# 7 secrets of Windows Task Manager every computer user should know

By Komando Staff, Komando.com, February 25, 2017

If you're a longtime Windows user, you've probably encountered the Task Manager on more than one occasion. This handy Windows feature gives you an overview of what your computer is doing from applications and processes to resource usage.

We've told you in the past how to use it to track down programs and apps that are causing computer crashes and other forms of instability. However, there are other things you can do with Task Manager you might not realize, especially in the newer Windows 8.1 and 10 versions. So, let's see what those are.

## 1. LAUNCHING TASK MANAGER

OK, this one sounds basic, but many people use more steps than needed to launch Task Manager. In fact, if we asked you to launch it right now, you'd probably hit the handy shortcut CTRL + ALT + DEL (also known as the "three-finger salute") and then select "Task Manager" from the list of options.

That works, but did you know you can open Task Manager directly with the shortcut CTRL + SHIFT + ESC? If you have to open Task Manager frequently, dropping that extra step saves you a lot of time over the long run.

If you aren't big on keyboard shortcuts, simply right-click on a blank area of the Windows taskbar and select "Task Manager." And if you're looking for some old-school command-line nostalgia, you can hit Windows Key + R (or go to Start>>Run), type the command "taskmgr" and hit Enter.

Hint: In Windows 8.1 and 10, the first time you open the Task Manager you aren't going to see very many options. Click the "More Details" link in the bottom-left corner of the Task Manager window to get the useful information.

## 2. MORE ADVANCED FREEZE-FIXING

We have previously told you [how to fix a frozen computer](). More often than not, however, it's a single program that's going to freeze on you. If you wait long enough, Windows will usually give you the option of shutting it down, but who wants to wait?

Open up Task Manager and go to the Processes tab. Right-click on the process and choose "End Process." That will kill that program completely. If you're using Windows Vista or 7, you can go to the Applications tab first, right-click on the program that says "Not responding" and select "Go To Process" to select the correct process in the Processes tab.

However, in Windows 8.1 and 10 there's a new option you might want to use first. In the Processes tab, find the program or process that appears to be frozen. Right-click and select "Go to Details" to see the process in the Details tab. Then right-click on the process and choose "Analyze Wait Chain."

This will show you if there's another process that's holding up the frozen process. You might discover that the problem isn't with the program you think. You can then go deal with the other program. You can save the valuable time you'd spend trying to get the wrong program to stop misbehaving.

## 3. BEFORE DOING A FULL RESTART

On occasion, you'll run into the situation where your programs aren't frozen, but the Windows taskbar and folders stop responding. If you wait long enough, sometimes Windows will give you the message that Windows Explorer, or explorer.exe, has crashed and is restarting. Windows Explorer is the underlying program that handles most of what you think of as "Windows."

If you run into this situation, however, you don't have to wait. If your computer is acting up and you're thinking of doing a lengthy restart, this is also a faster trick you might want to try.

Open Task Manager and go to the Processes tab. In Windows 10 and 8.1, scroll down to the "Windows Explorer" process. Right-click on it and choose "Restart." Your taskbar and any open folders will disappear and come back, hopefully working correctly again.

For Windows 7 and Vista, find "explorer.exe" in the process list, right-click and choose "End process." This is less elegant, but it should still work. And if not, you were going to restart anyway. Find out why restarting your computer can fix a lot of problems.

## 4. FIND PROGRAM FOLDERS

There are times when you need to find the folder where a program or Windows process lives on your hard drive. You could be spending many minutes hunting through the hard drive and Program Files or Windows directories. An easier option is to run the program and then open up Task Manager.

In Windows 8.1 and 10, go to the Processes tab and scroll down to find the program name or another process you want to find. Right-click on it and select "Open file location." The program folder will open right up.

For Windows Vista and 10, open Task Manager and go to the Applications tab. Right-click on the program and select "Go To Process" to select the process in the Processes tab (if you already know the process name, just find it in the Processes tab). Then right-click on the process and select "Open File Location." The program folder will open right up.

**5. KEEP AN EYE ON PERFORMANCE**

Aside from tracking down trouble programs, Task Manager is a great place to keep an eye on your computer's performance. You can see if a particular program is hogging too many resources, or realize you need to upgrade your RAM or get a faster hard drive.

Simply open Task Manager and go to the Performance tab. Here you'll see your processor usage, memory usage, disk usage, network (Ethernet and/or Wi-Fi) usage and more. If you really want to get serious details, click the "Open Resource Monitor" link at the bottom of the window.

In Windows 8.1 and 10, you can click on each small graph on the left to get more detail on a particular system. So, you can see exactly what processor you have and how fast it's running, or how much RAM you have and what kind. You can see how large your hard drive is and how fast your network is sending and receiving information, along with your IP addresses.

Another handy trick if you're trying to collect information for a repair tech or keeping track over time is to right-click on a graph and select "Copy." Then paste into a word processor or email and you'll get a snapshot of all your readings at that point in time.

**6. LOOK UP PROCESSES ONLINE**

In Windows Vista and 7, if you want to check out a suspicious process, you need to open up a browser and type in the process name to do a search. In Windows 8.1 and 10, simply right-click on a process and select "Search online" to instantly see what the internet knows about it.

**7. CUSTOMIZE TASK MANAGER**

By default, Task Manager shows most people what they need to know. However, there are times you might want to know more.

In all versions of Windows, for example, you can add more columns of information to the Processes tab. In Windows 8.1 and 10, simply right-click on the column header, such as where it says "Name." You'll see a number of other columns you can add, such as Type, Status, Publisher, etc.

Two columns you might want to use are "Process name" and "Publisher." The Process name shows you the actual .exe name of the process, just like in Windows 7 and Vista, instead of just what it says it is. This can help you spot programs that might be telling you one thing but are really another.

Similarly, the Publisher column can tell you where the process comes from. For example, a lot of them will say "Microsoft Corporation." If you spot a company you don't recognize, you can look them up and see if they're on the up-and-up.

In Windows Vista and 7, add more columns by going to View >> Select Columns. These options are going to be a lot more detailed than you probably need. For Windows 8.1 and 10, these same column options can be added in the Details tab of the Task Manager.

Finally, in Windows 8.1 and 10, you can also adjust whether you see percentages or absolute values. For example, in the Processes tab, you might see in the Memory column header that 70 percent of your memory is in use.

However, for each process, you see numbers like "2.2 MB" or "25 MB." Those numbers are useful, but you might want to see the percentage of memory each process is using to more quickly track down the hogs.

Right-click on a process and go to Resources values >> Memory >> Percents. Now you'll see the percentage each process takes up. You can do the same for Disk and Network.