

Windows 11 qualifying operating system requirements

This brief applies to all Microsoft Licensing programs.

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Summary

This licensing brief explains the qualifying operating system license requirements for Windows 11 upgrade licenses when purchased through Commercial Licensing programs. Windows 11 upgrade licenses available through Commercial Licensing programs include

- Windows 11 Pro
- Windows 11 Enterprise E3/E5/per device
- Windows 11 Education A3/A5/E3/E5
- Windows VDA per device
- Windows VDA E3/E5

Details

Qualifying operating systems for Windows local use

Windows 11 licenses acquired through a Microsoft Commercial Licensing program are upgrade licenses. You cannot acquire full Windows operating system licenses for desktop PCs through Microsoft Commercial Licensing programs. Customers must first have licensed and installed a Qualifying Operating System on a device before the device is

eligible for a Windows 11 upgrade license. Full Windows operating system licenses can be acquired for desktop PCs preinstalled on a new PC by an original equipment manufacturer (OEM). Full Packaged Product (FPP – retail) licenses may also be assigned and installed on a desktop PC device as a qualifying license.

Windows 11 upgrade licenses acquired through a Commercial Licensing agreement may only be installed or activated on devices licensed to run one of the Qualifying Operating Systems below:

Qualifying operating system for per user licenses and Virtual Desktop Access (VDA) per device/user licenses

Qualifying Operating Systems	Enterprise Agreement, Microsoft Products and Services Agreement, Select, Select Plus	Microsoft Cloud Agreement and Microsoft Customer Agreement
Windows 10/11		
Enterprise, IoT Enterprise, Pro, Pro for Workstations	•	•
Education, Home		• (Academic licenses only)
Windows 8/8.1¹		
Enterprise, Pro, Professional, , Windows Embedded 8/8.1 Pro, Industry Pro	•	

¹Windows 7 Operating Systems covered by an Extended Security Update (ESU) license are Qualifying Operating Systems during the device's active ESU coverage period. Windows 7 Enterprise, Professional, Ultimate and Professional/Ultimate for Embedded Systems editions are equivalent to Windows 8 Pro edition eligibility.

Qualifying operating system for per device licenses (excluding VDA licenses)

Qualifying Operating Systems	New Enterprise Agreement (EA)/Open Value Company Wide (OV-OW) ¹	Existing Enterprise Agreement (EA)/Open Value Company Wide (OV-OW)	Microsoft Products and Services Agreement (MPSA)/Select Plus/Open	Microsoft Cloud Agreement and Microsoft Customer Agreement	Academic and Charity
Windows 10/11					
Enterprise, Pro, Pro for Workstations	•	•	•	•	•
Education, Home				• (Academic licenses only)	•
Windows 8/8.1²					
Enterprise, Pro	•	•	•		•
Windows 8/8.1					•

Qualifying Operating Systems	New Enterprise Agreement (EA)/Open Value Company Wide (OV-OW) ¹	Existing Enterprise (EA)/Open Value Company Wide (OV-OW)	Microsoft Products and Services Agreement (MPSA)/Select Plus/Open	Microsoft Cloud Agreement and Microsoft Customer Agreement	Academic and Charity
Apple					
macOS ³	•		•		•
Windows Embedded operating systems					
Windows 10/11 IoT Enterprise	•	•	•	•	•
Windows 2000 Professional for Embedded Systems	•		•		•
Windows XP Professional for Embedded Systems	•		•		•
Windows Vista Business/Ultimate for Embedded Systems	•		•		•
Windows 7 Professional/Ultimate for Embedded Systems	•	•	•		•
Windows Embedded 8/8.1 Pro, Industry Pro	•	•	•		•

¹Also applicable to Qualified Devices acquired through merger or acquisition.

²Windows 7 Operating Systems covered by an Extended Security Update (ESU) license are Qualifying Operating Systems during the device's active ESU coverage period. Windows 7 Enterprise, Professional, and Ultimate editions are equivalent to Windows 8 Pro edition eligibility. Windows 7 Home Premium, Home Basic, and Starter Edition editions are equivalent to Windows 8 edition eligibility.

³macOS must be preinstalled by the authorized manufacturer prior to the initial sale of the device.

Qualifying operating systems when virtualizing Windows

When licensed solely for remote virtualization, Windows VDA licenses do not require users to have a device with a Qualifying Operating System. Windows VDA licenses do, however, require a Qualifying Operating System when used to run Windows locally, including local virtualization. All other Windows 11 licenses obtained through Commercial Licensing programs still require Qualifying Operating Systems for remote virtualization scenarios.

For additional details about virtualizing Windows 11, please see the licensing brief, [Windows 11 licensing for Virtual Desktops](#).

Frequently asked questions

Q1: *Can a Commercial Licensing customer purchase a new device that does not have an Operating System preinstalled and license the Windows operating system through Volume Licensing?*

A: No. All new PCs should be purchased with a Qualifying Operating System preinstalled by the original equipment manufacturer (OEM). Microsoft Commercial Licensing programs are not a source for full licenses for Windows 11. These programs offer only *upgrade* licenses for Windows 11. The only exception to this is that customers can acquire the Windows VDA license to remotely access Windows 11 running in a virtual environment regardless of whether the user's device has a Qualifying Operating System or not.

Q2: *Scenario: A customer has an older device that came preinstalled with a licensed copy of Windows 10 Pro but was upgraded to Windows 11 Pro using a Windows 11 Pro Upgrade license acquired through their Volume Licensing program. If the customer decides to donate this device to a charity, can they remove the newly installed Windows 11 Pro software from that device and transfer the license to a different device within their organization?*

A: Customers may only reassign Windows 11 per device licenses if they have active Software Assurance for the license. Windows 11 per device licenses acquired through Commercial Licensing may not be reassigned to a new device if the license does not have Software Assurance.

Q3: *Does a device licensed with Windows VDA require a Qualifying Operating System if the software is not installed locally on the device and the device is only used to remotely access a virtualized instance of Windows 11?*

A: No. Since the software is not installed locally on the device itself, Windows VDA licenses do not require a licensed device to have a Qualifying Operating System.

Q4: *Can a Commercial Licensing customer install Windows 11 Enterprise in a virtual machine on an Apple device that came preinstalled with macOS?*

A: Commercial customers can use approved solutions for running Windows 11 in a virtual machine on a macOS device, but in most cases, they will need to first purchase a Full Packaged Product (FPP – retail) Windows 11 Pro license for each device that will utilize a VM so that the device has an underlying Qualifying Operating System. See the table above titled “Qualifying operating system for per device licenses (excluding VDA licenses)” for scenarios that do not require this or discuss with your volume licensing reseller.

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