free process since Windows handles it for you automatically. But uninstalling a program can be a different matter: you may see a window similar to the one that appears when you install a program and have to step through it by clicking a **Next** button several

For a program, there may be steps to follow

times. In that case, be sure to read each step carefully to make sure you understand what you're being asked.

In addition, other questions and messages may pop up, and you may have the odd question of your own, so let's run through the most common of those.

Question 1: What happens to the files I created?

As an example, let's say you're uninstalling a particular word processor program. What does this do to the documents you created with that program?

*Files you created
are never removed*

Answer: Absolutely nothing! All those files remain exactly where they are on your PC. A wider question is whether you have any other program that can open them, now that this one is being uninstalled, but the files themselves won't come to any harm.

Question 2: Why does it think I'm installing the program again?

After you click the **Uninstall** button, you may see a message that says something like: 'Please wait while Setup prepares to install [program name]'. Is it really going to install the program again?

*The setup program
does two jobs*

Answer: No, it's just an oddity of the way the process works. The setup program that installed the software is sometimes used to uninstall it too, and as it starts it has to prepare itself to carry out either job. Rather confusingly, it often displays the same introductory text in both cases, but behind the scenes it knows you want to uninstall and it's preparing to do exactly that.

Question 3: Do I want to modify, repair or remove the program?

At an early stage, you may be asked whether you want to modify, repair or remove the program. What's that all about?

Answer: If you're sure you want to uninstall the program, the **Remove** option is the one you want. The 'Modify' or 'Change' option lets you keep the program but add any optional features you didn't choose when you originally installed it. The 'Repair' option reinstalls the program, which is useful if it doesn't seem to be working properly, but it's the exact opposite of uninstalling it!

*Always choose the **Remove** option*

Question 4: Remove all settings too?

Before the process gets very far, it may ask whether you also want to remove the program's settings – the various preferences and options you've chosen over the time you've been using it.

Answer: In most cases, the answer is a definite Yes: when you're uninstalling a program, you usually want to get rid of every last trace of it. There's just one exception: if you're uninstalling the program in preparation to install a newer version of the same program, it's best to keep the settings so that they'll be used by the new version without your having to set them up again.

You should usually remove the program's settings too

Question 5: Remove licence details?

If you're uninstalling a program you've previously paid for, you may be asked whether you want to keep its licence details.

Answer: If you're planning to install a newer version of the same program (or you think you might want to do so in future), choose to keep the licence details. These are your proof of purchase, and they ensure that if you ever install the same program again in the future, it will know it's been purchased correctly. Only remove these licence details if you're certain you'll never want to use this program again.

You may want to keep its licence details

Question 6: Why does it say the program can't be uninstalled?

Files not found?

After you click the **Uninstall** button, an error message appears saying that one or more files could not be found and the program can't be uninstalled. What can you do?

You'll have to leave the program installed

Answer: I'm afraid the simple answer is: nothing. As I mentioned earlier, the uninstall routine relies on a program that carries out the removal, along with a log file listing all the changes to be reversed. This error message means that one or both of these files have been deleted from your PC, perhaps by an over-enthusiastic 'disk clean-up' program that regarded them as unnecessary. You'll just have to leave the program installed and forget about it.



If it really is important that you uninstall the program, here's a trick that may help: try to install the same program again. It may seem illogical, but doing this should replace the files that were missing, and thus allow you to set about uninstalling it again afterwards.

Question 7: Do I really have to restart the computer?

Once the uninstall procedure has finished, you may see a message telling you to restart the computer to complete the removal of the program. Do you really have to do that straight away?

There's rarely any need to restart immediately

Answer: In most cases, no: you can choose the 'Restart Later' or 'Not Now' (or similar) option. At some point, you'll stop work and shut down the PC, and next time you start it, the process will be completed. The one exception to this is if you're planning to install or uninstall another program: in this case, it's wise to restart when prompted. This way, you can be sure all traces of the old program have gone before the system has to deal with the arrival or removal of another.