Bits of Bytes

Newsletter of the Pikes Peak Computer Application Society, Colorado Springs, CO

Volume XLV | November 2025 | Issue 11

Created by ChatGPT

Next P*PCompAS meeting: Saturday, 1 November 2025
No presentation topic has been announced.

Meeting Minutes

by Greg Lenihan,
P*PCompAS Secretary

The 4 October 2025 membership meeting started at 9:03 am with the arrival of President Paul Godfrey. There were no guests, six physically attending, and three calling in via Zoom. The meeting minutes from last month were approved. David George made our coffee and Greg Lenihan brought doughnuts.

OFFICER REPORTS

VP Cary Quinn called in via Zoom from Memorial Central. There was no planned presentation for this month.

Treasurer Toni Logan said we had $1401.72 in savings, $136.47 in checking, for a total of $1538.19. Our only expense was our $50 monthly room rental to the church, but the check hadn't been cashed yet.

Membership Chair Ann Titus reported we had 28 members.

Newsletter editor Greg Lenihan said the deadline for the November newsletter was 18 October.

Librarian Paul Godfrey had nothing to report.

Hospitality Chair Toni Logan had nothing to report.

APCUG Rep/Webmaster Joe Nuvolini was not present.

BOD Chair John Pearce had nothing to report.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

President Godfrey reminded everyone that elections were in December.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The next social breakfast meeting will be on Saturday, 18 October, at the Golden Corral, starting at 8:00 am.

Our next membership meeting is on Saturday, 1 November 2025.

AROUND THE ROOM

John Pearce has been attending to family matters, so hasn't had time for checking our Discord server or converting his Win10 computer to Linux. We had a cold morning recently, and his furnace would not turn on, so had to pay over $1K to get it fixed. His financial advisor uses Microsoft Teams, but the feature John needs will not work under Linux, so he would have to drive to Denver to meet with him face-to-face.

David George had cataract surgery in one eye on September 29th and everything seems to be working fine. The next eye will be done in November.

Toni Logan said she had an expense like John Pearce, except for her it was four tires. Toni also asked about the credibility of Discord. It all depends on the type of people on various Discord servers. She should be safe with ours.

Greg Lenihan finally got the option to extend his Windows 10 service updates for another year. His computer said he was using the Windows 10 backup feature, so he got a free update, although Greg was not aware of backing up anything to Microsoft. His wife's Win 10 computer got updated for the same reason.

Warren Hill says those with Q.com e-mail addresses will have to change their domain address to "myctl.com." CenturyLink says he did not have to do anything, but Warren questioned this. John Pearce said the Xfinity e-mail service is going from Comcast to Yahoo, but the domain was staying the same. Those responding to Warren thought he would have to notify everyone of the address change. Cary Quinn recommended using the e-mail signature line to let everyone know the address is changing.

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In This Issue

Articles

P*PCompAS

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Editor: Greg Lenihan
Librarian: Paul Godfrey
Membership: Ann Titus

Committees

Audio: Vacant
Hospitality: Antoinette Logan
Programs: Cary Quinn
Publicity: Vacant
Nominating: Vacant

Board of Directors

John Pearce
Bob Logan
David George
Greg Lenihan
Joe Nuvolini

President Paul Godfrey presiding over the Octpber membership meeting. A few members are in the background attending via Zoom.

Members physically attending the October 2025 meeting.

Digerati at the October breakfast

4 Free Tools I Keep on My USB Drive to Fix Any Windows PC

by Rich Hein, reprinted with permission from HowToGeek.com

Original article at https://www.howtogeek.com/4-free-tools-i-keep-on-my-usb-drive-to-fix-any-windows-pc/

I've spent more hours than I care to admit diagnosing stubborn Windows problems: sluggish laptops, desktop crashes, weird startup behavior, you name it. Over the years, I've used plenty of different tools, from flashy "PC optimizers" that promise too much, to hidden system utilities that actually deliver. What I've learned is that many of the best ones are lightweight, reliable, and give you a clear view of what's really happening under the hood, so to speak.

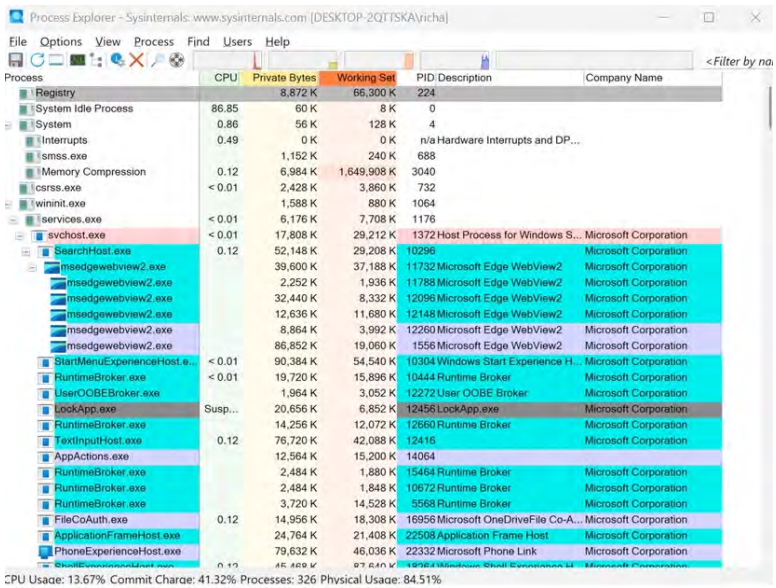
Instead of relying on Windows' built-in diagnostic tools and utilities, or worse, having to scramble to find the right application or utility when something breaks, I keep some trusted, third-party tools on my USB drive. These four tools are free, lightweight and portable, and they're always helpful when Windows starts acting out.

Sysinternals: The Free Microsoft Windows Toolkit

If you've spent any amount of time digging into Windows problems, then you've likely heard of Sysinternals Suite. The handy toolkit was originally built by Mark Russinovich and Bryce Cogswell, then it was later acquired by Microsoft. It consists of a free collection of utilities that give you a deeper layer of insight into Windows that you can't quite get with Windows built-in tools and utilities.

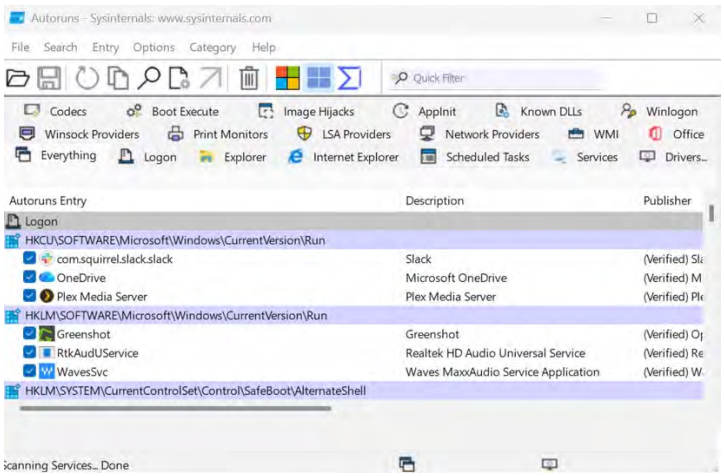
The suite has dozens of utilities, but these are the three I use primarily.

Process Explorer



Process Explorer is a more advanced version of Task Manager. It shows you exactly what processes are running, what resources they're using, along with which files or DLLs they've locked, and other interesting details. If a system seems sluggish or bogged down, or you can't delete a file, this is a good place to start your analysis.

Autoruns



Windows has a habit of loading things in the background, and Autoruns gives you all the details. It shows every startup item, scheduled task, and shell extension. This tool makes it easier to identify bloatware or malware in your system.

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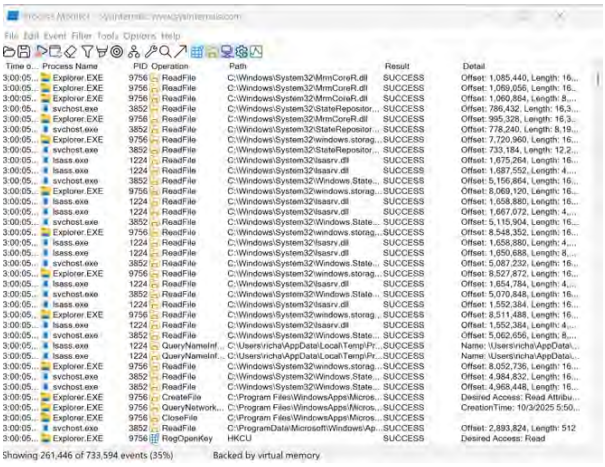
Meeting Minutes (Cont. from pg 1)

PRESENTATION

Three videos from Tech for Senior were shown. Two were about Google's Notebook LM and the other was about heart monitoring with a Smartwatch. ☺

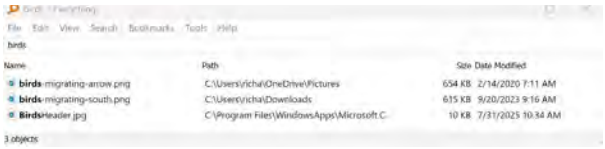
4 Free USB Tools (Cont. from page 3)

Process Monitor (ProcMon)



This utility gives deep insight into Windows processes. It logs real-time file system, registry, and process activities. If you're troubleshooting an application that keeps crashing, or having application installation problems, this tool can help you track down the problem.

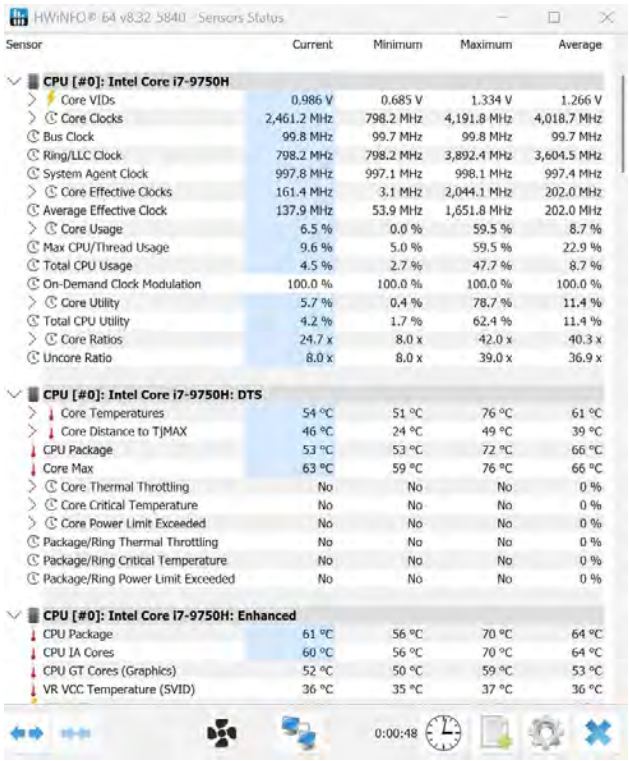
Everything: My Go-To When Windows Search Lets Me Down



Where Sysinternals helps analyze what's happening in Windows, Everything helps search my hard drives. Yes, Windows search has gotten better, but it's still slow, resource-intensive, and tied to Bing and Start menu results. When I need to know where a file is, especially on someone else's PC, I use Everything.

Unlike Windows built-in search, Everything doesn't crawl the contents of your files. Instead, it quickly builds an index of filenames and paths, resulting in nearly instantaneous search results as you type. There's no lag, or background indexing, just fast search results. If you're like me, after you use it a few times, Windows search will feel slow and clumsy.

HWiNFO: A Utility for Checking Temps, Fans, and Voltages



While Sysinternals is for monitoring, diagnosing, and troubleshooting Windows applications, processes, and the operating system itself, HWiNFO is a free utility that monitors what's going on with your PC's hardware in real-time. You can monitor fan speeds, voltages, clock rates, CPU temps, RAM, and more.

An overheating processor can cause your system to slow down, crash or behave strangely. These symptoms can look like a software glitch, or malware, but with HWiNFO, I can put my PC under a load and monitor my CPU temps and other hardware to make sure they're operating within specs.

I also use it to establish a baseline. When my wife tells me her computer is running slow, I can run HWiNFO and immediately see things like whether the CPU is boosting properly, the RAM is stable, and the system is running within spec. For troubleshooting physical problems, it's a great free resource.

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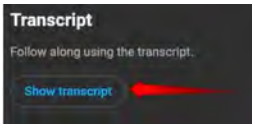
Tip: Read Along with YouTube's Transcript Feature. YouTube offers a built-in transcript feature that displays the spoken content of a video in text form, along with timestamps. This is useful for quickly skimming the content, locating a specific section without watching the entire video, following along with the sound off, or understanding unclear audio or accents. To get the transcript of a YouTube video, open the relevant video, scroll to its description, and click on "Show Transcript." A panel will appear on the right side of the window, showing the full transcript with timestamps.



Online College for Life-Long Learning

By Bob Rankin, http://askbobrankin.com, published through the APCUG

Learning is a life-long process. As an adult, going back to college used to be a daunting prospect. But today it's easy, often free, and just a few clicks away. "Massively Open Online Classes" presented by top universities provide opportunities to learn at your own pace, in your style, from wherever you happen to be You might even earn college credits! Read on to learn what you can learn...

What is a MOOC?

Massively Open Online Classes, also known as MOOCs, offer the opportunity to gain knowledge for personal growth. You might not get academic credits for MOOCs, much less a Harvard MBA degree. But if you're looking for tools to use in your job, or skills to help you find a new job, then MOOCs make perfect sense. Some do offer course certificates to share with your professional network and potential employers. At least one offers a path to accredited online master's degrees. Many people are just looking to learn for the pleasure of learning, and MOOCs are ideal for them, too.

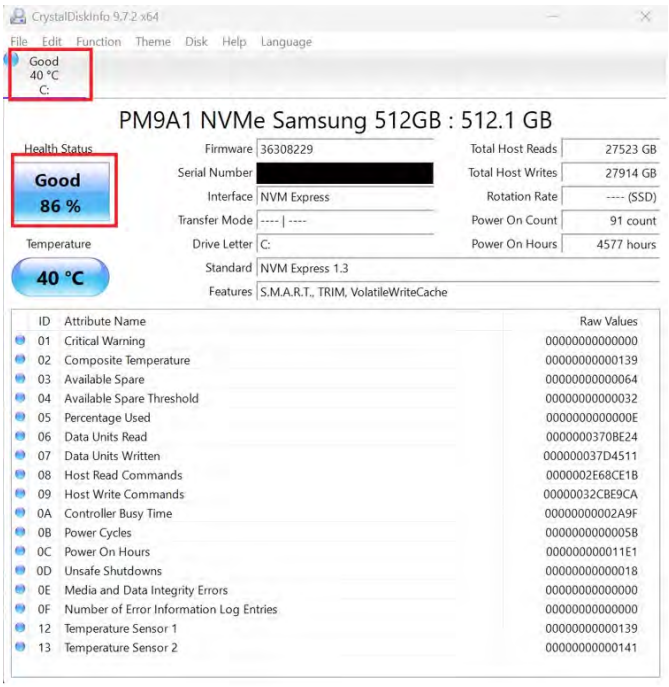
Various styles of MOOCs have evolved to suit the learning modes and preferences of different students. Yes, some MOOCs are dry, sparse things consisting only of reading texts and taking quizzes. But others include interactive communication with an instructor and even fellow students.

Live streaming video sessions closely approximate the traditional classroom environment, allowing all students to see and hear a lecturer and submit questions that are answered at the appropriate moments in a lecture. Usually, you don't even have to take notes; the video and chat sessions are preserved for students' later review. Technologies such as Zoom, Webex, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet are now familiar to most people, having gained popularity in the wake of the pandemic.

Continued on page 6

4 Free USB Tools (Cont. from page 4)

CrystalDiskInfo: Catch a Failing Drive Before It Dies



If you've owned a computer long enough, you've experienced a hard drive failure. To me, these are one of the most frustrating Windows problems you can run into. It usually starts small, files taking longer to open, slower boot times, or random hangs after startup. If you don't catch it early, it can end in total drive failure and lost data. That's why I keep CrystalDiskInfo on my flash drive.

This free tool reads the Self-Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Technology (S.M.A.R.T.) data that is built into hard drives and SSDs, then turns that data into something simple for everyone to grasp, a Good, Caution, or Bad status. Of course, it does more than that, it also shows temperatures, error counts, reallocated sectors, and more. This data has helped me identify the red flags that indicate a hard drive was ailing or on its way out, giving me the time to back up the data properly.

Windows comes with plenty of troubleshooting tools built right in, but when things get wonky, I find they don't often give the necessary level of detail to identify and resolve the problem. That's why I always keep these four tools on my troubleshooting flash drive. They help me cover most of the common failure points on my Windows PC. ☺

Online College (Continued from page 5)

Class discussions are just another application of videoconferencing technology as applied in MOOCs. Online forums where students and faculty can communicate publicly but asynchronously are also common. Microsoft Teams and Slack are friendly collaboration platforms allowing groups of users to communicate and collaborate. They offer direct messaging, file sharing, and integration with tools like Google Drive or Microsoft OneDrive. If you've ever been a participant in a Facebook group, you'll find this similar. You may find that what you seek was discussed a year ago by another group of classmates, or you may post a question and get fresh answers in nearly real time.

The software platform on which a MOOC is presented has a big impact on the student's experience. One of the most widely used MOOC platforms is Coursera which currently hosts over 10,000 courses from over 350 partner schools. Over 35 million people have used Coursera to learn new skills. In general, it's easier to learn a course's content when you're not busy learning a new platform.

What Khan You Learn?

Coursera says all their courses are taught by top instructors from the world's best universities and educational institutions. Among Coursera's partner schools are names like Carnegie Mellon, Duke University, Johns Hopkins, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale. Courses include recorded video lectures, auto-graded and peer-reviewed assignments, and community discussion forums.

Some of the most popular Coursera MOOCs are Programming for Everybody, Data Science, Chinese for Beginners, Introduction to Public Speaking, and How to Understand Arguments. (Is anyone else recalling a Monty Python sketch after seeing that last item?) Coursera offers Courses, which will help you learn a new skill in 4-6 weeks. Most are priced at $39-$99. Also available are more in-depth 4-6 month Specializations and Professional Certificates to help you master a specific career skill. These are priced at $39-$79 per month. Accredited online degree programs in business, computer science, and data science are offered via Coursera's university partners, and require 2-4 years of study.

And there are a bunch of free Coursera classes too! Topics include Machine Learning, Photography, Successful Negotiation Strategies, Financial Markets, Philosophy, and Cryptography.

Platforms, Styles and Results

Udemy offers over 250,000 online courses taught by experts. You can learn computer programming, web design, photography, business skills, music and many other topics. If you have expertise in a certain field, you can even create your own online course at Udemy. Udemy's pricing follows a flexible pay-per-course model combined with an optional subscription plan called the Udemy Personal Plan, designed for continuous learners. Standard course prices range from $9.99 to $199.99, depending on the content length, instructor reputation, and topic.

Khan Academy is another platform for MOOCs, which I reviewed in my 2011 article How to Learn Almost Anything For Free. Its style is the short, 15-30 minute video presentation that pares a subject down to its essence. Some academics fault Khan for its brevity, but many busy working students appreciate its cogency. Millions of people have taken free Khan Academy classes since it started in 2009.

Other options for online learning and free college classes are edX, MIT OpenCourseWare, Harvard Online Learning, and Alison.

Are online classes as effective as in-person on campus learning? Of course, that depends on the student. A 2010 study by the U.S. Department of Education found that "classes with online learning (whether taught completely online or blended) on average produce stronger student learning outcomes than do classes with solely face-to-face instruction."

More recently, a 2023 meta-analysis confirmed that online learning is at least as effective as traditional in-class instruction, with blended and flipped classroom approaches showing significantly superior outcomes compared to fully face-to-face learning. (A flipped classroom in the context of online learning is a teaching model that reverses traditional learning by having students first engage with new course content outside of class—commonly through watching pre-recorded video lectures, participating in online discussions, or completing readings at home.)

Is a MOOC right for you? If you are looking to earn transferable degree credits, perhaps not; very few schools accept MOOC coursework for credit. But if you want to learn (to gain new skills or just for fun) without taking out a second mortgage or losing sleep, then a MOOC is something to consider. ☺

Why Is My Machine Slowing Down?

Maybe it's not just tired or overworked.

By Leo A. Notenboom, https://newsletter.askleo.com; published under the Creative Commons License

Is your once-speedy computer crawling? From hidden malware to too many background apps, there are plenty of reasons your PC might feel sluggish. I'll walk you through the most common causes and what you can do to get things running smoothly again.

Perhaps when you purchased it, your computer ran like a champ and quickly did everything you needed. Now, well, not so much. Perhaps it takes forever to boot. Or starting applications is slower than molasses. Or maybe the machine just acts sluggish when you try to use it for just about anything.

Regardless of the specifics, the underlying theme is simple: *It's slow*.

There are *so many* reasons a machine could slow down. I'll list a few of the most common reasons here, along with some advice on what steps to take.

In Short

Your slow machine

A slow PC can be caused by malware, misbehaving programs, too many apps running, aging updates, or failing hardware. Check for viruses, trim unnecessary startup programs, add RAM or an SSD, and, of course, back up in case of hardware failure. Small fixes can often bring big speed improvements.

We're talking about a slow *computer*

An assumption I'm making here is that it's your *entire computer* that is slow, not just one or two applications.

For example, if Edge has slowed down while the rest of your software runs just fine, you need a different approach than what I'll outline here. Instead, you'll need to focus on the specific applications that are behaving slowly. The solutions may be the same, but arriving at those solutions and choosing one will depend on investigating the issue with that specific application.

Here, we're talking about a slow *computer*: just about everything seems slow.

Sudden slowdowns: Malware comes to mind

If the slowdown is sudden and severe, the first thing that comes to mind these days is malware.

Different malware does different things, and it behaves differently on different machines. One symptom of malware can be a suddenly slow or sluggish system.

Your security software is your first line of defense. Make sure it's up to date, and run full scans. Here's How to Run a Full Scan Using Windows Security.

Sudden slowdowns: A program run amok

Another step I take when my computer seems to slow down, particularly if it's sudden and unexpected, is to fire up Process Explorer. Very often, the source of a system slowdown can be attributed to a single program running on your machine that is attempting to use all available processing resources. When that happens, other programs (often including Windows itself) aren't able to respond to your actions as quickly.

How Do I Find Out What Program Is Using all My CPU? walks you through the steps to identify any processes in this state.

Similarly, a program that's using the disk heavily (i.e., the activity light isn't even flickering, it's just *on*), or even using the network heavily, can manifest as a slow system. Why Do I Have Constant Disk Activity in Windows? and How to Monitor Network Activity and Speed up Your Machine's Connection will help you identify those culprits, if present.

Sudden or gradual slowdowns: impending hardware failure

This isn't as common, but it definitely happens.

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Slowing Down (Cont. from page 7)

We normally think of most hardware failures as sudden and catastrophic. Sometimes, they're a little less catastrophic than we think.

For example, if a sector on a magnetic hard disk is going bad, that may first manifest as a slowdown whenever that sector is accessed. The disk drive will try multiple times to read a marginally bad sector before giving up, and that takes time. If multiple sectors are affected (which is common if it's an area on the disk media that's been damaged, for example), then this might happen for more than one sector, and that time adds up. The system keeps working because the sectors aren't so bad that they actually fail, but they take additional time to be read because they're going bad.

Back up, of course. Impending failure can quickly become actual failure and data loss.

In situations like this, when dealing with traditional magnetic hard disks, I start by running CHKDSK /R, and/or SpinRite to diagnose and possibly repair the hard disk in question.

Gradual slowdowns: Too much stuff

In my experience, the #1 cause of a system gradually slowing down over time is that it's being asked to do too much.

Many software packages install components that run all the time, whether or not you're actively working with the software in question. Install enough of those types of packages, and you may have a small army of components all starting automatically and running in the background, using resources constantly.

To be clear, some software needs to run all the time. But I see many that don't really need to, but run all the time anyway. Examples include:

- Instant messaging programs like WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Signal, and others.
- File sync programs like Dropbox, OneDrive, and others.
- Screen capture utilities like SnagIt.
- Encryption tools like VeraCrypt and Cryptomator.
- Software update checkers for just about any app.

Those are all legitimate, depending on how you use your computer.

I've also seen applications install tools that load the application when you boot your computer, whether you use the application or not. The reason? It makes your eventual use of the app *seem* faster, since it's already loaded. Unfortunately, it's at the cost of a slower boot or sign-in time.

There are two approaches to resolving the "too much stuff" scenario.

- **Run less stuff.** Review the list of software running on your machine when you're not doing anything (Task Manager will help) and question everything you've installed. Uninstall everything you don't really need.
- **Beef up your computer.** It's common knowledge that adding RAM to your computer is one of the quickest ways to speed it up, and this is why. If RAM is a constraint for the software you're running, your computer will slow down. Adding RAM to your system, if it's possible, fixes that. Switching a traditional HDD to an SSD can also provide a significant improvement.

Gradual slowdowns: Updates

In a sense, this falls into the "too much stuff" category, but it applies even if you haven't made a single change.

It's commonly understood that systems get bigger over time. That's more or less the nature of software evolution and our expectations of ever-increasing functionality and support.

While we normally associate that with major version updates (i.e., Windows 11 is larger than Windows 10), it can actually happen — slowly — at the system or application update level as well.

Years of updates slowly increase the resource requirements of your operating system and applications. Particularly if your system is already somewhat marginal, that increase can be enough to affect your overall performance.

Note that I'm not talking about files left behind after an update (unless, of course, your hard disk is full), but simply the scenario where the patched version of an application might need ever so slightly more RAM than before. Repeat that for all the applications you have installed and the updates your system receives, and it adds up.

Once again, adding RAM or uninstalling programs you don't use can help if this is the case.

Do this

Like so many things, there's no single, simple answer to computer slowdowns. It's a process of investigation and elimination. Hopefully, though, you now have a solid list of things to consider when your computer starts to slow down. ☺

Windows 11 Tips

From Kim Komando newsletters

Customize your Windows 11 Taskbar: Want quick access to an app? Just drag a **desktop shortcut** down to the **Taskbar**, or right-click something in the **Start menu** and hit **Pin to taskbar**. To remove an app, right-click > **Unpin from taskbar**. Don't like **Widgets**? Go to **Settings** > **Personalization** > **Taskbar** and toggle them **off**.

Speed up old PCs: On **Windows 11**, flashy animations and effects can slow down an older computer. Go to **Settings** > **Accessibility** > **Visual effects** and toggle off **Transparency effects** and **Animation effects**. Apps will open more basic and your desktop will look plainer, but you'll get a snappier system in return.

Fix Windows 11 right-click menus: Microsoft messed with **context menus** so you only see "important" options, and the rest are hidden under **Show more options**. Annoying, right? Quick fix: Hold **Shift** + **right-click** on any file or folder to see the full menu instantly. So much for simplifying things.

Delete bloatware on Windows 11: Your PC comes preloaded with apps you'll never use. They waste space and can slow performance by running in the background. Go to **Settings** > **Apps** > **Installed apps**. Scroll the list, click the **three-dot menu** on an app (like Xbox Live) and hit **Uninstall**. Just be careful not to touch system apps.

Boost your laptop battery: On **Windows 11**, turn on **Dynamic Refresh Rate** to adjust your screen based on what you're doing. It ramps up for smooth performance during intense tasks, but drops on static pages to save power. Go to **Settings** > **System** > **Display** > **Advanced Display** > **Choose a refresh rate** > **Dynamic refresh rate**.

Screenshot and record on Windows 11: For quick screenshots, press **Windows key** + **Shift** + **S** to open the **Snipping Tool**, then drag to capture the area you want. For recording, press **Windows key** + **Shift** + **R**, select the area you want again, and hit **Start**.

Type faster on Windows 11: Cut down on typos with built-in autocorrect. Go to **Settings** > **Time & language** > **Typing** and toggle on **Show text suggestions when typing on the physical keyboard** and **Autocorrect misspelled words**. Works in Word documents, Microsoft Teams and most third-party apps.

Hide Taskbar extras on Windows 11: Widgets and the **Task view** button can't be unpinned like regular apps, but you can still remove them. Right-click an empty spot on the **Taskbar**, select **Taskbar settings**, and under **Taskbar items**, toggle off **Task view** and **Widgets**. FYI: You can also hide the **Search box** from here.

Troubleshooting on Windows 11: Running into issues like no sound, no internet or a printer that won't connect? Go to **Settings** > **System** > **Troubleshoot** > **Other troubleshooters**. You'll see options like **Audio**, **Network & Internet**, **Printer** and more. Click **Run** next to the one giving you problems, then follow the prompts to diagnose and fix it.

Update apps on Windows fast: No need to check each one manually. In the **Search bar**, open **Command Prompt**, right-click it, and choose **Run as administrator**. Then type "winget upgrade" and hit **Enter**. You'll see apps with updates and maybe a few you can delete

Stay focused on Windows 11: Need to work without distractions? Go to **Settings** > **System** > **Focus**. Set your **Session duration**, and choose options like **Do Not Disturb** or **Hiding taskbar flashes**. When you're ready, click **Start focus session**, and a timer will begin in the **Clock app** to keep you on track.

Rename your Windows 11 PC: I called mine "Sir Crash-a-Lot." Personalize it by going to **Settings** > **System** > **About** > **Rename this PC**. Type your new name, click **Next**, then **Restart** to apply. Now it's easier to identify your computer when you're on a network or connecting via Bluetooth. ☺

P*PCompAS Newsletter
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Coming Events:
Next Membership Meeting: 1 November beginning at 9 am (see directions below)
Next Breakfast Meeting: 15 November @ 8:00 am, Golden Corral, 1970 Waynoka Road
Newsletter Deadline: 22 November

Check out our Web page at: http://ppcompas.apcug.org