Software Troubleshooting: How to Fix Common Issues with JAWS

# Introduction

Are you having trouble with JAWS? Is your screen reader not reading something in your document or on a webpage like you’re used to? Is the software behaving in an unusual way, or is it crashing altogether? This guide will explore some of the most common issues JAWS users may face, and will cover simple solutions that you can try to fix it.

DISCLAIMOR: While this guide will provide some basic troubleshooting options, it is not a replacement for the official documentation provided by the Vispero Training Team, including the free webinars covering this and many other topics.

# Effective Troubleshooting Techniques

The first step before attempting to resolve any issues is to determine the nature of the problem. For example:

* JAWS is not speaking at the logon screen, but starts after you log into your account. This could indicate that your settings are not configured for the program to start at logon.
* JAWS doesn’t properly read a certain element on a webpage or in a document. This could indicate that the page or document may not be marked up correctly, but could also be due to a setting that was changed.

Being able to isolate the issue is vital, and it will help you determine the next steps. To illustrate this, you would not immediately start uninstalling your JAWS software simply because it stopped announcing your heading levels.

After you isolate the issue, you can begin troubleshooting. However, the most effective technique is to always start with the simplest solution, then work your way to more complex ones. As mentioned above, the issue where JAWS suddenly stops announcing headings in a document or webpage, for example, does not require you to immediately uninstall JAWS. It also doesn’t require that you run a repair immediately either.

Instead, the best step would be to check your settings to see if a change may have caused the sudden issue. By understanding the nature of the issue and then using logical troubleshooting steps, you will not only save time because you can fix the issue right away, but it also might save you more trouble down the road. Let’s go over some general fixes.

# General JAWS Troubleshooting

If JAWS doesn’t read certain elements, it doesn’t navigate certain windows like your Outlook inbox completely, or seems to exhibit strange behavior, you can try the following:

1. Make sure the window is maximized.

Sometimes, if your program window isn’t fully maximized, JAWS may not be able to properly read the page. For example, users of Microsoft Office Outlook may experience an issue where all of the emails in a folder may appear missing. Try maximizing the Outlook window with **Windows + up arrow**, and your issue may be resolved.

1. Use the default mode option.

JAWS has a feature that allows users to easily check if a setting could be the cause of an issue. To toggle default mode on and off, first press **Insert + spacebar**. You will enter the layered command which will be identified by the popping sound. Once in the layered command, simply press Z on your keyboard. JAWS will announce that it has entered or exited default mode. When inside the mode, all user settings are disabled, and you will not be able to access features like Settings Center. You can test your document or webpage and note any changes in behavior. If your issue is resolved, this indicates that you may have a setting causing the problem.

1. Use the default switch.

While default mode can be an effective test for issues, the default switch is another option you can try. The difference between default mode and the default switch is that running JAWS in default mode simply places your currently running program in memory into the alternate mode, while the default switch requires you to completely unload JAWS from memory. In other words, you will start a completely fresh copy of JAWS with factory settings. To use the default switch:

1. Press **Windows + R** to launch the Run dialog box.
2. Type “jaws” and the version number. For example, if you’re running JAWS 2025, you’d type “jaws2025” without quotes.
3. Do not press the OK button. Instead, press the spacebar, then type “/default” to finish the command. The proper formatting should be “jaws2025 /default” without quotes. Replace 2025 with your appropriate version.
4. Once you have the command in the box, unload JAWS from memory. The simplest way to do this is to press **Insert + F4** followed by Enter to completely exit the program. If you have disabled the prompt to unload JAWS, it will automatically exit the program. It’s recommended that you wait about ten seconds to allow JAWS to be completely unloaded from memory.
5. After you have exited JAWS, simply press Enter, as focus will remain in the Run dialog box. Pressing Enter will launch JAWS using the default switch.

Once the program loads, test your document, webpage, or program. Note any changes in behavior. After you have tested for your issue, unload JAWS and relaunch it to restore your settings.

1. Check the Manage Application Settings dialog.

Manage Application Settings is a feature that allows you to temporarily enable and disable settings files. As you make changes to JAWS, it saves the changes you made in configuration files. When you open Manage Application Settings under the Options menu in JAWS, you will be placed in a list box containing items that you can check or uncheck. As you use the spacebar to check or uncheck the boxes, it turns on or off each settings file. This can help you isolate any settings that you may have configured. As you make changes, be sure to press the OK button and test for your issue. If you are able to solve the problem after disabling a settings group, such as the Excel file, you can leave this item unchecked.

1. Test with a secondary screen reader.

If all of the above options have not resolved your issue, the next step is to determine is this problem is universal. That is, does the problem happen across screen reading programs? If so, this means that you will need to contact the application developer, such as if you’re using an in-house or proprietary software package.

To test with another screen reader, first you will need to know what you have installed on your computer. By default, all Windows 10 and 11 machines come with a built-in screen reader known as Narrator. While many blind computer users have been hesitant to use this program, Microsoft has worked to make it very similar to other screen readers that you may be used to, like JAWS.

In addition, note any other programs that you may have, such as NVDA, older JAWS versions, and any other legacy software. The most common setup is typically JAWS and Narrator, though many users will also have NVDA installed.

Before testing another screen reader, turn off JAWS completely and allow it to unload from memory. Press **Insert + F4** followed by the Enter key to do this. While you can immediately launch your other program, it may help to give the computer about ten seconds to unload JAWS and all its processes from memory.

Launch your secondary program. For Narrator, simply press **Control + Windows + Enter**, and it will immediately begin speaking. For any other program, such as NVDA, the best way to do this is to use the desktop and first-letter navigation. Locate the icon using JAWS, and then disable it. Press Enter to launch your program, and it should begin speaking to you.

If you are familiar with the Run dialog box, you can use this as a method to launch the software instead. The critical factor here is to ensure that JAWS is not running. If you can replicate the behavior using a third-party program, you will need to contact the app developer, as the program needs to be modified to comply with accessibility standards.