What Does "Run as Administrator" Mean in Windows 10?

If you use Windows 10, you've no doubt seen the phrase "Run as administrator" at some point. But what does it mean? Here's why it's important, how it works, and when to use it.

Administrators Have Full System Access

There are two types of accounts in Windows: Standard user accounts and Administrator user accounts. Administrator accounts can configure system settings and access normally restricted parts of the operating system. (There's also a hidden account named "Administrator," but any account can be an administrator.)

The purpose of an administrator role is to allow changes to certain aspects of your operating system that might otherwise become damaged by accident (or through malicious action) by a normal user account.

If you own your own PC and it isn't managed by your workplace, you're probably using an administrator account. (You can check your administrator status by heading to Settings > Accounts > Your Info. You'll see "Administrator" below your name here if you're an administrator. If you have other accounts set up on your Windows 10 PC, you can head to Settings > Accounts > Family & other users to see if they're administrators.)

But even if you are using an administrator account on Windows, not every application needs full administrator permissions. In fact, that's bad for security—your web browser shouldn't have full access to your entire operating system. User Account Control (UAC) limits the

permissions that applications have, even when you launch them from an administrator account.

When you use "Run as Administrator," UAC gets out of the way, and the application is run with full administrator access to everything on your system.

So when you run an app as an administrator, it means you are giving the app special permissions to access restricted parts of your Windows 10 system that would otherwise be off-limits. This brings potential dangers, but it is also sometimes necessary for certain programs to work correctly.

(If you'd like to read more about the technical aspects of how the administrator account works, this Stack Overflow thread is very helpful.)

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When Should I Run Apps as an Administrator?

If an app isn't working as you would expect it to, you might want to run it as an administrator and see if that clears up the problem. This is particularly the case with utility programs that may require deep access to perform diagnostics on your file system, configure storage devices, or change the settings of certain devices installed in your system.

Which Apps Can Run as an Administrator?

Only apps programmed for the legacy Win32 and Win64 APIs can be run as an administrator. Traditionally, that means apps created for Windows 7 and earlier, but many modern Windows apps are still maintained that way. UWP (Universal Windows Platform) apps—like those downloaded from the Microsoft Store—cannot be run as an administrator.

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How Do I Run Apps as an Administrator?

If you'd like to run a Windows 10 app as an administrator, open the Start menu and locate the app on the list. Right-click the app's icon, then select "More" from the menu that appears. In the "More" menu, select "Run as administrator."
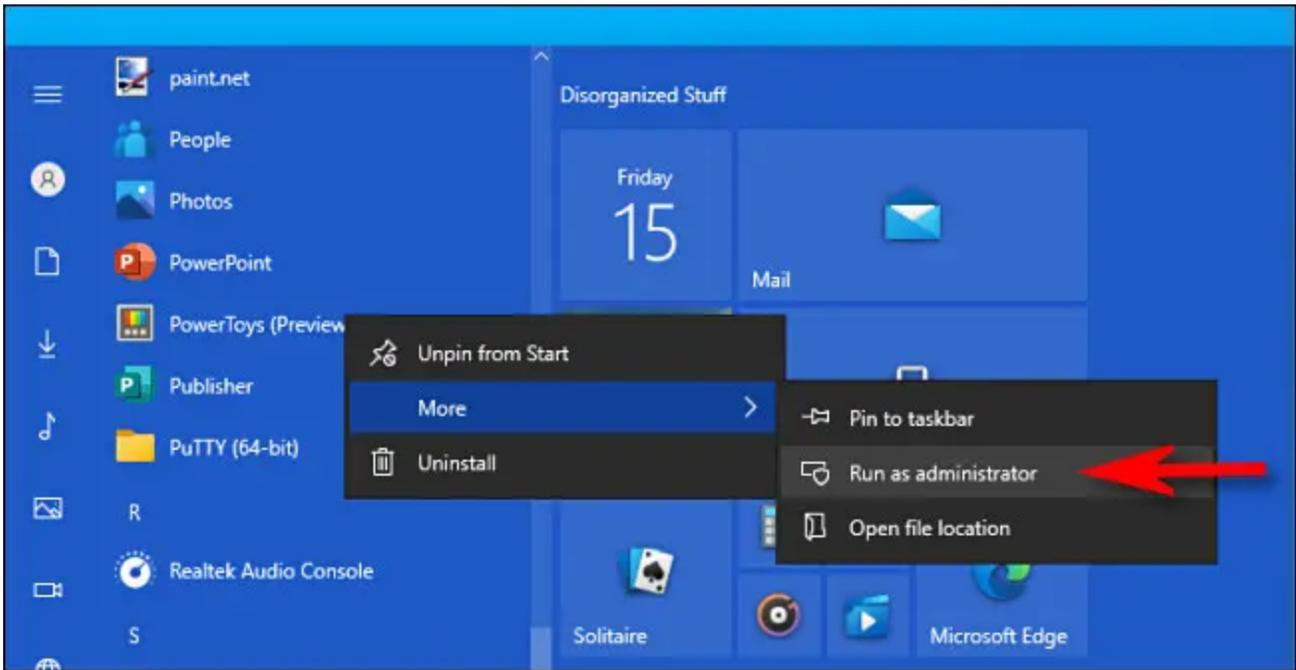
Also, if you'd like to always run an app as an administrator, create a shortcut to the app on your desktop or taskbar, or in File Explorer. Right-click the shortcut and select "Properties." In the Properties window that appears, click the "Compatibility" tab, then put a checkmark beside "Run this program as an administrator."
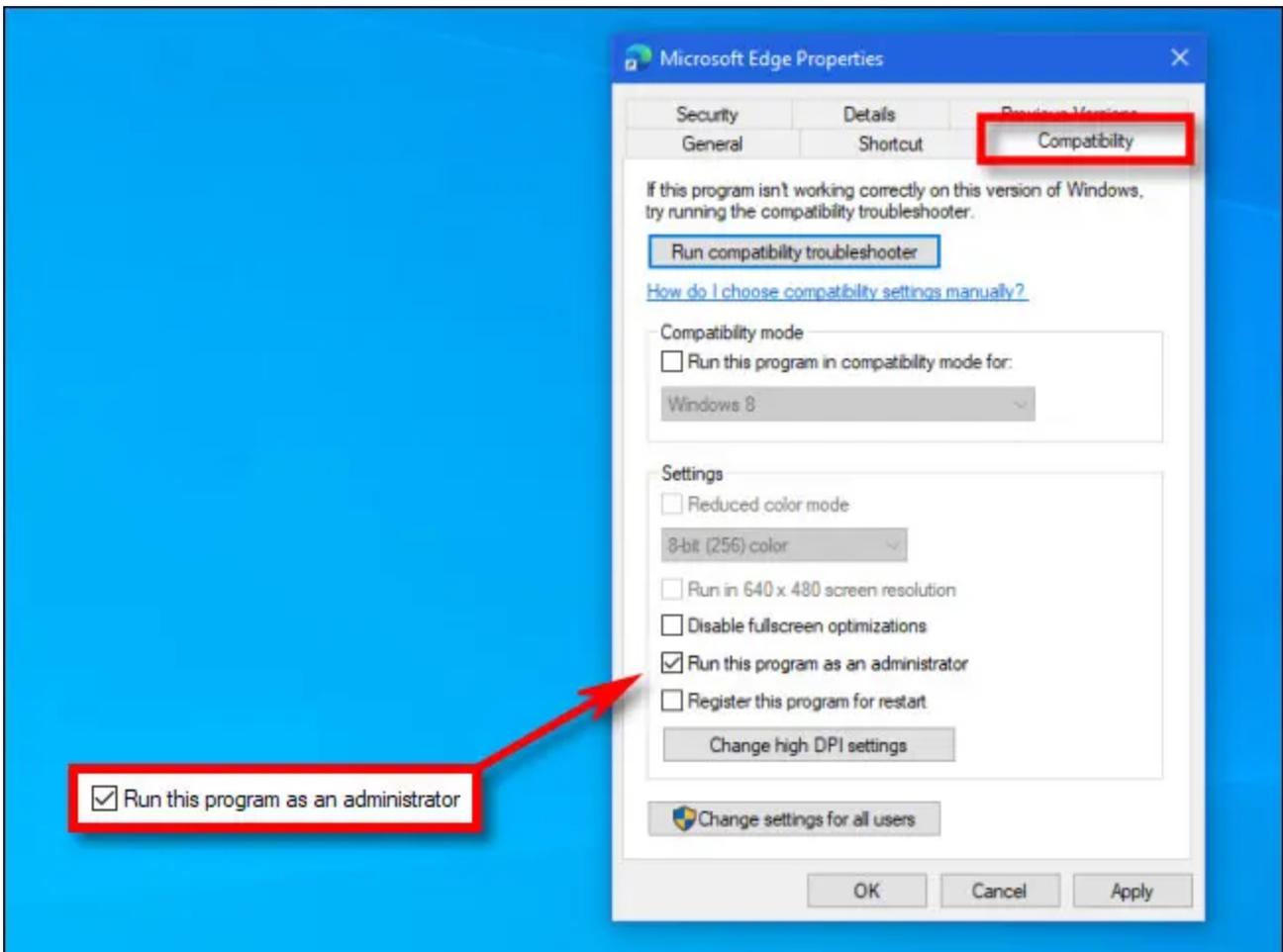
After that, close the Properties window. Now every time you run the app from that shortcut, you'll always be running it with administrator privileges.

You can also run a program as an administrator from the "Run" box (accessed by pressing Windows+R) if you press Ctrl+Shift+Enter when executing the app. Good luck!

RELATED: ***Run a Command as Administrator from the Run Box in Windows 7, 8, or 10***