SIDEBAR Operating Systems

Windows 11 Task Manager Cheat Sheet

Sidebar

Operating Systems · Windows 11 Task Manager Cheat Sheet

The tabs, columns and shortcuts of the Windows 11 Task Manager (the redesigned one), and the common ways its numbers are misread. Written from my own knowledge of Windows 11 and from the memory work in the course Windows 11 Memory, Performance & Crash Forensics (the Memory column, Commit size and the Performance-tab figures were rebuilt from counters). The Task Manager window itself was not clicked through on this machine (Windows 11 Pro, build 26300), so menu wording may differ slightly between builds.

OPENING IT

`Ctrl+Shift+Esc`	Opens Task Manager directly
`Ctrl+Alt+Del`	The security screen, then Task Manager
`Right-click Start`	The Start button menu has Task Manager
`taskmgr`	Win+R, or any prompt

THE PAGES (LEFT NAVIGATION)

`Processes`	Grouped list: Apps, Background processes, Windows processes. Expand a row for its child processes
`Performance`	CPU, Memory, Disk, Ethernet/Wi-Fi, GPU graphs. Open Resource Monitor from here
`App history`	CPU and network use per app over time (mostly Store apps)
`Startup apps`	What starts at sign-in, with a *Startup impact* rating from the last start. Right-click to Disable
`Users`	Signed-in users and what each is using; Disconnect or Sign off
`Details`	The classic process list: PID, status, user name, plus the extra columns below
`Services`	Windows services: start, stop, restart; *Open Services* for the full console
`Settings (gear)`	Default start page, Always on top, Hide when minimised, Show full account name, Real-time update speed

PROCESSES PAGE: RIGHT-CLICK A PROCESS

`End task`	Closes the process (and its children if you chose the group). Unsaved work is lost
`Efficiency mode`	Lowers priority and CPU speed for that process. Windows suggests it with a leaf icon
`Resource values`	Memory, Disk and Network: choose Values (MB) or Percents
`Go to details`	Jumps to the process on the Details page
`Open file location`	Where the program's file lives: the quickest check on an unfamiliar name
`Search online`	Looks up the process name with your default search engine
`Properties`	File details and digital signature
`Right-click a column header`	Choose columns: Type, Status, Publisher, PID, Process name, Command line (if present in your build)

WHAT THE COLUMNS MEAN

`Memory (Processes page)`	Private working set: RAM only this process uses. Not the working set shown elsewhere, and not commit
`Working set (memory)`	Details page: RAM in use, including pages shared with other processes
`Commit size`	Details page: private bytes, memory the process has asked for; can far exceed its RAM use
`Handles`	Open handles; a number that climbs without limit points at a leak
`Threads`	How many threads
`CPU`	Share of total CPU time over a short window (all cores combined)
`Disk / Network`	Current read+write rate, not total transferred
`GPU / GPU engine`	Share of the busiest engine, and which engine
`Power usage`	Estimated, relative, and rough: not a measurement
`Select columns (Details)`	Right-click a header > Select columns: PID, Status, User name, CPU, Working set, Peak working set, Commit size, Page faults, Handles, Threads, Command line, Platform, Elevated and more

THE PERFORMANCE PAGE

`CPU`	Utilisation, speed, processes, threads, handles, up time; base speed, sockets, cores, logical processors
`Memory`	In use (compressed), Available, Committed (charge/limit), Cached, Paged pool, Non-paged pool; slots, speed, form factor, hardware reserved
`Disk`	Active time, average response time, read/write speed; its type (SSD, HDD) and capacity
`Ethernet / Wi-Fi`	Send and receive, adapter name and IP addresses
`GPU`	Per-engine graphs, dedicated and shared memory, driver version and date
`Right-click a graph`	Change graph to Logical processors, Summary view, Copy
`Open Resource Monitor`	Link at the bottom of the Performance page (or run `resmon`)

DETAILS PAGE: POWER-USER ACTIONS

`Set priority`	Realtime to Low. Raising priority rarely helps; Realtime can freeze the PC
`Set affinity`	Which logical processors a process may use (until it restarts)
`Analyze wait chain`	For a hung program: what it is waiting for
`Create memory dump file`	Saves a dump of that one program's memory (to your Temp folder) for a developer or debugger
`UAC virtualization`	Whether old programs' writes to protected folders are redirected
`End process tree`	Ends the process and everything it started
`Update speed`	Settings > Real-time update speed: High, Normal, Low or Paused (pause to read a value)

COMMON MISREADINGS

`Memory % at the top`	Physical memory in use across the whole PC, not one program's share
`Available vs Free`	Available includes the Standby cache; low Free is normal and healthy
`Many Firefox or Edge rows`	Browsers use one process per tab or role: the group total overstates shared memory
`System interrupts`	A CPU pseudo-process for hardware interrupts; persistent high values suggest a driver or device problem
`Memory Compression`	A real process holding compressed pages; it keeps RAM free, not a fault
`Startup impact`	Measured at the last sign-in. *Not measured* is common on a fresh install
`Not responding`	The window did not answer for a few seconds; it may recover. Wait before ending
`100% disk with an SSD`	Look at Active time vs response time and the Disk column per process before blaming one program

TASK MANAGER SHOWS NOW, NOT WHY

It tells you what is using resources at this moment. For *why did it crash* use Event Viewer and Reliability Monitor (the Crash Triage and Event Viewer sheets); for *is something leaking* sample over hours (the Memory Troubleshooting sheet).

CHECK BEFORE YOU END TASK

A process you do not recognise: *Open file location* and *Properties* > *Digital Signatures* first. Ending a system process (e.g. csrss, wininit) can crash Windows.