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The site moved but something is broken: what each symptom points to

Backups & Migration

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The site moved but something is broken: what each symptom points to

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After a move, each error almost always has **one typical cause**. Instead of redoing everything, read the symptom, go to the most likely cause and confirm it in the error log. Nearly every problem on a moved site comes from six places: the database connection, the PHP version, the `.htaccess`, the addresses stored in the database, the certificate and the e-mail.

First, look at the log

Reproduce the error and open the site's error log: the last line usually names the file and the reason. See **where the PHP error log is, how to read it, and the errors you will see most**. If you cannot make sense of the message, the name of the error already steers you in the table below.

What you see	Most likely cause	Where to look
"Error establishing a database connection"	The configuration file still has the name, user or password of the **old** database. Names carry the account name in front, so they change.	**rebuilding the wp-config.php connection**
A blank page or a 500 error	A different PHP version, a missing extension, or an `.htaccess` the new server will not accept.	**the PHP configuration** and **website errors explained**
Text with question marks or swapped letters	The database was imported with a different character set.	**character sets: utf8mb4, collation, and the question marks**
Broken layout, images missing	A folder was left behind (often the hidden one), or paths changed.	Compare the folders on both sides.

What you see	Most likely cause	Where to look
Links lead to the old domain	The addresses stored in the database were not updated.	**moving WordPress to a new domain without losing anything**
The home page opens, inner pages give 404	The `.htaccess` is missing, or permalinks need re-saving.	**WordPress permalinks and the 404 that follows**
It keeps going back to the login screen	Cookies, or a site address different from the stored one.	**WordPress login redirect loop**
Padlock with a warning	Certificate not yet issued, or mixed content.	**no padlock on your site** and **mixed content**
Error 403	File or folder permissions changed in the copy.	**error 403: permissions, .htaccess and blocked IPs**
The old site keeps showing	DNS cache, or a forgotten line in your computer's hosts file.	**how long DNS changes take to propagate**
E-mail stopped arriving	The domain's mail records still point to the old place, or the mailboxes were not recreated.	**why your e-mail is not sending or receiving**

If it fits no row

1. **Compare with the old one.** If you still have it running, open the same address on both and look at the difference.

2. **Switch off what is not essential.** On WordPress, deactivate the plugins to see whether the site answers without them. See **disabling plugins, including when you cannot get in**.

3. **Change one thing at a time** and test after each change. With three changes at once you no longer know which one worked.

Do not delete the old site to "tidy up".
Until the problem is solved, the old one is your reference and your safety net.

Before you blame the new server
, make sure you are testing the new server: a forgotten line in the hosts file, or the browser's cache, makes it look as if nothing changed. See **the hosts file**. The first-day list is in **after moving a site: the checklist for the first day**.

NEED A HAND?

Been through the table and it still fails? Send us the domain and the text of the error exactly as it appears.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- Moving a site by hand: files by FTP and the database →
- Website errors explained: 500, 403, 404, 508 and what to do →
- Common WordPress errors: white screen, critical error and how to find the cause →
- After moving a site: the checklist for the first day →

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TAX ID (NUIT)	401 191 607
LEGAL ENTITY NO. (NUEL)	105 045 974
ECONOMIC ACTIVITY CODE (CAE)	62022
REGISTERED OFFICE	Bairro 7 de Setembro Vilankulo 1304 · CEP 0411-02, Inhambane, Mozambique
CONTACT	info@interweb.co.mz · +258 84 635 1111 · +258 86 635 1111 · www.interweb.co.mz
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