

COMPUTER NEWS from the



NOVEMBER 2015

Volume 3 NO. 11

As found on the web and other sources

Gadgets for Geezers?

Category: [Gadgets](#) From "askbobrankin.com".

The bad news is, we're all getting older. The good news is, we are not getting older alone. That makes older folks a market whose needs can't be ignored. This has inspired a broad spectrum of "assistive technology" that make computing, Web surfing, and enjoying digital media easier. Here are some of the best options...

Assistive Tech for Savvy Seniors

In 2011, 40 million Americans were age 65 or older; today, that figure is 76.4 million, according to the U. S. Census Bureau. The ranks of the "oldest old" – aged 85 or older – will swell to 19 million by 2050.

But age has nothing to do with curiosity -- most of [today's senior](#) citizens have had access to computers, the Internet and mobile gadgets for 20 years, and they've made technology a part of their daily lives. (My 86-year-old father has a desktop PC, an iPad, and an Android smartphone.)

VISION AIDS

Visual acuity naturally declines with age. Diseases such as cataracts, [glaucoma](#), and macular degeneration are common among seniors. Bigger computer monitors are one adaptation that can help. (Recently I've seen 23-inch monitors on sale at Best Buy for as low as \$129.)



But there are a variety of other gadgets and computer peripherals that can be used to make things bigger or easier to see.

The [AbleNet Large Print USB Computer Keyboard](#) (\$39.95 at Amazon) fills each key with its character(s), making the characters about twice as large as those on a standard keyboard. Yet overall, the keyboard is the same size as a standard 104-key keyboard.

Similarly, the [EZ Eyes Large Print Keyboard](#) (\$9.75 at Amazon) adds a high-contrast black-on-yellow color scheme to larger characters.

The [Big Bright Keyboard](#) (\$24.24 at Amazon) has extra-large, 1-inch keys that glow in the dark, and big black characters.



Perhaps the most flexible option is the [Ivation Seven Color Adjustable Letter Illuminated Large Print Keyboard](#) (\$29.95). Its keys are backlit by gently glowing LED bulbs, and you can adjust them to any of seven colors.

On Windows, hold down the Ctrl button and spin the scroll wheel on your mouse to enlarge or reduce the font size on your screen. If you don't have a scroll wheel, try Ctrl with the Plus (+) or Minus (-) sign.

Windows Vista and later editions include an "Ease of Access Center" that offers both Magnifier and Narrator tools, which will magnify portions of the screen, and/or read the text aloud. Click the Start button, type "Ease of Access" and press Enter to find it.

On a Mac, click the Apple key, then System Preferences, then Universal Access to find similar features.

If you love your current keyboard and can't bear to part with it, you might try [Glowing Fluorescent Large Lettering Keyboard Stickers](#) (\$7.80 at Amazon) made of self-adhesive vinyl here in the U. S. A.

Reading newspapers, [prescription drug](#) patient information inserts, or just about anything printed on paper these days can be challenging even for 20/20 vision. The [MagniPros® Book Light LED Magnifier](#) (\$10.99 at Amazon) enlarges tiny text 300%, and its ultra-thin frame harbors three LED bulbs for dim lighting conditions (batteries included). It doubles as a bookmark.

The [Fulcrum 20072-401 Magnifier 12 LED Floor Lamp](#) (\$79.99 at Amazon) has a 5-inch diameter lens with 2x magnification for reading and a 6x inset for detailed work such as cross-stitch or jewelry making.



I was struck by the review from “Betts” who bought this lamp for her 86 year-old mother in 2009. Never before have I seen a consumer update her product review three times over the course of five years! Betts last update, in September, 2014: “This light is like the ever-ready bunny. It keeps ticking along. Mom, now 91, continues to use the light every day.”

MOTOR CONTROL

Some seniors suffer diminished fine motor control due to arthritis, Parkinson's disease, and other causes. Using a laptop's touchpad can be extremely frustrating or impossible. Even conventional

mice may be too finicky for trembling or stiff fingers. Many [seniors find](#) trackballs more to their liking.

The [BIGtrack Trackball](#) by Infogrip, Inc. (\$83.52 at Amazon) looks like it belongs in a toddler's playpen. But its 3-inch trackball requires less [fine motor control](#) than much-smaller conventional trackballs. The blue buttons are located on the far side of the trackball to avoid unwanted clicks. A Drag Lock feature means you don't have to hold a button down while dragging an item on-screen; instead, click the Lock and roll the ball, then unlock to release the item.



HEARING IMPAIRMENT

[Hearing loss](#), particularly in the higher frequencies range, can also be frustrating. A number of products make listening to music and video easier for seniors.

The [Wireless TV Speaker System](#) from FirstStreet (\$179.95) puts TV sound right next to your chair. Speaker volume controls are independent of the TV system's volume controls. This system also enhances the audio channel that carries dialogue/voices.

The [Conversation Enhancer](#), also from FirstStreet (\$179.95) filters background noise while amplifying the voices of men and women alike. Plug in the earbuds and converse clearly with a driver from the back seat, even if the radio is on; or enjoy a dinner conversation even if your table is near the kitchen. It can also be helpful for individual [TV watching](#) without disturbing others in the room.

MORE ON WINDOWS 10 or how to save your sanity!

Learn to use the Windows 10 Recovery Drive

By Lincoln Spector



Sooner or later, nearly every Windows user powers up the machine — and Windows simply refuses to start.

Every current version of Windows lets you create and run a self-booting rescue disc, but Win10 takes that tool to a new level.

The Windows 10 Recovery Drive comes with multiple tools for repairing and reinstalling Windows. You can, for example, use a system restore point to restore an image backup, run an automated Startup Repair tool, refresh Windows (either keeping or removing your data), or completely reinstall the operating system.

If you're lucky, you'll never need your Win10 recovery drive. But when things go serious wrong with Windows 10, you'll be extremely relieved to have it. Here's how to create and use a recovery drive.

Preparing the Recovery Drive — on a flash drive

The changes to the self-booting, Windows-recovery system start with the name. Bowing to changes in PC technology, it's no longer a rescue *disc*, it's now a rescue *drive*. In fact, creating a bootable CD or DVD is no longer an option; you must use a spare USB flash drive with a capacity of at least 512MB. But for a recovery drive with a complete set of tools, you'll need an 8GB or larger drive.

If your internal drive crashes, and you need to install Windows on a replacement drive, you'll be glad you splurged on an 8GB drive.

Note that everything currently on the flash drive will be lost when you turn it into a Win10 recovery drive.

Most important, you'll want to create your new recovery drive *now*, while your Win10 setup is healthy. (Note: A recovery drive created on one PC might not work perfectly on another machine.)

Once you have a suitable flash drive plugged into your system, it's time to run Win10's **Create a recovery drive** option. There are two ways to do it:

- In the Win10 search box, enter "recovery" and select the option under Settings.
- Open Control Panel/Recovery (in the icon view).

Click **Create a recovery drive** (Figure 1) and follow the prompts. If your flash drive has a capacity of less than 8GB, uncheck the **Back up system files to the recovery drive** option. Otherwise, the drive-creation process will fail, possibly with a generic error message.

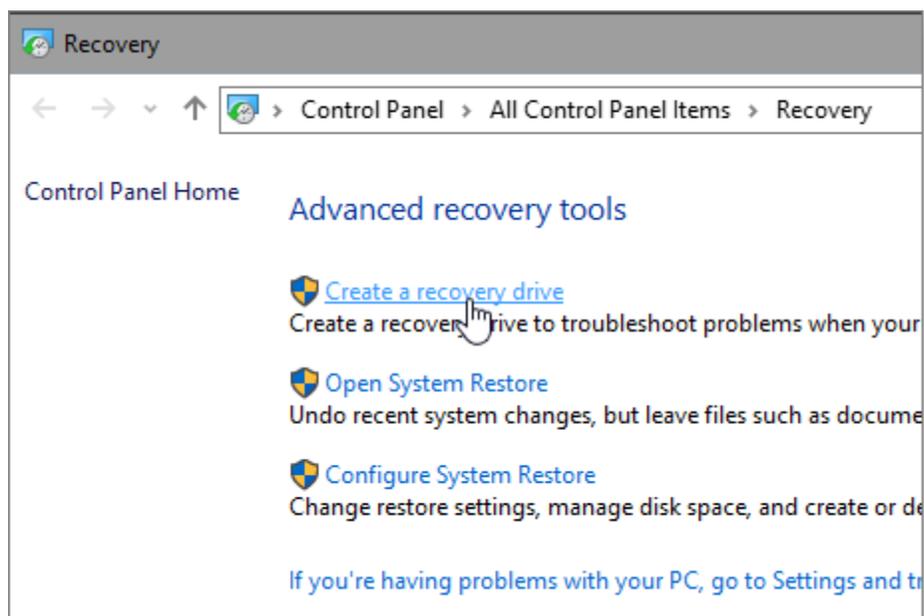


Figure 1. Setting up a Win10 recovery drive starts with a click of the *Create a recovery drive* link.

Keep in mind that the actual drive creation can take considerable time — especially if you're backing up system files.

When the process is done, label the flash drive with something like "Recovery" plus the make and model of the PC. Store it securely, so it doesn't get used for some other purpose and you'll be able to find it in an emergency.

But before you do that, I strongly suggest testing that the rescue drive boots — you can also check out its various tools, preferably while reading the rest of this article.

Booting Windows from the recovery drive

Starting your system from the recovery flash drive should be easy — simply plug in the USB drive and power up your system. But if that doesn't work on an older system, you'll need to check the preferred boot order in the BIOS.

On newer PCs, the disaster of an unbootable PC can be compounded by the UEFI startup system. If you're left with "How the bleep do I get this thing to boot from a flash drive?" you'll probably find the answer in Fred Langa's Dec. 11, 2014, [Top Story](#) "How to solve UEFI boot and startup problems."

When the recovery drive boots, you'll first be asked to choose a keyboard layout — which is really a choice of languages and nationalities. (I chose US.)

The next screen, **Choose an option** (Figure 2), offers three choices. Obviously, you can ignore **Exit and continue to Windows 10** and **Turn off your PC**. Click (or tap) **Troubleshoot**.

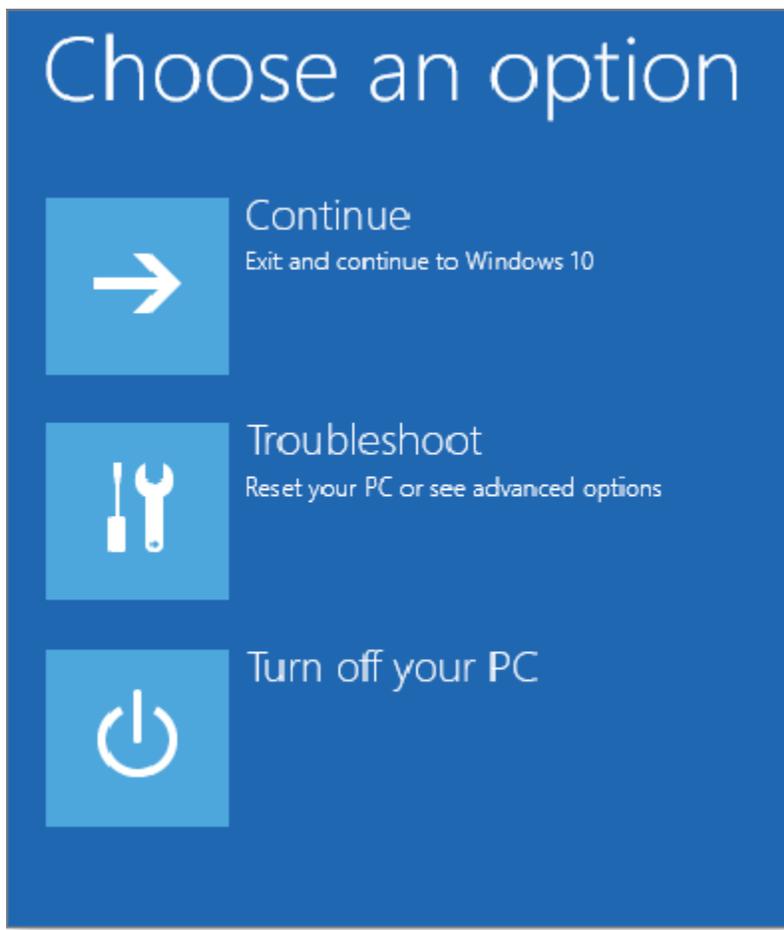


Figure 2. To access Win10's repair tools, select *Troubleshoot*.

Next, you get three more choices: **Reset this PC**, **Recover from a drive**, and **Advanced options** (Figure 3). I'll start with the more flexible **Advanced** tools.

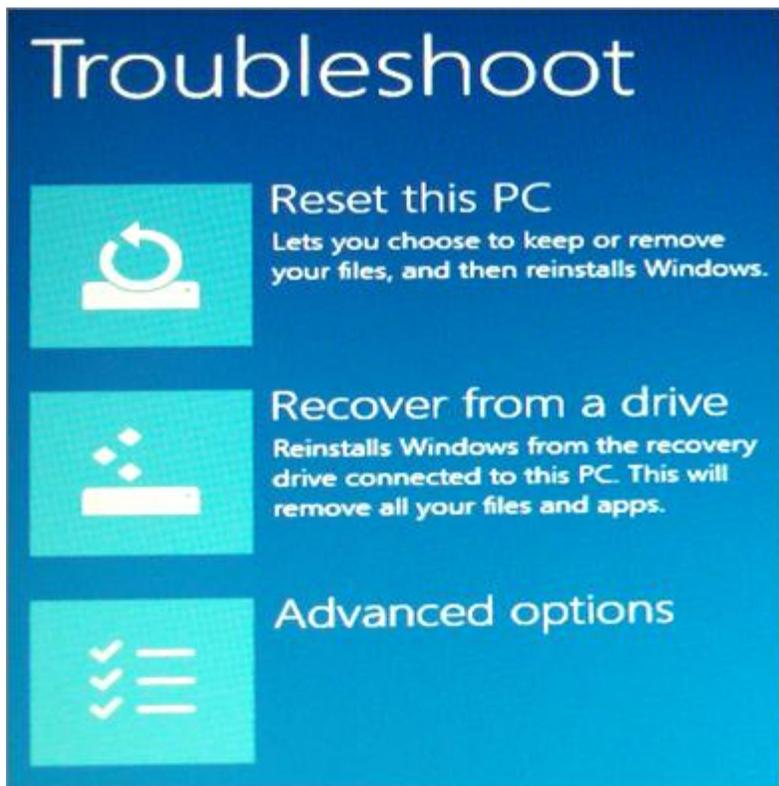


Figure 3. The *Advanced options* offers a variety of tools for fixing Win10 issues.

One more thing: After selecting one of these tools, you might be asked to select an operating system — even though the only option is Windows 10. Don't worry about it; simply select Windows 10.

Advanced options: When you don't need to reinstall

Despite the heading, most of the offerings under "Advanced options" (Figure 4) aren't more advanced than anything else on the Troubleshoot menu. They are simply tools that might fix Windows without reinstalling the operating system. In other words, these are the tools you should look at first.

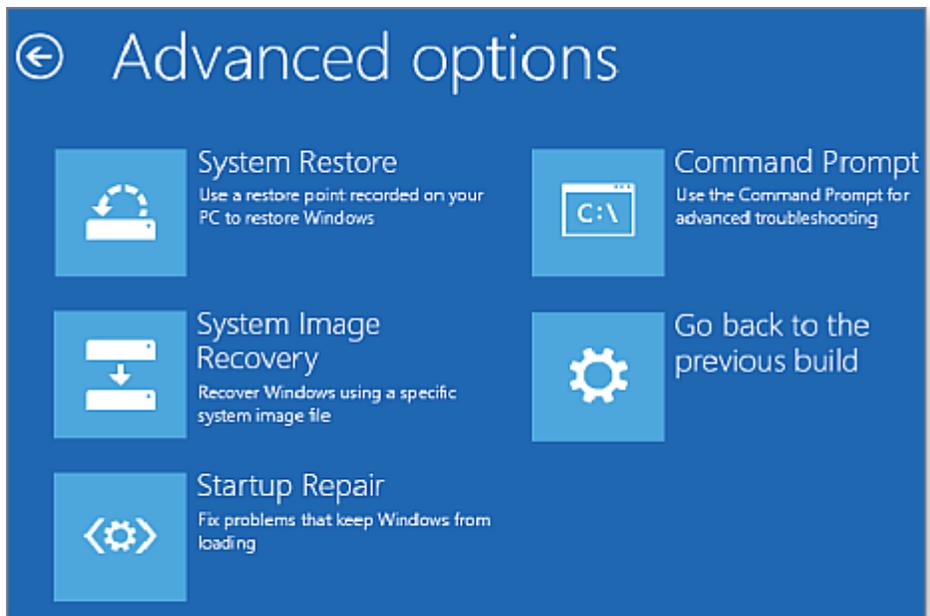


Figure 4. The recovery disk's *Advanced options* includes various levels of repair.

I'll start with the easiest. (Note that all these tools are available within the default Win10 setup. Click Settings/Update & security/Recovery/Advanced startup. Next click Restart now/Troubleshoot/Advanced options. But, of course, you can't access those tools if you can boot your PC.)

- **Startup Repair:** This simple tool examines all system files and settings that play a role in the Windows boot process. It then tries to determine what's at fault and attempts to fix it.

Because it's relatively quick, this tool is a good place to start your troubleshooting. If it doesn't work, you can then move on to more extensive solutions.

- **Go back to the previous build:** If you've upgraded from Win7 or Win8.1 within the last 30 days, and you haven't removed your **Windows.old** folder, this option will take you back to the previous OS.
- **System Restore:** Most likely, you're already familiar with Windows *restore points* — records of previous operating-system settings and configurations that you can access and restore via Control Panel/Recovery. The option in the recovery drive works that same way (Figure 5).

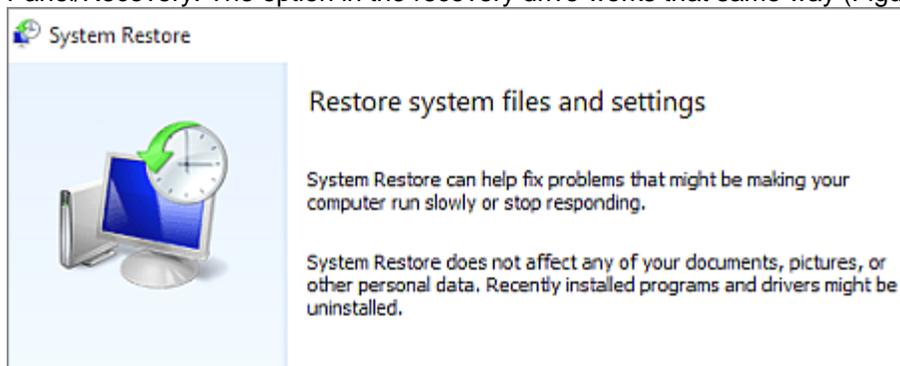


Figure 5. The Win10 recovery drive includes the basic *Restore system files* tool.

- **System Image Recovery:** You also access backup images of your system hard drive or SSD, stored on another drive. (I'll assume you have a recent image backup; if not, click Control Panel/File

History tool. You'll find the link, **System Image Backup**, in the lower-left corner of the File History window.)

To restore an image from an external drive, you'll need to plug in both the recovery drive and the backup drive into separate USB ports.

I succeeded in restoring a backup only after some struggles. On the first try, the image-restore system didn't see the backup drive. But rebooting the PC with the backup drive already plugged in solved the problem.

Then the tool failed to restore the backup, stating: "Windows cannot restore a system image to a computer that has different firmware. The system image was created on a computer using BIOS and this computer is using UEFI." This, as it turned out, was a cockpit error: my computer had displayed two listing for the same flash drive (Figure 6), and I'd mistakenly chosen the one prefaced with "UEFI."

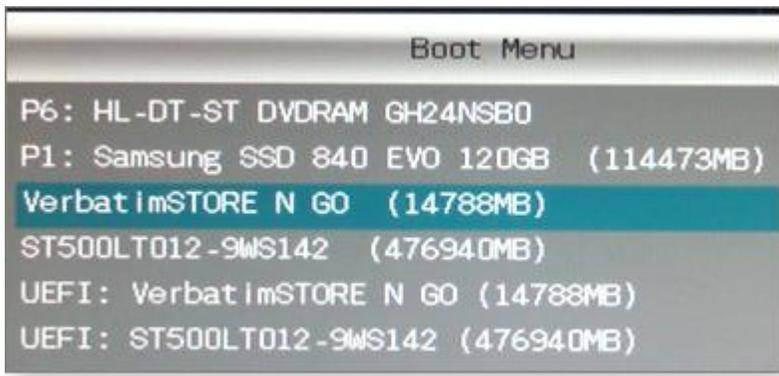


Figure 6. Picking the correct flash drive

The third try was the charm.

- **Command Prompt:** Feeling nostalgic about DOS? Me neither. But there are times when the command-prompt environment is useful — for example, when booting to Safe Mode from the recovery drive.

Unfortunately, recovery drive doesn't include a simple safe mode–restart option. In my opinion, that's a significant omission. (For more on booting in safe mode — including from a command prompt — see the Field Notes article in this issue and a Windows TenForums [page](#).)

The command prompt has other recovery uses. For example, use **XCOPY** ([more info](#)) to move your personal files to an external drive, or use **DISKPART** ([info](#)) to delete or create drive partitions (if you're careful and patient).

Of course, you'll also want to remember the "exit" command, which gets you out of Command Prompt.

Reset and Recover: Reinstalling Windows 10

Now back to those first two Troubleshoot options, **Reset this PC** and **Recover from a drive**. Both reinstall Windows and offer essentially the same options.

Where the two options differ is that **Reset** uses the installation files on the internal drive and **Recover** uses files on the recovery drive. That's why you'll see the **Recover** option only if you used an 8GB or larger flash drive and chose the **Back up system files to the recovery drive** option when you created the recovery drive.

When would you use **Recover** instead of the **Reset** option? Typically when the special recovery partition on the main system drive has been destroyed or corrupted. You might also use **Recover** when replacing or upgrading the main drive and you're creating a clean installation.

Neither of these options will require a product key — assuming you're running the recovery drive on the original PC.

When selecting **Reset the PC**, you'll be asked whether you want to **Keep my files** or **Remove everything** (Figure 7). The first option reinstalls Windows but leaves your personal documents, photos, and other data files where you left them — at least if you left them in folders (Documents, Music, and so on) recognized by Windows as part of your libraries. Personal files in other locations might get deleted. (Obviously, you should have all your data files backed up before you do anything involving significant changes to Windows. In fact, your data files should be regularly backed up, period.) **Reset the PC** also remembers who you are; you won't have to set up your account all over again.

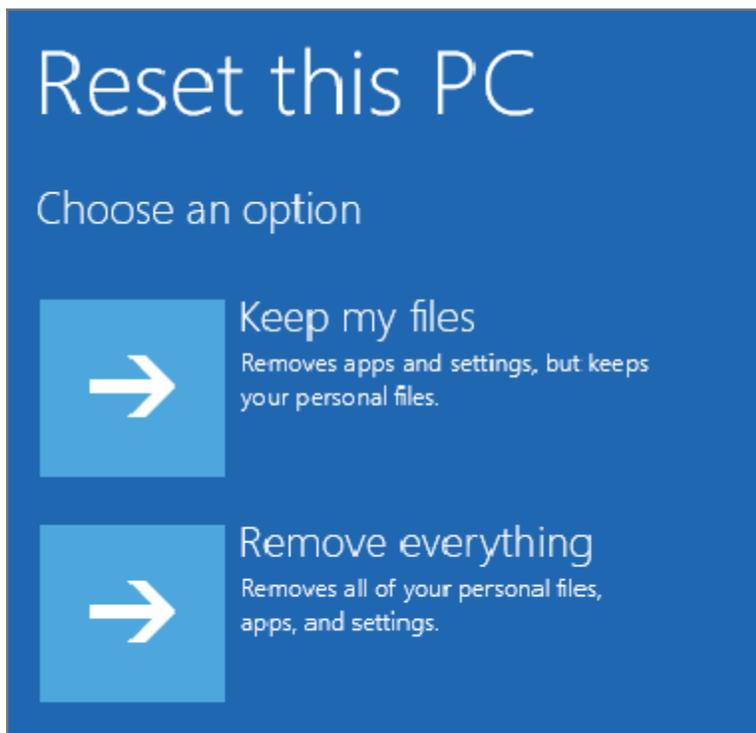


Figure 7. When resetting a PC, you can either keep personal files or start from scratch.

If you select **Recover from a drive** or if you go with **Reset this PC** and **Remove everything**, the installation process will delete all files. Once it's finished, you (or perhaps a new owner) will have to start from scratch, including setting up user accounts.

Remove everything has two more options: **Just remove my files** and **Fully clean the drive**. That last one, which can take hours, securely wipes everything off of the drive.

A secure wipe will make it impossible to recover any data from your hard drive. But the technique is problematic with SSDs, as reported in a PCWorld [article](#). Microsoft hasn't answered my questions about this issue. For now, I'd skip this option on an SSD.

Final thoughts: The Win10 recovery drive could use some more tools — the lack of a "Boot to Safe Mode" option is particularly vexing. If you can't get to your usual sign-in screen, you can't get to the various Safe Mode settings via the standard Win10 Troubleshoot/Advanced/Startup Settings screen.

That said, Win10's flash drive-based repair system is still a must. Create a recovery drive and store it someplace where you won't forget where it is. One of these days, it may save, if not your life, than at least your sanity.

A TRUISM!

IT AIN'T THE GOLDEN YEARS, IT'S THE RUSTY YEARS! (See article 1)