Bootable USB Quick-Start & Troubleshooting Guide

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Plug the USB into a powered-off PC, turn it on while tapping the boot menu key, pick the USB, then choose what you need from the menu. Most PCs boot in under 2 minutes; the first boot on a new PC may need one extra 30-second security step (Step 4).

What's on this USB

When the USB boots you'll see a black menu with four choices. Use the arrow keys and press Enter.

Menu item	What it does	Use it when
Hiren's BootCD PE	A repair desktop that runs from the USB	Resetting a lost Windows password, recovering files, testing hardware, fixing a PC that won't start
Windows 10 (64-bit)	Installs or reinstalls Windows 10 Home or Pro	Older PCs, or PCs that say they can't run Windows 11
Windows 11 25H2 (64-bit)	Installs or reinstalls Windows 11 Home or Pro	Most PCs made in 2018 or later
Windows 11 26H2 (64-bit)	The newest Windows 11 release	Newest PCs, or if 25H2 has trouble finding your drive or network

The USB works on Windows PCs and laptops (Dell, HP, Lenovo, Acer, ASUS, MSI, custom builds). It does not work on Apple Macs or Chromebooks.

Before you start

- ☐ Back up anything you want to keep. Installing Windows can erase the drive.
- ☐ Plug in the laptop charger. A battery dying mid-install can leave the PC unbootable.
- ☐ Use a USB port directly on the PC (rear ports on a desktop). Avoid hubs, docks and front-panel ports.
- ☐ If the PC has BitLocker drive encryption and you plan to keep its data, write down the BitLocker recovery key first (find it at aka.ms/myrecoverykey). Changing BIOS security settings can make Windows ask for it.

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- ☐ Don't format, rename or delete anything on the USB. If Windows says "You need to format the disk", click Cancel. Formatting erases everything on it.
- ☐ No activation key card is included. You don't need a key to install, only to activate afterward. Request it by email (see To Redeem your Activation Key).

How to boot from the USB

1. Shut the PC down completely. On Windows 10/11, hold Shift while clicking Shut down, so it fully powers off instead of hibernating.
2. Plug in the USB.
3. Press the power button, then immediately tap the boot menu key for your brand (table below) about twice per second until a menu appears.
4. In the boot menu, pick the entry with your USB's name that starts with **UEFI** (for example "UEFI: USB DISK"). If there's no UEFI entry, pick the plain USB entry.
5. The black USB menu appears. Arrow to what you need and press Enter. If it asks for a boot mode, choose **Boot in normal mode**.
6. First time on this PC? If you see a blue screen saying **Verification failed: (0x1A) Security Violation**, that's expected. Go to the next section; it takes about 30 seconds and you only do it once.

PC brand	Boot menu key	BIOS setup key
Dell	F12	F2
HP	F9 (or Esc, then F9)	F10
Lenovo laptops	F12 or Fn+F12 (or the small Novo button)	F1 or F2
Acer	F12 (must be enabled in BIOS first, see troubleshooting)	F2
ASUS laptops	Esc	F2
ASUS desktops	F8	Del
MSI	F11	Del
Gigabyte	F12	Del
Microsoft Surface	Hold Volume Down while pressing Power	Hold Volume Up while pressing Power
Samsung	F2 or Esc	F2
Toshiba / Dynabook	F12	F2

On many laptops the F-keys are media keys by default. If tapping F12 does nothing, hold **Fn** and tap F12.

Can't find the key? From a working Windows: Settings → System → Recovery → Advanced startup → Restart now. Then choose Use a device → your USB.

First boot on a new PC: approve the USB once (Secure Boot)

This USB works with Secure Boot left ON. The first time it boots on a PC, the PC asks you to approve it once. You do not need to turn Secure Boot off. These screens look the same on every brand of PC. Use the arrow keys and Enter; the mouse does not work here.

1. On the blue **Verification failed: (0x1A) Security Violation** screen, press **Enter** (OK).
2. A blue screen says "Press any key to perform MOK management". Press any key within 10 seconds. If you miss it, restart and boot the USB again.
3. Choose **Enroll key from disk**.
4. You'll see a list of drives. Pick the one that shows folders named **grub**, **ventoy**, **EFI** and **tool**. If you see folders like "Windows", "Users" or "System Volume Information", that's your PC's hard drive, not the USB. Press Esc and pick another.
5. Select **ENROLL_THIS_KEY_IN_MOKMANAGER.cer** and press Enter.
6. Choose **Continue**, then **Yes**, then **Reboot**. ("View key 0" just shows the key; you can skip it.)
7. Tap the boot menu key again and choose the USB. The black USB menu now appears.

This approval stays on that PC. You won't see the security screen on it again.

Never saw the blue screen? Some PCs (Microsoft Surface, newer Lenovo ThinkPads, and some newer Dell and HP models) are set to block the USB before this screen can appear. You may see a different security message, or the PC goes straight back to the boot menu. See "A different security error" in Troubleshooting on the back.

Installing Windows

Installing does not need your activation key. The key is entered after Windows is up and running.

1. Pick Windows 10 or Windows 11 from the USB menu and wait for the Windows Setup screen (1–3 minutes).
2. Choose language and keyboard, then **Install Windows**.
3. At "Enter product key", click **I don't have a product key**, or type the generic install key shown on the USB's splash screen (it installs Windows but doesn't activate it).

4. Choose the edition: **Home** or **Pro**. Reinstalling on a PC that already had Windows? Pick the same edition it had, and it usually activates by itself.
5. Choose **Custom: Install Windows only**.
6. Pick the drive. For a clean install, select each partition on the main drive (Drive 0), click **Delete**, then select the **Unallocated Space** and click Next. This erases everything on that drive.
7. When the PC restarts the first time, **unplug the USB**. If you leave it in, the PC may start setup over again.
8. Finish the setup screens. To use a local account instead of a Microsoft account, see below.
9. Activate: Settings → System → Activation → Change product key, then enter the activation key emailed to you by Windowskey@kissrecoverydrive.com (see To Redeem your Activation Key).

Setting up without a Microsoft account (local account)

At the "Let's connect you to a network" screen, don't connect to Wi-Fi yet.

1. Press **Shift+F10** (or **Fn+Shift+F10**). A black command window opens.
2. Type `start ms-cxh:localonly` and press Enter. If a "Create a user" window appears, fill it in and you're done.
3. If nothing happens, type these two lines, pressing Enter after each:
   - `reg add HKLM\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\OOBE /v HideOnlineAccountScreens /t REG_DWORD /d 1 /f`
   - `shutdown /r /t 0`
4. After the restart, choose **I don't have internet** if asked, then create your username and password.

Microsoft keeps changing these steps. If neither works, connect to the internet, sign in with any Microsoft account, then add a local account later in Settings → Accounts.

To Redeem your Activation Key:

1. Choose Windows 10 or 11 then Choose Home or Pro
2. Send request to Windowskey@kissrecoverydrive.com
3. Include your choice and Order number

Troubleshooting On Back

Find what you're seeing in the left column. Most problems are fixed by the first fix listed.

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What you see	Why it happens	How to fix it
PC goes straight into Windows; the USB is never seen	Windows "fast startup" skipped the boot menu, the key was pressed too late, or the port isn't bootable	Shut down with Shift held. Tap the boot key from the moment you press Power. Try Fn+F12. Move the USB to a different port directly on the PC. In BIOS, make sure **USB Boot** is enabled.
USB isn't listed in the boot menu	USB boot is turned off, or the PC is set to boot only from its own drive	Enter BIOS (see key table). Enable USB Boot / Boot from external devices, and set Boot Mode to **UEFI**. Save and exit (usually F10).
Blue screen: **Verification failed: (0x1A) Security Violation**	Normal first-time Secure Boot check	Press OK, then follow "First boot on a new PC" above. Takes 30 seconds, once per PC.
A different security error (not the blue 0x1A screen), such as "Secure Boot Violation" or "Invalid signature", or the PC goes straight back to the boot menu	Some PCs (Surface, newer Lenovo, some Dell and HP) ship set to trust only Microsoft's own software, so they block the USB before the approval screen	In BIOS, under Secure Boot, turn on **Allow Microsoft 3rd Party UEFI CA** (Dell: **Enable Microsoft UEFI CA**; Surface: **Microsoft & 3rd party CA**). Save, restart, and boot the USB again. No such option? Turn Secure Boot off, install, then turn it back on. Have your BitLocker key ready if keeping data.
"Press any key to perform MOK management" vanished before I pressed a key	It times out after about 10 seconds	Restart, boot the USB again, and press a key right away.
Enroll screen shows "Windows", "Users" or "System Volume Information" folders	You're looking at the PC's hard drive, not the USB	Press Esc and pick the other drive in the list: the one with grub, ventoy, EFI and tool folders.

What you see	Why it happens	How to fix it
Acer: F12 does nothing, or Secure Boot can't be changed	Acer ships with the boot menu and Secure Boot controls locked	Usually not needed: approve the USB once (section above) and leave Secure Boot on. To open the boot menu: press F2, Main tab → set **F12 Boot Menu** to Enabled, then F10 to save. If you must change Secure Boot: Security tab → **Set Supervisor Password** first; the Secure Boot option then unlocks. Write that password down.
I read the USB is exFAT and modern PCs need FAT32	The USB has two parts: a small FAT boot section the PC starts from, plus a large exFAT section that holds Windows	Nothing to fix; this layout boots on UEFI PCs. Do **not** reformat it to FAT32; that erases it.
USB menu appears, but choosing Windows shows a black screen, error, or freezes	Some PCs need a different loading mode	Restart and pick it again. When asked, choose **Boot in wimboot mode** instead of normal mode. Also try the other Windows 11 version (25H2 or 26H2).
Setup says "We couldn't find any drives" or no drives are listed	Intel storage (RST / VMD / RAID) hides the drive from Windows Setup. Common on Dell, HP and Lenovo laptops from 2020 on	Clean install only: in BIOS, change Storage / SATA Operation from **RAID** or **Intel RST** to **AHCI** (on some PCs, turn off **VMD**). Warning: if you're keeping an existing Windows install, changing this stops it from starting; download the Intel RST driver for your model instead and click **Load driver** in setup.

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What you see	Why it happens	How to fix it
Asked for a product key and don't know which code to use	The activation key is emailed to you separately and is only for activating, not installing	Click **I don't have a product key**. Activate after Windows is installed (Step 9 of Installing Windows).
"This PC can't run Windows 11"	PC is missing TPM 2.0, Secure Boot, or a supported CPU	Windows 11 only installs on PCs that meet its requirements. In BIOS, turn on TPM (called PTT on Intel, fTPM on AMD) and Secure Boot, then try again. If the PC still isn't supported (common on PCs made before 2018), install Windows 10 from the menu instead.
Setup keeps starting over after the restart	The PC booted from the USB again instead of the hard drive	Unplug the USB when the PC first restarts. If it's already looping, unplug it and restart.
Forced to sign in with a Microsoft account	Microsoft requires it by default on Windows 11	See "Setting up without a Microsoft account" above.
No Wi-Fi networks listed during setup	Windows doesn't include a driver for your Wi-Fi card yet	Use an Ethernet cable, or USB-tether your phone. After setup, Windows Update installs the Wi-Fi driver.
Keyboard or touchpad doesn't work during setup	Missing driver for that laptop's input devices	Plug in a USB keyboard and mouse to finish setup. Windows Update fixes the built-in ones afterward.
PC asks for a **BitLocker recovery key** after a BIOS change	Windows noticed a security setting changed	Get the key at aka.ms/myrecoverykey (sign in with the Microsoft account used on that PC), or change the BIOS setting back.

What you see	Why it happens	How to fix it
Activation key gives an error	Installed edition doesn't match the key (Home vs Pro), or the key wasn't redeemed yet	Check Settings → System → Activation for the edition. Email a screenshot of the error and your order number to windowskey@kissrecoverydrive.com; we'll send a replacement key. No need to panic: Windows keeps working until then.
Files on the USB look missing, or Windows says the USB needs formatting	Windows can't read one of the USB's sections; that's normal	Click **Cancel**. Never format or delete files on it. If the USB stops booting, contact us for a replacement or re-image.
Using a Mac or Chromebook	These use a different startup system	Not supported. Use a Windows PC.
Work or school PC asks for a BIOS password	The organization locked the BIOS	Contact that organization's IT team.

Taking care of the USB, and getting help

- Keep it as a repair tool. Don't store your own files on it, format it, or run "fix" or "scan and repair" on it in Windows.
- Use "Eject" in Windows before unplugging it.
- Additional instructions and help can be found at our support site: www.kissrecoverydrive.com
- Still stuck? We also offer a **FREE scheduled 10-minute support call**. Book it at tidycal.com/rminvestments2019 or from the "Book a call" button on our support site.

Additional Videos, Support and Downloadable Instructions go to

WWW.KISSRECOVERYDRIVE.COM