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Express says Cannot GET or returns 404 on every route: the causes

Node.js & JavaScript

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Express says Cannot GET or returns 404 on every route: the causes

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The message `Cannot GET /` is Express saying: “I received a GET request for this path and none of my routes or files answers it”. The good news: the application **is running** (if it were not, you would see a 503), so the problem is routing, not the server. **The short answer:** there is no route for that path, or the static files folder points to the wrong place, or what is opening is not your application.

Finding which one, in order

1 **Confirm it is your Express answering.** Add a test route, restart the application and open `/ping`:

```
app.get("/ping", (req, res) => res.send("ok"));
```

If it answers “ok”, the server is fine and the fault is in your routes. If not, you are looking at something else: an `index.html` in the public folder that wins over the address, or another application. Check the address on the “Setup Node.js App” screen.

2 **See what arrives.** Put this before all routes and look at the log (**where to read the logs**):

```
app.use((req, res, next) => {
  console.log(req.method, req.url);
  next();
});
```

3 **Compare with the routes.** The method, the full path and the prefix must match what is registered.

4 **Restart.** A Node application keeps the old code in memory until it is restarted: use the button on the application screen.

The most common causes

Cause	How to recognise it	Fix
No route for `/`	Only `/` fails; `/ping` works.	Define `app.get("/", ...)` or serve a folder with an `index.html` through `express.static`.
Wrong static folder	`express.static("public")` works on your computer and not here.	The relative path depends on where Node was started. Use `path.join(__dirname, "public")`.
Route prefix	The router is mounted at `/api` and you open `/users`.	Open `/api/users`, or mount the router on the right prefix.
Different method	The message says `Cannot POST /x`.	The route is defined with `get` and the form sends `post`, or the other way round.
Route order	A catch-all (`*`) or a 404 handler sits before the others.	Put them last: Express uses the first route that matches.
Capital letters in files	The file exists, but the address asks for another name.	Express ignores case in routes by default, but file names in a static folder are case-sensitive.
Old code in memory	The fix is done and the error does not change.	Restart the application.

Do not “fix” it by hard-coding or opening a port.
On shared hosting the application is served through the domain, by Passenger, not by a port number. Keep `process.env.PORT || 3000` in `listen`, which works here and on your computer. If the application will not even start, that is another case: **a 503 on a Node.js app**.

Write a 404 that helps.
After all the routes, a handler that returns the method and path it received saves a lot of time: `app.use((req, res) => res.status(404).send(req.method + " " + req.url + " not found"))`. Look at the result and compare it with what you expected.

NEED A HAND?

The route exists, the log shows the request and it still fails? Send us the domain and the last lines of the log.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- Getting a Node.js application running →
- Node.js app in cPanel returns 503: the usual causes →
- Where console.log and print output goes, and how to read your app logs →

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