

Why won't that DVD play correctly?

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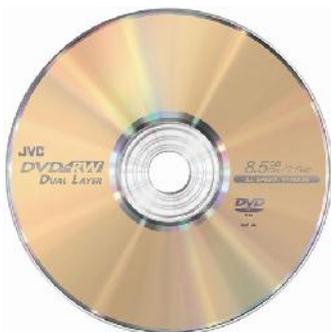


*Stump the PC Club is a free tech-advice column written by members of the **North Orange County Computer Club**, which has been in existence since 1976. Visit the club's site at noccc.org. And don't forget to stop by the Gadgetress' home for the PC Club, at ocregister.com/link/pcclub, to find out how to ask a question and read past answers.*

QUESTION: I find that some DVD's won't launch on my PC, whereas others play with perfect visuals and sound. I have a mixed bag of DVD's, some from friends and others I bought. One of these finicky DVD's came with a new textbook and did not launch on my computer but did on other computers. I checked my Device Manager and everything looked fine. What's up? I am rather unsophisticated with computers.

PC CLUB: Up until Windows 7, most PCs required the installation of software to play DVD movies, even if you had a DVD drive. However, many PCs today come bundled with this software already installed.

When DVD drives first arrived on the scene, I would purchase a DVD movie for testing purposes since you never know if you have a faulty DVD or one that was created improperly. This comes in handy when I suspect that a PC has a problem or that a DVD is faulty.



Regarding your mixed bag of DVDs, it's almost impossible to diagnose them. But typically, PCs with newer hardware or software installed will play a

larger variety of DVDs. As an aside, a friend of mine could not play a DVD on an older DVD Player. It turned out that he had a newer player in the next room that worked fine.

Windows 7 Home Premium and higher versions have built-in support for playing DVD movies but the Starter and Home Basic editions require additional software or a decoder to be installed. If you have a problem playing DVDs with Windows Media Player you can download and install the free VLC Media Player from www.videolan.org/vlc/. If you still can't play a DVD with this program, either the DVD or your hardware has a problem.

Unfortunately, checking your Device Manager will not shed any light on the problem unless you have a hardware problem. If you do have a hardware problem, by all means resolve it, but it's no guarantee that resolving it will allow you to play DVDs since it could be that some crucial piece of software is missing or corrupted.

Here's an example of what can go wrong with DVDs. If someone is authoring or creating a DVD and accidentally adds an extra audio track which is left blank, some DVD players will still play the DVD correctly and others may not. It's impossible to test all DVDs with all players but most DVD movie producers use stringent rules for producing them.

There are several commercially available programs for playing DVDs including WinDVD, available at www.corel.com for \$79.99 and PowerDVD, available at www.cyberlink.com from \$49 to \$99 depending on the features. However, I would start out with the free VLC player first and see if it meets your needs.

Even though you can play DVDs, that doesn't mean that you can play the new HD (High Definition) Blu-ray disks. You'll need a Blu-ray DVD player in your computer. And hopefully, if you have one of those, the drive or PC came with software to play it. The free VLC Player cannot play these types of discs. So, before buying any software, be sure to read the specifications and reviews. For example, the Cyberlink Web site will show you a comparison of the various versions of PowerDVD including the formats of DVDs that can be played. The most expensive version usually can play all formats.

Normally, there is quite a selection of freeware for a particular application but free DVD player software is quite limited. Be careful when searching for software on the Internet since there are many sites that advertise "free downloads" but you still have to pay to unlock all of the features or convert a trial version to a permanent one. Read the fine print or search Google for a review of the program. You can read a review of the top ten DVD player programs at TopTenReviews (link: bit.ly/dvdreview).

2010 DVD Player Software Review Product Comparisons										
TopTenREVIEW.COM Software Multimedia DVD Player Software Review										
Rank	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10
	PowerDVD	WinDVD	BlackDVD	Zoom Player	CinePlayer	TotalMedia Theatre	DVD X Player	RiuDVD Region Free Player	DiasDVD	SuperDVD Player
										
	READ REVIEW	READ REVIEW	READ REVIEW	READ REVIEW						
Reviewer Comments:										
Lowest Price	BUY \$38.95	BUY \$39.95	BUY \$39.95	BUY \$39.95	BUY \$29.99	BUY \$29.99	BUY \$49.95	BUY \$39.95	BUY \$39.99	BUY \$35.90
Overall Rating										
Ratings										

- Ed Schwartz, NOCCC member. View his blog at www.edwardns.com/blog.