# Vision Trouble? Make Windows Easier to Use

Struggling to Use Your PC with Poor Eyesight? Windows Has Ways to Help!

This article shows you how to:
- Make the mouse pointer and text cursor easier to see
- Make the most of zoom features in many programs
- Enlarge everything on your screen

As we get older, many of us start to suffer from some sort of difficulty with our eyesight, and computer screens can become especially hard to work with. Whether it's simple short-sightedness or something more severe, however, you shouldn't have to stop using your PC. Windows has all sorts of settings and features that can help, and you can combine them in any way that works for you. Read on to discover what you can do to make your PC use more comfortable.
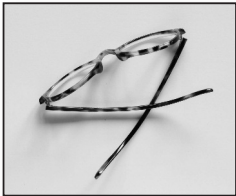
Contents:

Essential Tips for Every Computer User

Easy steps for improved screen use

There are several very easy things that every computer user can do to make their computer screen easier to see and use. They'll certainly help a little if you do struggle with poor vision, but they'll also make quite a difference if you don't.

Keep it clean!

Screens quickly get dirty

It's amazing how grubby a computer screen can get in a short time! Even if it's not a touch-sensitive screen that has fingers tapping and swiping it, it quickly attracts a thick layer of dust, it picks up smudges and smears for no obvious reason, and (I hate to say it) it also suffers from our coughs, sneezes and splutters while we're using it.

Clean it regularly

All this conspires to make the screen's picture harder to see clearly, so rule number one is to keep the screen clean. A regular flick with a soft, dry duster will help a lot, but my recommendation is to keep a pack of screen wipes handy. These are rather like wet wipes or the impregnated tissues you might use to clean your spectacles, but make sure you pick wipes that really are intended for computer screens.

When the screen is off, and has been off long enough that it's cool, use the duster first and then use the wipe to remove all the other smears and smudges.

Tilt it to the best viewing angle

Make sure the screen is angled correctly

Modern screens are designed to be viewed square-on, pointing straight at your face. If you tilt the screen up or down, or angle it left or right, you quickly lose clarity: the brightness and contrast decline and the colours all edge closer to black. In general, the cheaper the screen, the more limited its viewing angle will be.

Find the clearest view

This is a matter for some experimentation, but it should be fairly quick and easy. First, make sure the screen isn't

angled to the left or right, but is pointing towards you. Next, tilt it upwards or downwards as necessary so that it's pointing at your face (and/or adjust the height of your seat). If it helps, start by tilting it far enough upwards or downwards that the picture looks dreadful, as described above, then slowly tilt it back to the point that the clarity becomes as good as you can get it.

If you use a notebook PC, this acquires a greater significance because you probably flip down the screen when the PC is off and flip it back up next time you use it. Get into the habit of paying attention to the viewing angle each time you flip it open. Once you have a full-colour picture on the screen (the desktop, perhaps, or the sign-in screen), tilt the screen a long way back, then slowly bring it upwards until the picture is clear.

Get the lighting right

Here there are a two elements to consider. First, you don't want to be facing into the light – towards a window, for instance – particularly if that light is brighter than your computer screen. Even with great eyesight you'll struggle to see the screen clearly. Ideally, position your screen at a right-angle to the window, so that it's to your side. If you can't do that, pull the curtains or close the blind.

Don't face towards a window!

Second, avoid glare (from windows or lighting) and reflections on the screen, since those will make the screen's picture much harder to see clearly. You don't want to work in the dark, but equally you don't want lights shining directly on the screen.

Try turning off the monitor and then checking that expanse of blackness for glare and reflections, adjusting the monitor's position and/or the lighting until you're seeing just a solid, matte black.

Avoid reflections in the screen

See the Mouse Pointer and Text Cursor More Easily

You can combine options as needed

Now we'll shift our focus to steps you can take to make your PC easier to use if you do struggle with poor vision. As I hinted on the first page of this article, there's quite a range of options available, and not all of them will help everyone – it really depends on what impairment you're having to deal with.

However, you can combine all the suggestions that follow in this article as you like, so my suggestion is to try anything that seems as though it may help. If it doesn't, you'll be able to switch it off again (as I'll explain at every stage).

Make the mouse pointer easier to see

Make sure you can always see the mouse pointer

Since so much of what you do in Windows involves using the mouse, it's important to be able to see the mouse pointer (and its various other shapes, such as the I-beam that appears when the mouse is over text).

There are two related options that can help: making the pointer larger and changing its colour. Here's how to change these settings:
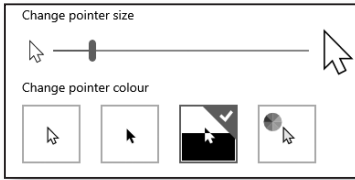
Windows 10:

1. Open the Settings app by pressing **Win+I**.

2. In the Settings window, click on **Ease of Access** then, at the left, click on **Mouse pointer**.

3. Now you'll see the options pictured in the screenshot opposite: a simple slider for 'Change pointer size' and four options for 'Change pointer colour'. Here's what to do:

Pick a pointer size…

- **Change pointer size:** drag the slider slowly to the right to gradually increase the pointer size. As you drag, you'll see the pointer enlarge.

• **Change pointer colour:** a choice of white, black, inverting or a custom colour. A great benefit of the inverting colour is that the I-beam (for text) is much thicker and more visible.

… and colour

4. After choosing the combination you like, close the window. You can return here at any time to try something different, or to return to the normal size/colour combination (by selecting the first option in each group).

Windows 8.1 and Windows 7:

1. Open the Control Panel. (A good way to do that is to press the **Win** key and start typing **control panel**.)

2. In the Control Panel window, click on **Ease of Access** and then click the words **Change how your mouse works**.

3. Now you'll see a 'Mouse pointers' heading with a box giving a choice of nine combinations of pointer size (Regular, Large and Extra Large) and colour (White, Black and Inverting). Click whichever seems as though it might be an improvement, then click the **Apply** button at the bottom of the window to put it into effect and see what you think. Not quite right? Choose a different one and click **Apply** again to try that.

Pick a combination of size and colour

4. After choosing the combination you like, click **OK** to close the window. You can come back here whenever you like to try a different combination, or to return to the normal combination by choosing the **Regular White** item.

If you tend to lose track of the pointer on the screen, whatever its size, there's another setting that can help you find it. Press **Win+R** to open the Run dialog, type **control mouse** and press **Enter**, then switch to the **Pointer Options** tab in the Mouse Properties dialog that opens. At the bottom, tick the box beside **Show location of pointer when I press the CTRL key**. Press **Apply** to put this setting into effect. Now imagine you've lost the mouse pointer: press the **Ctrl** key (by itself) and a series of concentric circles will appear around it to draw your attention to it. (Didn't see them? Press **Ctrl** again.) If you like this option, just click **OK** to close the dialog; if you're not keen, remove the tick you just added before clicking **OK**.

Increase the thickness of the flashing text cursor

See where you are when typing text

When you're typing text into any program, a flashing vertical bar (the text cursor) shows the 'insertion point' – the point where the next character you type will appear. It's rather thin and therefore quite hard to see, so another option you might find helpful is to make this bar thicker. Here's how that's done:
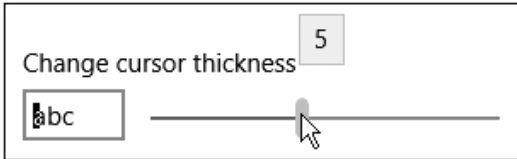
Windows 10:

1. Open the Settings app by pressing **Win+I**.

2. In the Settings window, click on **Ease of Access** then, at the left, click on **Text cursor**.

Make the cursor a little thicker

3. At the top of the page you'll see a 'Change cursor thickness' heading with a slider below it and a preview of the cursor to the left. Drag the slider a little way to the right to increase the thickness of the cursor: as you drag, a little number will appear above the slider to show the new thickness.

Although you can choose a thickness of up to 20, my suggestion is to use a maximum of about 4

or 5. Any thicker and the cursor will overlap the character to its right, which tends to make you uncertain about exactly where it is. That said, you can certainly try a higher setting and see how you get on with it!

4. When you're happy with the new setting, for now at least, simply close the window. You can return here at any time to adjust the cursor thickness some more, or return it to its normal size by dragging the slider all the way to the left.

Windows 8.1 and Windows 7:

1. Open the Control Panel. (A good way to do that is to press the **Win** key and start typing **control panel**.)

2. In the Control Panel window, click on **Ease of Access** and then click the words **Optimise visual display**.

3. Scroll to the bottom of the page and you'll reach a setting labelled **Set the thickness of the blinking cursor**. Here, choose a number from 1 (the current, thin setting) to **20** for the thickness of the cursor, and the preview to the right will show you how it looks. (Note the warning at the bottom of the previous page: despite the immense range of sizes available, I recommend sticking to about 4 or 5.)

Set a new width for the text cursor

4. Click **OK** to confirm the new setting and close the Control Panel window. Whenever you like, you can come back here to tweak the cursor thickness some more, or return it to its normal size by choosing **1** from the drop-down list.

Make Text More Readable Using Zoom Features

For a great many vision problems, what you'd really like to do is make items on your screen bigger and easier to see. This tip and the two that follow will show you different ways to do that.

Many programs allow you to 'zoom in'

We'll start with the simplest method. Some of the programs you use – perhaps quite a few – have a 'Zoom' feature which enlarges the contents of the program to make it easier to see and read.

For example, all popular web browsers allow you to zoom in on the web page you're reading, making everything on that page larger. Likewise, many word processors (including WordPad and Microsoft Word) can zoom the document you're reading or writing.

The one drawback to these 'Zoom' features is that they only enlarge the content displayed by the program – the web page or document. Other parts of the program stay the same size – the address box and buttons in a web browser, the Ribbon, menus and side-panels in word processors and other programs.

If you need entire programs to be enlarged, skip ahead to the next tip on page 10. You'll still be able to combine these 'Zoom' features with that tip if you need to.

So, where will you find these 'Zoom' features? It depends on which program you're using:

Web browsers:

See web pages at a larger size

In Firefox, Chrome and Edge, you can click the menu button at the far-right of the toolbar and, on the panel that appears, you'll see a 'Zoom' section showing the current zoom percentage. At either side of that

percentage you'll find a **–** and **+** button: click the **+** button as often as needed to zoom in on the web page.

Zoom	— 125% + ↗

A less fiddly way to do this is to hold the **Ctrl** key and tap the **+/=** key on the top row of your keyboard several times: each tap increases the zoom level a little. Use **Ctrl** and the **–** key to reduce the zoom, or **Ctrl+0** (zero) to return to the normal 100% size.

Easily changed from the keyboard

Microsoft Office:

In Office programs such as Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook, you'll find a 'Zoom' slider in the bottom-right corner of the window: either drag the slider to the right to zoom in or use the **+** button beside it.

Zoom in on Office documents

Alternatively, switch to the **View** tab on the Ribbon and click the **Zoom** button in the 'Zoom' group. In the dialog that opens, you can use the **Percent** box to type a figure (such as **140**) and click **OK**.

WordPad:

Switch to the View tab on the Ribbon and click the **Zoom in** button as often as needed to see your document at a larger size.

Adobe Acrobat Reader:

To read PDF documents at an increased size in Acrobat Reader, one option is to use the same keyboard shortcuts as in a web browser: hold **Ctrl** and tap the **+/=** key to zoom in or the **–** key to zoom out. Alternatively, you can click the circled **+** and **–** buttons on the toolbar, or use the drop-down list to their right to select a zoom level.

Read PDFs at an increased size

Other programs:

Look at the 'View' options in other programs

Not all programs have a 'Zoom' feature, of course, but it's quite common in programs that display content to be read or viewed – text documents, pictures, videos, web pages, email messages, and so on. If you can't see a 'Zoom' slider or buttons on the program's toolbar or at the bottom of its window, look on the **View** tab of its Ribbon (if it has one) or on its **View** menu (it if has one of those).

No joy? If you're feeling adventurous, you could try holding **Ctrl** and tapping the **+/=** key (although there's no knowing what this might do if it doesn't zoom!), or try holding down the **Ctrl** key and rolling the wheel on your mouse.

The **Ctrl+mouse wheel** method works in web browsers and in Microsoft Office programs. It also works in File Explorer (known as Windows Explorer in Windows 7), but with the disappointing catch that it only increases the size of the icons, not the text of their names.

Make Everything on Your Screen 25% Larger

Zoom your entire screen

The catch to the tip above is that it only enlarges the content you're reading – the document, web page or email message – rather than everything on the screen. If you need everything on your screen to be bigger, that's possible too. Here's how it's done:

Windows 10:

1. Right-click a blank space on the desktop and choose **Display setting**s.

Choose 125% or 150%

2. In the window that appears, you'll see a drop-down list labelled **Change the size of text, apps and other**

items. Open this drop-down list and choose either **125%** or, for an even-greater increase in size, **150%** if that option is offered.

> If you see a pop-up message referring to apps that are 'blurry', click **Apply**. The Settings window then switches to a different page. Here, below the words **Let Windows try to fix apps so they're not blurry**, click the switch to turn it to **On**.

3. Close the Settings window and see what you think. Everything on your screen is now 25% (or 50%) larger than it was and, hopefully, much easier to see.

If you chose **125%** and it isn't enough, you may be able to repeat the steps and choose **150%**. Likewise, of course, if you decide you don't like this change, you can put things back to normal by choosing **100%**.

> You may see higher figures than 150% offered but I don't recommend choosing anything greater than 150%. Doing so can cause some windows to be displayed in very peculiar ways that result in items overlapping or partially disappearing, which obviously makes your PC more difficult and frustrating to use – precisely the opposite of what we're intending!

Windows 8.1 and Windows 7:

1. Right-click a blank space on the desktop and choose **Screen resolution**.

2. In the window that opens, click the link near the bottom that says **Make text and other items larger or smaller**.

3. In Windows 8.1 you'll see a slider ranging from **Smaller** at the left to **Larger** on the right. Drag the slider one notch to the right to increase the size of

Drag the slider to the right

everything by 25%, or two notches to increase it by 50%. Click the **Apply** button lower down to put this setting into effect and see what you think.

Choose either 'Medium' or 'Larger'

In Windows 7 you'll see a choice of **Medium – 125%** and **Larger – 150%** (and perhaps others). Click whichever of these you feel is likely to be sufficient and then click the **Apply** button lower down to put the new setting into action and see what you think.

4. In either case, if you feel you didn't make the right choice in the previous step, pick a different setting and click **Apply** to try that (but note the warning on the previous page – I don't recommend picking anything higher than 150%). When you're happy with your choice, close this window. Needless to say, you can repeat the steps at any time to pick a different setting, or put things back to normal by dragging the slider to **Smaller** in Windows 8.1 or choosing **Smaller – 100% (default)** in Windows 7.

All versions:

Your screen will feel smaller!

Note that when you use this feature, making everything on your screen larger, the result is a little like exchanging your screen for a smaller one: you won't see as much at once and you'll probably have to scroll up, down, right and left somewhat more than you used to.

At first, you may have to resize and move windows

Be aware, too, that some windows may extend off the right or bottom of your screen the first time you open them, because they've opened at the same size as they did last time (when your screen was still its normal size). Thus you'll have to do a little resizing and moving of windows in the early stages to make them fit your screen again.

However, since most programs remember their last-used size and position, when you've done this once for a particular program you shouldn't have to do it again.

See Your Screen in Close-up with Magnifier

Perhaps what you really feel you need is a kind of magnifying glass you could hold up to your screen, letting you see items at a far-greater size? If so, Windows has just the thing – a program named Magnifier.

Need to zoom in a lot further?

To start Magnifier, hold down the **Win** key and tap the **+/=** key and you'll see its tiny window appear somewhere on your screen. (You can drag it elsewhere, such as up to one corner, to get it out of your way.)

Try using Magnifier

Magnifier offers three different modes, which you choose by clicking the **Views** button or by pressing the key combinations noted below:
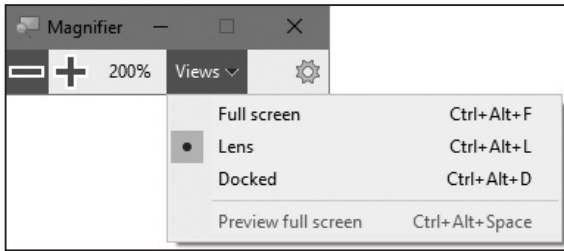
Full screen (Ctrl+Alt+F) magnifies your whole screen. That means you won't see the whole screen at once, but as you move the mouse pointer around, the screen scrolls to show you the area of it under the mouse.

Magnify your whole screen

Lens (Ctrl+Alt+L), pictured overleaf, is like a rectangular magnifying glass that shows the portion of the screen around the mouse pointer as you move the mouse around.

A rectangular magnifying glass

Docked (Ctrl+Alt+D) adds a rectangular panel at the top of the screen which shows a letterbox-shaped slice of the screen containing the mouse pointer.

A letterbox-shaped panel
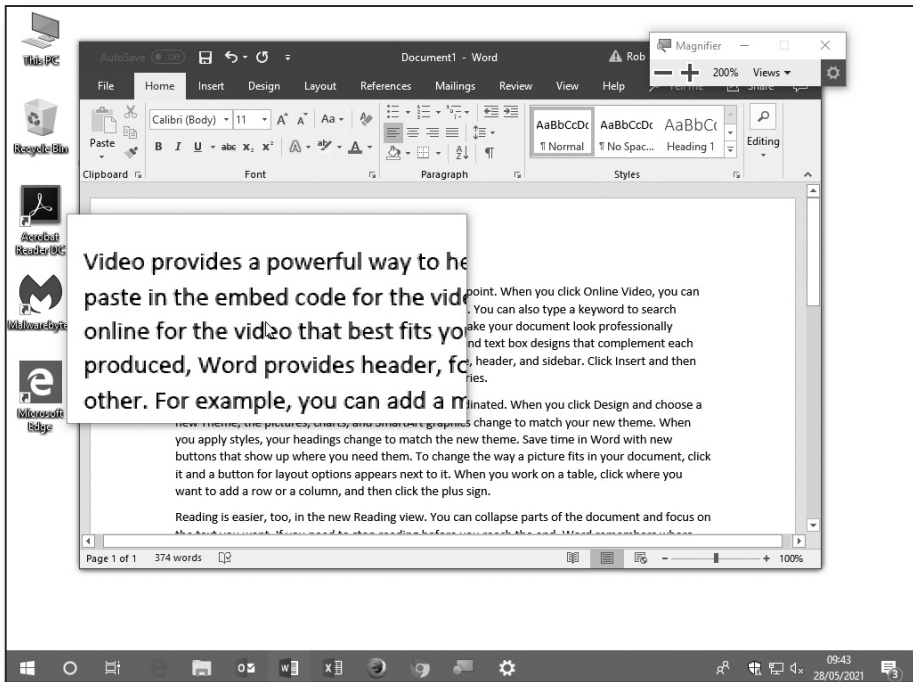
Choose how much to zoom by

Magnifier can enlarge the portion of screen it's showing by up to 1600%. Either click the large **+** icon in its window repeatedly to zoom in further or hold the **Win** key and tap the **+/=** key. (To zoom out again, click the large **–** icon or hold **Win** and tap the **–** key.) When you've finished using Magnifier and want to close it, press **Win+Esc**.

To find out more about Magnifier, you can visit Microsoft's web page about it here:

tinyurl.com/7uzbyypk

Near the top of the page, choose **Windows 10**, **Windows 8.1** or **Windows 7** according to the version of Windows you're using in order to ensure you're seeing the correct details.

Use a High Contrast Theme to See Things More Clearly

Perhaps, rather than making things larger on the screen, what you really need to do is make them clearer – more sharply-defined and easier to identify.

Need more clarity and stronger colours?

Windows offers a choice of four 'high contrast' colour schemes in which the colours of everything you see on the screen are much more clearly defined: bright yellows and whites on black, or blacks and dark-blues on white, for instance. At the same time, it places clear borders around buttons and icons to help you see where you need to click, and it thickens the edges of windows and text boxes.

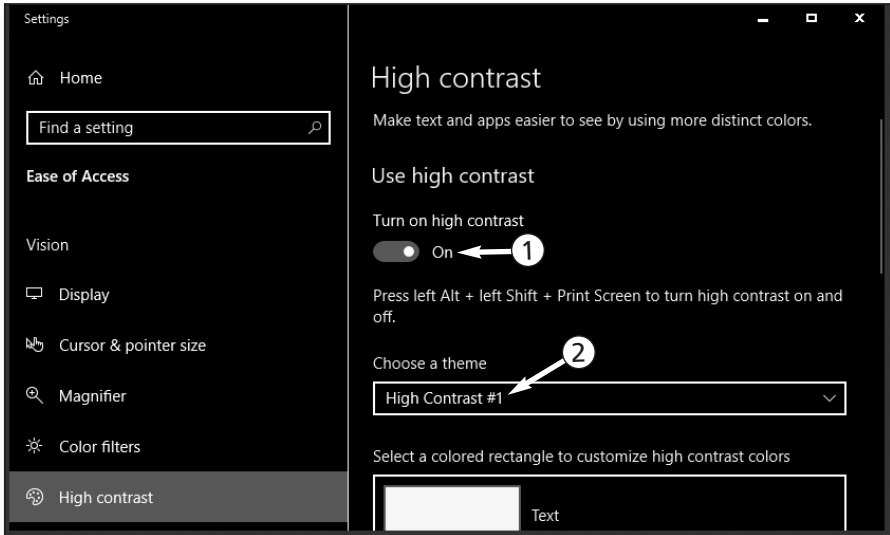*Try a 'high contrast' colour theme*

To try one of these high contrast themes, follow the appropriate steps below.

Windows 10:

1. Right-click a blank space on the desktop and choose **Personalise**.

2. In the window that opens, scroll down to the **Related settings** heading and choose **High contrast settings**.

3. On the page that appears, click the switch below **Turn on high contrast** ① to turn it to **On**.

4. Now, below **Choose a theme**, click one of the four themes ② to put it into effect and see what you think. Not keen? Open the drop-down list again and try one of the others.

Choose one of the four themes

5. When you find a theme you're happy with, simply close this window. At any time, you can repeat these steps and either choose a different high contrast theme or put things back to normal by clicking the switch you encountered in step 3 to turn it back to **Off**.

Windows 8.1 and Windows 7:

1. Right-click a blank space on the desktop and choose **Personalise**.

2. In the window that opens, you'll see a large box containing icons for the available Windows themes. Scroll down in this box until you reach a section headed **High Contrast Themes** (in Windows 8.1) or **Basic and High Contrast Themes** (in Windows 7).

Click a high contrast theme to try it

3. In this section you'll find the four high contrast themes. Click one of these to put it into effect and then see what you think of the result. Not keen? Click another to see if that suits you better.

4. When you've found and clicked a theme you like, just close this window to keep the theme in effect. At any time you can repeat these steps and either pick one of the other high contrast themes or, if you prefer, put things back to normal by choosing one of the 'ordinary' themes higher up in this box.