

Caution: Windows Audio Policy and FT8 (WSJT-X)

Operators running FT8 on **Windows** should be aware of a subtle but serious issue with Windows audio handling that can silently interfere with digital modes.

The problem

Windows uses multiple hidden audio “policy” layers (communications handling, exclusive mode, per-app state, and background services). Under certain conditions, Windows may:

- **Silently mute or clamp TX audio**
- Reassign or lock audio devices mid-session
- Override mixer settings without warning
- Cause FT8 transmissions to stop producing RF even though WSJT-X appears to be transmitting normally

These failures can occur **minutes after startup**, not immediately, making them hard to diagnose. The result is often “TX but no signal,” poor decodes, or inconsistent performance.

Why this matters for FT8

FT8 relies on **continuous, unattended, stable audio paths**. Windows audio policy was designed for consumer communications (calls, conferencing, media), not for long-running digital signal generation. Adjusting audio levels in the Windows mixer can *appear* to fix things temporarily, only to have the OS reassert control later.

What was observed in practice

- TX audio muting every few minutes despite WSJT-X watchdog disabled
- Mixer sliders locked or reset by the OS
- Interference from remote desktop software audio (e.g., NoMachine)
- Stable operation only after disabling multiple Windows audio features
- Even then, ongoing vigilance was required

By contrast, the same radio and WSJT-X configuration on Linux (PipeWire) or macOS resumed normal operation immediately under identical band conditions.

Practical takeaway

Windows **can** be made to work with FT8, but it behaves like a *dull tool*:

- It requires disabling features most users don’t know exist
- Audio adjustments must be done upstream (radio or WSJT-X), not in the OS

- Stability comes at the cost of flexibility and ongoing attention

For operators who value reliability and minimal intervention, **Linux or macOS may be better long-term platforms for FT8**, even if they have their own quirks.

Recommendation

If you run FT8 on Windows:

- Be cautious about audio mixers and “helpful” OS features
- Avoid remote desktop software that injects audio
- Expect that problems may reappear after updates or reboots
- Consider documenting a known-good configuration or using system images

If you prefer to focus on radio rather than operating system behavior, alternative platforms may be worth the switch.