

Fix Windows Server Boot Failure After Windows Update

This guide walks through recovering a Windows Server system that fails to boot after a Windows Update. It uses Windows Recovery Environment (WinRE) and DISM to revert or remove problematic updates.

Tested with Windows Server 2019. The process is nearly identical for Server 2016 / 2022.

Prerequisites

- Windows Server installation ISO matching your OS version
- Physical console, iDRAC, iLO, or other remote KVM access
- Administrator credentials
- BitLocker recovery key (if BitLocker is enabled)

Step 1 — Boot into Windows Recovery Environment

1. Download the correct Windows Server ISO from Microsoft. Search: "**Windows Server 2019 Evaluation ISO**"
2. Boot the server using:
 1. Bootable USB
 2. Virtual Media via iDRAC / iLO
3. At the installer screen:
 1. Click **Next**

2. Select **Repair your computer**

4. Navigate to:

1. **Troubleshoot ? Advanced Options ? Command Prompt**

If Windows already entered automatic recovery after multiple failed boots, you may see this menu without external media.

Step 2 – Unlock BitLocker (If Enabled)

If the system drive is encrypted, unlock it first:

```
manage-bde -status  
manage-bde -unlock D: -RecoveryPassword YOUR-KEY-HERE
```

Replace drive letter and recovery key as needed.

Step 3 – Identify the Windows Installation Drive

In recovery mode, drive letters change. The OS drive is often NOT C:.

```
diskpart  
list volume  
exit
```

Note the volume containing the **Windows** folder.

```
dir C:  
dir D:  
dir E:
```

Example: Windows located on D:\

Step 4 — Check Disk Integrity (Recommended)

Before touching updates, verify filesystem health:

```
chkdsk D: /f
```

Replace D: with your OS drive.

Step 5 — Revert Pending Updates

This cancels unfinished update operations.

```
dism /image:D:\ /cleanup-image /revertpendingactions
```

This may take several minutes.

When complete:

1. Close Command Prompt
2. Click **Continue ? Boot to Windows**

If Windows boots successfully, stop here.

Step 6 — Remove a Fully Installed Broken Update

If Windows crashes after login or loops during boot, the update must be manually removed.

List Installed Packages

```
dism /image:D:\ /get-packages
```

Recent updates appear near the bottom.

Remove a Package

```
dism /image:D:\ /remove-package /packagename:PACKAGE_NAME
```

Tip: Highlight package ? right-click to copy ? right-click to paste.

Remove updates one at a time and reboot between attempts.

Step 7 — Repair Boot Configuration (If System Still Won't Start)

If the system fails before Windows loads, repair the bootloader:

```
bootrec /fixmbr  
bootrec /fixboot  
bootrec /scanos  
bootrec /rebuildbcd
```

If `/fixboot` returns Access Denied:

```
bootsect /nt60 sys
```

Step 8 — Run System File Check Offline

Scan for corrupted Windows files:

```
sfc /scannow /offbootdir=D:\ /offwindir=D:\Windows
```

Step 9 — Final Reboot

1. Exit Command Prompt
2. Remove installation media
3. Reboot normally

Troubleshooting Notes

- If DISM fails: verify correct drive letter

- If drive is read-only: run `diskpart ? attributes disk clear readonly`
 - If BitLocker relocks: unlock again
 - If updates reinstall automatically: pause Windows Update after recovery
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Summary

- Boot to recovery
- Unlock BitLocker
- Locate OS drive
- Check disk health
- Revert pending updates
- Remove broken packages
- Repair bootloader if needed
- Run SFC

This procedure resolves most Windows Update boot failures without reinstalling the operating system.

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