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TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE

Zebra ZT231 troubleshooting guide: errors, faults and fixes

Updated 21 October 2026 · By TIMCOD maintenance technicians · Source: official Zebra documentation, ZT231/ZT231R user guide (ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide) (list at the end of the page)

TIMCOD PRODUCT PAGE (IN FRENCH)

See the Zebra ZT231 product page →

In brief. The Zebra ZT231 is an industrial thermal transfer or direct thermal label printer; the ZT231R adds RFID encoding. Its control panel combines a colour touch display, whose background colour shows the printer's status, five lights and three buttons (PAUSE, FEED, CANCEL). The Zebra guide attributes most stoppages to incorrectly loaded media or ribbon, a calibration that needs redoing or a printhead that needs cleaning. This guide covers the 14 messages in the official table, the calibration procedure from the touch display, the quality settings and RFID problems. Click a question to open its entry.

- **A message appears on the display** (Media Out, Ribbon Out, Head Open...): find it in the [lookup table](#) and open the matching entry. The [red, yellow or green display](#) entry explains how to read the display.
- **No message, but the print quality is poor:** start with [calibration](#), then the [ribbon and media](#) and [print quality](#) entries.

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- **The problem keeps coming back:** the [preventive maintenance](#) section explains how it reduces this type of fault.

Which message is my Zebra ZT231 showing? Lookup by message and by lights

The ZT231 shows its alerts on the colour touch display, in English by default, and backs them up with five lights. The table links each message to its cause and to the entry that resolves it.

Message or state	Lights (Zebra guide)	Likely cause	Entry
Head Open	● ● STATUS solid red, PAUSE solid yellow	Printhead not fully closed or faulty head-open sensor	Head Open
Media Out	● ● STATUS solid red, SUPPLIES solid red	Media missing or incorrectly loaded, sensor misaligned, wrong media type	Media Out
Paper Jam	—	Media jammed or wrapped around the platen roller	Paper Jam
Ribbon Out	● ● STATUS solid red, SUPPLIES flashing red	Ribbon missing, incorrectly loaded or not detected; wrong print mode; linerless jam	Ribbon Out
Ribbon In	● ● STATUS solid yellow, SUPPLIES flashing yellow	Ribbon loaded in direct thermal mode	Ribbon In

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Message or state	Lights (Zebra guide)	Likely cause	Entry
Head Over Temp	● STATUS solid yellow	Printhead overheating	<u>Head Over Temp</u>
Head Under Temp	● STATUS flashing yellow	Printhead too cold, printhead cable incorrectly connected or faulty thermistor	<u>Head Under Temp</u>
Head Thermistor Fault	—	Printhead cable incorrectly connected or faulty thermistor	<u>Head Thermistor Fault</u>
Head Identification Failed	● ● ● STATUS, PAUSE and DATA solid red	Non-genuine Zebra printhead or faulty printhead	<u>Head Identification Failed</u>
Printhead resolution unreadable (light only)	● STATUS flashing red	The printer cannot read the printhead's dpi setting	<u>Printhead not recognised</u>
Head Element Out	—	Print element out of order	<u>Head Element Out</u>
Replace Printhead	—	Printhead at the end of its life	<u>Replace Printhead</u>
Head Maintenance Needed	—	Printhead needs cleaning	<u>Printhead cleaning</u>
Cutter Error	● STATUS solid red	Cutter blade in the media path	<u>Cutter Error</u>

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Message or state	Lights (Zebra guide)	Likely cause	Entry
Out of Memory Storing XXX	—	Not enough memory for the requested function	Out of Memory
Network error (light only)	● NETWORK solid red	Ethernet or WLAN error, printer off the network	NETWORK light

The messages come from the “Alerts and Error Messages” page of the Zebra ZT231/ZT231R guide and the lights from the “Indicator Lights” page. With the display set to French, the label shown is translated; the French guide only reproduces these messages as images. A dash means that the page consulted does not specify the state of the lights.

Zebra ZT231 error messages: what the display means and how to get going again

The ZT231's alerts appear on the colour touch display and on the lights. Each entry gives the short answer, the cause identified by Zebra, the steps to take and, where the guide provides for it, when to call a technician.

What does a red, yellow or green display mean on my Zebra ZT231?

Symptoms: home screen background red, yellow or green, icon in the top bar.

Short answer: On the ZT231, the background colour of the home screen reflects the printer's status. According to Zebra, a red or yellow background generally blocks printing until the problem is resolved; a green message is informational and usually clears by itself.

LIKELY CAUSE

The Zebra guide states that a change in the home screen background colour may require action on your part to return to the ready state.

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WHAT TO DO

1. Touch the icons in the bar at the top of the home screen to read the error, alert or information message.
2. Look up this message in the [lookup table](#) and open the matching entry.
3. Once the problem is resolved, check that the STATUS light returns to solid green: the printer is ready.
4. To print the last label again, touch Reprint on the home screen. If the button does not appear, no format is available for reprinting.

The ZT231's control panel combines a colour touch display, five lights (STATUS, PAUSE, DATA, SUPPLIES, NETWORK) and three buttons: PAUSE (starts or stops the printer), FEED (feeds one blank label) and CANCEL (when paused, one press cancels the next format; holding it for 2 seconds cancels them all).

Sources: [Alert and Error States](#) · [Control Panel](#) · [Indicator Lights](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

My Zebra ZT231 shows “HEAD OPEN” with the printhead closed: how do I clear the alert?

Message: **Head Open** · Lights: STATUS solid red, PAUSE solid yellow.

Short answer: The ZT231 guide gives two explanations: the printhead is not fully closed, or its head-open sensor is malfunctioning. Close the printhead completely; if the alert stays on the display, the sensor must be replaced by a technician.

LIKELY CAUSE

Printhead not completely closed, or head-open sensor not working properly.

WHAT TO DO

1. Close the printhead completely.
2. Check that the alert clears and the STATUS light returns to solid green.

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3. If Head Open is still displayed even though the printhead is properly closed, the head-open sensor is at fault.

When to call a technician: if Head Open is still displayed with the printhead closed, Zebra specifies replacement of the head-open sensor by a service technician.

Sources: [Alerts and Error Messages](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Indicator Lights](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Why does my Zebra ZT231 show “MEDIA OUT” when a roll of labels is loaded?

Message: **Media Out** · Lights: STATUS solid red, SUPPLIES solid red.

Short answer: Zebra gives three causes: media incorrectly loaded, media sensor incorrectly positioned, or printer set for separate labels when the roll is continuous. Reload the media, check the sensor and the label type, then run a calibration.

LIKELY CAUSE

Media missing or incorrectly loaded; media sensor misaligned; printer configured for non-continuous media when continuous media is loaded.

WHAT TO DO

1. Reload the media following the “Loading the Media” section of the guide, according to your mode (tear-off, peel-off, cutter...).
2. Check the position of the media sensor.
3. Check the label type in Menu > Print > Print Quality > Label Type: Continuous, Gap/Notch or Mark.
4. Check the selected sensor in Print > Sensors > Sensor Type: Transmissive for most media, generally Reflective for black mark media.
5. Run a calibration (see the [calibration](#) entry).

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With continuous media, the guide states that the label format must specify a label length (^LL command).

Sources: [Alerts and Error Messages](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Indicator Lights](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Print Menu](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

What should I do when my Zebra ZT231 shows “PAPER JAM”?

Message: **Paper Jam** · Lights: not specified by the guide.

Short answer: The media is getting stuck somewhere along its path: incorrectly loaded, stuck to a part or wrapped around the platen roller. Carefully remove the jammed labels and, if adhesive remains on the platen roller, clean it.

LIKELY CAUSE

Media problem in the media path: labels incorrectly loaded, stuck to parts in the path or wrapped around the platen roller.

WHAT TO DO

1. Look for incorrectly loaded media or labels stuck to parts of the media path.
2. Check whether media has wrapped around the platen roller; remove the labels carefully.
3. If adhesive remains on the platen roller, clean it (“Cleaning the Printhead and Platen Roller” procedure in the guide).
4. Reload the media.

On a ZT231 fitted with the linerless option, a linerless cutter jam or media wrapped around the platen roller is shown as **Ribbon Out** : see the [Ribbon Out](#) entry.

Sources: [Alerts and Error Messages](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) (official documentation).

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Why does my Zebra ZT231 ask for ribbon (“RIBBON OUT”) when ribbon is loaded?

Message: **Ribbon Out** · Lights: STATUS solid red, SUPPLIES flashing red.

Short answer: In thermal transfer mode, the sensor does not see the ribbon: ribbon missing or not properly engaged, sensor blocked by the media, or printer set to thermal transfer with direct thermal labels. Reload the ribbon and calibrate; if that is not enough, restore the printer settings.

LIKELY CAUSE

The Zebra table lists: ribbon not loaded or incorrectly loaded; ribbon sensor not detecting the ribbon; media blocking the ribbon sensor; ribbon correctly loaded but not detected; direct thermal labels while the printer expects ribbon in thermal transfer mode.

WHAT TO DO

1. Reload the ribbon (“Loading the Ribbon” section). Under the printhead, it must go all the way back, close to the inner wall (firewall), so that it passes in front of the sensor.
2. Calibrate the printer (see the [calibration](#) entry).
3. If the ribbon is still not detected even though it is correctly loaded, recalibrate or restore the default values: Menu > System > Settings > Restore Defaults, PRINTER option.
4. With direct thermal labels, set Print > Print Quality > Print Type to Direct Thermal.
5. Conversely, if the printer does not report the end of the ribbon, it was calibrated without ribbon or with incorrectly loaded ribbon: reload it, then recalibrate.

With the linerless option, **Ribbon Out** can also indicate a linerless cutter jam or media wrapped around the platen roller. The guide then refers to the PAPER ERROR recommendations in the “Linerless Printing or Cutter Issues” section.

Sources: [Alerts and Error Messages](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Indicator Lights](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Ribbon Issues](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [System Menu](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide

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(official documentation).

How do I clear the “RIBBON IN” alert on my Zebra ZT231 in direct thermal mode?

Message: **Ribbon In** · Lights: STATUS solid yellow, SUPPLIES flashing yellow.

Short answer: Ribbon is loaded while the printer is set to direct thermal. With direct thermal labels, remove the ribbon: Zebra states that this message does not affect printing. With thermal transfer labels, set Print Type to Thermal Transfer.

LIKELY CAUSE

Ribbon loaded, printer set to direct thermal mode.

WHAT TO DO

1. Direct thermal labels: remove the ribbon, which is not needed.
2. If the message persists with no ribbon in the printer, calibrate it (see the [calibration](#) entry).
3. Thermal transfer labels: set Print > Print Quality > Print Type to Thermal Transfer.

Sources: [Alerts and Error Messages](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Indicator Lights](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Print Menu](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Why does my Zebra ZT231 stop with “HEAD OVER TEMP”?

Message: **Head Over Temp** · Light: STATUS solid yellow.

Short answer: The printhead is overheating. Let the printer cool down: printing resumes by itself as soon as the printhead elements return to an acceptable temperature. If the alert comes back often, move the printer or reduce the print

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speed.

LIKELY CAUSE

Printhead temperature too high.

Caution: HOT SURFACE: according to Zebra, the printhead can be hot enough to cause severe burns. Let it cool before touching it.

WHAT TO DO

1. Let the printer cool down; printing resumes automatically.
2. If the error persists, move the printer.
3. Reduce Print Speed (Menu > Print > Print Quality).

Sources: [Alerts and Error Messages](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Indicator Lights](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Print Menu](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

What do “HEAD UNDER TEMP” and “HEAD THERMISTOR FAULT” mean on a Zebra ZT231?

Messages: Head Under Temp , Head Thermistor Fault (alone or alternating) · Light: STATUS flashing yellow.

Short answer: If the printhead is simply approaching its lower temperature limit, keep printing: it will warm up. If the alert persists, the room is too cold or the printhead is at fault: data cable incorrectly connected, or a faulty thermistor that means the printhead must be replaced.

LIKELY CAUSE

Zebra lists: printhead temperature close to its lower operating limit; printhead data or power cable incorrectly connected; faulty printhead thermistor. The indicator lights page states that a flashing yellow STATUS light can also indicate overheating of the main logic

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board or the power supply.

Caution: HOT SURFACE: according to Zebra, the printhead can be hot enough to cause severe burns. Let it cool before touching it. Zebra states that an incorrectly connected printhead data or power cable can cause these messages.

WHAT TO DO

1. Keep printing while the printhead reaches its operating temperature.
2. If the message is still displayed, move the printer to a warmer location.
3. If the ambient temperature is not the cause, the printhead must be properly reconnected.
4. If the printhead thermistor is faulty, replace the printhead.

Sources: [Alerts and Error Messages](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Indicator Lights](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

How do I free up memory when my Zebra ZT231 shows “OUT OF MEMORY”?

Message: **Out of Memory Storing XXX** · Lights: not specified by the guide.

Short answer: The printer does not have enough memory for the requested function. Simplify the label format or the settings, in particular by setting the print width to the actual width of the label, and check that the data is not addressed to a device that is not present.

LIKELY CAUSE

Not enough memory to carry out the requested function.

WHAT TO DO

1. Adjust the label format or the printer settings to free up memory.

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2. Set the width in Menu > Print > Print Quality > Label Width (Dots) to the actual width of the label rather than the default value.
3. Check that the data is not being sent to a device that is not installed or is unavailable.

When to call a technician: if the message persists, Zebra advises calling a service technician.

According to the Print menu, a width that is too large wastes memory and may print beyond the label; one that is too narrow truncates the format.

Sources: [Alerts and Error Messages](#) ↗ – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#) ↗ – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Print Menu](#) ↗ – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Zebra ZT231 calibration: skipped labels, misaligned printing

The ZT231's manual calibration procedure is carried out from the touch display; these entries detail it and list the causes of misalignment cited by Zebra.

How do I run a manual sensor calibration on a Zebra ZT231?

Symptoms: skipped labels, misplaced printing, unwarranted Media Out or Ribbon Out, automatic calibration failure.

Short answer: On the touch display, open Print > Sensors > Manual Calibration, touch Start Calibration and follow the prompts, touching Next at each step.
Shortcut: hold PAUSE + FEED + CANCEL for 2 seconds. At the end, press PAUSE to resume printing.

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LIKELY CAUSE

Zebra advises calibrating as soon as there is a problem with the printed output. If automatic calibration fails, the guide lists: media or ribbon incorrectly loaded, sensors not detecting the media or ribbon, dirty or incorrectly positioned sensors, wrong media type, printer set to continuous or not calibrated for the media in use.

OFFICIAL MANUAL CALIBRATION PROCEDURE

1. Check that the media and ribbon are correctly loaded, and that the sensors are clean and correctly positioned.
2. Check Label Type (Continuous, Gap/Notch or Mark) in Print > Print Quality, and Sensor Type (Transmissive or Reflective) in Print > Sensors.
3. On the touch display, go to Print > Sensors > Manual Calibration.
4. Touch Start Calibration.
5. Follow the printer's prompts: carry out the requested action, then touch Next to go to the next step.
6. When calibration is complete, press PAUSE to exit pause mode and allow printing.

Zebra asks you to follow the procedure exactly in the order shown. To cancel at any step, press and hold CANCEL. To diagnose detection, print a sensor profile: Print > Sensors > Print: Sensor Profile, or hold FEED + CANCEL at power-up. The Power Up Action and Head Close Action settings (System > Settings) determine what the printer does at power-up and when the printhead is closed: CALIBRATE, FEED, LENGTH, NO MOTION or SHORT CAL.

Sources: [Performing Manual Sensor Calibration](#) · [Print Menu](#) · [System Menu](#) · [Miscellaneous Issues](#)
– Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).



Why is my Zebra ZT231 printing out of position or skipping labels?

Symptoms: skipped labels, image drifting vertically, loss of registration at the top of the label, one to three labels printed incorrectly.

Short answer: According to Zebra, the printer is not calibrated for the media, the media type is set incorrectly or the platen roller is dirty. Set Label Type, clean the platen roller, then calibrate.

LIKELY CAUSE

The “Printing or print quality problems” table lists: printer not calibrated, incorrect label format, separate labels used in continuous mode, dirty platen roller, media guides incorrectly positioned, media or ribbon incorrectly loaded, printhead pressure set incorrectly, media not meeting specifications.

WHAT TO DO

1. Set Label Type to match your media (Gap/Notch, Continuous or Mark), then calibrate (see the [calibration](#) entry).
2. Check the label format sent by your software.
3. Clean the printhead and the platen roller.
4. Reposition the media guides, then reload the media and the ribbon.
5. Check the media: the gaps or notches between labels must measure 2 to 4 mm and be evenly spaced.
6. To correct a constant image offset, use Vertical Label Offset or Horizontal Label Offset in Print > Image Adjust.

Sources: [Printing or print quality problems](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Print Menu](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

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Ribbon and media on the Zebra ZT231: wrinkling, breakage, sideways drift

Ribbon and media feed problems, based on the “Ribbon Issues” table and the print quality table in the Zebra guide.

Why is the ribbon wrinkling on my Zebra ZT231?

Symptoms: wrinkles in the ribbon, fine grey diagonal lines on blank labels, streaks with no print.

Short answer: Zebra links ribbon wrinkling to three settings: ribbon loading, burn temperature (darkness and speed) and printhead pressure. Reload the ribbon, reduce the darkness or speed, and bring the pressure down to the minimum needed.

LIKELY CAUSE

Ribbon incorrectly loaded; incorrect burn temperature; incorrect or uneven printhead pressure. The print quality table also attributes fine grey diagonal lines on blank labels to wrinkled ribbon.

WHAT TO DO

1. Reload the ribbon correctly.
2. Set the darkness to the lowest level that gives good quality and, if necessary, lower the speed: Menu > Print > Print Quality.
3. Set the printhead pressure to the minimum that gives good print quality.
4. If you are able to, check that the printhead and the platen roller are correctly installed.

When to call a technician: if the printhead or the platen roller appear to be incorrectly installed and you cannot check this, Zebra refers you to a technician.

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Sources: [Ribbon Issues](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Printing or print quality problems](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) (official documentation).

Why is the ribbon on my Zebra ZT231 tearing or melting?

Symptoms: ribbon pierced, melted or broken during printing.

Short answer: The darkness is too high, or the ribbon is coated on the wrong side. Lower Darkness (and possibly the speed), clean the printhead and the platen roller, and change the ribbon if it is not coated on the right side.

LIKELY CAUSE

Darkness set too high; ribbon with an unsuitable coated side.

WHAT TO DO

1. In Menu > Print > Print Quality, lower Darkness (0.0 to 30.0) to the lowest level that gives a good print, and lower the speed if necessary.
2. Clean the printhead and the platen roller.
3. Replace the ribbon with one coated on the correct side.

The Print menu points out that excessive darkness can also blur the image, make barcodes unreadable and wear the printhead prematurely.

Sources: [Ribbon Issues](#) · [Print Menu](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Why does the media on my Zebra ZT231 drift sideways during printing?

Symptoms: media “walking” from side to side, image shifted horizontally after tearing off.

Short answer: The media guide is set incorrectly, the printhead pressure is unsuitable, or previous labels were torn off incorrectly. Adjust the guide so that it just touches the edge of the media, and pull labels down and to the left to remove



them.

LIKELY CAUSE

Media not feeding straight (media guide, printhead pressure); previous labels torn off in the wrong direction, which makes the media slide sideways.

WHAT TO DO

1. Adjust the media guide so that it just touches the edge of the media.
2. If that is not enough, check the printhead pressure.
3. To remove a label, pull it down and to the left: the tear-off bar helps cut the liner. Pulling upwards, or down and to the right, can shift the media sideways.
4. If the label does not stop in the right place on the tear-off bar, adjust Print > Image Adjust > Tear Line Offset (-120 to +120).

When to call a technician: if the media still drifts after adjusting the guide and the pressure, Zebra advises calling a technician.

Sources: [Ribbon Issues](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Printing or print quality problems](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Print Menu](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Several of these faults involve the ribbon or labels used. TIMCOD, [Zebra reseller](#), supplies [labels](#), [thermal transfer ribbons and printheads](#) for thermal printers (pages in French).

Zebra ZT231 print quality: faded print and unreadable barcodes

Darkness, speed, pressure and printhead cleanliness: the settings Zebra has you check first, with the touch display menu paths.

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Why are the labels from my Zebra ZT231 coming out faded or too dark?

Symptoms: faded, too dark or uneven print · Possible message: **Head Maintenance Needed** .

Short answer: Zebra cites incorrectly set darkness or speed, a dirty printhead, incorrect printhead pressure or an unsuitable label and ribbon combination. Clean the printhead and the platen roller, then set the darkness to the lowest level that gives good quality in Menu > Print > Print Quality.

LIKELY CAUSE

The ZT231 print quality table lists: incorrect darkness or speed (the driver or software can change them), dirty printhead, incorrect or uneven printhead pressure, unsuitable label and ribbon combination, media or ribbon not designed for high speed, a format that scales a non-scalable font. The **Head Maintenance Needed** message indicates that the printhead needs cleaning.

Caution: HOT SURFACE: according to Zebra, the printhead can be hot enough to cause severe burns. Let it cool before touching it.

WHAT TO DO

1. If the display shows Head Maintenance Needed, or if the printhead is dirty, clean the printhead and the platen roller following the “Cleaning the Printhead and Platen Roller” procedure in the “Routine Maintenance” chapter of the guide.
2. Run the Print Wizard again, as described in the “Running the Print Wizard and Printing a Test Label” section.
3. Set Darkness to the lowest level that gives good quality: too high, it blurs the image, burns the ribbon and wears the printhead prematurely.
4. Lower Print Speed (2 to 14 ips): a slower speed generally improves quality.
5. Check that your driver or labelling software is not imposing other speed or darkness values.

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6. Set the printhead pressure to the minimum needed (“Adjusting the Printhead Pressure” section).
7. If the fault persists, try different media or a different ribbon; an authorised Zebra distributor or reseller can advise you.

According to Zebra, print that is too light or too dark on only one side of the label indicates uneven printhead pressure. With thick labels, the guide also recommends reviewing the pressure.

Sources: [Printing or print quality problems](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Alerts and Error Messages](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Print Menu](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Why won't the scanner read barcodes printed by my Zebra ZT231?

Symptom: barcode rejected by the scanner.

Short answer: The barcode is out of specification because the darkness or printhead pressure is set incorrectly, or the blank area around it is too narrow. Run the Print Wizard again, adjust darkness and speed, and leave at least 3.2 mm of blank space around the barcode.

LIKELY CAUSE

Barcode out of specification (incorrect darkness or insufficient printhead pressure); not enough clear space around the barcode.

WHAT TO DO

1. Follow the Print Wizard, then adjust Darkness or Print Speed in Menu > Print > Print Quality if necessary.
2. Set the printhead pressure to the minimum needed for good quality.
3. Leave at least 3.2 mm (1/8 inch) between the barcode and other printed areas, and between the barcode and the edge of the label.

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Source: [Printing or print quality problems](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) (official documentation).

Zebra ZT231 printhead: printhead not recognised, elements out of order

Messages that relate directly to the printhead and its replacement.

Why does my Zebra ZT231 show “HEAD IDENTIFICATION FAILED” after a printhead change?

Message: `Head Identification Failed` · Lights: STATUS, PAUSE and DATA solid red (non-genuine printhead).

Short answer: The installed printhead is not a genuine Zebra printhead, or it is faulty. Install a genuine Zebra printhead; if the error comes back after switching off and on again with a genuine printhead, replace the printhead.

LIKELY CAUSE

Printhead replaced with one that is not genuine Zebra; printhead fault.

WHAT TO DO

1. Switch the printer off and on again to see whether the error recurs.
2. If the printhead is not genuine, install a genuine Zebra printhead.
3. If the error comes back with a genuine printhead, replace the printhead.

A flashing red STATUS light indicates a related case: the printer cannot read the printhead's resolution (dpi). The indicator lights page gives no procedure for this case.

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Sources: [Alerts and Error Messages](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Indicator Lights](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

My Zebra ZT231 shows “HEAD ELEMENT OUT” or “REPLACE PRINTHEAD”: do I need to change the printhead?

Messages: **Head Element Out** , **Replace Printhead** · Symptom: long unprinted streaks on several labels.

Short answer: Head Element Out indicates that a printhead element no longer works: Zebra advises replacing the printhead only if this element affects printing. Replace Printhead indicates a printhead at the end of its life, which needs replacing.

LIKELY CAUSE

Print element out of order (Head Element Out); printhead nearing the end of its service life (Replace Printhead). The print quality table also attributes long unprinted streaks to a damaged element, or to wrinkled ribbon.

WHAT TO DO

1. First check that the ribbon is not wrinkled (see the [ribbon wrinkling](#) entry).
2. If the streaks stay in the same place and affect your barcodes or text, replace the printhead.
3. If the display shows Replace Printhead, plan to replace the printhead.

When to call a technician: for a damaged print element, Zebra's print quality table recommends calling in a service technician.

Sources: [Alerts and Error Messages](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Printing or print quality problems](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) (official documentation).

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TIMCOD supplies [printheads for thermal printers](#) (page in French).

Zebra ZT231 connection: network, communication with the computer, USB

NETWORK light, communication diagnostics test and USB host port, according to the Zebra guide.

My Zebra ZT231 can no longer be reached on the network: what does the NETWORK light say?

Light: NETWORK solid red (Ethernet or Wi-Fi).

Short answer: A solid red NETWORK light indicates an Ethernet or WLAN error: the printer is not connected to the network. On Wi-Fi, solid green means connected with a good signal, flashing green means connected with a weak signal.

LIKELY CAUSE

Ethernet error or WLAN error.

WHAT TO DO

1. Read the light's state on Ethernet: off = no link; solid green = 100 Base-T link; solid yellow = 10 Base-T link; solid red = error.
2. On Wi-Fi, at power-up, the light goes from off to flashing red during association, then flashing yellow during authentication. After that: solid green = strong signal, flashing green = weak signal, solid red = error.
3. The System menu also lets you reset the wired or wireless print server: Menu > System > Settings > Restore Defaults, NETWORK option.

Sources: [Indicator Lights](#) · [Indicator Lights](#) · [System Menu](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

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How can I tell whether my Zebra ZT231 is receiving data from the computer correctly?

Symptoms: label not printed or garbled, doubts about the link with the computer.

Short answer: Turn on communication diagnostics mode: the printer then prints every character received in ASCII, with its hexadecimal value underneath. FE, OE, PE or NE codes on the label indicate communication settings that need correcting.

LIKELY CAUSE

The communication diagnostics test checks the link between the printer and the host computer.

OFFICIAL PROCEDURE (COMMUNICATION DIAGNOSTICS MODE)

1. Set the label width to the actual width of the media or less: Menu > Print > Print Quality > Label Width.
2. Turn on diagnostics mode: Menu > System > Program Language > Diagnostic Mode.
Shortcut: hold PAUSE + FEED for 2 seconds in the ready state.
3. Send your data: the printer prints it on a test label, upside down.
4. Read the label: FE = framing error, OE = overrun error, PE = parity error, NE = noise.
If any of these codes appears, check the communication settings.
5. Exit diagnostics mode by switching the printer off and on again, or by turning off Diagnostic Mode.

Zebra reminds you to exit this mode after the test so that the printer returns to normal operation.

Sources: [Using Communication Diagnostics Mode](#) · [System Menu](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

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Why does the USB host port on my Zebra ZT231 ignore my USB stick?

Symptoms: USB device not recognised, files unreadable.

Short answer: The printer only reads USB sticks of 1 TB or less, and some devices need their own power supply. Use a smaller stick, or connect the device to a working power supply.

LIKELY CAUSE

Stick larger than 1 TB; USB device that requires an external power supply.

WHAT TO DO

1. Use a USB stick of 1 TB or less.
2. If the device needs an external power supply, connect it to a working power supply.

Source: [Miscellaneous Issues](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Zebra ZT231 cutter: “Cutter Error”

The cutter error and the Zebra procedure to follow before cleaning the cutter module.

How do I free the cutter on my Zebra ZT231 after a “CUTTER ERROR”?

Message: **Cutter Error** · Light: STATUS solid red.

Short answer: The cutter blade has stayed in the media path. Switch off and unplug the printer, then inspect and clean the cutter module following the Zebra procedure.

LIKELY CAUSE

Cutter blade in the media path.

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Caution: The cutter blade is sharp: Zebra asks you not to touch it or rub it with your fingers.

WHAT TO DO

1. Switch the printer off and unplug it.
2. Inspect the cutter module for debris.
3. Clean it following the “Cleaning and Lubricating the Cutter Module” procedure in the guide.
4. If your ZT231 has the linerless cutter option, refer instead to the “Linerless Printing Issues” section of the guide.

Sources: [Alerts and Error Messages](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Indicator Lights](#)  – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Zebra ZT231 driver and settings: image size, restoring factory defaults

Driver settings and returning to default values from the System menu.

Why does my Zebra ZT231 print a label that is too small or too large?

Symptom: image reduced or enlarged relative to the label.

Short answer: According to Zebra, the printer driver is not suitable or the application settings are incorrect. Check the driver or software settings and reinstall the driver if necessary.

LIKELY CAUSE

Incorrect printer driver or unsuitable application settings.

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WHAT TO DO

1. Check the communication and label settings in the driver or software.
2. Reinstall the driver if necessary (“Connecting the Printer to a Device” section of the guide).
3. Check Label Width (Dots) in Menu > Print > Print Quality: too narrow, it truncates the format; too wide, it may print beyond the label.

Sources: [Printing or print quality problems](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Print Menu](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

How do I restore the factory defaults on a Zebra ZT231?

When to use it: inconsistent settings, persistent Ribbon Out, network problem, settings that do not stick.

Short answer: Open Menu > System > Settings > Restore Defaults. PRINTER restores the printer settings other than the network settings, NETWORK resets the wired or wireless print server, LAST SAVED reloads the last saved settings.

LIKELY CAUSE

The Zebra guide suggests this restore in particular when correctly loaded ribbon is not detected (see [Ribbon Out](#)).

WHAT TO DO

1. Before restoring, print a configuration label to keep a record of the settings: System > Settings > Print: System Settings, or hold FEED + CANCEL for 2 seconds in the ready state.
2. Open Menu > System > Settings > Restore Defaults.
3. Choose PRINTER, NETWORK or LAST SAVED as required.

When to call a technician: if the settings still do not stick after checking the formats and the software, Zebra suggests calling a technician.

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If a setting does not stick or changes by itself, the guide states that a firmware setting or a command in a label format may be preventing or resetting it: check your formats and the settings of the software that sends them, or consult the “Programming Guide for ZPL, ZBI, Set-Get-Do, Mirror, and WML” (zebra.com/manuals).

Sources: [System Menu](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and Error Messages](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide · [Alerts and error messages](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (French version) · [Miscellaneous Issues](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Zebra ZT231R RFID: voided labels, stopping on the inlay

These entries cover the RFID version, the ZT231R. They follow the “RFID Issues” table in the Zebra guide, which also refers to the RFID Programming Guide 3.

Why does my Zebra ZT231R stop on the RFID inlay instead of the gap between labels?

Symptom: the printer stops at the RFID inlay.

Short answer: During calibration, the printer measured the label length up to the RFID inlay, rather than up to the gap between labels. Set Power Up Action and Head Close Action to FEED, then run a manual calibration.

LIKELY CAUSE

Label length calibrated on the RFID inlay instead of the gap between labels.

WHAT TO DO

1. Open Menu > System > Settings.
2. Set Power Up Action and Head Close Action to FEED.
3. Run a manual calibration (see the [calibration](#) entry).

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Sources: [RFID Issues](#) · [System Menu](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Why is my Zebra ZT231R voiding my RFID labels?

Symptoms: all RFID labels voided, or too many labels voided per roll (low yield).

Short answer: Zebra first cites missing calibration, labels that are not Gen 2, an incorrect programming position or radio interference. Calibrate manually, check the label type and programming position, and move the printer away from fixed RFID readers.

LIKELY CAUSE

All labels voided: printer not calibrated for the media; non-Gen 2 labels (only Gen 2 RFID labels are supported); RFID reader cannot be reached; radio interference; labelling software settings overriding the printer's; incorrect programming position; incorrect ZPL or SGD RFID commands. Low yield: labels out of specification (transponder incorrectly placed); unsuitable read and write power levels; interference; outdated printer or reader firmware.

WHAT TO DO

1. Run a manual calibration (see the [calibration](#) entry).
2. Use Gen 2 RFID labels that meet the transponder placement specifications (zebra.com/transponders).
3. Switch off the printer, wait 10 seconds and switch it back on to restore communication with the reader.
4. Move the printer away from fixed RFID readers and other radio sources, and keep the media cover closed during encoding.
5. Align the labelling software settings with those of the printer.
6. Check the RFID programming position in the printer or the software, or restore its default value, and adjust the read and write power levels (RFID Programming Guide 3).

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7. Check your label formats (RFID commands) and update the firmware from zebra.com/firmware.

When to call a technician: if the RFID reader still cannot be reached after a restart, Zebra suggests a faulty or poorly connected reader and refers you to technical support or an authorised Zebra RFID technician.

Source: [RFID Issues](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Why don't the RFID settings appear on my Zebra ZT231R?

Symptoms: RFID settings missing from the menus and the configuration label; DATA light flashing endlessly after a firmware update.

Short answer: The printer has often been switched back on too quickly for the RFID reader to initialise. Switch it off, wait at least 10 seconds, switch it back on, then check the menus again or print a configuration label.

LIKELY CAUSE

Restart too quick for the RFID reader to initialise; wrong firmware version; communication with the RFID subsystem impossible. A DATA light that flashes indefinitely after a firmware download (printer or reader) indicates a failed download.

WHAT TO DO

1. Switch off the printer, wait at least 10 seconds, then switch it back on.
2. Print a configuration label: System > Settings > Print: System Settings, or hold FEED + CANCEL for 2 seconds in the ready state.
3. Check the firmware version (RFID Programming Guide 3) and load the correct version if necessary.
4. After a failed firmware download (DATA flashing endlessly), switch off the printer, wait 10 seconds, switch it back on and restart the download.

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When to call a technician: if the RFID subsystem still cannot be reached or the download fails again, Zebra refers you to technical support or an authorised technician.

Sources: [RFID Issues](#) · [System Menu](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Other Zebra ZT231 problems: display language, password, freezing

Display in an unknown language, control panel password, frozen printer: what the Zebra guide provides for.

The display on my Zebra ZT231 is in an unknown language: how do I switch it back to French?

Symptom: menus and messages in an unreadable language.

Short answer: The language setting has been changed from the display or by a firmware command. On the home screen, touch Menu (icon at the bottom left), then the first line: the languages scroll by, each written in its own language.

LIKELY CAUSE

Language setting changed from the control panel or by a firmware command.

OFFICIAL PROCEDURE

1. On the home screen, touch Menu, the icon at the bottom left.
2. Touch the first option on the screen.
3. Scroll through the languages: each one is shown in its own language.
4. Touch the language you want.
5. Touch the Home icon to return to the home screen.

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According to the System menu, this setting (System > Language) changes the language of the home screen, the menus and the error messages.

Sources: [Miscellaneous Issues](#) · [System Menu](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

Why is my Zebra ZT231 asking for a password on the display?

Symptom: prompt for a control panel password or PIN that nobody thinks they have set.

Short answer: The ZT231's display can be locked with a control panel password. According to Zebra, this password is not set initially: it has therefore been configured on your printer. The guide refers to the Zebra Link-OS PrintSecure Printer Administration Guide.

LIKELY CAUSE

Control panel password configured on the printer; its initial value is undefined and must be set before use.

WHAT TO DO

1. Ask the person who administers your printers.
2. Consult the “Zebra Link-OS PrintSecure Printer Administration Guide” for managing this password.

Source: [Miscellaneous Issues](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

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Why does my Zebra ZT231 freeze with all the lights on?

Symptoms: all lights on and blank display, freezing at start-up, characters missing on the display.

Short answer: Zebra attributes this freeze to an internal electronics or firmware fault. Switch the printer off and on again; if it freezes again, call in a technician. According to the guide, freezing during start-up indicates a main logic board fault.

LIKELY CAUSE

Internal electronics or firmware fault; freezing at start-up due to a main logic board fault; display needs replacing if characters are missing.

WHAT TO DO

1. Switch the printer off and on again.
2. If the freeze persists, call in a technician.

When to call a technician: freeze persisting after a restart or characters missing on the display: Zebra refers you to a technician; freezing during start-up is attributed to a main logic board fault.

Source: [Miscellaneous Issues](#) – Zebra ZT231/ZT231R user guide (official documentation).

When should you call a technician for a Zebra ZT231?

The entries above first suggest reloading, adjusting or calibrating. In the following cases, the Zebra guide refers you to a technician or to technical support:

- **Persistent “Head Open”, printhead closed:** head-open sensor needs replacing.
- **Persistent “Out of Memory”:** technician call-out after simplifying the format.
- **Printhead or platen roller incorrectly installed:** installation check if you cannot do it yourself.

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- **Media drifting despite adjustments:** media guide and printhead pressure already adjusted.
- **Damaged print element:** long unprinted streaks on several labels.
- **RFID reader cannot be reached:** faulty or poorly connected reader: technical support or an authorised Zebra RFID technician.
- **RFID subsystem missing or firmware not loaded:** technical support or an authorised technician.
- **Settings that do not stick:** after checking the formats and the software.
- **Printer frozen or stuck at start-up:** electronics or firmware fault, main logic board or display.

Avoiding recurring faults on the Zebra ZT231: preventive maintenance

Several entries in this guide point to sensors that are badly positioned or dirty, a printhead or platen roller that needs cleaning, or unsuitable settings or consumables. These are exactly the points a preventive maintenance visit checks before they cause a breakdown.

TIMCOD preventive maintenance is part of the through-life maintenance (MCO). TIMCOD provides for your fleet (page in French): scheduled preventive visits by certified technicians, with a detailed report. What it brings to a ZT231 fleet:

Fewer breakdowns, less downtime

Fewer production interruptions caused by label printers.

Worn parts detected in time

Printhead, platen roller, sensors: spotted before they cause a breakdown.

Regular cleaning and checks

Printhead, rollers and sensors cleaned and checked at every visit.

Longer service life

A well-maintained, properly adjusted printer lasts longer.

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Print quality maintained

Legible barcodes, with darkness and printhead pressure suited to your consumables.

Fewer emergency call-outs

Incidents are handled during scheduled visits rather than as emergency repairs.

Controlled maintenance costs

A predictable budget instead of unplanned repairs.

Specialist Zebra technicians

Support from teams who know your equipment.

In addition, TIMCOD corrective maintenance includes phone support (hotline), repair to working order, express exchange and, as an option, SWAP. Maintenance contracts come in three levels (Essentiel, Confort, Premium).

Zebra ZT231 troubleshooting: frequently asked questions

How do I calibrate a Zebra ZT231?

On the touch display, open Print > Sensors > Manual Calibration, touch Start Calibration and follow the prompts, touching Next at each step. The shortcut is PAUSE + FEED + CANCEL held for 2 seconds. At the end, press PAUSE to resume printing. [See the detailed entry.](#)

What does “Head Maintenance Needed” mean on a Zebra ZT231?

This message indicates that the printhead needs cleaning. Follow the printhead and platen roller cleaning procedure in the Zebra guide, letting the printhead cool first. Then set the darkness to the lowest level that gives good quality. [See the detailed entry.](#)

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Why does my Zebra ZT231 show “Media Out” when the roll is loaded?

According to Zebra, the media is incorrectly loaded, the media sensor is incorrectly positioned, or the printer expects separate labels when the roll is continuous. Reload the media, check Label Type and Sensor Type, then run a calibration. [See the detailed entry.](#)

Why does my Zebra ZT231 show “Ribbon Out” with ribbon loaded?

The sensor does not see the ribbon: ribbon not properly engaged, sensor blocked by the media, or printer in thermal transfer mode with direct thermal labels. Reload the ribbon and calibrate. If the ribbon is still not detected, restore the printer defaults in System > Settings > Restore Defaults. [See the detailed entry.](#)

What does a red or yellow display mean on a Zebra ZT231?

The background colour of the home screen shows the printer's status. A red or yellow background generally blocks printing until the problem is resolved; a green message is informational. Touch the icons at the top of the display to read the message. [See the detailed entry.](#)

How do I reset a Zebra ZT231 to its factory configuration?

Open Menu > System > Settings > Restore Defaults. The PRINTER option restores the printer settings except the network settings, NETWORK resets the print server, LAST SAVED reloads the last saved settings. Print a configuration label first to keep a record. [See the detailed entry.](#)

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How do I print a sensor profile on a Zebra ZT231?

Open Print > Sensors > Print: Sensor Profile on the touch display, or hold FEED + CANCEL at power-up. The profile compares the sensor settings with their actual readings and helps you understand a media or ribbon detection problem. [See the detailed entry.](#)

Why is my Zebra ZT231R voiding RFID labels?

Zebra cites missing calibration, labels that are not Gen 2, an incorrect programming position, radio interference or outdated firmware. Calibrate manually, check the labels and the programming position, and move the printer away from fixed RFID readers. [See the detailed entry.](#)

Sources consulted

All the causes, procedures and messages in this guide come from the pages of the official Zebra documentation listed below (ZT231/ZT231R guide, English and French versions), consulted on 20 October 2026.

- [ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide](#) [🔗](#) – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide (docs.zebra.com, home page and table of contents) **official**
- [Control Panel](#) [🔗](#) – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide **official**
- [Alert and Error States](#) [🔗](#) – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide **official**
- [Alerts and Error Messages](#) [🔗](#) – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide **official**
- [Alerts and error messages](#) [🔗](#) – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide (French version) **official**
- [Indicator Lights](#) [🔗](#) – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide **official**
- [Indicator Lights](#) [🔗](#) – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide **official**
- [Printing or print quality problems](#) [🔗](#) – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide (French version) **official**

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- [Ribbon Issues](#)  – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide **official**
- [Miscellaneous Issues](#)  – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide **official**
- [RFID Issues](#)  – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide **official**
- [Performing Manual Sensor Calibration](#)  – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide **official**
- [Print Menu](#)  – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide **official**
- [System Menu](#)  – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide **official**
- [Using Communication Diagnostics Mode](#)  – ZT231/ZT231R Industrial Printer User Guide **official**

The “Communications Issues” and “Troubleshooting” (chapter contents) pages and the English version of “Printing or Print Quality Issues” in the ZT231 guide (docs.zebra.com), the pages on cleaning the printhead and the cutter, adjusting the printhead pressure, automatic calibration, the RFID menu, loading defaults and linerless problems, as well as the PDF version of the guide, were not consulted for this guide and are not cited. If the fault falls under these documents, refer to the manufacturer's documentation or ask the TIMCOD technicians.

See also

- Product page on timcod.fr (in French): [Zebra ZT231](#)
- All Zebra printer troubleshooting guides (ZT230, ZT410, ZT421, ZT420, ZT411, S4M, GK420, ZD421, GX420, QLn420, ZQ630, ZQ511, ZQ610 Plus, ZQ510, ZC100 and ZC300, ZD410, ZD411, ZD420, ZD500R, ZD510-HC, ZD611, ZD620, ZD621, ZQ310 Plus, ZQ320 Plus, ZQ620 Plus, ZT510, ZT610 and ZT620, ZXP Series 7)
- [Maintenance and repair of Zebra printers](#)
- [All printer troubleshooting guides, all brands](#)
- [Through-life maintenance \(MCO\): preventive and corrective maintenance](#) (in French)
- [TIMCOD, Zebra reseller](#) (in French)
- [Zebra labels and consumables for thermal printers](#) (in French)
- [RFID labels and RFID printers](#) (in French)
- [Printer cleaning kits](#) (in French)

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PDF version of the page <https://www.timcod.fr/repair/en/printer-troubleshooting/zebra/zt231>, updated on 21 October 2026.

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