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Turning on WordPress debug mode safely: WP_DEBUG and the log

WordPress & CMS

CODE

RLX-MZ-KB-1891

VERSION

v2026.10.15

COUNTRY · LANGUAGE

Mozambique · English

MozOut Mozambique

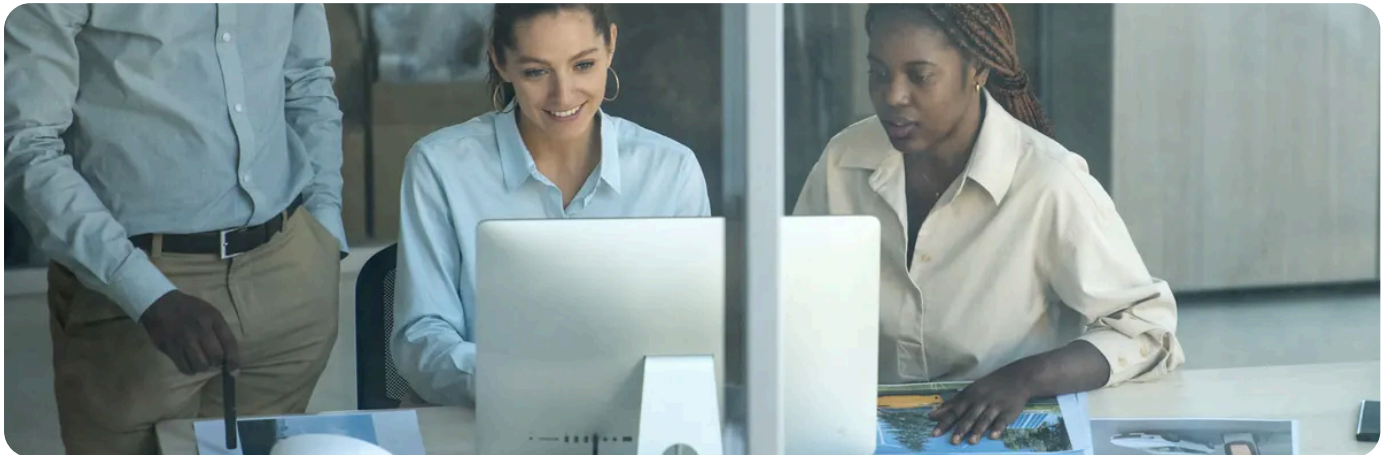
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Tax ID (NUIT) 401 191 607 · Legal entity no. (NUEL) 105 045 974 · Economic activity code (CAE) 62022

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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
<code>define('WP_DEBUG', true);</code>	Switches on debug mode: WordPress starts recording warnings and errors.
<code>define('WP_DEBUG_LOG', true);</code>	Writes them to the file <code>wp-content/debug.log</code> .
<code>define('WP_DEBUG_DISPLAY', false);</code>	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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