How to set the path and environment variables in Windows

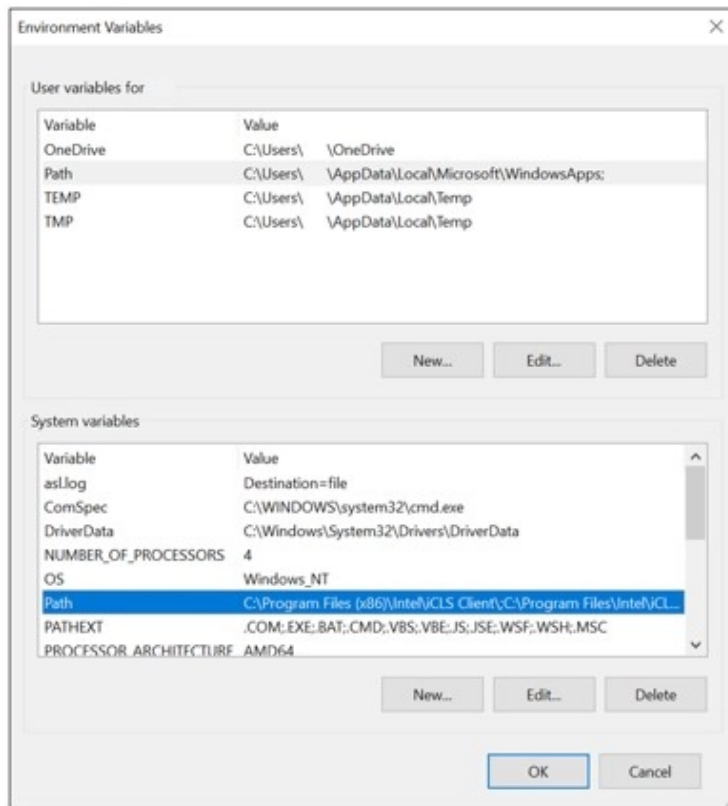Updated: 12/05/2021 by Computer Hope

Setting the path and environment variables differs depending on the Windows operating system version on your computer. Select a link below for your version of Windows and follow the steps.

Tip: Administrator privileges are required to modify the path and environment variables.

Setting the path and variables in Windows 11

1. Press the **Windows key** ⊞ +**X** to access the Power User Task Menu.
2. In the Power User Task Menu, select the **System** option.
3. In the *System* window, scroll to the bottom and click the **About** option.
4. In the *System > About* window, click the **Advanced system settings** link at the bottom of the *Device specifications* section.
5. In the *System Properties* window, click the **Advanced** tab, then click the **Environment Variables** button near the bottom of that tab.
6. In the *Environment Variables* window (pictured below), highlight the **Path** variable in the *System variables* section and click the **Edit** button. Add or modify the path lines with the paths you want the computer to access. Each directory path is separated with a semicolon, as shown below.

```
C:\Program Files;C:\Winnt;C:\Winnt\System32
```

6. After creating or modifying the environment variables, restart the computer for those changes to take effect in Windows.

> **Tip:** You can edit other environment variables by highlighting the variable in the *System variables* section and clicking **Edit**. If you need to create a new environment variable, click **New**, and enter the variable name and value.

> **Tip:** To view and set the path through the Windows command line, use the path command.

Setting the path and variables in Windows 10

1. Press the **Windows key** ⊞+**X** to access the Power User Task Menu.
2. In the Power User Task Menu, select the **System** option.
3. In the *About* window, click the **Advanced system settings** link under *Related settings* on the far-right side.
4. In the *System Properties* window, click the **Advanced** tab, then click the **Environment Variables** button near the bottom of that tab.

5. In the *Environment Variables* window (pictured below), highlight the **Path** variable in the *System variables* section and click the **Edit** button. Add or modify the path lines with the paths you want the computer to access. Each directory path is separated with a semicolon, as shown below.

```
C:\Program Files;C:\Winnt;C:\Winnt\System32
```


6. After creating or modifying the environment variables, restart the computer for those changes to take effect in Windows.

   Tip: You can edit other environment variables by highlighting the variable in the *System variables* section and clicking **Edit**. If you need to create a new environment variable, click **New**, and enter the variable name and value.
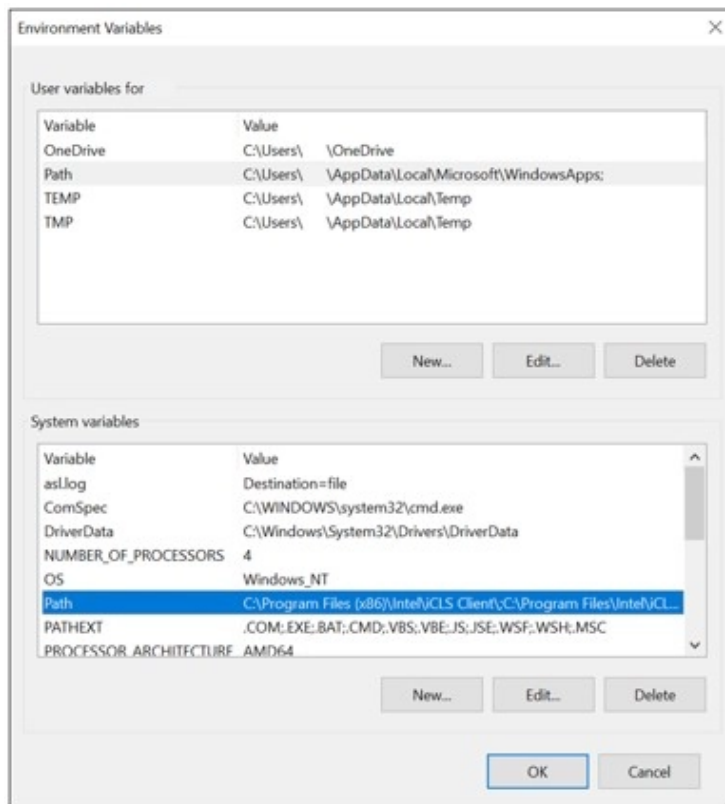
   Tip: To view and set the path through the Windows command line, use the path command.

Setting the path and variables in Windows 8

1. Press the **Windows key** ⊞+**X** to access the Power User Task Menu.
2. In the Power User Task Menu, select the **System** option.
3. Click the **Advanced System Settings** link in the left column.
4. In the *System Properties* window, click the **Advanced** tab, then click the **Environment Variables** button near the bottom of that tab.
5. In the *Environment Variables* window (pictured below), highlight the **Path** variable in the *System variables* section and click the **Edit** button. Add or modify the path lines with the paths you want the computer to access. Each different directory is separated with a semicolon, as shown below.

```
C:\Program Files;C:\Winnt;C:\Winnt\System32
```


6. After creating or modifying the environment variables, restart the computer for those changes to take effect in Windows.

   Tip: You can edit other environment variables by highlighting the variable in the *System variables* section and clicking **Edit**. If you need to create a new environment variable, click **New**, and enter the variable name and value.
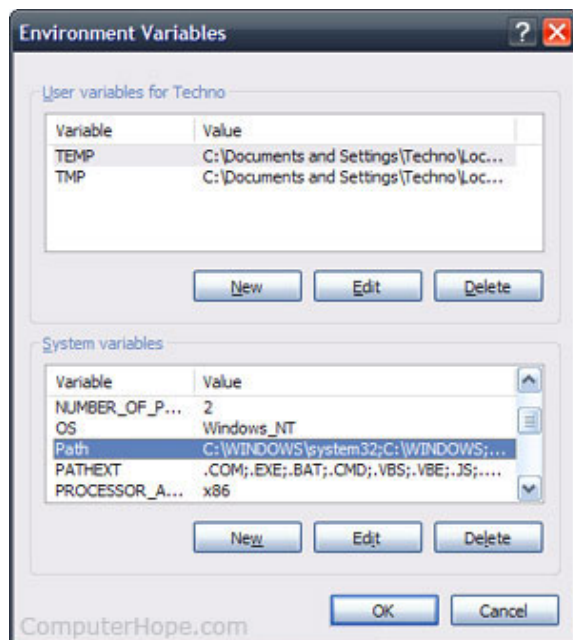
Tip: To view and set the path through the Windows command line, use the path command.

Setting the path and variables in Windows Vista and Windows 7

1. On the desktop, right-click the **Computer** icon and select **Properties**. If you don't have a Computer icon on your desktop, click Start, right-click the **Computer** option in the Start menu, and select **Properties**.
2. Click the **Advanced System Settings** link in the left column.
3. In the *System Properties* window, click the **Advanced** tab, then click the **Environment Variables** button near the bottom of that tab.
4. In the *Environment Variables* window (pictured below), highlight the **Path** variable in the *System variables* section and click the **Edit** button. Add or modify the path lines with the paths you want the computer to access. Each different directory is separated with a semicolon, as shown below.

```
C:\Program Files;C:\Winnt;C:\Winnt\System32
```


5. After creating or modifying the environment variables, restart the computer for those changes to take effect in Windows.

Tip: You can edit other environment variables by highlighting the variable in the *System variables* section and clicking **Edit**. If you need to create a new environment variable, click **New**, and enter the variable name and value.
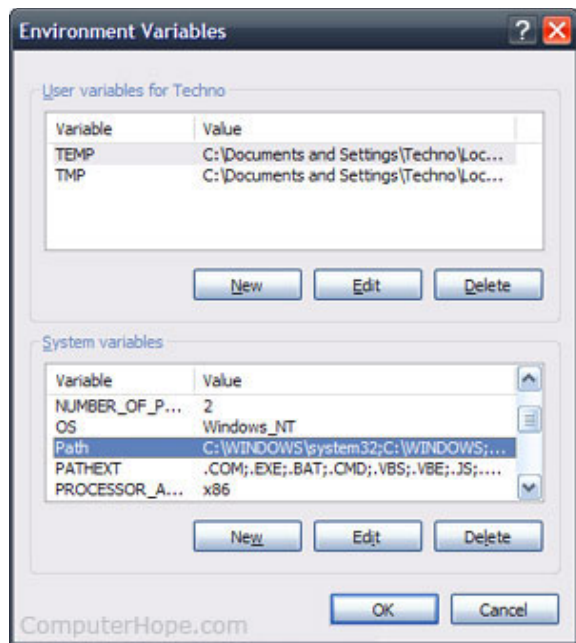
Tip: To view and set the path through the Windows command line, use the path command.

Setting the path and variables in Windows 2000 and Windows XP

The path is now managed by Windows 2000 and Windows XP and not the autoexec.bat or autoexec.nt files, as was done with earlier versions of Windows. To change the system environment variables, follow the steps below.

1. From the desktop, right-click **My Computer** and click **Properties**. If you don't have a My Computer icon on your desktop, click Start, right-click the **My Computer** option in the Start menu, and select **Properties**.
2. In the *System Properties* window, click the **Advanced** tab.
3. In the *Advanced* section, click the **Environment Variables** button.
4. In the *Environment Variables* window (as shown below), highlight the **Path** variable in the *System Variable* section and click the **Edit** button. Add or modify the path lines with the paths you want the computer to access. Each different directory is separated with a semicolon, as shown below.

```
C:\Program Files;C:\Winnt;C:\Winnt\System32
```

5. After creating or modifying the environment variables, restart the computer for those changes to take effect in Windows.

> **Tip:** You can edit other environment variables by highlighting the variable in the *System variables* section and clicking **Edit**. If you need to create a new environment variable, click **New**, and enter the variable name and value.

> **Tip:** To view and set the path through the Windows command line, use the path command.

What is the default Windows %PATH%?

The path is based on programs installed on the computer, so there is no "default path." However, the Windows minimum path is often the path below.

```
%SystemRoot%\system32;%SystemRoot%;%SystemRoot%\System32\Wbem
```

Tip: Keep in mind that as you install programs, the path is updated with the paths for the newly installed programs. So, if you have erased your path after installing other programs, those programs

may be affected.

Setting path in the MS-DOS and Windows command line

To view and set the path in MS-DOS and the Windows command line, use the path command.