Useful Tips to Help You Get the Very Best from Windows 10

This article shows you how to:

✓ Find Windows 10 options you haven't discovered

✓ Power-up cut, copy and paste with Clipboard History

✓ Put useful extra options a click away on your desktop

There's a lot more to Windows 10 than meets the eye! Whether you've been using this version of Windows for a few months or several years, there are sure to be all sorts of useful things you haven't yet discovered. Indeed, some are so well hidden you might wonder if you're not supposed to discover them! In this article, I'll run through the most useful of these lesser-known tips.

Put Handy Extra Icons on Your Desktop

**Useful locations with a quick double-click**

When first installed, the Windows 10 desktop is rather bare: it's likely that the only icon you see there is the Recycle Bin. Perhaps other programs you've installed have added other icons, and you can delete those if you don't tend to use them, but the Recycle Bin is the one icon that Microsoft thought you really needed.

But perhaps you feel differently about it? In particular, you might miss having a 'This PC' icon (the equivalent of the 'Computer' icon from Windows 8.1 or 7), and there are a couple of others you might find useful.

Tick boxes beside icons you want on your desktop

1. Open the Start menu and click on **Settings**.

2. Click on **Personalisation**, then click **Themes** at the left followed by **Desktop icon settings** at the right.

3. In the dialog that appears, use the checkboxes at the top to choose which icons appear on your desktop:
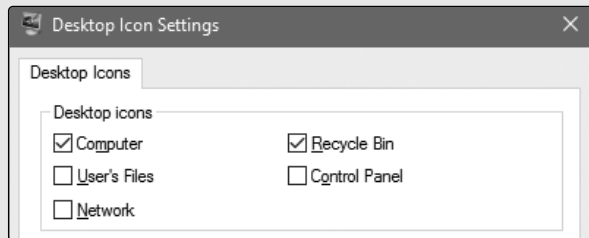
Along with the handy **Computer** (which takes you straight to the list of drives connected to your PC), two others are especially useful:

- **Control Panel** gives you a quick way to open the Control Panel, something we still need to use every so often but have no particularly easy way to reach.

- **User's Files** takes you straight to all your personal folders – Documents, Pictures, Music, Downloads, and so on.

4. After ticking the boxes beside the icons you want on your desktop, click **OK** and then close the Settings window. You'll see the new icons on your desktop and you can drag them around to rearrange them in any way you like. If you ever want to remove one of them, just repeat the steps above and remove the tick from its checkbox.

Drag icons to rearrange them as you like

Sign into Windows Faster with a PIN Number

Every time you sign into Windows 10 (most commonly after starting or restarting your PC), you have to sign into your account by typing your password. It should be a good, strong password and that makes it somewhat laborious to type.

Typing your password is slow

But typing your password isn't the only option, and it's not the best option either. A better choice is to sign in by typing a PIN number – a sequence of 4 digits or more.

It's also not very secure

How is that better? Well, it's quicker for one thing, but somewhat surprisingly it's also more secure. If someone were to somehow discover your password while you were typing it, they'd have full access to your Microsoft account: they could sign into that account on any of your devices, and they could sign in online to access your Outlook.com email, your OneDrive files, your Microsoft 365 subscription and more.
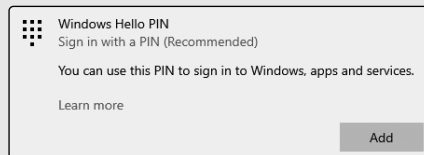
Using a PIN is better

But your PIN only applies on this one computer. So if someone were to discover your PIN, they could sign into this PC (if they can get their hands on it!), but that's all they could do.

Here's how to set up a PIN on your PC:

1. Press (⊞) + (I) (the letter 'i') to open the Settings app and click on **Accounts**.

2. At the left of the Settings window, choose **Sign-in options**.

3. On the right you'll see a list of ways you can sign in to Windows 10. Click on **Windows Hello PIN**, then click on **Add**.

> ⠿ Windows Hello PIN
> Sign in with a PIN (Recommended)
>
> You can use this PIN to sign in to Windows, apps and services.
>
> Learn more
>
>   Add

Choose, type and confirm a PIN

4. In the pop-up box that appears, click Next and you'll arrive at a dialog in which you type whatever you'd like to use as a PIN and then retype it to confirm it. As I mentioned, it can be 4 digits or more in length (and if you prefer not to use numbers, or to use a mix of numbers and letters, you can tick the box beside **Include letters and symbols** first).

> Windows Security   ✕
>
> Set up a PIN
>
> Create a PIN to use instead of passwords. Having a PIN makes it easier to sign in to your device, apps and services.
>
> ▦   ••••
>
>   ••••
>
> ☐ Include letters and symbols
>
>   OK   Cancel

5. Click **OK** and you're done: you can close the Settings window.

In future, whenever you sign into Windows on this PC, you'll be prompted to enter your PIN rather than your password. Just below this prompt, you'll see a **Sign-in options** link: if you ever forget your PIN, you can click that and then click the password icon to sign in using your password instead.

Password option still available if required

Create a PDF from Any Document or Web Page

In the past, if you wanted to create PDF files, you had to install special software for the job. Now, at last, Windows 10 includes this handy feature.

The 'Print to PDF' feature

It comes in the form of a 'virtual printer'. In other words, creating a PDF is much the same as printing something on paper, but you don't use your normal printer to do it; instead you use a special printer named 'Microsoft Print to PDF'.

That means this feature is available from any program that has a 'Print' command – word processors, email programs, photo editors, spreadsheet programs, you name it. One especially handy use of this is for keeping copies of web pages without having to print them out on paper. As an example, let's assume you've arrived at a web page in Microsoft Edge (the web browser included with Windows 10) and you'd like to keep a copy of it as a PDF. Here's what to do:

A useful way to keep copies of web pages

1. At the far-right of Microsoft Edge's toolbar, click the ... ('Settings and more') button and then choose **Print**. Alternatively, press the key combination ⊞ + P.

Select the Microsoft Print to PDF printer

2. This opens Edge's Print dialog, pictured in the next screenshot. Open the drop-down list labelled **Printer** ① and choose **Microsoft Print to PDF**. This tells Edge to use this special 'PDF printer' rather than your usual ink-and-paper printer.

If you want to, you can make a few adjustments to the other settings presented in this dialog. One in particular you might find useful is to click **More settings** and tick the box beside **Headers and footers**: this adds the address of the web page and the current page number to the bottom of each page and today's date at the top.

Choose where to save the PDF

3. Click the **Print** button ②. This displays a familiar 'Save' dialog in which you choose where you want to save the PDF and type a name for it. Then click the **Save** button and you've finished: Edge has created a PDF copy of the web page and saved it to your chosen folder with the name you typed.

Use this in any program with a Print command

As I mentioned above, this doesn't only work for web pages, and it doesn't only work in Microsoft Edge. You can create a PDF from absolutely anything that can be printed, and the steps are always the same: after opening the required

document, open the program's Print dialog (usually by pressing $\boxed{\text{Ctrl}}$ + $\boxed{\text{P}}$), open the list of available printers and choose the **Microsoft Print to PDF** item, then click the **Print** or **OK** button and choose a name and location to save the PDF file.

Prevent Windows from Changing Your Default Printer

The tip above brings us to something else that's new in Windows 10, and it's something that could easily catch you by surprise: whichever printer you used last is the one that will be used next time you print something.

Windows remembers which printer you used

As an example, let's say you do come across a web page you'd like to keep as a PDF one day, and you follow the steps above. Sometime later, you want to print something on paper – in the same program or a different one – and you press $\boxed{\text{Ctrl}}$ + $\boxed{\text{P}}$ to open the program's Print dialog. When you do, you'll find that the 'Microsoft Print to PDF' printer is still selected. Since that was the printer you used last time, Windows 10 assumes you want to use it this time too.

If you notice this, it's obviously a quick change to select your normal printer instead. If you don't notice, however, you may well just click **Print** and be left wondering why your printer isn't doing anything and a 'Save' dialog has popped up instead!

It could catch you by surprise!

Of course, now you know this happens, you could just get into the habit of checking which printer is selected in the Print dialog before you click the **Print** button.

But perhaps you'd rather things just worked the same way as they did before: your ink-and-paper printer was your default printer, and that one would always be used unless you specifically chose a different printer.

Make this work the way it used to

If so, you can follow the steps below:

1. Open the Start menu and click the **Settings** (cog) icon or press the key combination (⊞) + (I).

2. In the Settings window that opens, click on **Devices**.

3. At the left of the window, choose **Printers & scanners**.

4. In the right-hand section of the window you'll see a list of your printers and scanners. Scroll downwards past this list (if necessary) and you'll see the option pictured below, with a tick beside it. Click the check-box to remove the tick and switch off this option.

☐ Allow Windows to manage my default printer
When this is on, Windows will set your default printer to be the one you used most recently at your current location.

Check which printer is set as the default

5. That's got the first half of the job done. The second half is to tell Windows which printer you prefer to use for the majority of your printing – usually your ink-and-paper printer. Scroll back upwards to the list of devices we passed a moment ago and see which of those is accompanied by the word **Default** immediately below its name. If it's the one you prefer to use for your day-to-day printing, there's nothing more to do; just jump ahead to step 7.

Set your preferred printer as default instead

6. If some other printer is currently shown as being the default, click the name of your preferred printer. When you do this, several buttons will appear below the name: click on **Manage**, then, on the next page, click the **Set as default** button.

Close the Settings window

7. Done! Now just close the Settings window by clicking the **x** button in its top-right corner. In future, unless you purposely choose a different printer when printing something, the default printer you've just chosen will be used.

Make Copy & Paste Easier with Clipboard History

Here's a very useful feature you're not likely to discover by accident! It's named Clipboard History and it remembers the last 25 items you cut or copied to the clipboard, allowing you paste any of them into a program.

Specifically, it remembers text and images you've cut or copied – not files, folders or more esoteric items – but that still makes it very useful.

As an example of how it works, perhaps earlier today you copied and pasted your email address into an online form. Since then, you've cut or copied other things, so your email address is no longer on the clipboard. Now you arrive at another online form asking for your email address: just call up the Clipboard History window, click your email address item in the list, and it's pasted straight into the form.

If you'd like to have this handy feature available (and I can't think why you wouldn't), you have to switch it on. Here's how to do that:

1. Open the Start menu and click the **Settings** (cog) icon or press the key combination (⊞) + (I).
2. Click the **System** icon and then, at the left, click on **Clipboard**.
3. On the right, below the 'Clipboard history' heading, click the switch to **On**. Nothing interesting will happen, but you've finished and you can close the Settings window.

From now on, Clipboard History is watching what you copy to the clipboard and keeping a list of anything that's text or an image. You can carry on using the clipboard's Cut,

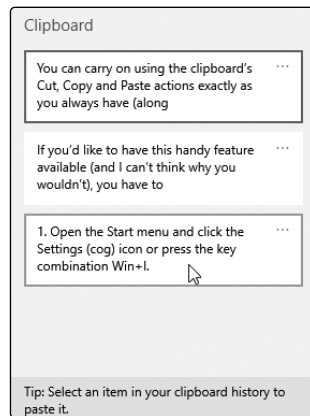**Power-up the Windows clipboard**

Switch on the new feature

You still use the clipboard as normal

Copy and Paste actions exactly as you always have (along with their respective keyboard shortcuts, (Ctrl) + (X), (Ctrl) + (C) and (Ctrl) + (V)).

The only time you really need to use Clipboard History is when you want to paste something you cut or copied to the clipboard earlier and you know it's no longer there (because you've cut or copied other things since).

Press Win+V to see and use the history list

On those occasions, press the keyboard shortcut (⊞) + (V) and a little Clipboard window will appear containing your list of clippings, with the most recent at the top. Scroll through them to find the item you want to paste and then click it: the text (or picture) in that clip will be pasted into the window you were using when you pressed (⊞) + (V) and this panel will then close again.

> **Clipboard**
>
> You can carry on using the clipboard's Cut, Copy and Paste actions exactly as you always have (along   ...
>
> If you'd like to have this handy feature available (and I can't think why you wouldn't), you have to   ...
>
> 1. Open the Start menu and click the Settings (cog) icon or press the key combination Win+I.   ...
>
> Tip: Select an item in your clipboard history to paste it.

Rather than using the mouse to scroll through the list, you can use the up/down arrow keys on your keyboard to look through them, and press either (Enter) or (Space) to paste the selected clip.

Those are the basics of Clipboard History, and it really is a very straightforward feature to use, but here are a few extra pointers worth knowing about it:

Your last 25 clips are stored

- The list only stores the last 25 text/image items you placed on the clipboard. When you reach 25, the oldest items are removed from the list to make way for new ones.

- You can 'pin' items to the list to ensure they never get removed. For instance, if you frequently have to type your email address, you might like to copy it to the clipboard, then open the Clipboard History panel to find that item and pin it. In future, whenever you need to type your email address somewhere, you can press (⊞) + (V) and simply paste it from there. To 'pin' an item to the list, just click the ellipsis ('...') in that item and choose **Pin**.

Pin useful items permanently

Pinned items aren't moved to the top of the list: they stay where they were, with the list always arranged 'newest first'. The result is that your pinned items will gradually move down the list until they reach the bottom. To unpin an item (and thus allow it to be removed from the list as time goes on), click its ellipsis again and choose **Unpin**.

- When you shut down or restart your PC, your Clipboard History list is emptied, leaving only the pinned items.

Restarting your PC clears the list

- You can also clear the list yourself at any time. Press (⊞) + (V) to open the list, click the ellipsis beside any item and choose **Clear all**. This removes everything from the list apart from items you've pinned there.

- You can also remove individual items (pinned or otherwise) without having to clear it entirely. Just click the ellipsis beside an unwanted item and choose **Delete**.

You can remove items yourself

Clipboard History has one extra little trick, although I'm not sure you'll find it useful. If you have two or more Windows 10 computers, it can 'synchronise' your clippings between those PCs. Effectively that means you could copy some text on one PC and later press (⊞) + (V) on another PC to paste it there. If you like the sound of this, you can follow steps 1 and 2 on page 9

to return to the Clipboard page of the Settings app and click the On/Off switch below the 'Sync across devices' heading to switch on this additional feature (and do the same on your other Windows 10 computers).

Choose Which Programs You Prefer to Use

Windows 10 favours its built–in apps

Windows 10 comes with its own bundle of apps, and it seems to think you'd rather use those than anything else. Thus you'll find that music files open in the Groove Music app, pictures open in the Photos app, and Videos open in the Films & TV app. And Windows assumes you want to use Microsoft Edge as your web browser and the lacklustre Mail as your email program.

Rather annoyingly, it also has a habit of forcing those choices onto you. Even if you've chosen to use different programs for some of these tasks, you can find that simply installing one of the six-monthly 'feature updates' causes Windows 10 to undo your choices and inflict those built-in apps on you again.

Would you rather use different programs?

There's nothing wrong with those apps (and, like Windows 10 itself, they're receiving frequent updates and improvements), but perhaps you'd rather stick with the programs you were using before? If so, that's certainly possible. There are a couple of approaches you can take, and I'll start with the most straightforward:

1. Open the Start menu and click the **Settings** (cog) icon or press the key combination ⊞ + Ⓘ.

2. When the Settings app opens, click the **Apps** item, then click **Default apps** at the left.

3. In the main section of the window, pictured below, you'll see a list of items such as 'Music player', 'Photo viewer' and 'Video player', and beneath each is the name and icon of the program currently used to open the corresponding types of file.
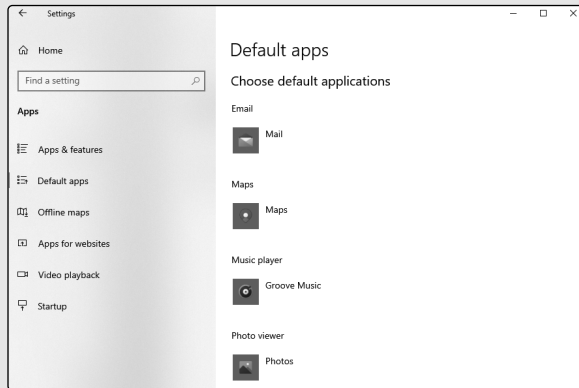
The programs used for certain types of files

4. To use a different program in place of one of these, just click the current program: a list of alternative programs will appear which, hopefully, will contain the program you prefer. Click the required program and you're done.

Click a program and choose something different

As an example, perhaps you'd like to use Windows Media Player for all your music and video files. If so, below 'Music player' click on **Groove Music** to open the list of alternative music apps and then click on **Windows Media Player.** Next, below 'Video player' click on **Films & TV** to open the list of alternative video apps and again click on **Windows Media Player.**

I mentioned that there's another way of doing this, and if you can't get along with the method above – or if you'd like more control over which files open with which programs -

Choose a program for a particular file type

you can use this method instead. As an example, perhaps you'd like all files with .JPG extensions to open with your favourite photo viewer, or all files with .MP3 extensions to open with a particular music player.

You start from the same page of the Settings app, so follow steps 1 and 2 above if you haven't already. Scroll to just below the list of items we were using above and click the blue link that reads **Choose default applications by file type**.

Pick an extension and choose a program

Now you'll see an alphabetical list of file extensions on the left with their associated programs on the right. Scroll down to find the file extension you want (such as **.JPG**) then click the program shown to its right, which is the one currently used for that type of file, and select your preferred program from the list to open files with that extension.

Prevent Windows from Hiding Your Tray Icons

**Windows hides most 'tray' icons...**

Do you find it irritating that Windows hides some of the little icons that appear in the 'Notification area' (popularly known as the tray), the area of the taskbar immediately to the left of the clock?

...in a pop-up panel

You can see these hidden icons at any time by clicking the chevron button ⬚1 to the left of this little row, causing them to appear in a pop-up panel ⬚2, but perhaps you'd prefer to see all of them in one place, all the time?
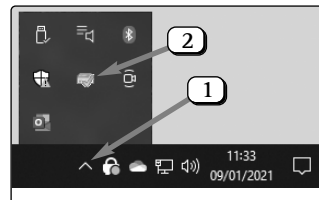
If so, here's what to do:

1. Right-click a blank space on the taskbar (or that little chevron symbol) and choose **Taskbar settings** from the menu that appears.

2. This takes you to the 'Taskbar' page of the Settings app: scroll down to the 'Notification area' heading and click the words **Select which icons appear on the taskbar**.

3. At the top of the next page, click the switch labelled **Always show all icons in the notification area** to turn it to **On**, and then close this window.

> ⌂ Select which icons appear on the taskbar
>
> Always show all icons in the notification area
> 🔘 On
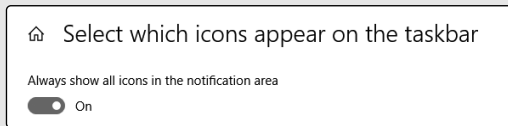
Now you'll see that the chevron symbol has disappeared from the tray and the icons that were previously hidden in that pop-up panel are now shown in the tray itself. They'll obviously take up more space on your taskbar than that solitary chevron (which is why Windows had hidden them), but they'll always be visible.

They'll take more space on your taskbar, of course

If you decide you preferred things as they were before, repeat the same steps but turn the switch to **Off**.

Avoid Eye Strain with 'Dark Mode'

If you use your PC during the evening, do you find the glare of those white windows hard to bear? If you do, Windows 10 has the answer – or, at least, a partial answer: switch to 'dark mode'.

Tired of glaring white windows?

Try Windows 10's dark mode

Right-click the desktop and choose **Personalise** (or press ⊞ + I to open the Settings app and click **Personalisation**), click **Colours** at the left and then, below the words 'Choose your default app mode', choose **Dark**. Many of your Windows 10 apps, such as the Settings window itself and the Store app, will switch to a reversed, white-on-black theme that's much easier on tired eyes.
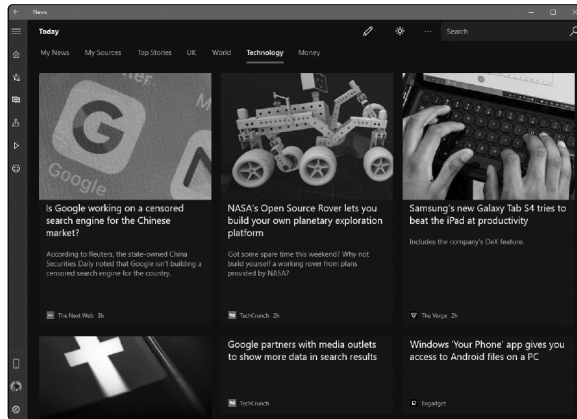
Look for a dark mode in other apps

For any apps you're using that haven't gone dark, check their Settings page (usually by clicking a cog-shaped icon) to see if they offer a 'dark mode' option: an ever-increasing number do.

This setting also won't affect the colour of traditional Windows programs – only apps from the Microsoft Store and those built into Windows 10. However, if you're using Microsoft Office, here's something similar. Choose **File** > **Options** in any Office program (such as Word), and alongside **Office Theme** or **Colour Scheme** you'll find a theme named 'Dark Gray' or 'Black' that reduces the glare of all that whiteness.