Command Prompt: What It Is and How to Use It

Command Prompt can be found in the Start menu or Apps screen, or use the Run command cmd

By Tim Fisher · Updated on June 28, 2023

What to Know

- Command Prompt can be found in the **Start** menu or **Apps** screen.

- Alternatively, use the Run command **cmd**, or open from its original location: **C:\Windows\system32\cmd.exe**

- To use, enter a valid Command Prompt command.

Command Prompt is a command line interpreter application available in most Windows operating systems. It's used to execute entered commands. Most of those commands automate tasks via scripts and batch files, perform advanced administrative functions, and troubleshoot or solve certain kinds of Windows issues.
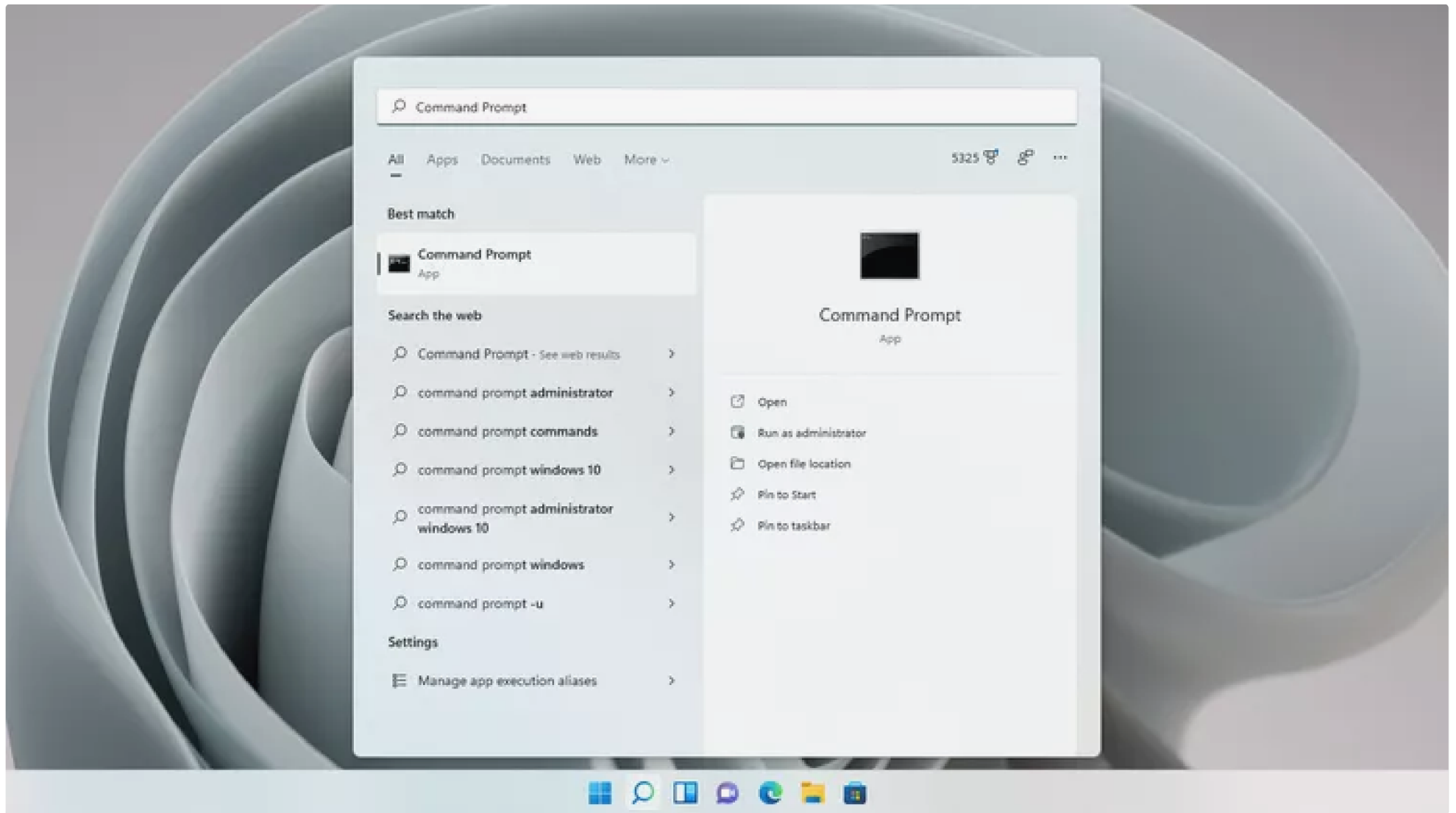
What Is Windows Command Prompt?

Command Prompt is officially called Windows Command Processor, but it's also sometimes referred to as the command shell or cmd prompt, or even by its filename, cmd.exe.

Command Prompt is sometimes incorrectly referred to as "the DOS prompt" or as MS-DOS. Command Prompt is a Windows program that emulates many of the command line abilities available in MS-DOS, but it's not MS-DOS.

> **Note:** Cmd is also an abbreviation for many other technology terms like *centralized message distribution*, *color monitor display*, and *common management database*, but none of them have anything to do with Command Prompt.

How to Access Command Prompt

There are several ways to open Command Prompt, but the "normal" method is via the **Command Prompt** shortcut located in the Start menu or on the Apps screen, depending on your version of Windows.

📷 Opening Command Prompt in Windows 11.

The shortcut is faster for most people, but another way to access Command Prompt is via the **cmd** Run command. You can also open **cmd.exe** from its original location:

```
C:\Windows\system32\cmd.exe
```

Yet another method for opening Command Prompt in some versions of Windows is through the [Power User Menu](#). However, you might see PowerShell there instead of Command Prompt depending on how your computer is set up. You can [switch between Command Prompt and PowerShell from the Win+X menu](#).

> **Note:** Many commands can only be executed if you're [running the Command Prompt as an administrator](#).

How to Use Command Prompt

To use Command Prompt, you enter a valid Command Prompt command along with any optional parameters. Command Prompt then executes the command as entered and performs the task or function it's designed to perform in Windows.

For example, executing the following Command Prompt command in your Downloads folder would remove all [MP3s](#) from that folder:

```
del *.mp3
```

Commands must be entered into Command Prompt exactly. The wrong [syntax](#) or a misspelling could cause the command to fail or worse; it could execute the wrong command or the right command in the wrong way. A comfort level with [reading command syntax](#) is recommended.

For example, executing the **dir** command will show a list of files and folders that exist at any specific location on the computer, but it doesn't actually *do* anything. However, change just a couple letters and it turns into the **del** command, which is how you delete files from Command Prompt!

Syntax is so important that with some commands, especially the delete command, adding even a single space can mean deleting entirely different data.

Here's an example where the space in the command breaks the line into two sections, essentially creating *two* commands where the files in the root folder (files) are deleted instead of the files in the subfolder (music):

```
del  C:\files\  music
```

The proper way to execute that command so as to remove files from the *music* folder instead is to remove the space so that the whole command is strung together correctly.

Don't let this scare you away from using Command Prompt commands, but definitely let it make you cautious.

Command Prompt Commands

A large number of commands exist in Command Prompt, but command availability varies across Microsoft Operating Systems.

Command Prompts for Windows Operating Systems:

- Windows 8 Commands

- Windows 7 Commands

- Windows XP Commands

- [All Windows Command Prompt Commands](#)

There are lots and lots of commands you can use in Command Prompt, but not all of them are used as often as others.

Here are some of the more commonly used Command Prompt commands that are utilized in a variety of circumstances: [chkdsk](#), [copy](#), ftp, [del](#), [format](#), [ping](#), [attrib](#), [net](#), [dir](#), [help](#), and [shutdown](#).

⇨ **[21 Best Command Prompt Tricks](#)**

Command Prompt Availability

Command Prompt is available on every Windows NT-based operating system which includes [Windows 11](#), [Windows 10](#), [Windows 8](#), [Windows 7](#), [Windows Vista](#), [Windows XP](#), and Windows 2000, as well as Windows Server 2012, 2008, and 2003.

Windows PowerShell, an advanced command line interpreter available in recent Windows versions, supplements the command executing abilities available in Command Prompt. Windows PowerShell may eventually replace the Command Prompt in a future version of Windows.

> **Tip:** [Windows Terminal](#) is another Microsoft-approved way of using Command Prompt and PowerShell within the same tool. In fact, Terminal has replaced Command Prompt in Windows 11.

FAQ

How do I use a command prompt in macOS?

The Terminal app is similar to the Command Prompt in Windows. To open it, go to **Applications** > **Utilities** > **Terminal**.

How do I change the directory in Command Prompt?

To change directories, enter **cd** followed by a space. Then drag the folder or type the name of the folder into the command prompt.