

WordPress .htaccess on cPanel — Reference Card

Companion to: "Why Your WordPress Redirects Stopped Working"

The One Rule

Run exactly one security plugin. Delete (don't just deactivate) the other.

Correct Section Order (top to bottom)

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. Security plugin block | ← Wordfence etc. manages this |
| 2. HTTPS redirect rule | ← You own this |
| 3. Your custom redirects | ← You own this |
| 4. # BEGIN WordPress # END WordPress | ← WordPress manages this |
| 5. # BEGIN cPanel-generated | ← Never touch this |

Custom redirects must come **above** the WordPress block. With pretty permalinks, WordPress's catch-all rule (`RewriteRule . /index.php [L]`) will swallow any URL that isn't a real file or directory — which includes all your redirect targets. They will silently 404 if they're below it.

Safe HTTPS Redirect Rule

```
apache

<IfModule mod_rewrite.c>
RewriteEngine On
RewriteCond %{HTTPS} !=on
RewriteCond %{REQUEST_URI} !^/\..well-known/acme-challenge/
RewriteRule ^(.*)$ https://%{HTTP_HOST}/$1 [R=301,L]
</IfModule>
```

Place this *above* your custom redirects but *below* the security plugin block.

Custom Redirect Syntax

```
apache

RewriteCond %{HTTP_HOST} ^.*$
RewriteRule ^ShortName$ "https://www.yoursite.com/page" [R=301,L]
```

- `ShortName` = the path you want (e.g. `Birds` makes `yoursite.com/Birds` redirect)
 - One `RewriteCond` + one `RewriteRule` pair per redirect
 - Place all custom redirects **above** `# BEGIN WordPress`
-

Managing Redirects

| Task | Use this | Not this |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Add/edit a redirect | cPanel File Manager | cPanel Redirects dashboard |
| Fix a broken file | cPanel File Manager | cPanel Redirects dashboard |
| Regenerate WordPress block | Settings → Permalinks → Save | Manually editing between markers |

The cPanel Redirects dashboard appends rules without checking order. It will eventually put something in the wrong place. Don't use it.

Who Owns What

| Section | Owner | You edit it? |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| # BEGIN [Security Plugin] | Security plugin | No |
| HTTPS redirect | You | Yes |
| Custom redirects | You | Yes |
| # BEGIN WordPress / # END WordPress | WordPress | No |
| # BEGIN cPanel-generated | cPanel | Never |

Empty WordPress Block = Normal

If permalinks are set to **Plain** (`?p=123`), the WordPress block will be empty. This is correct — plain permalinks don't need rewrite rules. Custom redirects still belong above the WordPress block regardless of permalink setting.

When Things Break: Checklist

1. Open `.htaccess` in File Manager and check section order (should match the order above)
2. Look for a rule near the top with `[R=301, L]` that catches all traffic — this will swallow everything below it
3. Confirm custom redirects are **above** `# BEGIN WordPress`
4. Check whether two security plugins are installed — if so, remove one
5. After any fix, test redirects immediately in an incognito window (browsers cache 301s aggressively)

After Installing a New Security Plugin

1. Let the plugin do its initial setup and write its block
2. Open the file in File Manager and verify section order
3. Add or restore your custom redirects **above** `# BEGIN WordPress`
4. Do not use the cPanel Redirects dashboard afterward

Incognito Window Reminder

301 redirects are cached hard by browsers. Always test redirect changes in an incognito/private window, or clear your browser cache first. A redirect that "isn't working" is often just your browser serving a cached response from before the fix.

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