

Handy Tips, Solutions and Answers to
Common PC Questions

Do you have a question about a Windows Advisor article, or need help with a computing problem? If you do, just drop us a line by email to editorial@windowsadvisor.co.uk and we'll do our level best to help!

When you write, please remember to include your customer number, your postcode, and the version of Windows you use (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.

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Explorer No Longer Shows Previews of My Pictures

Plain icons for your pictures?

Question: When I look at a folder of my photos, I no longer see small versions of them, just a collection of identical icons. How can I fix this?

Mary Coates

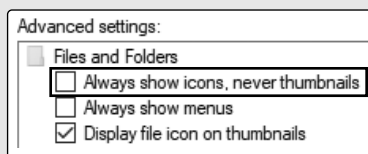


Answer: At the moment, then, your photos are looking rather like the left-hand screenshot above and they should look like the screenshot on the right. Here's how to correct this:



Tell Windows to show thumbnails

1. Open File Explorer (aka Windows Explorer) – for example, by pressing **Win+E** – and make your way to any folder containing pictures so that you'll be able to see quickly whether these initial steps have worked.
2. In Windows 10 or 8.1, switch to the **View** tab on the Ribbon and click the upper half of the **Options** button at the far-right. In Windows 7, click the **Organize** button and choose **Folder and search options**.
3. In the Folder Options dialog that opens, switch to the **View** tab.
4. You'll see a box headed **Advanced settings**, and the topmost checkbox in this list is **Always show icons, never thumbnails**. This is probably the culprit: does it have a tick beside it?



- If it does have a tick, this certainly explains why you're seeing icons rather than previews ('thumbnails') of your pictures. Remove the tick and click the **Apply** button at the bottom of the dialog.
 - If there's no tick, this is still worth a try: tick the box and then click the **Apply** button at the bottom of the dialog, then remove the tick you just added and click **Apply** again.
5. We've done all we can with this dialog, so click the **OK** button to close it. The question is, has this caused the ordinary icons to change to picture previews in the folder you're looking at? If so, you've obviously finished. If it hasn't, we need to try something else:

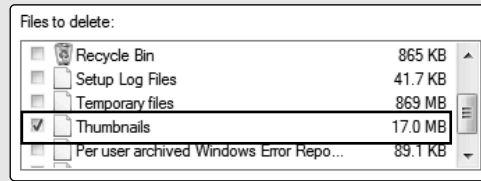
Success?

1. In the Explorer window you've opened earlier, click on **This PC** (in Windows 10 or 8.1) or **Computer** (in Windows 7) at the left.
2. Right-click the icon for the drive where your pictures are stored (quite likely your hard drive, whose name ends with C: in brackets) and choose **Properties**.
3. In the dialog that opens, just below the graph showing your disk space, click the **Disk Cleanup** button.
4. Wait a few moments and the Disk Cleanup window will appear. Here you'll see a list of items that can be 'cleaned up', each with a checkbox beside it. Remove the tick beside all the items except one: you want to tick the item named **Thumbnails**.



Delete the non-working store of old thumbnails

New thumbnails
are created for
each folder
you open



5. With only the **Thumbnails** item ticked in this list, click **OK** then confirm you want to permanently delete the items you've selected by clicking the **Delete Files** button.
6. The Disk Cleanup window closes, and you can click **Cancel** to close the Properties dialog you opened in step 2. What we've done is to delete Windows' store of the thumbnails of your photos, which had seemingly become damaged in some way and stopped working. This will force Windows to recreate them again as needed. So, if you now go to a folder containing pictures and have a look, Windows should once again be displaying those little previews rather than just ordinary icons.



Excel Doesn't Print the Correct Area of My Spreadsheet

Excel won't print
all your data

Question: *Usually when I try to print a spreadsheet in Excel, it goes without a hitch. But there's one spreadsheet which won't print properly: all I get on paper are a few cells from the last column and everything else is ignored. How can I fix this?*

John Hull

Answer: Microsoft Excel can work in seemingly-mysterious ways when it comes to printing. In fact, though, there is a pattern to what's printed.

Unless you explicitly tell Excel which part of the sheet to print, it decides for itself. It does this by looking at which cells have been changed in some way – either by having something typed into them or by having been formatted in some way (filled with colour, or having a border applied, for instance). The result is that you might have typed some figures into the first four columns (say), but if you've accidentally typed something into a cell in column 30 too, Excel will try to include all 30 columns in the print-out. That might result in the printed page looking tiny and impossible to read, or it might produce a stream of mostly-blank pages from your printer.

To prevent this, and to ensure you only print what you want, the trick is to tell Excel which part of the sheet you're interested in. However – and this is what appears to have happened to the questioner – if you do this accidentally and/or mark the wrong area, Excel will still follow your instructions and print only that area, even if it's blank.

The solution, then, is to make sure the correct area of the sheet is marked for printing. Here's how:

1. Start by marking the area of the sheet you want to print. To do that, move the mouse to the first (top-left) cell of the required area, press-and-hold the left mouse button, and then drag diagonally down and to the right until you reach the last (bottom-right) cell to be printed.
2. When you reach that last cell, release the mouse button. (If you get this wrong, click in another cell, away from those you've just selected, to clear the selection and then start again.)
3. Now switch to the **Page Layout** tab on the Ribbon. In the 'Page Setup' group, click the **Print Area** button and choose **Set Print Area** from the menu that appears.

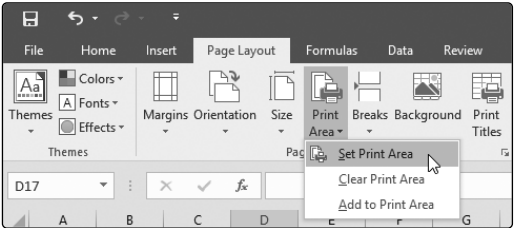
How Excel prints (unless told otherwise)

Take control by setting the 'print area'



Select the cells to be printed

Set these as the print area



If you save your spreadsheet now (by pressing **Ctrl** + **S**) this newly-set print area will be saved with it, ensuring that whenever you print it in future, only the same area will be printed. If you ever extend the sheet into cells below or beside those you've marked, remember to follow the same steps again to mark the new, larger area before printing!

Check the Print Preview before printing

Done! Any print area you'd previously set has now been forgotten and Excel will print only the area you've just defined. To confirm this, take a look at the Print Preview before you print, which shows what will appear on paper: choose **File > Print** (or press **Ctrl** + **P**) and you'll see the preview to the right of the Print button and printing options.



What Does the Bold Text Mean on a Context Menu?

One item often appears in bold type

Question: When I right-click on a file or a folder (or quite a lot of other things) in Windows, the first item on the menu is usually shown in bold text. Is there any significance to that?

Celia Smith

How context menus work

Answer: When you right-click on almost anything in Windows, you'll often see a menu known as a context menu.

The reason for the name is that the items on this menu vary according to what it was you right-clicked – in other words, they depend on the ‘context’ – so there’ll be differences according to whether you right-clicked a folder, a Word document, a picture file, a music file, a printer icon, one of the tiny icons near the clock on the taskbar, and so on.

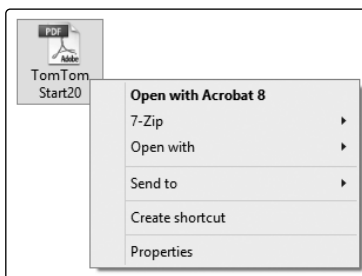
On these context menus, you’ll often see that one item is shown in bold type. It’s frequently the first item on the menu, but not always.

The bold text is used to provide you with a little helpful information: it indicates that this is the default item on the menu. This means that, rather than right-clicking the file or folder and then clicking that bold-text item, you could simply have double-clicked the file or folder and achieved exactly the same result.

As an example, when I right-click a PDF file on my computer, the bold-text item is **Open with Acrobat 8**. If I click that item, the PDF file will open in a program named Adobe Acrobat 8. But, since that item is shown in bold text, I can see that a possibly-simpler way to open a PDF file in Acrobat 8 is simply to double-click the file.

Bold text indicates the ‘default’ item on the menu

The same would happen if you double-clicked the file or folder



If you’re not keen on double-clicking, an alternative is click the file once to select it and then press the **Enter** key on your keyboard. Just like double-clicking it, this also carries out the same action as that bold-text item on its context menu.

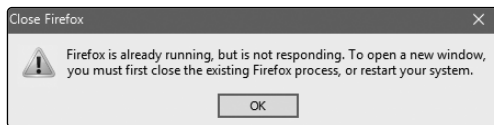


Firefox Says It's Already Running When I Start It!

Firefox is already running

Question: I'm trying to start my Mozilla Firefox web browser, but I just see a message that says it's already running. I can't see it on the screen, and there's no Firefox button on my taskbar, so how can I close it as the message tells me to do?

Martin Ferris



Programs don't always close correctly

Answer: Just occasionally when you try to close a program, it doesn't actually close. You clicked the x button in its top-right corner (or chose File > Exit, or something similar) and its window did indeed vanish from your screen, but something went wrong behind the scenes and that program continued running.

It usually doesn't matter

You can't see it, so you don't know it's still running, but in most cases it doesn't matter: if you try to start the same program again later, it will start as normal and you'll be able to use it. Although you're not aware of it, there are now two instances of that program running: one you can see and one you can't.

With Firefox, it does

In the case of Firefox, things don't work like this. If the Firefox program continued running invisibly after you closed it, you won't be able to start it again: when you try, you'll see the error message pictured above.



Why didn't the Firefox program close? It's impossible to say for sure, but one possibility is that Firefox was in the middle of updating itself (or updating one of its add-ons) when you closed it, and it got itself into a

pickle as a result: by chance you just picked an unfortunate moment to close it. You'll never know what caused the problem, and it's impossible to avoid, so it's simplest not to wonder about it!

Whatever the reason for the problem, you do want to use Firefox again, so what can you do? There are two possible solutions:

All programs are closed automatically

Solution 1: restart your PC

This is the simpler solution, although it's annoying to have to do it. As Windows shuts down, all the programs that were running are forced to end, including that invisible and unresponsive Firefox. After Windows restarts, you'll be able to start Firefox.

Solution 2: force Firefox to close using Task Manager

This is the quicker option, and it's far less disruptive to your work than restarting your computer:

1. Start Task Manager using either of these methods:
 - Press the key combination **Ctrl** + **Shift** + **Esc**.
 - Right-click a blank space on the taskbar and choose **Task Manager** (or **Start Task Manager**) from the menu that appears.
2. **Windows 10 or 8.1:** at the bottom-left of the Task Manager window, do you see the words **More details** beside a circled arrow? If so, click those words: the window will grow in size to show a row of tabs at the top (and the words at the bottom will change to 'Fewer details').
3. In Windows 10 or 8.1, select the **Details** tab **1**; in Windows 7, select the **Processes** tab.

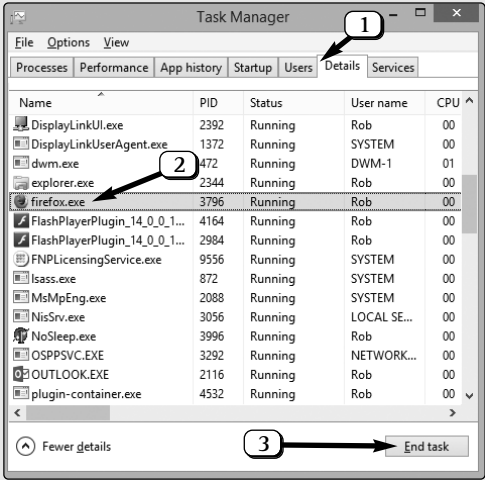


Extra step for Windows 10 or 8.1

Find Firefox in the list

Force it to close

- 4. Now you'll be looking at a list of all the programs that are currently running on your PC. Find `firefox.exe` in this list and click it once to select it (2).
- 5. At the bottom of the window, click the End task button (in Windows 10 or 8.1) (3) or the End process button (in Windows 7).



- 6. A little dialog will appear asking if you want to end `firefox.exe`. Click the End process button in this dialog.
- 7. You'll notice that the '`firefox.exe`' item you selected disappears from the list: that invisible Firefox program has now been stopped. You can close the Task Manager window by clicking the x button in its top-right corner or by pressing the (Esc) key on your keyboard.

Firefox has been shut down

Now you'll be able to start and use Firefox in the normal way.

