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Generated on 15/11/2026 00:09

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Error establishing a database connection: the causes, in order

Connection & SQL Errors

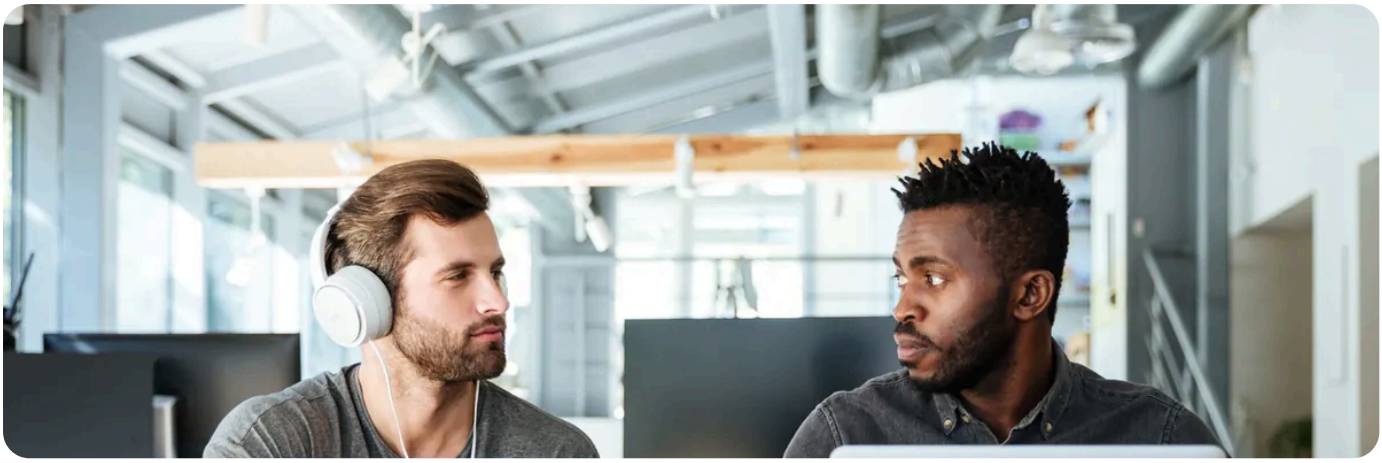
CODE	VERSION	COUNTRY · LANGUAGE
RLX-AO-KB-606	v2026.09.27	Angola · English

Interweb Angola
RLX Angola, Lda. · Group RLX Holdings
Tax ID (NIF) 500 260 5724 · Commercial registration no. 26464-25/250724

https://www.meu.interweb.ao/knowledgebase/606

Error establishing a database connection: the causes, in order

Connection & SQL Errors Created on **September 27, 2026** 5 min read



The page shows one white line saying *«Error establishing a database connection»* and nothing else. It is not a WordPress fault: it is WordPress telling you it asked the database for the data and got nothing back. There are only a few causes, and they have an order of likelihood that rarely lets you down.

Before editing `wp-config.php`, keep a copy of it.
It is the file holding the database password. Download it to your computer, or copy it **outside** `public_html`. Never leave a copy called `wp-config.bak` or `wp-config.txt` inside the site folder: a file with those extensions is served as plain text to anyone who guesses the name, and the password becomes public.

First: is it only this site?

Thirty seconds that save half an hour. Answer these three:

1. Does `/wp-admin` give the same error? If it does, it is the database and not the site. If the dashboard opens, the problem is something else.

2. Do you have another site on the same account? If the other one opens, the database service is up and the problem belongs to this installation.

3. Does phpMyAdmin open from cPanel? If it does and you can see the database with all its tables, then the database exists and what is failing is the authorisation. See **databases and phpMyAdmin**.

The causes, in order

Cause	How to recognise it and how to fix it
1. Wrong password	The commonest, by far. Somebody changed the database user's password in cPanel and did not correct it in `wp-config.php`. It also happens every time a site is copied from another server.
2. User not attached to the database	The user exists, the database exists, but they are not linked. In **MySQL Databases**, under *Add User To Database*, join the two and give **ALL PRIVILEGES**.
3. Wrong database name	On a shared account the real name carries the account prefix: it is not `wordpress`, it is `account_wordpress`. Same for the username. Anyone bringing a site in from outside forgets this every time.
4. Wrong `DB_HOST`	Here it is `localhost`. If the file came from another provider, it may carry an address or a server name that does not exist here.
5. The account hit a limit	With no disk space, or no file allowance left, the database can no longer write and the connection drops. Look at what cPanel shows and at **the limits nobody advertises**.
6. A corrupted table	The error comes and goes, or shows up only on some pages. Dealt with below, with the repair tool.
7. The service is down on our side	Rare, and recognisable because it hits every site on the account at once, phpMyAdmin included. If that is the case, do not change anything: open a request.

Checking the four lines

In cPanel, **File Manager**, site folder, `wp-config.php`, **Edit**. Near the top are the four lines that matter:

1. `define( 'DB_NAME', 'account_wordpress' );` the database name, with the account prefix
2. `define( 'DB_USER', 'account_wpuser' );` the user, also with the prefix
3. `define( 'DB_PASSWORD', '...' );` that user's password
4. `define( 'DB_HOST', 'localhost' );` here it is always this

Do not guess the password: set a new one.
It is quicker and leaves no doubt. In **MySQL Databases**, in the user list, choose *Change password*, generate a new one (**password generator**), save, and put exactly that into `wp-config.php`. Watch for stray spaces at either end when you paste.

Quotes and apostrophes.
If the password contains an apostrophe, a backslash or a dollar sign, it breaks the PHP line and the error stays, now for a different reason. The safe route is to generate a long password using only letters and digits, rather than fighting with escaping.

If the credentials are right: repairing the tables

WordPress ships a repair tool that does not need a login. You turn it on, use it, and turn it off:

1. Add `define( 'WP_ALLOW_REPAIR', true );` to `wp-config.php`.
2. Open `https://asuaempresa.ao/wp-admin/maint/repair.php` and choose repair, or repair and optimise.
3. **Remove the line afterwards.** While it is there, that page is open to everybody, with no password at all.

If you would rather do it by hand, phpMyAdmin has the same: select all the tables and choose *Repair table* from the list at the bottom.

When the error comes and goes

An intermittent error that shows up at busy hours and clears by itself is rarely a wrong password: a wrong password fails every time. That is the account hitting a limit, usually the number of simultaneous requests. Look at **Resource Usage** in cPanel for the hour it happens: **monitoring your site performance in cPanel** and **the limits nobody advertises**.

The underlying cause is usually a heavy site taking too long on each request. Then the article is a different one: **the site is slow**.

If none of this fixes it

Look at the `error_log` in the site folder, because for this fault it usually holds a line with the exact reason for the refusal: **where the PHP error log is**. If the configuration file is damaged or missing, rebuild it: **rebuilding the wp-config.php connection**. If you do not know which database is yours, **find it first**. And if the database really was damaged, restore a copy from a day it worked: **how to restore your data**.

NEED A HAND?

Send us the domain, the time it started, and the line from error_log.

Open a request →

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