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Turning on WordPress debug mode safely: WP_DEBUG and the log

WordPress & CMS

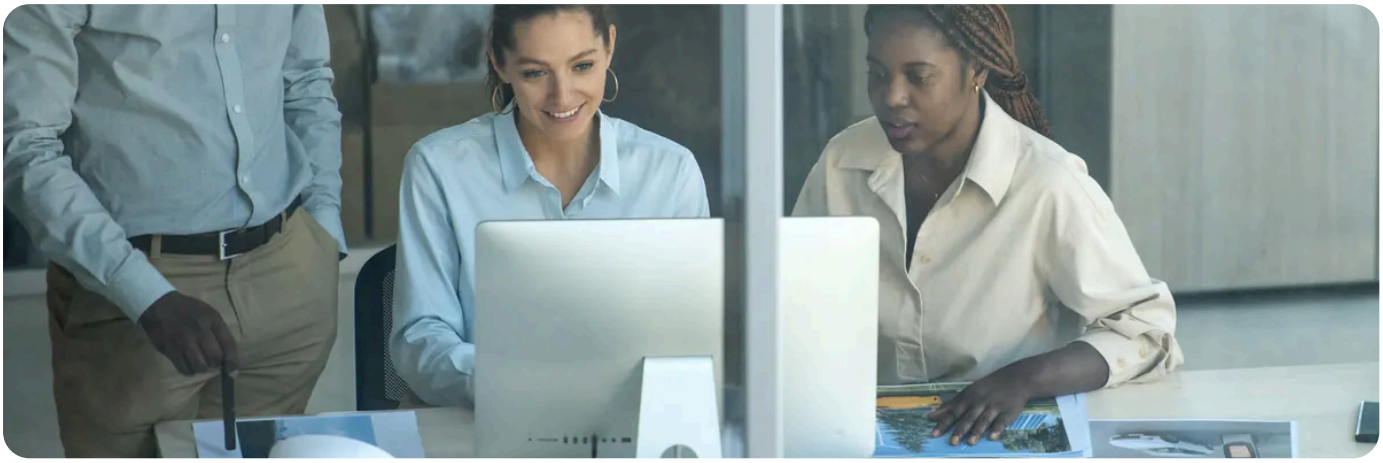
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Turning on WordPress debug mode safely: WP_DEBUG and the log

WordPress & CMS Created on **October 15, 2026** 2 min read



The short answer: when the site shows a white page or a “critical error” without saying why, debug mode makes WordPress **write the error to a file**. You switch it on with three lines in **wp-config.php**. But there is a rule: **switch it off when you finish**, and do not leave errors in view of visitors.

The three lines

Line	What it does
`define( 'WP_DEBUG', true );`	Switches on debug mode: WordPress starts recording warnings and errors.
`define( 'WP_DEBUG_LOG', true );`	Writes them to the file `wp-content/debug.log`.
`define( 'WP_DEBUG_DISPLAY', false );`	Does **not** show them on screen, so visitors do not see them.

Step by step

1. **Take a copy of wp-config.php.** A typing mistake in this file takes the site down.
2. **Open wp-config.php** (cPanel File Manager) and look for the line that says “WP_DEBUG”. If it exists with the value false, swap it for the three lines above; if not, put the three **before** the line “That’s all, stop editing”.
3. **Repeat the problem** (open the page that fails) and then open the file **wp-content/debug.log**: the last line usually says the file and the plugin or theme at fault.

4 **Read the error** and act: **Common WordPress errors**, and if it is memory, **give it more memory**. The server's PHP log is a different one, and complements it: **The PHP error log**.

5 **Switch everything off at the end:** back to false, and **delete debug.log**.

The debug.log file is public

by default: whoever knows the address (`your-domain.com/wp-content/debug.log`) can read it, and it shows paths and plugin names. So: switch the mode off when you finish, delete the file and, if you must leave it on, protect it. Never leave **WP_DEBUG_DISPLAY** true on a site with visitors.

If the site will not even open because of the error, deactivate the plugins first: **Disabling plugins, even when you cannot get in**.

NEED A HAND?

The log does not help and you still do not understand? Open a ticket with the last lines of debug.log (no passwords).

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **Common WordPress errors: white screen, critical error and how to find the cause** →
- **Where the PHP error log is, how to read it, and the errors you will see most** →
- **Giving WordPress more memory** →
- **Rebuilding the wp-config.php connection** →

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