

The Grumpy Sysadmin

Ultimate Windows Survival System - Start Here

Before You Do Anything...

If your system is already having problems, stop.

- Do not start clicking random things.
- Do not jump between guides.
- Do not guess.
- Do not reset Windows just because you are frustrated.

Follow this system in the right order. That is how you fix Windows without turning a repair job into a weekend-long digital dumpster fire.

What You Just Got

This updated bundle now includes the core survival system plus the new planning, recovery, update, and maintenance resources. Each piece has a job. Use the right one at the right time.

Folder / Component	What It Is For
01 - Core Windows Survival System	Main guides for cleaning, repairing, optimizing, and controlling Windows. Includes the Survival Guide, Repair Playbook, and Debloat Playbook.
02 - Windows Repair Toolkit	PowerShell-based repair tool files for faster fixes. Read the instructions before running anything.
03 - Backup, Repair, and Reset Planning	The safety-first section. Use this before major repairs, before Reset This PC, or whenever you are not sure what to do next.
04 - Recovery USB and Emergency Tools	Your preparation guide for creating a recovery USB toolkit before disaster strikes.
05 - Windows Update Protection	A survival checklist for dealing with Windows Updates without blindly trusting Microsoft to behave itself.
06 - Monthly Maintenance	A recurring checklist to keep Windows from dragging a bag of bricks through your CPU, memory, disk, startup apps, drivers, and background tasks.

The Complete Updated Bundle Contents

Your ZIP file is organized into folders so you are not hunting through a pile of PDFs like Windows threw them into a junk drawer.

01 - Core Windows Survival System

- The Grumpy Sysadmin Windows Survival Guide.pdf
- Grumpy-Sysadmin-Windows-Repair-Playbook.pdf
- Windows Debloat Playbook.pdf

02 - Windows Repair Toolkit

- Grumpy-Sysadmin-Windows-Repair-Toolkit-v1.02 folder with the PowerShell repair tool files

03 - Backup, Repair, and Reset Planning

- Windows Pre-Repair Backup Checklist - Expanded Edition.pdf
- Windows Repair Decision Tree.pdf
- Before You Click Reset This PC Checklist - Expanded Edition.pdf

04 - Recovery USB and Emergency Tools

- Windows Recovery USB Toolkit Guide.pdf

05 - Windows Update Protection

- Windows Update Survival Checklist.pdf

06 - Monthly Maintenance

- Windows Monthly Maintenance Checklist.pdf

Grumpy Rule: If you cannot explain what you are about to click, run, remove, reset, or reinstall, do not do it yet. Read the matching guide first. Windows is very good at letting you make confident mistakes.

Where You Should Start

If your PC is broken, crashing, freezing, or throwing errors

Start with the **Windows Repair Playbook**. It helps you identify the real problem and follow the correct repair order. Use the **Repair Toolkit** only when the playbook points you toward repair actions.

If your PC is slow, bloated, or acting weird

Start with the **Windows Debloat Playbook**. Then use the **Windows Survival Guide** to improve performance and reduce future problems.

If you are thinking about using Reset This PC

Start with the **Windows Repair Decision Tree**. Then use the **Windows Pre-Repair Backup Checklist**. Then use the **Before You Click Reset This PC Checklist**. Do not skip the backup work.

If you are preparing for emergencies

Use the **Windows Recovery USB Toolkit Guide** before you need it. Recovery tools are not much help if you wait until the broken machine is already staring at you like a brick with a keyboard.

If a major Windows Update is coming

Use the **Windows Update Survival Checklist** before the update, not after it breaks something.

If your PC is currently working

Use the **Windows Monthly Maintenance Checklist** once a month to keep it clean, stable, and under control.

Recommended Use Order

You do not have to use every guide every time. Use this order when you want the safest path through the whole system.

Step 1 - Back up first

Use the **Windows Pre-Repair Backup Checklist** before major changes, repairs, resets, debloating, or update troubleshooting.

Step 2 - Decide what kind of problem you have

Use the **Windows Repair Decision Tree** when you are not sure whether to repair, reset, update, debloat, or leave things alone.

Step 3 - Repair the real problem

Use the **Windows Repair Playbook** to troubleshoot in order. Then use the **Windows Repair Toolkit** when you need faster automated repair actions.

Step 4 - Clean up the mess

Use the **Windows Debloat Playbook** to remove junk, reduce background activity, and improve performance.

Step 5 - Protect and optimize the system

Use the **Windows Survival Guide** to improve reliability, protection, and day-to-day Windows behavior.

Step 6 - Prepare your recovery tools

Use the **Windows Recovery USB Toolkit Guide** to create recovery media before you are desperate.

Step 7 - Survive Windows Updates

Use the **Windows Update Survival Checklist** before and after major updates.

Step 8 - Maintain it monthly

Use the **Windows Monthly Maintenance Checklist** to keep the system from sliding back into slow, bloated nonsense.

Important: If you are already in the middle of a serious problem, do not start with debloating, cleanup, or random scripts. Start with backups, then decision-making, then repair. Cleaning a broken system before you understand the problem can make troubleshooting harder.

Before Running the Repair Toolkit

The Repair Toolkit is powerful because it can automate common fixes. That also means you should treat it with respect.

- Read the toolkit instructions first.
- Run it as administrator only when the guide tells you to.
- Create a restore point if Windows is stable enough to do so.
- Back up important files before making repairs.
- Do not run every option just because it is there.
- After running repairs, reboot when instructed and test before moving to the next fix.

Quick Scenario Map

Problem / Goal	Use This First	Then Use This
PC is broken or unstable	Windows Repair Playbook	Repair Toolkit if needed
PC is slow or bloated	Windows Debloat Playbook	Windows Survival Guide
Not sure whether to repair or reset	Windows Repair Decision Tree	Pre-Repair Backup Checklist
About to click Reset This PC	Pre-Repair Backup Checklist	Reset This PC Checklist
Need emergency recovery media	Recovery USB Toolkit Guide	Keep USB updated

Problem / Goal	Use This First	Then Use This
Major Windows Update coming	Windows Update Survival Checklist	Monthly Maintenance Checklist
Monthly tune-up	Monthly Maintenance Checklist	Debloat Playbook if needed

A Few Rules Before You Start

- Back up important files before repair work, reset work, update troubleshooting, or debloating.
- Do not run random commands from the internet because some comment said it worked once in 2017.
- Do one major change at a time, then test.
- Write down what you changed so you can undo it later.
- Keep your BitLocker recovery key, passwords, license keys, and important files somewhere safe before major repairs.
- When in doubt, slow down. Panic-clicking is not troubleshooting.

Pro Tip: If something does not work, do not keep piling fixes on top of fixes. Go back to the Repair Playbook, confirm the symptoms, and work through the process again. Random guessing is how Windows turns one problem into six.

Final Thought

You do not need to know everything about Windows to manage it properly. You need a system that keeps you from making rushed, expensive, avoidable mistakes.

This bundle is built to help you:

- Back up before things go sideways.
- Decide whether to repair, reset, update, or clean up.
- Fix Windows in the right order.
- Create recovery tools before disaster strikes.
- Survive Windows Updates with fewer surprises.
- Maintain your PC before it turns into a slow-motion dumpster fire.

Clean it. Fix it. Protect it. Control it.

Because when Windows breaks, you are the one stuck fixing it.

- The Grumpy Sysadmin

The Windows Repair Playbook

**Because when Windows breaks...
you're the one stuck fixing it**

The Grumpy Sysadmin – The Windows Repair Playbook

Contents

Before You Start	5
Back Up Your Data First	5
Follow the Steps Carefully	6
Some Fixes Require Administrator Access	6
Take Your Time	6
Understand What You're Changing	7
Final Thought.....	7
Windows Is Broken... Now What	8
How to Quickly Identify the Problem.....	8
What NOT to Do First.....	9
Your First 5-Minute Triage Checklist.....	10
1. Restart your system	10
2. Open Task Manager.....	11
3. Check Windows Update status	11
4. Check available disk space	11
5. Try a simple action that fails.....	12
Windows Update Repair	13
Fix Stuck Updates (0%, 20%, 100%)	13
Step 1 — Give it a minute (but not forever)	14
Step 2 — Restart the system.....	14
Reset Windows Update Components (Step-by-Step).....	15
Step 1 — Open Command Prompt (Admin).....	15
Step 2 — Stop update services	15
Step 3 — Rename update folders.....	15
Step 4 — Restart services.....	16
Step 5 — Reboot your system	16
Fix Update Errors & Failed Installs	16

Step 1 — Retry after reset	17
Step 2 — Run built-in troubleshooter	17
Step 3 — Check disk space	17
Step 4 — Run system file repair	17
When to Stop Fighting Windows Update	18
System File & OS Repair.....	19
SFC vs DISM (What They Actually Do)	19
The Correct Repair Order (CRITICAL)	20
What to Do When SFC Fails	21
Step 1 — Run DISM again	21
Step 2 — Reboot.....	21
Step 3 — Run SFC again.....	21
Running Repairs Offline (Advanced Fix)	22
Step 1 — Get Windows ISO	22
Step 2 — Find the install source.....	22
Step 3 — Run DISM with source	22
Step 4 — Run SFC again.....	23
Explorer, Taskbar & UI Issues	24
Fix Explorer Freezing / Crashing.....	24
Step 1 — Restart Explorer.....	25
Right-Click Freezes & Context Menu Issues.....	25
Step 1 — Test in Safe Mode.....	26
Step 2 — Disable shell extensions	26
Missing Thumbnails & Icon Problems	26
Step 1 — Enable thumbnails	27
Step 2 — Clear thumbnail cache	27
Broken Taskbar / Start Menu Fixes	28
Step 1 — Restart Explorer (again).....	28
Step 2 — Re-register Start Menu	28
Step 3 — Check for corruption.....	29
Performance Problems (Slow PC Fixes)	30
Identify What's Actually Slowing You Down	30

Step 1 — Open Task Manager	30
Step 2 — Watch the Performance tab	31
Startup & Background Process Cleanup	31
Step 1 — Check Startup programs	31
Step 2 — Check running processes	32
Disk vs RAM vs CPU Bottlenecks	33
When Slowness = Deeper System Issues	34
Permissions, Profiles & Access Issues	36
“I’m Admin but Can’t Access Files” Fix	36
Step 1 — Take ownership of the file/folder	37
Step 2 — Grant full permissions	37
Fix Broken User Profiles	38
Step 1 — Test with a new user	38
Step 2 — Migrate to a new profile	39
Credential & Account Corruption Issues	39
Step 1 — Open Credential Manager	39
Step 2 — Remove problematic entries	39
When to Create a New User Profile	40
Protect Your Data Before You Fix Anything	42
What You MUST Back Up First	42
Where to Back It Up	43
How Repairs Can Make Things Worse	44
Safe Recovery Practices	45
1. Verify your backup	45
2. Disconnect your backup drive	45
3. Take your time	45
Advanced Recovery Options	46
System Restore (When It Works... and When It Doesn’t)	47
Step 1 — Open System Restore	47
Step 2 — Choose a restore point	48
In-Place Upgrade Repair (Step-by-Step)	48
Step 1 — Get Windows installation media	49

Fix Your Slow PC **FAST**

The Grumpy Sysadmin – Windows Survival Kit

Fix Your PC FAST & Stop Windows From Breaking It Again

Contents

SECTION 1: The 15-minute Speed Fix	3
STEP 1: Stop Startup Junk.....	3
STEP 2: Stop What's Already Running	4
STEP 3: Fix Power Settings	5
STEP 4: Stop Background Apps	5
STEP 5: Restart Your Computer	6
SECTION 2: Windows Is Slowing You Down on Purpose.....	7
STEP 1: Turn Off Windows "Suggestions" (They're Ads)	8
STEP 2: Disable Start Menu Ads & Junk	10
STEP 3: Turn Off Widgets (They Run Constantly)	12
STEP 4: Disable Search Box Junk.....	13
STEP 5: Disable Background "Content & Sync"	15
STEP 6: Stop Windows From Re-Enabling This Stuff.....	16
SECTION 3: Repair a Broken Windows System	19
STEP 1: Open Command Prompt (Admin Mode)	20
STEP 2: Run SFC (System File Checker)	21
STEP 3: Run DISM (Deeper Repair Tool)	22
STEP 4: Fix Windows Update (When It Breaks)	25
STEP 1: Open Command Prompt (Admin)	26
STEP 2: Stop Update Services.....	26
STEP 3: Clear Update Cache	26
STEP 4: Restart Services	27
STEP 5: When This Doesn't Fix It	28
SECTION 4: Before You Reinstall Windows (Read This or Regret It)	30
STEP 1: Back Up Your Data (Don't Assume Anything)	30
STEP 2: Check for BitLocker (THIS IS HUGE)	32
STEP 3: Make Sure You Can Sign Back In.....	34

STEP 4: Deauthorize & Sign Out (Optional but Smart)	34
STEP 5: Know What You'll Have to Reinstall	34
STEP 6: Decide If You ACTUALLY Need to Reinstall	35
SECTION 5: Your 5-Minute Maintenance System	37
STEP 1: Check Startup Apps (1 minute)	37
STEP 2: Check Background Apps (1 minute)	38
STEP 3: Quick Performance Check (1 minute)	38
STEP 4: Check for Updates (1 minute)	39
STEP 5: Reboot Your System (1 minute)	39

SAMPLE
thegrumpysysadmin.com — full version has 237 pages

SECTION 1: The 15-minute Speed Fix

Fix Your Slow Windows PC... Without Breaking Anything

If your PC feels slow, there's a very good chance nothing is actually wrong with it.

You don't need a new computer.

You don't need to reinstall Windows.

What you need to do is stop Windows from dragging your system down, especially if you've been running it for years!

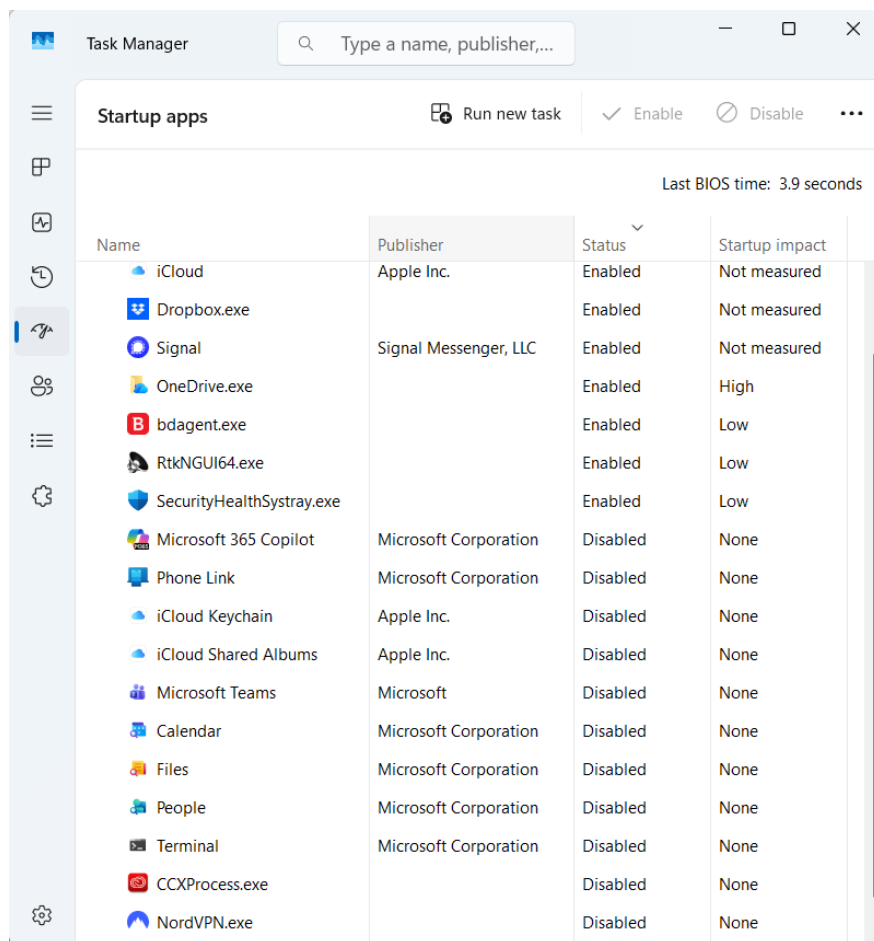
Before You Start:

You're not going to be deleting system files or breaking anything. Everything recommended here is safe and reversible.

STEP 1: Stop Startup Junk

Open Task Manager:

Right-click Start → Task Manager → More Details → Startup tab



👉 Disable anything you don't need at startup

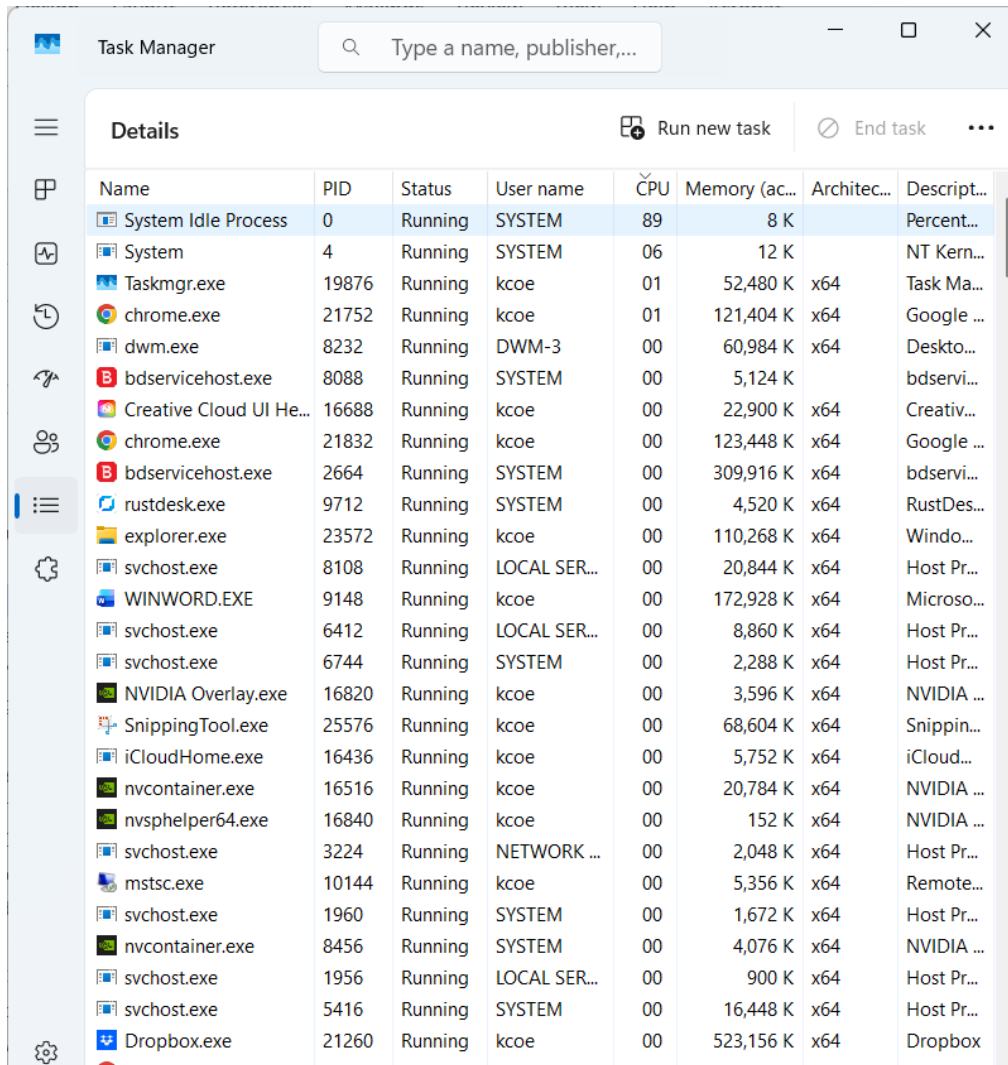
Disable apps you don't need:

Teams, Spotify, Discord, Zoom, Steam, Adobe, printer helpers.

Do NOT disable antivirus or drivers.

STEP 2: Stop What's Already Running

Press Ctrl + Shift + Esc → Processes tab



The screenshot shows the Windows Task Manager window with the 'Details' tab selected. The window title is 'Task Manager' and it has a search bar at the top. The 'Details' tab shows a list of processes with columns: Name, PID, Status, User name, CPU, Memory (ac...), Archite..., and Descript... The processes listed include System Idle Process, System, Taskmgr.exe, chrome.exe, dwm.exe, bdservicehost.exe, Creative Cloud UI He..., chrome.exe, bdservicehost.exe, rustdesk.exe, explorer.exe, svchost.exe, WINWORD.EXE, svchost.exe, svchost.exe, NVIDIA Overlay.exe, SnippingTool.exe, iCloudHome.exe, nvcontainer.exe, nvspHelper64.exe, svchost.exe, mstsc.exe, svchost.exe, nvcontainer.exe, svchost.exe, svchost.exe, and Dropbox.exe. The CPU and Memory columns are highlighted in blue.

Name	PID	Status	User name	CPU	Memory (ac...	Archite...	Descript...
System Idle Process	0	Running	SYSTEM	89	8 K		Percent...
System	4	Running	SYSTEM	06	12 K		NT Kern...
Taskmgr.exe	19876	Running	kcoe	01	52,480 K	x64	Task Ma...
chrome.exe	21752	Running	kcoe	01	121,404 K	x64	Google ...
dwm.exe	8232	Running	DWM-3	00	60,984 K	x64	Desкто...
bdservicehost.exe	8088	Running	SYSTEM	00	5,124 K		bdservi...
Creative Cloud UI He...	16688	Running	kcoe	00	22,900 K	x64	Creativ...
chrome.exe	21832	Running	kcoe	00	123,448 K	x64	Google ...
bdservicehost.exe	2664	Running	SYSTEM	00	309,916 K	x64	bdservi...
rustdesk.exe	9712	Running	SYSTEM	00	4,520 K	x64	RustDes...
explorer.exe	23572	Running	kcoe	00	110,268 K	x64	Windo...
svchost.exe	8108	Running	LOCAL SER...	00	20,844 K	x64	Host Pr...
WINWORD.EXE	9148	Running	kcoe	00	172,928 K	x64	Microso...
svchost.exe	6412	Running	LOCAL SER...	00	8,860 K	x64	Host Pr...
svchost.exe	6744	Running	SYSTEM	00	2,288 K	x64	Host Pr...
NVIDIA Overlay.exe	16820	Running	kcoe	00	3,596 K	x64	NVIDIA ...
SnippingTool.exe	25576	Running	kcoe	00	68,604 K	x64	Snippin...
iCloudHome.exe	16436	Running	kcoe	00	5,752 K	x64	iCloud...
nvcontainer.exe	16516	Running	kcoe	00	20,784 K	x64	NVIDIA ...
nvspHelper64.exe	16840	Running	kcoe	00	152 K	x64	NVIDIA ...
svchost.exe	3224	Running	NETWORK ...	00	2,048 K	x64	Host Pr...
mstsc.exe	10144	Running	kcoe	00	5,356 K	x64	Remote...
svchost.exe	1960	Running	SYSTEM	00	1,672 K	x64	Host Pr...
nvcontainer.exe	8456	Running	SYSTEM	00	4,076 K	x64	NVIDIA ...
svchost.exe	1956	Running	LOCAL SER...	00	900 K	x64	Host Pr...
svchost.exe	5416	Running	SYSTEM	00	16,448 K	x64	Host Pr...
Dropbox.exe	21260	Running	kcoe	00	523,156 K	x64	Dropbox

👉 Look for apps using high CPU or memory

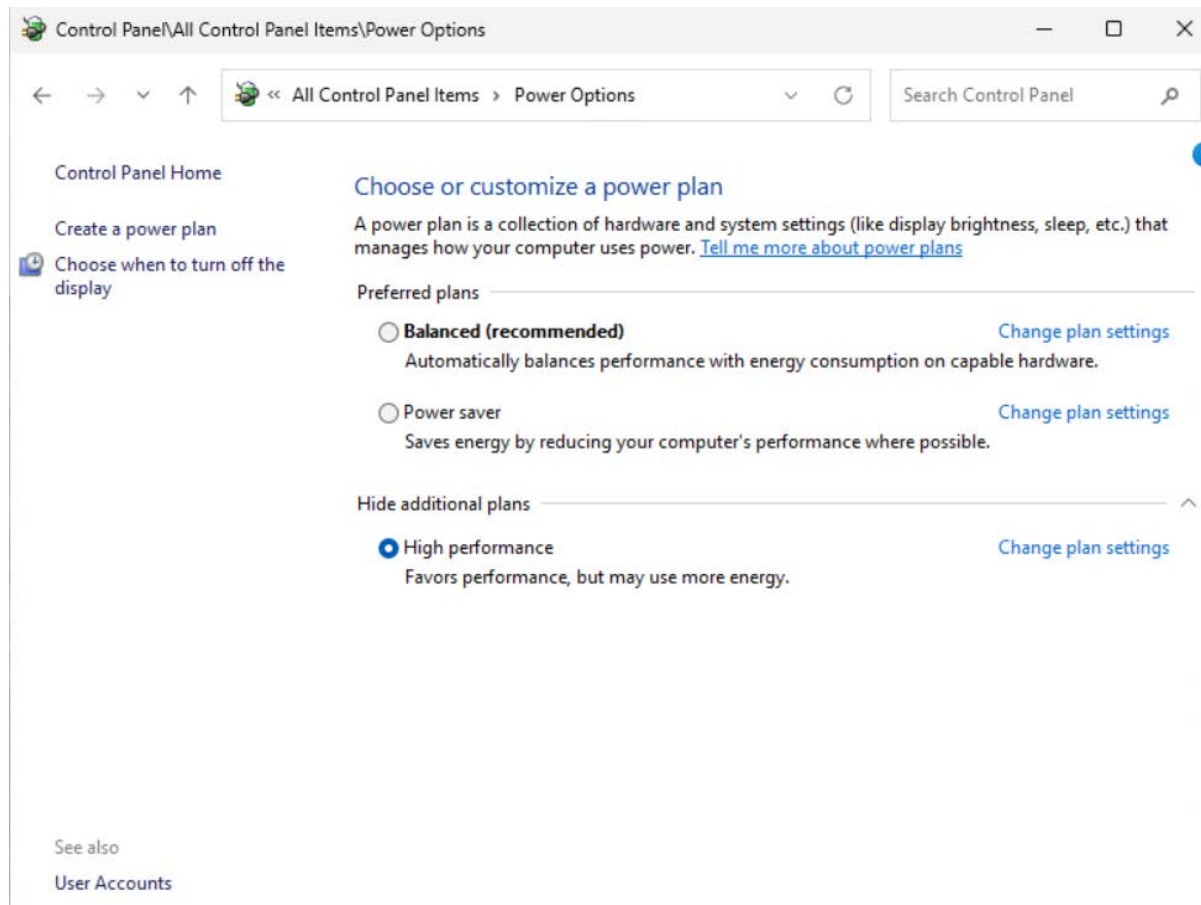
End tasks you don't need.

Do NOT end system processes.

STEP 3: Fix Power Settings

Start → type Power Plan → Edit power plan → Power Options

Select High Performance or Ultimate Performance.



👉 Use High Performance for best responsiveness

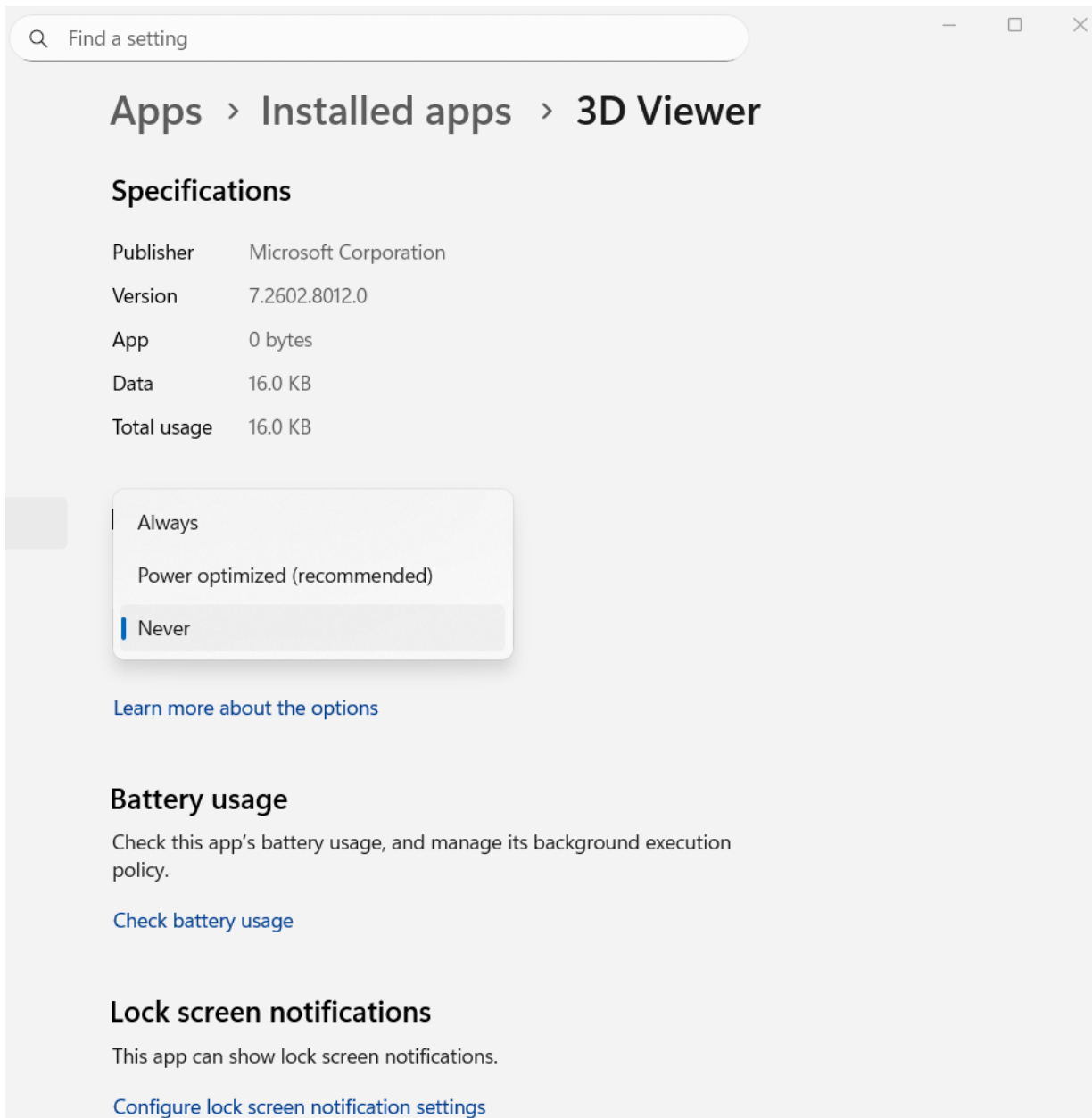
STEP 4: Stop Background Apps

Windows 11:

Settings → Apps → Installed apps → Advanced options → Background app permissions → Never

Windows 10:

Settings → Privacy → Background apps → turn off unnecessary apps



👉 Turn off apps that don't need to run in the background

STEP 5: Restart Your Computer

Restart (not sleep).

Final Result:

Faster startup, better responsiveness, less lag.

Windows Debloat Playbook

Make It Fast Again

**Remove junk. Speed up your PC. Keep Windows from slowing it
down again**

The Grumpy Sysadmin – Windows Debloat Playbook

Contents

Before You Start	4
Back Up Your Data First	4
Before making any changes:	4
Create a Restore Point Before You Continue	5
Before making bigger system changes:	5
Follow the Steps Carefully	5
Some Steps Require Administrator Access	5
Don't Disable Things Blindly	6
This is important.	6
Take Your Time	6
Windows did not become cluttered in five minutes... ..	6
Final Thought	7
Why Your Windows PC Feels Slow	8
If your PC feels slower than it used to... ..	8
Here's what's really happening:	8
The Result?	8
The Biggest Problem	8
Most people don't know what's safe to remove... ..	8
The Internet Makes This Worse	9
This Playbook Is Different	9
This is not:	9
This IS:	9
What You'll Get Out of This	9
And Most Important... ..	10
Let's Get Started	10
Quick Wins: Clean Up the Obvious Junk (5–10 Minutes)	11
Step 1 — Clean Up Startup Programs	11
Step 2 — Close Background Apps You Don't Need	13
Step 3 — Uninstall Programs You Don't Use	14

Step 4 — Disable Unnecessary Background Permissions.....	16
Step 5 — Restart Your PC	17
Core Debloat: Remove What Windows Doesn't Need	19
Step 1 — Turn Off Unnecessary Startup Apps (Windows Settings)	19
Step 2 — Remove Unused Optional Features.....	20
Step 3 — Disable Background Apps (System-Wide).....	21
Step 4 — Review and Disable Unnecessary Services	21
Step 5 — Clean Up Scheduled Tasks	24
Step 6 — Turn Off Unnecessary Windows Features	26
Using Debloat Tools Safely (Without Breaking Your System)	28
⚠ The Biggest Mistake People Make	28
The Right Way to Use These Tools	28
Tool #1 — O&O ShutUp10++	29
Tool #2 — Winhance / Similar Debloat Tools	30
Tool #3 — Chris Titus Tech Utility (Optional Advanced Tool).....	31
Keep Windows Clean (So It Doesn't Undo Your Work)	35
Why This Happens.....	35
The Goal Going Forward.....	35
Your 5-Minute Monthly Maintenance Routine	35
Step 1 — Check Startup Programs	36
Step 2 — Review Installed Apps.....	36
Step 3 — Reopen O&O ShutUp10++.....	36
Step 4 — Check Background Activity.....	37
Step 5 — Restart Your System.....	37
Signs Your System Is Getting Cluttered Again.....	38
Backup & Recovery (Don't Lose Your Data)	41
The Biggest Mistake People Make.....	41
Backup vs Sync (This Matters)	41
Minimum setup:	42
Better Setup (Recommended)	42
System Image vs File Backup.....	43
Create a Restore Point (Quick Safety Net)	44

You're Back in Control	47
What You've Done	47
You now understand:	47
What Happens Next.....	47
Your New Habit (This Is What Matters).....	48
If You Want to Go Further	48
Final Thought	49
One Last Reminder	49

SAMPLE

thegrumpysysadmin.com — full version has 237 pages

The Grumpy Sysadmin

Windows Repair Decision Tree

What to Try First When Windows Starts Acting Broken.

Windows Repair Is Not Random Button Mashing

When Windows starts acting broken, most people do one of two things: they panic, or they start clicking every repair button they can find.

Neither one is a troubleshooting strategy.

A slow PC, a failed update, a broken printer, a blue screen, a missing network connection, or a Windows boot problem all need different repair paths. The goal is not to try the biggest fix first. The goal is to choose the next logical step based on the symptom.

This decision tree helps you start with the least destructive fix, check the obvious things first, and escalate only when the simple stuff does not work.

Grumpy Rule

Resetting Windows as your first repair step is like burning down the kitchen because the toaster made a weird noise.

Start with the symptom. Confirm the basics. Then escalate.

The Golden Repair Rule

Start with the least destructive fix first. Protect the data before you start swinging the hammer.

Repair Principle	Done
Identify the exact symptom before doing anything else	☐
Save any open work if Windows still runs	☐
Back up important files before major repair actions	☐
Check what changed recently: updates, drivers, apps, hardware, settings	☐
Try simple fixes before destructive fixes	☐
Take notes so you know what you already tried	☐
Escalate only when the current step fails or the symptom demands it	☐

Normal repair escalation order

Observe -> Back up -> Restart -> Check recent changes -> Check simple settings -> Run basic repairs -> Use Safe Mode/System Restore -> Use recovery media -> Reset/reinstall only after protecting files.

Start Here: The Fast Triage Grid

Use this page when the PC is acting weird and you need to decide which section to jump to first.

Symptom / Question	If Yes	Next Step	Done
PC is slow	Slow at startup or slow all the time?	Go to PC Is Slow	☐
Windows will not boot	Does the PC power on but Windows will not load?	Go to Windows Will Not Boot	☐
Blue screen or crashes	Did it happen once or repeatedly?	Go to Blue Screens or Crashes	☐
Internet is broken	Only this PC or all devices?	Go to Internet or Network Is Broken	☐
Printer/scanner broken	Offline, duplicated, or not printing?	Go to Printer or Scanner Is Broken	☐
Audio, camera, or mic broken	Missing device or wrong device selected?	Go to Audio, Camera, or Microphone Is Broken	☐
Apps keep crashing	One app or many apps?	Go to Apps Will Not Open or Keep Crashing	☐
Update failed	Error code, repeated failure, or rollback needed?	Go to Windows Update Failed	☐
Files missing	Deleted, moved, hidden, or OneDrive redirected?	Go to Files Are Missing or OneDrive Is Confusing Everything	☐

Stop and Back Up First If...

Some problems are annoying. Others are warning signs that you should stop repairing and protect your data first.

Situation	Stop and Back Up
The drive is clicking, grinding, or making strange noises	☐
Files are disappearing or becoming corrupted	☐
Windows is unstable but still boots	☐
You are considering Reset This PC	☐
You are considering reinstalling Windows	☐
You see signs of ransomware or file encryption	☐
BitLocker recovery appears and you are unsure what changed	☐
The PC will not boot reliably but you can still access files sometimes	☐
You do not have another copy of important files	☐

Grumpy Rule

Do not keep poking a dying drive because you are curious.

Curiosity is great. Data recovery bills are not. If the data matters, back it up before the repair becomes the disaster.

The Grumpy Sysadmin

Before You Click Reset This PC Checklist

Expanded Edition

Stop Before You Reset: Save Your Files, Apps, and Sanity.

Before You Start

This checklist is not here to scare you away from resetting Windows. Sometimes a reset is the right move. But clicking Reset without checking your files, passwords, BitLocker key, apps, and backups first is how a simple repair turns into a full-blown digital dumpster fire.

Don't wipe your Windows PC until you check these first.

Resetting your PC sounds simple. Microsoft makes it look like a big friendly button that magically fixes everything. And sometimes it does.

But sometimes it also removes apps, breaks your workflow, wipes settings, disconnects accounts, nukes local data, or leaves you staring at your screen wondering where your stuff went.

Before you click Reset this PC, go through this checklist.

Microsoft's reset option lets you choose between Keep my files and Remove everything, and also between Cloud download and Local reinstall. But even "Keep my files" does not mean "everything stays exactly the way it was." Apps and settings can still be reset or removed.

Section 1: Decide If Reset Is Actually the Right Move

Before resetting your PC, ask:

Question	Yes	No
Is Windows booting normally?	☐	☐
Is the problem caused by a recent update?	☐	☐
Is one specific app causing the problem?	☐	☐
Is the PC slow, but otherwise working?	☐	☐
Do you suspect malware or a scam tool changed something?	☐	☐
Have you tried basic repair steps first?	☐	☐
Do you have a current backup?	☐	☐
Do you know your Microsoft account password?	☐	☐
Do you have your BitLocker recovery key if needed?	☐	☐

Grumpy Rule: If you do not have a backup, do not reset yet. That's not troubleshooting. That's gambling with extra steps.

Section 2: Understand What “Reset This PC” Really Does

Windows Reset gives you two main choices:

Option 1: Keep my files

This reinstalls Windows while attempting to preserve your personal files. But apps and settings may be removed or reset. Microsoft describes Reset as reinstalling Windows while giving you the choice to keep or remove personal files, while apps and settings are reset to default.

Use this when:

- You want to repair Windows
- You want to keep files in your user profile
- You understand that installed programs may still be removed
- You are prepared to reinstall apps afterward

Do not assume this keeps:

- Installed programs
- App settings
- Printer settings
- Some custom configurations
- Local app data
- Browser extensions
- Saved passwords outside browser/cloud sync
- Specialty software licensing

Option 2: Remove everything

This removes personal files, apps, and settings.

Use this when:

- You are selling, donating, or giving away the PC
- The machine is badly corrupted
- You want a clean start
- You already backed up everything important

Do not use this casually unless you are ready for data loss.

Section 3: Cloud Download vs Local Reinstall

During Reset, Windows may offer:

Cloud download

Downloads a fresh copy of Windows from Microsoft.

Best when:

- You suspect local Windows files are corrupted

The Grumpy Sysadmin

Windows Pre-Repair Backup Checklist

Expanded Edition

Back up the right things before you fix, reset, reinstall, clean up, or repair Windows.

Before you touch Windows, slow down. Repairing Windows sounds harmless. You run a troubleshooter, uninstall an update, reset a setting, run a repair command, or reinstall Windows because Microsoft told you that was “easy.” Sometimes it is. Sometimes it turns into missing files, broken apps, lost passwords, BitLocker lockouts, OneDrive confusion, missing email archives, printer problems, or a PC that suddenly needs more help than it did when you started.

Grumpy Rule: If your only copy of an important file is on the same computer you are about to repair, that is not a backup. That is optimism with a file path.

Why “I Think My Files Are Backed Up” Is Not Good Enough

A lot of people think their files are backed up because they have OneDrive, Google Drive, Dropbox, an external drive somewhere in a drawer, or a vague memory of copying files three years ago. That is not good enough.

Before doing anything risky to Windows, you need to know where your important files are, where the backup copy is, whether cloud sync is actually working, whether files are local or cloud-only, whether you can access passwords, whether you can recover BitLocker, whether you can reinstall important apps, and whether your email data is stored online or only on the PC.

Good Backup Test: A good backup is not “I hope my stuff is somewhere.” A good backup is: “I know where my important files are, I know where the backup is, and I tested that I can open it.”

1. Quick Backup Readiness Checklist

Before making repairs, ask these questions first.

Question	Yes	No
Are you about to reset Windows?	☐	☐
Are you about to reinstall Windows?	☐	☐
Are you about to run repair commands?	☐	☐
Are you about to uninstall updates or drivers?	☐	☐
Are you about to remove malware or suspicious software?	☐	☐
Are you about to modify partitions or drives?	☐	☐
Are you about to disable or change BitLocker/device encryption?	☐	☐