Windows 11: Common Problems Solved

Finding Aspects of Windows 11 Less than Ideal? Here's What to Do!

This article shows you how to:
- Shift the taskbar icons back to the left
- Stop seeing simplified context menus in File Explorer
- Get fast access to your personal folders, and more…

If you've just upgraded to Windows 11, or you've bought a new PC that comes with the latest version, there's plenty about it to like. However, I'm sure there's the odd thing you'd change about it if you could! In this article, I'll run through the adjustments you're most likely to want to make and explain why and how to change them.

Contents:

Align Your Taskbar Icons Back to the Left

Taskbar icons are now centred

It's probably the first thing you notice when you start Windows 11: the Start button and program icons are now aligned to the centre of the taskbar, rather than to the left where they've been for the last 25 years.

Some people do prefer this new arrangement, so it's worth living with it for a while to see how you get on. If there's one drawback to it (besides the way it looks, which is a matter of taste), it's that the icons slide left and right along the taskbar as windows are opened and closed, so you won't always find them in quite the same place you last saw them.

Align them to the left

If you don't like having your taskbar icons centred, it's a quick job to align them back to the left. Here's what to do:

1. Right-click a blank space on the taskbar (such as somewhere to the left of the Start button) and choose **Taskbar settings** from the tiny context menu that appears.

2. The Settings app opens and takes you to its Personalisation > Taskbar page. Near the bottom of the page, click on **Taskbar behaviours**.

3. To the right of the words **Taskbar alignment**, open the drop-down list and choose **Left**.

Taskbar behaviours		
Taskbar alignment, badging, automatically hide, and multiple displays		^
Taskbar alignment		Left ⌄
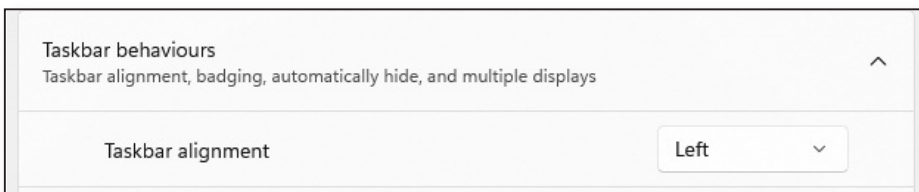
4. You'll instantly see that your taskbar icons have shifted to the left, and you've finished – you can close the Settings window.

See All Notifications by Turning Off Focus Assist

When Windows wants to notify you about something, it displays a 'toast' – a rectangular box in the bottom-right corner of your screen which remains visible for a few seconds. If you ignore one of these notifications, or you're away from your PC when it appears, it moves into the Notification Centre panel, which you can open by clicking the clock.
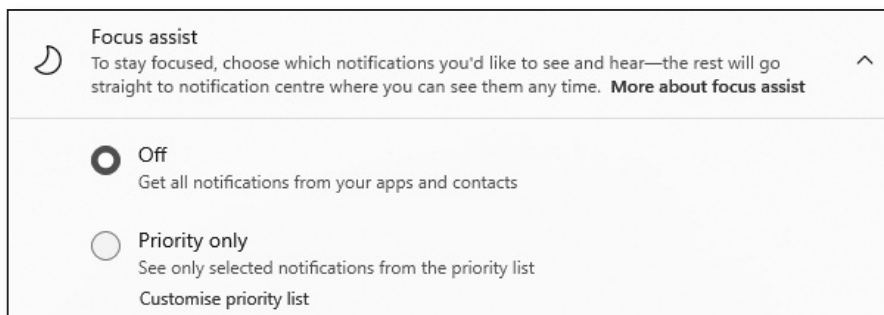
How notifications work

Something that's new in Windows 11 is a feature named Focus Assist. We did have this in Windows 10 too, but it was switched off by default. In Windows 11 it's switched on (as indicated by a little crescent-moon icon to the right of the clock). When Focus Assist is on, you won't necessarily see all notifications in those pop-up boxes: some might vanish straight to the Notification Centre panel instead.

Focus Assist means some may not appear

If you'd like to be sure you really are seeing all notifications, you'll want to switch off Focus Assist:

1. Right-click the clock and choose **Notifications settings**.

2. This opens the System > Notifications page in the Settings app. Near the top of the page, click on **Focus assist**.

Focus assist
To stay focused, choose which notifications you'd like to see and hear—the rest will go straight to notification centre where you can see them any time. **More about focus assist**

○ Off
Get all notifications from your apps and contacts

○ Priority only
See only selected notifications from the priority list
Customise priority list

Turn off Focus Assist…

3. You'll see that Focus Assist is currently set to 'Priority only', meaning that it only shows you high-priority notifications. Click on **Off** to switch the feature off, as pictured in the previous screenshot. (When you do this, you'll see the crescent-moon icon disappear from your taskbar.)

… and a couple of possible annoyances

While you're here, there's something else we can take care of that could become an annoyance. Windows 11 is currently set to displays tips and suggestions as notifications every so often, and you might like to prevent it from doing so. If so, follow these steps:

1. Click the arrow in the extreme top-left corner of the Settings window to go back to the System > Notifications page.

2. Scroll to the bottom of the page and you'll see the two checkboxes pictured below. Remove the ticks from these two options.

3. Done – you can close the Settings window.

Prevent Microsoft Teams from Running Constantly

Chat on the taskbar

On Windows 11's taskbar you'll find a new icon: Chat, a purple speech bubble showing a video camera. This rep-resents a new built-in app named Microsoft Teams which you can use to have text chats or video chats with your contacts. Likewise they can initiate chats with you. The question is, do you use it, or do you expect to ever use it?
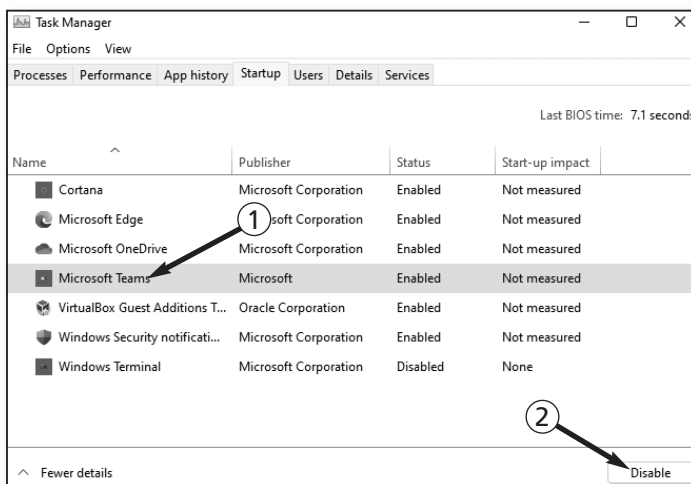
Microsoft Teams starts up automatically every time you sign into Windows 11 and it's running constantly in the background. If you don't expect to use this app, you might as well stop it doing that, saving your PC some resources and making Windows start a little faster as a result:

Will you be using Teams?

1. Right-click the Start button, or press **Win+X**, to display the Quick Links menu.

2. On this menu, choose **Task Manager**.

3. At the bottom-left of the Task Manager window, do you see the words **More details**? If so, click those words to display the full-size Task Manager window, which has a row of tabs along the top.

4. Select the **Startup** tab.

5. You'll now see a list of the programs that are set to start automatically each time Windows starts. Click on **Microsoft Teams** ①.

6. At the bottom-right of the window, click on **Disable** ②.

Prevent it from starting

Task Manager				— □ ×
File Options View				
Processes Performance App history Startup Users Details Services				
				Last BIOS time: **7.1 seconds**
Name ^	Publisher	Status	Start-up impact	
Cortana	Microsoft Corporation	Enabled	Not measured	
Microsoft Edge	soft Corporation ①	Enabled	Not measured	
Microsoft OneDrive	Microsoft Corporation	Enabled	Not measured	
Microsoft Teams	Microsoft	Enabled	Not measured	
VirtualBox Guest Additions T...	Oracle Corporation	Enabled	Not measured	
Windows Security notificati...	Microsoft Corporation	Enabled	Not measured	
Windows Terminal	Microsoft Corporation	Disabled	None	
^ Fewer details			②	Disable

7. Close the Task Manager window and you've finished. Microsoft Teams is currently still running, but next time you switch on your PC, Teams won't be started.

If you ever want to change this, follow the same steps again. When you reach step 5 and click on **Microsoft Teams** in the list, you'll see that the 'Disable' button now says **Enable**: click that button, and next time you start your PC Teams will be started automatically again.

Remove Unwanted Icons from the Taskbar

Four taskbar icons you may not need

The Windows 11 taskbar contains four icons that aren't really necessary and – if you've pinned a number of apps to your taskbar – just add extra clutter. They're the four icons to the right of Start button: Search, Task View, Widgets and Chat.

Of course, you might use and appreciate one or more of these icons and that's fine, but here's why they're unnecessary:

• Search: you can open the Search panel by pressing **Win+S** or by just opening the Start menu and beginning to type something.

• Task View: you can see the Task View screen by pressing **Win+Tab**.

• Widgets: you can open the Widgets panel by pressing **Win+W** (or, with a touchscreen device, by swiping in from the left of the screen).

• Chat: you can open Microsoft Teams from the Start menu (either in the 'Pinned' section or by clicking **All apps**).

You can remove them

If you'd like to recover some space on your taskbar by removing one or more of these icons, it's easy:

1. Right-click a blank space on the taskbar and choose **Taskbar settings** from the tiny context menu.

2. This takes you to the Personalisation > Taskbar page of the Settings app, and right at the top you'll see those four icons listed, each with an On/Off button to its right. Just click the switch to 'turn off' any icon you don't want to see on your taskbar.

3. Needless to say, if you do ever want to see any of these icons returned to your taskbar, you just come back to the same Settings page and click the switches again.

Add Quick Access to Settings and Personal Folders

In Windows 10, at the bottom-left corner of the Start menu you'd find a Settings (cog-shaped) icon which gave you a quick way to open the Settings app. It was also possible to add icons for your personal folders – Documents, Music, Pictures and so on – to give you fast access to those.
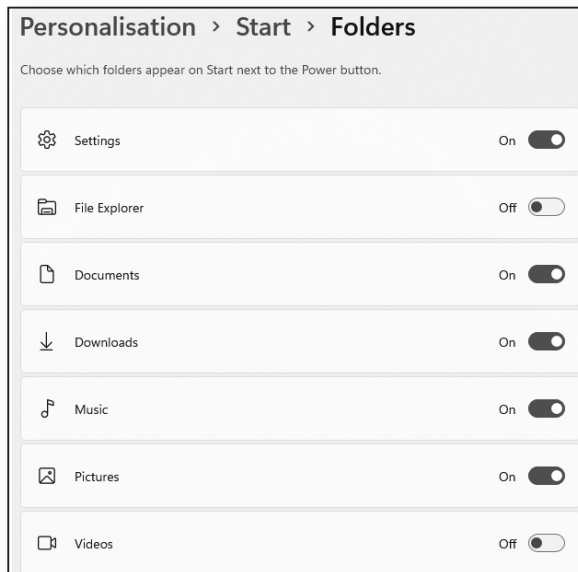
Useful extra icons on the Start menu

It's possible to add any of the same icons to the Start menu in Windows 11. Just follow these steps:

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

2. This opens the Personalisation page of the Settings app. Scroll down the page and click on **Start**.

3. On the next page, click on **Folders**.

Jump lists sometimes list recent files

4. Now you'll see a list of all the icons you can add to your Start menu, each with an On/Off switch beside it: one for the Settings app, one for File Explorer, and one each for all your personal folders. Click the switch to 'On' for any icon you'd like to add to your Start menu.

Personalisation › Start › **Folders**

Choose which folders appear on Start next to the Power button.

Settings	On	⬤
File Explorer	Off	○
Documents	On	⬤
Downloads	On	⬤
Music	On	⬤
Pictures	On	⬤
Videos	Off	○

A row at the bottom of the Start menu

Now open the Start menu and you'll see that the icons you've chosen all appear in a row at the bottom, as pictured in the next screenshot. A click on any of these icons will open the corresponding folder or app. Of course, at any time you can come back to this page in Settings and switch off an icon or switch on others.
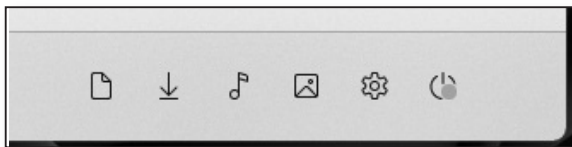
Regain the Classic Context Menu in File Explorer

One change in Windows 11 that doesn't seem entirely popular is the newly-simplified context menu that opens when you right-click anything in File Explorer or on the desktop.

File Explorer has a simplified context menu

On the surface, this new context menu might seem to contain everything you use most. At the top there's a row of icons for common actions such as Cut, Copy, Rename and Delete, and the remainder of the menu shows items many of us use most frequently:
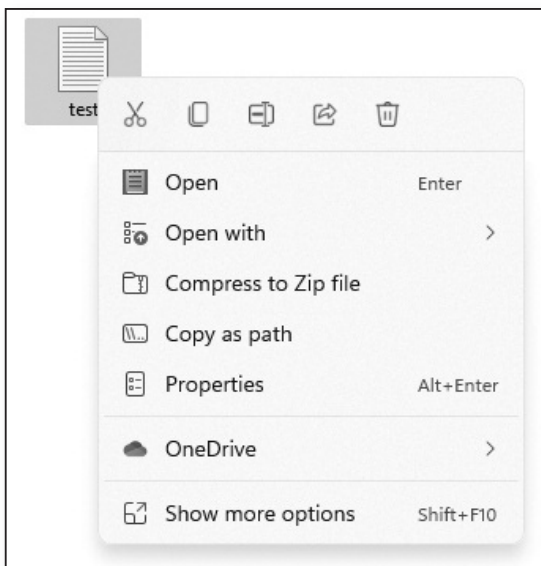
But if you choose **Show more options** you'll see the 'classic' context menu – the one you would have seen in Windows 10 and all previous versions. This larger menu contains rather more items and you'll see some useful ones that the simplified menu was lacking, such as Print, Send to, Create shortcut and Scan with Microsoft Defender.

It may be slowing you down

More importantly, perhaps, some of the programs you install add their own handy items to the context menu, and those will only appear on the 'classic' menu. Whenever you want to use them, you have to right-click and then choose **Show more options**, taking them all one click further away.

You can go back to the 'classic' menu

Fortunately, there is a way to tell Windows 11 to stop showing that shortened menu and to show the 'classic' context menu straight away every time. Unfortunately, it requires a rather tricky edit to the Registry, so I won't explain how to do it that way. Instead, I'll point you to a free program that makes the necessary Registry edit for you with one click. It's a bit of a palaver to get your hands on this program, but it's still easier than that Registry edit! Here's what to do:

1. Start your favourite web browser, type this address into its address box and press **Enter**:

   tinyurl.com/prftzuwn

2. Scroll down the page, below the screenshots, and you'll find a grey **Download** button: click that button.

3. This whisks you to another page and your download will start almost immediately.

Open your Downloads folder

4. When the download is complete (which should take only a few seconds), open your Downloads folder. One way to do that is to press **Win+E** to open File Explorer and then click **Downloads** at the left.

5. In this folder you'll see a zip file (otherwise known as a 'Compressed (zipped) Folder') named 'W11ClassicMenu'. Right-click this file and choose **Extract All**.

   Extract the zip file

6. In the window that opens, remove the tick beside **Show extracted files when complete** and then click the **Extract** button.

7. You'll be returned to your Downloads folder where you'll see you've now gained a folder named 'W11ClassicMenu'. This is what you'll keep, and you can delete the no-longer-needed zip file.

8. The question now is whether you're happy to leave this folder (and the program it contains) here in your Downloads folder, or whether you'd like to move it elsewhere. On one hand, your Downloads folder isn't the obvious place to go looking for a program, so you may prefer to move it to your Program Files folder. (If you do, File Explorer will display a security prompt, since the Program Files folder is protected, and you'll have to click **Continue** to allow the folder to be moved there.) On the other hand, you might well only use this program once, so taking the trouble to move it elsewhere might seem a bit pointless.

   Move this folder or leave it where it is?

9. When you're ready, double-click the 'W11Classic-Menu' folder to open it, then open the similarly-named folder inside it in the same way and you'll find the program it contains. Double-click that program to run it.

   Run the program

10. At this point you might see a pop-up message saying that 'Windows protected your PC'. That's just because this program isn't frequently downloaded and Windows doesn't recognise it. Click the words **More info** and then click the **Run anyway** button.

11. Now you'll see this program's simple window. At the top it tells you whether you're currently using the

    Enable the 'classic' menu

'default' or the 'classic' context menu. Below that it effectively offers two options: one to switch to the 'classic' menu and one to switch back to the 'default' menu. Click on the first button, **Enable Win11 Classic Context Menu Style**.
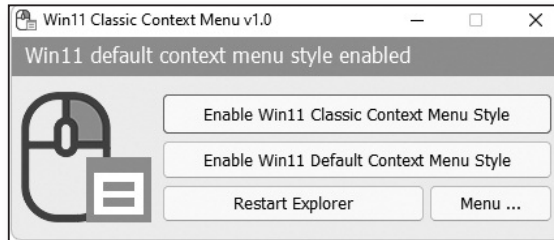
12. Since File Explorer is currently open, you'll see a message saying the Explorer needs to be restarted: click **Yes**.

Your desktop and File Explorer will restart

13. Wait a few seconds for your desktop to refresh and your File Explorer window to reopen, and then try right-clicking something – that 'W11ClassicMenu' icon, or an icon on your desktop, or the background of the folder or desktop. You'll see that the classic context menu now appears straight away.

14. Assuming you're happy with this (and it obviously won't have come as any surprise!), you can close the little program you opened earlier and you've finished. If you ever decide you'd rather be seeing the shortened 'default' context menu instead, you can run the program again and choose **Enable Win11 Default Context Menu Style**.

Pin Favourite Apps and Folders to the Start Menu

The 'Pinned' section

When you first start using Windows 11, the 'Pinned' section at the top of the Start menu shows a number of

built-in apps Microsoft thinks you'll want to use. There's space here for 18 apps, although about a third of those slots are initially empty. (In fact, you can add as many apps as you like to this section, but only the first 18 are visible without scrolling down, meaning that you'll tend to forget whatever else you've put there.)

One of the most practical things you can do to customise Windows 11 is to make this section of the Start menu your own: unpin items you don't use and replace them with items you do. It's not only apps you can pin here, but folders too.

Make sure it works for you

> Remember that you can pin apps to your taskbar too, and they're easier to reach here than on the Start menu. Perhaps a good way to organise things is to use the taskbar to pin the 6–10 apps you use most frequently, and the 'Pinned' section of the Start menu for apps you use less often, plus regularly-used folders.

The best way to start is by looking at the apps currently shown in that 'Pinned' section and asking yourself two questions:

• First: 'Do I use this app so often that it should be on my taskbar?' If the answer is Yes, right-click that icon and choose **Pin to taskbar**. Having done that, right-click it again and choose **Unpin from Start** (since there's little point in having it in both places).

Should an app be on the taskbar?
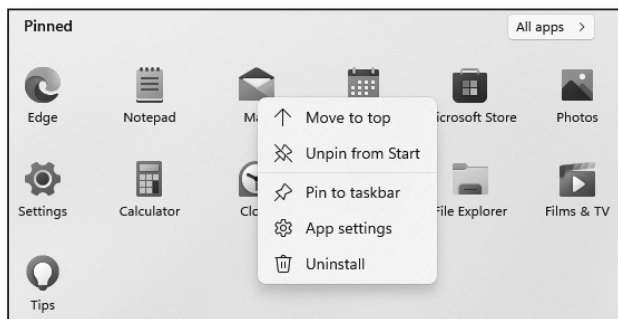
Should an app really be pinned here?

- Second: 'Does this app really deserve one of the 18 available slots in this Pinned section?'. If the answer is No, right-click that icon and choose **Unpin from Start** to remove it. On the odd occasion you do want to use the app, you'll still find it in the 'All apps' list.

See what else you want to pin here

Now click on **All apps** at the top-right of the Start menu and have a look through your list of installed apps. You're looking to see which ones you'd like quicker access to, either on the taskbar (if you use them frequently) or on the Start menu (if you use them less often).

When you come across an app that you'd like in one of these places, right-click it and choose **Pin to Start** or **More** > **Pin to taskbar** as appropriate.

Want to pin folders too?

Having done that, consider whether there are any folders you'd like to add to the 'Pinned' section of the Start menu. If there are, open File Explorer and go in search of one of those folders. When you find it, right-click it and choose **Pin to Start**.

Organise this 'Pinned' section

As a final step, you might like to organise the 'Pinned' section of the Start menu in some way to make apps easier to spot. At the moment, it shows any items placed there by Microsoft followed by the apps you added yourself in the order you pinned them there, but you don't have to put up with that.

One option is simply to drag icons around. As you do, others will step out of the way to leave a space. You might like to drag items into alphabetical order, or most-used order – it's up to you.

Another thing you can do is right-click an icon and choose **Move to top**: that moves this icon to the top-left of the bunch, making it the first in the section. If you did this in turn from your least-favourite to most-favourite apps, you'd end up with all your favourites at the beginning of the list.

In a similar way, you can also drag the app icons on your taskbar left and right to arrange those into an order you prefer.

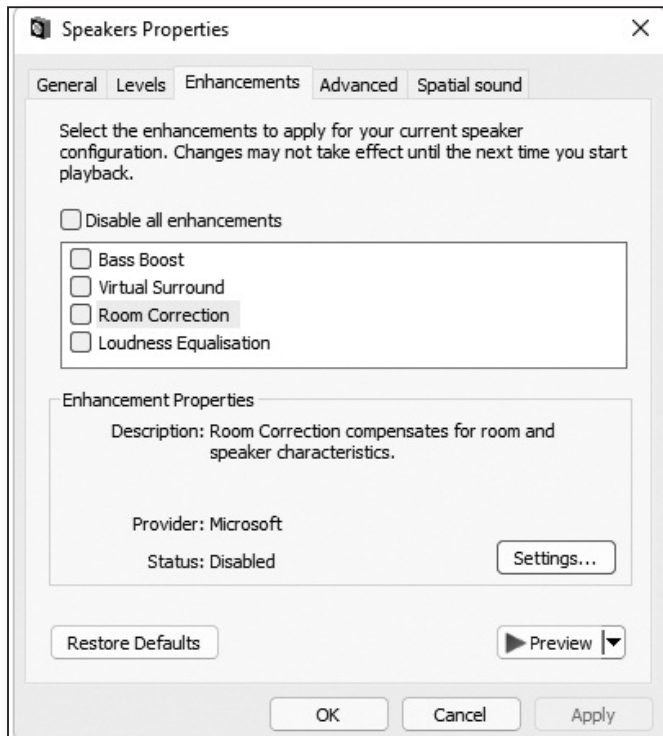## Experiment with Enhancing Your PC's Audio

Windows 11 finally includes some rather nifty options for improving the sound quality of your PC, which might be especially welcome if you use it to listen to music. These settings take a few steps to reach, but they're well worth experimenting with to see if you like them.

Try out these sound settings

1. First, set some music playing so that you can gauge the results of what you're doing. If you don't have any music on your own PC, you might visit an online radio station, or head to www.youtube.com to find an album to play.

2. Open the Settings app (for instance by pressing **Win+I**).

3. You arrive at the System section of the app, which is exactly where you want to start. Click on **Sound**.

4. Scroll down to the 'Advanced' section and click on **All sound devices**.

5. Click on **Speakers**.

6. Alongside **Enhance audio**, click the switch to turn this feature on, then click the word **Advanced**.

7. Another dialog opens which offers up to four different enhancements: Bass Boost, Virtual Surround, Room Correction and Loudness Equalisation. Try enabling any of these and deciding what you think about the result. (If you look a little lower down, the **Settings** button may be enabled, allowing you to fine-tune the sound of this enhancement.)

Four possible enhancements to try

8. When you're happy with any enhancements you've switched on, click **OK**. This returns you to where you were in the Settings app.

Experiment with 'Spatial sound'

9. One extra item you might like to try out is **Spatial sound**, a little lower down the page. Open the drop-down list and choose **Windows Sonic for Headphones**. You may well find that this only has an effect if you actually are using headphones to listen to music, as opposed to speakers, but if that's what you usually do, you might like this 'spatial' effect.

10. When you're happy with the audio enhancements you've chosen, close the Settings app and you've finished.