

## Catching and Killing Error Messages

Error messages for you usually result in phone calls to me. That's OK, it's routine troubleshooting, and when you see as many error messages as I do, it's more about pattern recognition than anything else. There are a lot of repeats, and sometimes new errors show up on the same day on multiple computers—those are generally triggered by bad Windows updates.

So what should you do about error messages? You can't always leave them sitting on-screen for me to look at, so it makes sense to keep a screen shot of them. Some of them are one-time messages (literally nothing to fix), and others are constant reminders of what modular programming does when not supervised—it triggers old errors to become new error messages.

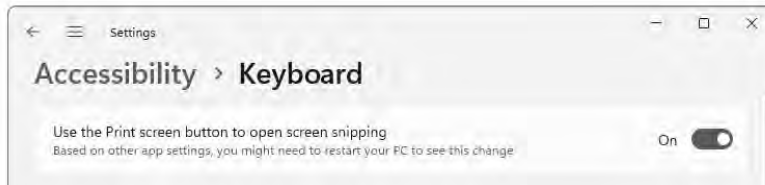
## Screen Captures, Refreshed

All these screen captures work in all current Windows versions. These first two work all the way back to Windows 95:

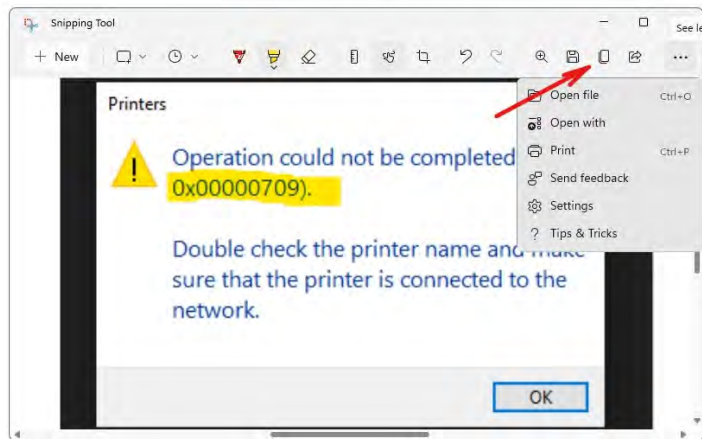
- Alt-PrintScreen takes a picture of **only** the active Window, or the program window on top of all other apps, and copies it to the clipboard. Nothing will appear to happen. Use paste (ctrl-V) to add it to any program that accepts images, such as Word, Outlook, Thunderbird, or any photo editor.
- Ctrl-PrintScreen takes a picture of the entire screen (all monitors), and copies that to the clipboard.

And then there are newer methods:

- Hold down the Windows (logo) key and tap PrintScreen to take a picture of the entire screen, and auto-save it in your Pictures\Screenshots folder.
- Hold down the Windows key with Shift and tap S. That starts Snip & Sketch, and the screen will become slightly shaded. Drag a rectangle around any part of the screen you want to save, and it will be saved as an image to the clipboard. Paste it wherever you need it.
- Better: Snip & Sketch can be started much more easily, by just tapping the PrintScreen key on your keyboard. However, that feature has to be turned on, in Windows Settings. Find that setting by pressing Start, go to Settings (the gear), then Accessibility, Keyboard, and slide *Use the Print screen button to open screen snipping* to On.



- The Snipping Tool can also create a screenshot, and add notes to it. There's highlighting too, and a ruler. Click the 3-dots menu at the top right to find options to open an existing image file to work on, and use the diskette icon to save the file, or the copy icon to place the image back onto the clipboard. (The arrow points to Save and Copy.)



Here's a good video on how to draw straight lines using the ruler, and more, in Snip & Sketch.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5LH2DGSZrk>

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## What Error Messages Don't Say

First, there are two types of error messages.

There are error messages that are triggered by something that the programmer planned for, looked for, and wrote a message for. They're frequently in the category of 'Input Checking.' Like these:

- Address is too long; use up to 60 characters.

- The ZIP code box can't be empty.
- Check the email address; it isn't possible.

And then there are all the rest. These are the unplanned errors. These are identified in programs by **when** they happen, and not much more than that. So a program might be very simply shown like this set of steps:

- Program starts.
- Set Error Label = "Error during start."
- Draw first screen of program.
- Set Error Label = "Error during printing"
- Print result by using Windows print routine.
- End
- If there was an error, show the last Error Label.

So what's happening there is that programmers guess in advance, if an error happens in each part of the code, it must be their assumed error causing it, so the error code is set as that before each section of code. Simple. Powerful. But doesn't respond well to a changing Windows environment, so it's often dead wrong. It's reporting **when**, not what happened.

## What it Means

The nice clean input checking messages usually don't cause trouble. And a good programmer may even add code that suggests a correction. That's an investment in a few lines of code that prevents more tech support phone calls later.

The 'when it happened' messages are our big mystery issues. Did a line of code fail because there was an unanticipated event? For example, the preferences for a program are set in a way that breaks a feature. Or the program expects input of a Canadian post code and you typed in a USA zip code. And there are more complex combinations that can trigger these things.

For example, 'File Not Found' can also mean any of these things:

- Folder missing. Drive missing. Network missing.
- Typographical error in the file name.
- Folder permissions don't allow opening that.
- File is open somewhere else on your PC, or on your network
- Drive is full.
- Filename includes characters that Windows allows, but this program does not.

## What to Do

Look first at **WHEN** the error occurred. Check any inputs or menu selections that happened then. Check that the files involved are readable and good.

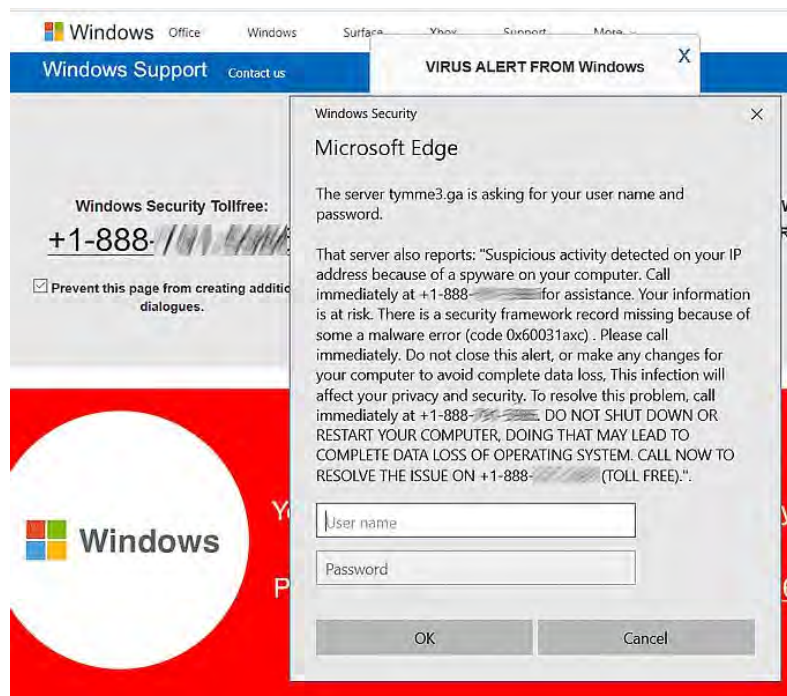
Beyond that, Google is your friend. The usual search is something like program-name error-name while-activity.

- quickbooks error -8977 saving deposit
- windows 11 error 0x00000709 printing
- acrobat DC error 105 cannot save

In many cases, these searches will have far better results if you use Google's 'Tools' option, pull down 'Any time' and choose 'Past year' or 'Past month', especially if the issue is caused by a bad patch.

## Fake Errors

And finally, error messages can be marketing or very big trouble. **EVERY** error message that includes a phone number is a fake. Microsoft, Adobe, and Intuit go out of their way to discourage your phone calls. The error message is just a scammer's way of creating false urgency for what is basically a garbage web page, usually redirected from a bad search result, in the hopes that they can capture your payment info or take control of your computer. Don't call any phone number that appears in an error, ever.



If you're trapped in an error message like this one, with no way to close it, tap F11 on your keyboard to exit full-screen mode, and then use the usual top-right X to close the browser.

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