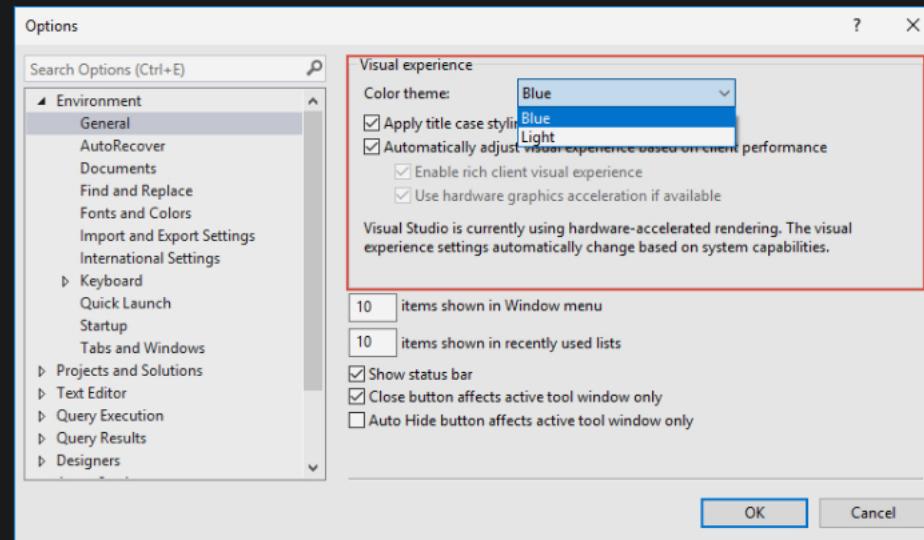


## Setting up the dark theme in SQL Server management studio

September 28, 2017 by Bojan Petrovic

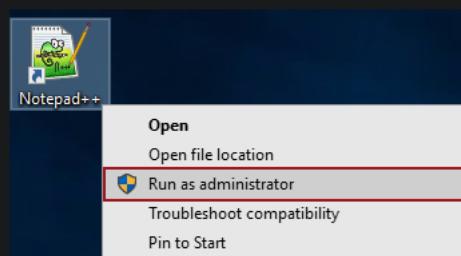
In SQL Server management studio 2016, Microsoft introduced a visual setting option to choose between the Blue and Light color theme. In both SSMS 2016 and the latest SSMS 17, the user can switch between the Blue or Light theme by going to Tools > Options > Environment > General > Color theme:



### SSMS Dark theme

Although it's not officially supported by Microsoft, the Dark theme is also available in SQL Server management studio 2016, 17, and the latest 18 version. The dark theme has been very popular among SQL database administrators and developers. To enable the SSMS Dark theme, follow these simple steps.

Close SSMS if it is running. Run any text editor as an administrator, in this case, Notepad++ is used, in order to edit the SSMS configuration file:



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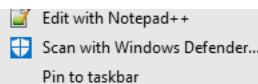
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The configuration (ssms.pkgundef) file is located at the following locations:

#### SSMS 2016

C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft SQL Server\130\Tools\Binn\ManagementStudio

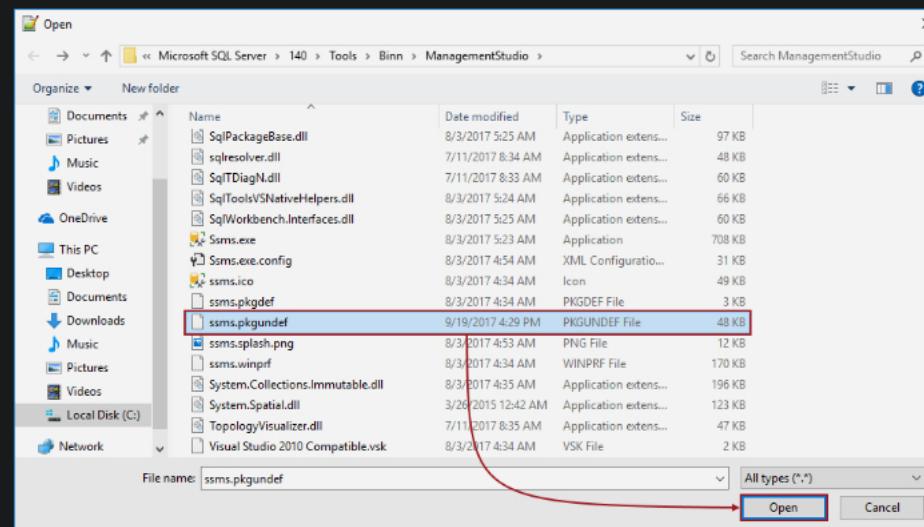
#### SSMS 17

C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft SQL Server\140\Tools\Binn\ManagementStudio

#### SSMS 18

C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft SQL Server Management Studio 18\Common7\IDE

Depending on SSMS version, locate and open the configuration file ([ssms.pkgundef](#)) in the text editor:

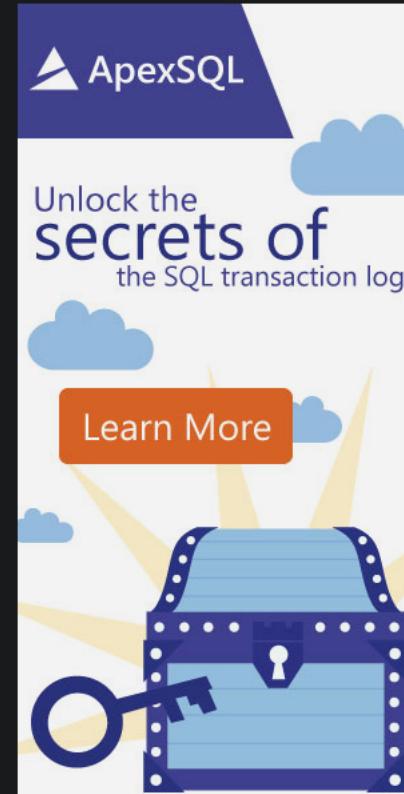


Once the file is opened in the text editor, scroll down and find the section of the code under the "Remove Dark Theme" heading, add "//" (without quotation marks) at the beginning of the first line like shown below, and save the file:

```
237 "(B22490B8-AA51-43B1-97EE-509A33B681F3)""=""  
238 "(b89cd7d2-19db-4b60-a958-e882ae71a66e)""=""  
239 "{f47a268a-bba9-442d-ac61-eeff97f906458)""=""  
240
```

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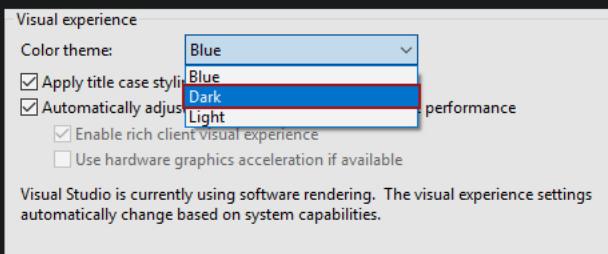
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```

241 // Remove_Dark_theme
242 // [$RootKey$\Themes\{1ded0138-47ce-435e-84ef-9eclf439b749}]
243 [$RootKey$\AD7Metrics\PortSupplier\{4103F338-2255-40C0-ACF5-7380E2BEA13D}]
244 [$RootKey$\External Tools\Error Loo&kup]
245 [$RootKey$\LightSwitch]
246 [$RootKey$\Debugger\LaunchHooks110]
247 [$RootKey$\DiagnosticsHub]
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256 [$RootKey$\Text Editor\JavaScript]
257 [$RootKey$\Text Editor\Memory]
258 [$RootKey$\Text Editor\Register]
259 [$RootKey$\Text Editor\ResJSON]
260 [$RootKey$\Text Editor\TypeScript]
261 [$RootKey$\Text Editor\VBScript]

```

Once completed, start SQL Server management studio and the Dark color theme will be available in the Color theme drop-down box:



Each upgrade of the latest generation of SSMS will set the configuration file back to its defaults. This will, of course, overwrite the tweak we made earlier and the dark theme will no longer be available in the options.

Instead of doing the same steps to enable the SSMS Dark theme each time there is an upgrade, thanks to a reader (Luka Lovre) who made a PowerShell script, there's an easier way with the same outcome which can be achieved in just a few clicks.

All we need to do is to run either Command Prompt or Windows PowerShell which is designed to improve the command-line and scripting. Either way, make sure to run the interpreter as an administrator or you'll get an error message that access to the path is denied:

I'd go with the PowerShell because in some cases even upon successful execution of the script in Command Prompt, the changes are not applied (the case with SSMS 17.7). So, in this example, Windows PowerShell is used.

To run the PowerShell as an administrator, click **Start**, type PowerShell, right-click **Windows PowerShell**, and then choose **Run as administrator**.

Depending on the version of SSMS, copy the appropriate script into the clipboard and hit Enter to run it:

## Overview of the SQL REPLACE function

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## SSMS 2016

```
powershell -Command "(gc 'C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft SQL Server\130\Tools\Binn\ManagementStudio\ssms.pkgundef') -replace '\[\'$RootKey`\$\Themes\\{1ded0138-47ce-435e-84ef-9ec1f439b749}\]', '//[$RootKey$\Themes\{1ded0138-47ce-435e-84ef-9ec1f439b749}]' | Out-File 'C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft SQL Server\130\Tools\Binn\ManagementStudio\ssms.pkgundef'"
```

## SSMS 17

```
powershell -Command "(gc 'C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft SQL Server\140\Tools\Binn\ManagementStudio\ssms.pkgundef') -replace '\[\'$RootKey`\$\Themes\\{1ded0138-47ce-435e-84ef-9ec1f439b749}\]', '//[$RootKey$\Themes\{1ded0138-47ce-435e-84ef-9ec1f439b749}]' | Out-File 'C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft SQL Server\140\Tools\Binn\ManagementStudio\ssms.pkgundef'"
```

## SSMS 18

```
powershell -Command "(gc 'C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft SQL Server Management Studio 18\Common7\IDE\ssms.pkgundef') -replace '\[\'$RootKey`\$\Themes\\{1ded0138-47ce-435e-84ef-9ec1f439b749}\]', '//[$RootKey$\Themes\{1ded0138-47ce-435e-84ef-9ec1f439b749}]' | Out-File 'C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft SQL Server Management Studio 18\Common7\IDE\ssms.pkgundef'"
```

There will be no return message that the operation succeeded except the blinking cursor on a new line.

Once either of those two methods is done, startup SSMS, and change the visual appearance to dark. Here's how it looks:

**Note:** As we mentioned before, the SSMS Dark theme is not officially supported and it probably never will be and that's why it is disabled by default. There might be some visual deviations e.g. white background in the Object Explorer, Results grid, etc.

To see how we've implemented visual themes in our products, see this article: [Visual themes in ApexSQL tools](#)

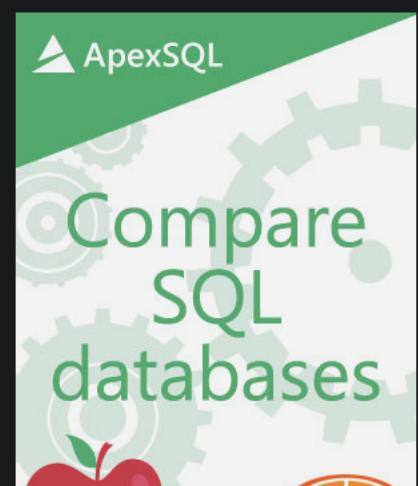
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To boost SQL coding productivity, check out these [free SQL tools](#) for SSMS and Visual Studio including T-SQL formatting, refactoring, auto-complete, text and data search, snippets and auto-replacements, SQL code and object comparison, multi-db script comparison, object decryption and more



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- How to restore a SQL Server database backup to an older version of SQL Server



The screenshot shows the ApexSQL Search interface. On the left is a tree view of database objects. In the center is a search results grid with columns: Name, Schema, Type, Column name, and Column value. The results show various columns from different tables containing the value 'new york'. A search bar at the top has the text 'new york'.

## 100% free SQL tools



**Bojan Petrovic**

Bojan has a passion for working with computers, servers, and network technology, and electronics. He likes to stay updated with developments and the most recent technology. He currently works at ApexSQL LLC as a Support Engineer with a bachelor's degree in IT Network and Electronics Technology.

He helps customers with any technical issues and does quality assurance (testing applications and

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The logo for ApexSQL SQL auditing features the company name 'ApexSQL' in white on a green triangle, followed by the words 'SQL auditing' in large white letters on a white background. Below the text is a stylized graphic of a yellow and brown ribbon or wave shape.

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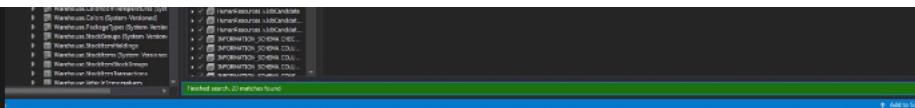
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ApexSQL



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He helps customers with any technical issues and does quality assurance (testing applications and preparing for production) for ApexSQL Complete, ApexSQL Refactor, and ApexSQL Search free add-ins.

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Name



Michael Hill • 2 years ago

This is fantastic and makes working in SSMS so much better. I do have to re-apply this change after each SSMS update (e.g. now, as I just updated from v17.3 to v17.4 and had to look this article up again), but that is a small price to pay to make it that much easier on the eyes. Thank you for sharing this.

9 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Luka Lovre → Michael Hill • a year ago

I made a powershell script just for that reason. This is for the location of SSMS 17. It needs to be run as administrator.

```
powershell -Command "(gc 'C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft SQL Server\140\Tools\Binn\ManagementStudio\ssms.pkgundef') -replace '\$RootKey\$Themes\\{1ded0138-47ce-435e-84ef-9ec1f439b749}', '$RootKey$Themes\\{1ded0138-47ce-435e-84ef-9ec1f439b749}' | Out-File 'C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft SQL Server\140\Tools\Binn\ManagementStudio\ssms.pkgundef'"
```

9 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Bojan Petrovic → Michael Hill • 2 years ago

Hi Michael,

Thanks for dropping the comment. I couldn't agree more, the dark theme rules! I'm glad that you find the article useful :)

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Hiram Fleitas León • 2 years ago

This isn't new. Right click submenus are dark still hence why it's not public release. Have you figured out a way to fix the submenus?

9 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Bojan Petrovic → Hiram Fleitas León • 2 years ago

Hi Hiram,

Thanks for the comment. You're right, this isn't new, but for some reason Microsoft keeps postponing the release of the Dark theme for SSMS, although it's fully implemented in VS. I was playing with the settings in the Environment under the Fonts and Colors, but I was not able to figure it out how to match sub-menus. I'll keep trying cause I really like the dark theme :)

Best regards,  
Bojan

8 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Hiram Fleitas León → Bojan Petrovic • 2 years ago



Open a maint plan and brace yourself. Lol

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Vitaliy Slobodzian • a year ago

Thanks a lot. It's really cool. I wish Microsoft return dark theme back to Management Studio.

8 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Cengiz Ilterler • 2 years ago • edited

Thanks for the article, Finally I can get rid of the white background. By the way, if I'm not mistaken commenting only 1st line should be fine, no need to do it for rest.

8 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Bojan Petrovic → Cengiz Ilterler • 2 years ago

Hi Cengiz,

You're very welcome. Thank you for reading it, and dropping a comment. By the way, you're right... commenting only the first line does the job :)

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



curiousLee • a year ago

Excellent article! Worked like a charm on SSMS 2017. Thank you, @Bojan Petrovic!

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Eff This • a year ago

I tried this but didn't affect the Object Explorer and the Results Grid. How can I apply the theme to those components?

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Bojan Petrovic → Eff This • a year ago

Hi there,

Thx for dropping the comment - As I mentioned in the article, the dark theme is still a work in progress and not fully implemented. I far as I know, there's no workaround for the white background in the Object Explorer and Results grid

Best regards,

Bojan

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Dilanka Senani • a year ago

Thanks so much. It worked

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Prashanth Jayaram • 2 years ago

Hi Bojan,

Thanks for sharing the SSMS tip. It works:). The only piece I would like to add is the location of ssms.pkgundef file. The path is correct for the default installation. In my case, we use custom installation hence the location of the file is different. Anyways, great write-up and keep up the great work:)

Best Regards,

Prashanth

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Bojan Petrovic → Prashanth Jayaram • 2 years ago

Hi Prashanth,

Thanks for the comment. You're right, I should have wrote a note regarding custom installation location.

Also, thanks for the encouraging words and for bringing this to our attention :)

Best regards,

Bojan

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Prashanth Jayaram → Bojan Petrovic • 2 years ago

Thanks for the reply:). Keep up the spirit!

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Rodrigo • a year ago

Thanks this works beautifully. Great article!

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Christian Gauer • a year ago

Still works with the just released 17.8

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



LowRezSkyline • a year ago

Should just running the powershell script do the trick? I ran it, seems to run fine (no errors, etc), but i still don't see the dark theme in the drop-down(?). I'm running Studio 17.7.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Bojan Petrovic → LowRezSkyline • a year ago

Yes, executing the script does the same job but in some cases even upon successful execution in Command Prompt, the changes are not applied e.g. SSMS 17.7. Please try again using the Windows PowerShell instead or use the "manual" method if it fails again.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



LowRezSkyline → Bojan Petrovic • a year ago

Thanks, I got it sorted out.

I ended up renaming the original to x\_ssms.pkgundef; SSMS 17.7 regenerated the file and after that I applied the powershell script again and it worked. I didn't get any errors but who knows, maybe the file was locked, I didn't have SSMS open when I tried to apply this.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Junaid Kamoka • a year ago

thanks dear u r just amazing

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share >

- | ↗



Myroslav Pituley • a year ago

My eyes thank you for this article.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Ailia Morejón • a year ago

in my case, it wasn't necessary to change anything in the file, 'cause it was already uncommented, but still not showing the Dark option in the General configuration.

any ideas?

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Lluís Palou Bestard → Ailia Morejón • a year ago  
Because you have to comment it, not uncomment it ;)  
6 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Bojan Petrovic → Ailia Morejón • a year ago • edited  
Hi Ailia - by default, this is disabled so it has to be changed

Open the ssms.pkgundef file again, scroll down to the "Remove Dark theme" section and ensure the "[RootKey\$\Themes\{1ded0138-47ce-84ef-9ec1f439b749}\]" line is commented like shown in the shot that I've attached

Don't forget to run the text editor as administrator. Otherwise, you'll not be able to save changes  
5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Anders • 7 months ago  
This does not look as expected. "Object Explorer" and "registered servers" are still having a white background with black text. Select top 1000 rows or edit top 200 rows are also not using reverse video. I understand why they remove this theme from the list.  
4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Arthur Blake • 10 months ago • edited  
Just upgraded to SSMS 18.0 (Preview 4) Looks like the dark theme is now available by default.  
4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Bojan Petrovic → Arthur Blake • 9 months ago  
Hi Arthur - thx for dropping the comment

Unfortunately, it's been just enabled by default. Microsoft hasn't even put this in the SSMS changelog. Visual deviations like white Object Explorer, Results grid, barely visible right-click context menu, etc. are still there :(

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Arthur Blake → Bojan Petrovic • 9 months ago  
Agree. Not optimal at all. Hopefully someone at Microsoft will get motivated to make the dark theme fully operational.  
3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Bojan Petrovic → Arthur Blake • 3 months ago