Microsoft

Windows 11 commercial desktop operating systems

Contents

Introduction

Windows 11 helps you achieve more with less cost, and complexity.

Microsoft Commercial Licensing solutions provide the most flexible and cost-effective way to give your organization access to the latest Windows Desktop technologies. Whether you want to upgrade your PCs to Windows 11, gain access to exclusive offerings such as Windows 11 Enterprise edition, or use Windows with greater flexibility, there's a Commercial Licensing option that's right for your organization.

This document provides an overview of the products and use rights available through Commercial Licensing, information about the products that are eligible for upgrades, and the key choices you have for using Windows in your organization.

Content included is for informational purposes only and is not meant to replace or override other licensing documentation such as the Windows 11 End User License Agreement or Commercial Licensing Product Terms.

Windows 11 editions

There's an edition of Windows software designed to meet the needs of every organization, from a small, growing business to a multinational enterprise. The following table lists the editions of Windows 11 available through each Microsoft distribution channel.

Full Packaged Product (Retail)	Preinstalled on PC (OEM)	Commercial licensing
Windows 11 Pro	Windows 11 Pro	Windows 11 Pro
Windows 11 Home	Windows 11 Home	Windows 11 Enterprise
		Windows 10 Enterprise LTSC

Windows desktop offerings in commercial licensing

The following offerings are available for purchase through Microsoft Commercial Licensing:

Product	Description
Windows 11 Pro Upgrade	Windows 11 Pro is designed for small and medium businesses and enables organizations to manage their devices and apps, protect their business data, facilitate remote and mobile scenarios, and take advantage of the cloud technologies for their organizations. Windows 11 Pro devices are a good choice for organizations that support CYOD programs and "prosumer" customers. The Windows 11 Pro Upgrade in Commercial Licensing upgrades a device from a previous version of Windows Pro.
Windows 11 Enterprise E3	Windows 11 Enterprise E3 is a per user subscription available in Commercial Licensing programs and is intended for large and medium sized organizations. It includes Windows Enterprise edition with cloud-powered capabilities and subscription use rights. Examples include advanced identity protection, the broadest range of options for operating system deployment, update control, and device management. Windows Enterprise E3 is licensed through Commercial Licensing programs.
Windows 11 Enterprise E5	Windows 11 Enterprise E5 is for organizations that want to take advantage of everything in Windows 11 Enterprise E3 with the addition of Microsoft Defender for Endpoint Plan 2, a service that helps enterprises detect, investigate, and respond to advanced cybersecurity attacks on their endpoints and networks. Windows 11 Enterprise E5 is available per user in Commercial Licensing programs.
Windows 10 Enterprise LTSC	Windows 10 Enterprise LTSC is designed for PC systems that have strict change-management policies with security and critical bug fixes. By using a Long-Term Servicing Channel edition, you can apply monthly Windows 10 security updates for specialized devices while holding back new-feature updates for an extended period of time, up to 5 years. Windows Enterprise LTSC is available in the per user or per device model depending on the Volume Licensing program through which it is acquired.
Windows Virtual Desktop Access (VDA) Subscription License	The Windows VDA subscription license provides the right to access virtual Windows desktop environments from devices that aren't covered by a Commercial Licensing offer that includes VDA rights, such as thin clients. Windows VDA is available on a per device or per user basis.

Windows 11 Pro Upgrade license

Windows 11 Pro is designed for small and medium businesses and enables you to manage your devices and apps, protect your business data, facilitate remote and mobile scenarios, and take advantage of the cloud technologies for your organization. Windows 11 Pro has core security to help protect your data, and it's simple to set up and manage for multiple users. It works across your devices so you can stay mobile and integrates seamlessly with Microsoft Intune and Office 365*—connecting your team to maximize productivity.

*Subscriptions sold separately.

The Windows 11 Pro Upgrade license is recommended if you want to:

- Upgrade a Windows 10 Pro PC to Windows 11 Pro.
- Upgrade Windows 7/8/8.1 Pro devices to Windows 10 Pro

Windows 11 Enterprise

There are two core Windows 11 Enterprise offers: Windows 11 Enterprise E3 and Windows 11 Enterprise E5. Each of these can be purchased on a per user basis, and are available only through Commercial Licensing, including the Cloud Solution Provider program.

Windows 11 Enterprise E3

Windows 11 Enterprise E3 builds on Windows 11 Pro by adding more advanced features designed to address the needs of large and mid-size organizations. Examples include advanced protection against modern security threats, the broadest range of options for operating system deployment and update, and comprehensive device and app management. Organizations with devices running Windows 11 Enterprise will be able to take advantage of the latest security and feature updates on an ongoing basis, while having the ability to choose the pace at which they adopt new technology.

With Windows 11 Enterprise E3, you can take advantage of the following features, services, and use rights. Windows Enterprise E3 **is a per user subscription**, intended for organizations. It includes **Windows Enterprise edition** with **cloud-powered capabilities** and **subscription use rights**. Windows Enterprise E3 is usually licensed through Volume Licensing programs and is an upgrade from Windows Pro.

Here is an overview of the unique Windows Enterprise edition features, cloud powered capabilities, and use rights.

Windows Enterprise edition OS based functionality	Description
Windows Defender Credential Guard	Protects against user credential harvesting and pass-the-hash attacks or pass the token attacks, enabled by default.
Managed Microsoft Defender Application Guard for Microsoft Edge	Isolates enterprise-defined untrusted sites with virtualization-based security from Windows, protecting your company while employees browse the Internet.

Windows Enterprise edition OS based functionality	Description
Modern BitLocker Management	Allows you to eliminate on-premises tools to trigger, monitor and support recovery scenarios.
Personal Data Encryption	Encrypts individual's content using Windows Hello for Business to link the encryption keys to user credentials.
Direct Access & Always-On VPN device tunnel	Connect remote users to the organization network without the need for traditional VPN connections with DirectAccess or benefit from advanced security capabilities to restrict the type of traffic and which applications can use the VPN connection with Always-On VPN (device tunnel).
Windows Experience customization	Settings to lockdown the user experience of corporate desktops and Shell Launcher with Unified Write Filter for frontline workers devices or public kiosks.

Cloud-based capabilities	Description
Windows Subscription Activation	This service enables you to "step-up" from Windows Pro edition to Enterprise edition in an instant. You can eliminate license key management or deployment of Enterprise edition images.
Windows Autopatch	You can choose how to keep your Windows devices up-to-date and reduce vulnerabilities. Windows Autopatch is a cloud service that puts Microsoft in control of automating updates to Windows, Microsoft 365 Apps for enterprise, Microsoft Edge, and Microsoft Teams.
Windows Update for Business deployment service (preview)	This cloud service gives you the control over the approval, scheduling, and safeguarding of quality, feature upgrades, and driver updates delivered from Windows Update.
Universal Print	Removes the need for on-premises print servers and enables any endpoint to print to cloud registered printers.
Microsoft Connected Cache (preview)	A software-only solution that caches app and OS updates on the local network to save internet bandwidth in locations with limited connectivity.
Endpoint analytics proactive remediation	Helps you fix common support issues before end-users notice issues.
Organizational messages	Keeps employees informed with organizational messages directly inserted in Windows UI surfaces.

Licensing use rights	Description

Five Windows instances per licensed user	Allow your employees to simultaneously use a Windows laptop, a cloud PC and a specialized device with Windows LTSC and more.
36 months (3 years) support on annual feature releases	Get extra time to deploy feature releases.
Azure Virtual Desktop, Windows 365 Enterprise, and Virtual Desktop Access	Empower flexible workstyles and smarter work with the included access rights. Includes FSLogix for a consistent experience of Windows user profiles in virtual desktop environments.
Windows release health in Microsoft 365 Admin Center	Gives you essential information about monthly quality and feature updates in the Microsoft 365 admin center.
Windows feature update device readiness report	Provides per-device information about compatibility risks that are associated with an upgrade or update to a chosen version of Windows.
Windows feature update compatibility risk report	Provides a summary view of the top compatibility risks, so you understand which compatibility risks impact the greatest number of devices in your organization.
Windows LTSC Enterprise	Intended for highly specialized devices that require limited changes due to regulations and certification.
Microsoft Desktop Optimization Pack (MDOP)	Help improve compatibility and management, reduce support costs, improve asset management, and improve policy control.

Learn more about Windows 11 Enterprise E3

Windows 11 Enterprise E5

Windows 11 Enterprise E5 is for organizations that want to take advantage of everything in Windows 11 Enterprise E3 with **the addition of Microsoft Defender for Endpoint Plan 2**, a service that helps enterprises detect, investigate, and respond to advanced cybersecurity attacks on their endpoints and networks. Windows 11 Enterprise E5 is available per user in Commercial Licensing programs.

Building on the existing security defenses in Windows 11, Microsoft Defender for Device provides a post-breach layer of protection to the Windows 11 security stack. With a combination of client technology built into Windows 11 and a robust cloud service, it can help detect threats that have made it past other defenses, provide enterprises with information to investigate the breach across endpoints, and offer response recommendations.

Windows Enterprise E3 in Microsoft 365 F3

Windows Enterprise E3 subscription license in Microsoft 365 F3 has all the OS features, and most of the cloud services and use rights, included with regular Windows Enterprise E3.

Windows Enterprise E3 in Microsoft 365 F3 does not include some use rights previously included in Software Assurance benefits that come with the regular E3 user subscription license. F3 does not come with:

1. Microsoft Desktop Optimization Pack (MDOP)
2. Windows Enterprise LTSC

3. Windows Autopatch

Qualifying Operating Systems

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.

Device licenses may only be assigned to devices with a Qualifying Operating System. See Product Terms

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, and Select Plus	Microsoft Cloud Agreement and Microsoft Customer Agreement
Windows 10/11		
Enterprise, IoT Enterprise, Pro, Pro Workstations	✓	✓
Windows 8 / 8.1[1]		
Enterprise, Pro, Professional, Windows Embedded 8/8.1 Pro, Industry Pro	✓	

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 Windows 11 licensing for Virtual Desktops guide.

Availability of Windows desktop operating system products in licensing programs

Use the chart below to see which Windows Desktop Operating System products are available with which programs:

Enterprise Agreement; Enterprise Subscription Agreement; Server and Cloud Enrollment (EA/EAS)
Microsoft Customer Agreement (MCA)
Microsoft Product and Services Agreement (MPSA)
Open Value/Open Value Subscription (OV/OVS)

Product	EA EAS	MCA	MPSA	OV OVS

Windows 11 Enterprise E3 or E5 (User Subscription License)	✓	✓	✓	
Windows 11 Enterprise E3 From SA (User Subscription License)	✓			
Windows 11 Enterprise E3 per User Add-on (to Enterprise per device) (User Subscription License)	✓		✓	
Windows 11 Enterprise E5 From SA (User Subscription License)	✓			
Windows 11 Enterprise E5 per User Add-on (to Enterprise per device) (User Subscription License)	✓		✓	
Windows 11 Enterprise (per Device)	✓		✓	✓
Windows 11 Pro (per Device)		✓	✓	
Windows Enterprise LTSC 2021 (per Device)		✓	✓	
Windows VDA E3 (User Subscription License)	✓	✓	✓	
Windows VDA E5 (User Subscription License)	✓		✓	
Windows VDA per device (Device Subscription License)	✓		✓	✓
HEVC Codec (per Device)	✓			
Universal Print Volume Add-on (10K)	✓	✓		
Universal Print Volume Add-on (500)	✓	✓		

For more details on availability of Windows desktop products by commercial licensing program see Microsoft product terms for a full list.

Using a Windows Pro device with the Windows Enterprise user subscription license

In most cases, the Windows Pro edition comes pre-installed on a business class PC. Microsoft recommends upgrading your Windows Pro devices to Enterprise edition when you have acquired a user subscription license for Windows. However, there are cases that require you to keep the PC on the Pro edition and not upgrade them to Enterprise edition.

With Windows 11 Enterprise E3, you can take advantage of features, services and use rights, not licensed with the Windows Pro license bound to the device. It includes Windows Enterprise edition with cloud-powered capabilities and subscription use rights and **these capabilities are not always technically enforced**.

We want to offer organizations maximal flexibility in applying user licenses to their devices and trust they will choose to be properly licensed for the functionality that is applied to those devices.

Sometimes organizations have legitimate reasons to keep a device with the pre-installed Windows Pro edition, without upgrading it to Enterprise edition, while the user is licensed with Windows Enterprise E3. And in this circumstance apply certain cloud capabilities or use rights to those devices.

There are many reasons this could be the case:

1. The device was not properly provisioned and did not upgrade to Windows Enterprise edition.
2. A device may have been acquired for a business process that was not under control of a central IT department or outside of the IT department's knowledge.

3. A device may be used temporarily for a project by a vendor and added to the IT infrastructure but not upgraded to Enterprise edition.
4. A corporate developer that is developing applications that need to be tested and certified on Pro, as that is how it will be delivered to customers.
5. A Windows Pro PC that was preconfigured for a specific purpose and is certified on Pro only.

In these cases, you want the PC to be configured, secured, monitored, and updated with the enterprise management and security tools that come with the Windows Enterprise user subscription. Your Windows Enterprise E3 subscriptions does not block these scenarios.

Windows Enterprise edition OS based functionality	Edition dependency of functionality
Windows Defender Credential Guard	Functional on Windows 10/11 Enterprise edition only.
Managed Microsoft Defender Application Guard for Microsoft Edge	Functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition. *Windows 10/11 Pro and higher also support Application Guard in standalone mode. Standalone mode requires the employee to manually enable application guard and manually start Microsoft Edge in Application Guard while browsing untrusted sites.*
Modern BitLocker Management	Functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition.
Personal Data Encryption	Functional on Windows 11 Enterprise edition only, but not on Windows 10 Enterprise, nor on Windows 10/11 Pro.
Direct Access & Always-On VPN device tunnel	Functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition.
Windows Experience customization	Functional on Windows 10/11 Enterprise edition only.

Cloud-based capabilities	Edition dependency of functionality
Windows Subscription Activation	Functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition.
Windows Autopatch	Functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition.
Windows Update for Business deployment service (preview)	Functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition.
Universal Print	Functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition.
Microsoft Connected Cache (preview)	Functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition.
Endpoint analytics proactive remediation	Functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition.
Organizational messages	Only functional on Windows 11 Enterprise edition, but not Windows 10 Enterprise, nor on Windows 10/11 Pro.

Licensing use rights	Edition dependency of functionality
Five Windows instances per licensed user	N/A
36 months (3 years) support on annual feature releases	Functional on Windows 10/11 Enterprise edition only.

| Licensing use rights	Edition dependency of functionality
Azure Virtual Desktop, Windows 365 Enterprise, and Virtual Desktop Access	N/A
Windows release health in Microsoft 365 Admin Center	Not functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition. *Access to Microsoft 365 Admin Center is required, information shown there applies to both Windows Pro and Enterprise. The public version in learn.microsoft.com has no root cause information needed for decision making.*
Windows feature update device readiness report	Functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition. Microsoft Intune license required.
Windows feature update compatibility risk report	Functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition. Microsoft Intune license required.
Windows LTSC Enterprise	N/A
Microsoft Desktop Optimization Pack (MDOP)	Functional on Windows 10/11 Pro and Enterprise edition.

Per device or per user?

You can choose to license Windows on a per device or a per user basis.

Licensing Windows 11 Enterprise or Windows VDA on a per User basis

You can license Windows 11 Enterprise and Windows VDA on a per user basis. With per user licensing, you assign a license to an individual instead of a device, and that individual receives use rights for up to five devices concurrently. This puts your users at the center of your Windows licensing solution, gives you flexible options for how you deploy and access Windows across devices and instances, and simplifies Windows licensing management.

Windows Enterprise E3 and Windows Enterprise E5 are the core ways to license Windows Enterprise per user. These subscriptions align perfectly with Microsoft 365 E3 and E5, and there are many better together scenarios with other components of the Microsoft 365 suite of offers. In addition, these subscriptions bring additional value and use rights not available the Windows Enterprise license per device, as described in the Windows Enterprise section of this guide.
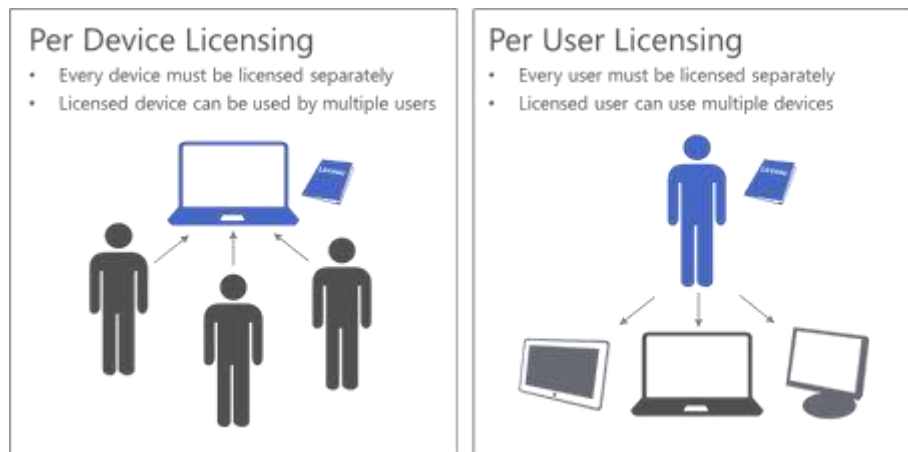
There are three different options for how you license access to Windows on a per user basis: **Windows 11 Enterprise per User**, **Windows VDA per User**, and **Windows 11 Enterprise per User Add-on**.

Here's a comparison of the options:

	Windows 11 Enterprise per User	Windows VDA per User	Windows 11 Enterprise per User Add-on, when added to Windows 11 Enterprise per Device	Windows 11 Enterprise per User Add-on, when added to Windows VDA per Device
Qualifying licensing requirements	Primary users' primary devices must be licensed for Windows Pro, or Enterprise	No device requirements; may be assigned to any user.	Primary users' primary devices must already be covered by Windows Enterprise per device	Primary user's primary device must already be covered by Windows VDA
License Model	per user; five (5) concurrent device limit	per user; five (5) concurrent device limit	per user; five (5) concurrent device limit	per user; five (5) concurrent device limit
Local installation of Windows Enterprise	On any Windows 10/11 Pro or Enterprise	On any Windows 10/11 Pro or Enterprise device	On any Windows 10/11 Pro or Enterprise device	On any Windows 10/11 Pro or Enterprise device
Virtualization rights included	VDI, AVD and Windows 365	VDI, AVD and Windows 365	VDI, AVD and Windows 365	VDI, AVD and Windows 365

Note: "Primary user's primary device" means the user is the primary user of a device AND that device is that user's primary work device.

Here's how to choose the right option:

Windows 11 Enterprise per User (E3 and E5)

Windows 11 Enterprise per User is the right option if ALL the following apply:

- The user is the primary user of at least one device licensed for Windows 10/11 Pro or Enterprise.
  AND
- The device is the user's primary work device.
  AND
- The device isn't already covered by Windows 10/11 Enterprise or Windows VDA.

Windows VDA per User

Windows VDA per User is the right option if either one of the following applies:

- The user isn't the primary user of at least one device licensed for Windows 10/11 Pro or Enterprise.
  OR
- The user uses a device licensed for Windows 10/11 Pro, Enterprise, or Education, but that device isn't the user's primary work device.

  Note: Because there's no requirement that the user is the primary user of a primary device licensed for Windows 10 Pro or Enterprise, Windows VDA per User is the least restrictive option. If you were to license every user with Windows VDA per User, every user would have access to Windows Enterprise without the need to track the operating system license(s) on the user's device(s) (except for devices on which you install the software locally).

Windows 11 Enterprise per User Add-on

Windows 11 Enterprise per User Add-on is the right option if either *one* of the following applies:

- The user is the primary user of a primary device with active Windows 10/11 Enterprise coverage
OR
- The user is the primary user of a primary device with active Windows VDA coverage.

With the Windows 10 Enterprise per User Add-on, you get all the benefits of Windows 10/11 Enterprise per User or Windows VDA per User at a price that recognizes your existing investment. When you license the primary user of a primary device that's already covered with Windows 10/11 Enterprise, the Windows 11 Enterprise per User Add-on grants the licensed user with all the benefits of Windows 11 Enterprise per User. When you license the primary user of a primary device that's already covered with Windows VDA, the Windows 11 Enterprise per User Add-on grants the licensed user with all the benefits of Windows VDA per User.

	Underlying device license	
	Windows 11 Enterprise	Windows VDA
Add-on license	Windows 11 Enterprise per User Add-on	Windows 11 Enterprise per User Add-on
Use Rights granted by Add-on	Windows 11 Enterprise E3 per User	Windows VDA per User

Use this flow chart to help you choose the right per user option:
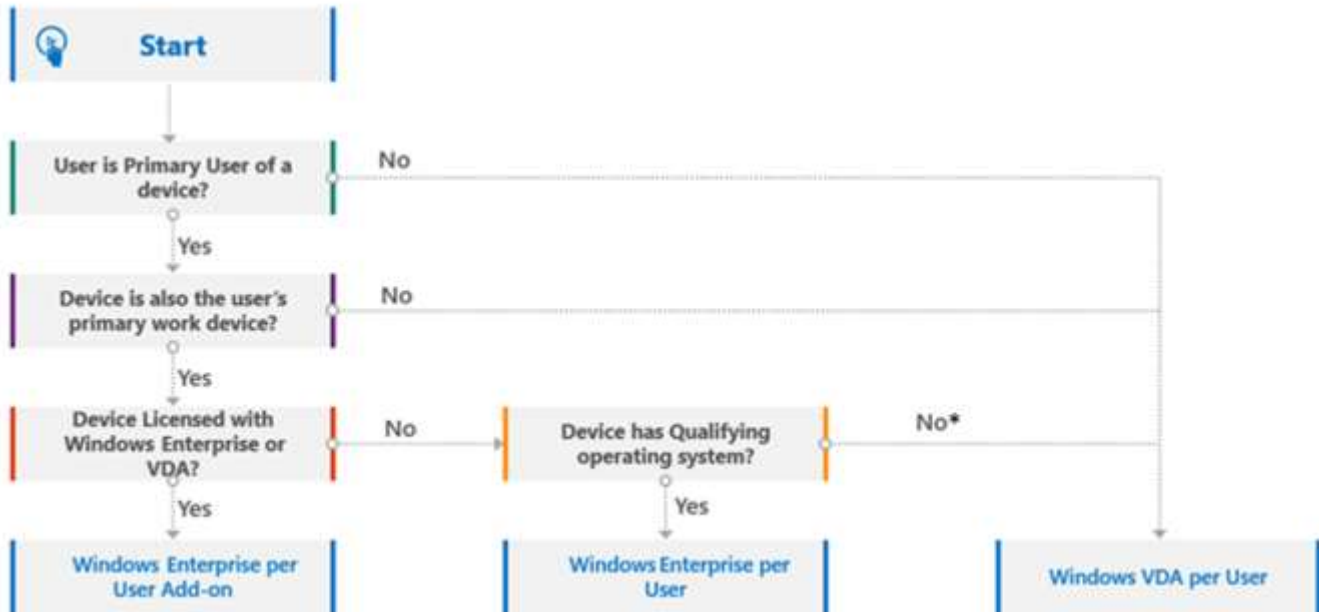
* Except for Local Use & Local Virtualization. Local Use & Local Virtualization always need QoS.

Licensing Windows 11 Enterprise or Windows VDA on a per Device basis

You can license Windows on a per device basis in the following ways:

1. When purchasing Windows 11 Enterprise, with Software Assurance included, in some Commercial Licensing programs such as Enterprise Agreement, Enterprise Subscription Agreement, Open Value, and Open Value Subscription.
2. If you have devices that do not have Qualifying Operating System or are not eligible for Windows 11 Enterprise (such as thin clients), you can access many of the benefits of Software Assurance by licensing those devices with a Windows VDA subscription.

Windows Enterprise with Software Assurance

Software Assurance includes a set of benefits to help improve workforce productivity, streamline software deployment, and reduce costs. It's available with Windows 11 Enterprise through Commercial Licensing but isn't offered with the Cloud Solution Provider program.

For devices that don't qualify for Windows 11 Enterprise, you can license Windows VDA for access to the benefits of Software Assurance. With Software Assurance and Windows VDA, you get flexible access to Windows Enterprise, Microsoft Desktop Optimization Pack (MDOP), and a number of additional benefits, which are described in the following table.

Benefit	Description
New Version Rights	With New Version Rights, you have access to new releases of Windows on any licensed device as soon as they're released for no additional cost. With the launch of Windows 11, this will include future LTSCs, as well as the Current Channel for Business for Enterprise edition.
Microsoft Desktop Optimization Pack (MDOP)	MDOP enables businesses to virtualize the operating system applications and the user experience, manage Windows features, and restore user productivity after a system issue. See the Microsoft Desktop Optimization Pack for more details.
Windows Virtual Desktop Access (VDA) Rights	Windows VDA Rights enables users to access virtual instances of Windows on a VDI infrastructure in a variety of user scenarios. See the Windows 11 licensing for Virtual Desktops guide for additional details.
Windows Enterprise Long Term Servicing Channel (LTSC)	Get security updates regularly, without new features, for the duration of the five-year support period.

Note: "Licensed device" refers to any device covered by either Software Assurance or a Windows VDA on a per device basis. "Licensed user" refers to any user covered by Windows VDA on a per user basis.

Windows Enterprise LTSC per Device

The use rights for Windows Enterprise LTSC are perpetual for the licensed device even when the Windows Enterprise per Device license with Software Assurance has ended. When the Windows LTSC edition is installed as part of a Windows Enterprise E3 or E5 subscription per user this is not the case.

If Windows Enterprise with Software Assurance expires, the perpetual use rights will be for the LTSC that was current at the time that the Software Assurance coverage expired, including any past LTSC, but not a future LTSC.

Windows Enterprise E3 is a user subscription license and doesn't have an underlying Windows Enterprise upgrade license with Software Assurance, therefore perpetual use rights aren't granted for Windows Enterprise LTSC.

Windows 11 downgrade rights

Your rights to use prior versions of Windows in place of Windows 11 ("downgrade rights") depend on how the license was acquired.

For Windows 11 Pro preinstalled on PC (OEM) the downgrade rights are limited to the equivalent edition for Windows 10 using Volume Licensing media or media provided by the OEM. Licenses acquired in Commercial Licensing programs provide the greatest flexibility with downgrade rights to any prior version.

Version Downgrade to	OEM preinstall Windows 11 Pro	Commercial Licensing Windows 11 Pro	Windows 11 Enterprise
Windows 10 Enterprise			✓
Windows 10 Pro	✓	✓	✓
Windows 8/8.1 Enterprise			✓
Windows 8.1 Pro		✓	✓
Windows 7 Enterprise			✓
Windows 7 Professional		✓	✓
Windows Vista Enterprise			✓
Windows Vista Business		✓	✓
Windows XP Pro		✓	✓
Windows 2000 Professional		✓	✓
Windows 95/98/NT		✓	✓

PCs purchased with Windows 11 Pro preinstalled by an OEM will have the option to downgrade to either Windows 10 Pro. For circumstances requiring Windows 8.1, 7, Vista, Windows XP, or other prior versions, the rights to downgrade to these versions are available only through Commercial Licensing, not the OEM preinstall license.

Note: There are no downgrade rights to Windows 7 Ultimate.

Volume licensing activation

Windows product activation is a set of technologies that enables customers to confirm that their copy of Windows is properly licensed. Product activation is required for all editions of Windows 10 and 11.

Volume activation applies to computers that are covered under a Commercial Licensing program and allows enterprise customers to automate the activation process, making it transparent to users. It's used strictly as a tool for activation and isn't used for license invoicing or billing.

Activation through Windows Subscription Activation

The subscription activation feature enables you to "step-up" from Windows Pro edition to Enterprise edition. You can use this feature if you acquired Windows Enterprise E3 or E5 licenses. The step-up takes place when a device is added or registered with your Azure AD tenant by a user. A user with a user subscription license can activate up to 5 devices or virtual instances of the OS. At any point the user (if allowed by company policy) can remove the license from a device or discard a virtual instance and repurpose the license for another instance. For example, when the user receives a new device, the Enterprise license can be recovered to apply to the new device. The old device will revert to Windows Pro.

In combination with Windows Autopilot, you can have devices shipped directly from your OEM or participating reseller to the user's location. Microsoft partners will have configured the device to automatically register with your Azure AD tenant and step-up the device to the Enterprise edition. The step-up will take less than one minute.

The benefits of Windows Subscription activation are that you no longer have to manage Windows OS activation keys, nor have to deploy a Windows Enterprise image to update a Pro device to your corporate policy, saving you time and bringing the device quickly into compliance, so your employees are not disrupted.

Learn more about subscription activation

Activation through Key Management Service and Multiple Activation Key

Key Management Service (KMS) allows organizations to activate computers within the corporate environment through an on-premises hosted service (KMS), and Multiple Activation Key (MAK) activates computers on a one-time basis by using the hosted activation services provided by Microsoft. You can use either or both key types to activate computers in your environments, but each device that hasn't activated by a KMS must use a MAK.

During Active Directory-based activation, any Windows 11 computers connected to the domain will activate automatically and transparently during computer setup. These clients stay activated as long as they remain members of the domain and maintain periodic contact with a domain controller.

Learn more about volume activation.

How to acquire Licenses through Commercial Licensing

To acquire the latest Microsoft technology at significant cost savings over full packaged products through Microsoft Commercial Licensing, contact your Microsoft representative or Microsoft Reseller Partner.

Your preferred Microsoft Commercial Licensing reseller can help you acquire Windows 11 Enterprise, which can be ordered through Microsoft Commercial Licensing programs. To find a Microsoft Commercial Licensing reseller:

- In the United States, call (800) 426-9400 or visit Microsoft partners.
- Outside the United States, contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To locate licensing information for your local subsidiary, visit Microsoft Licensing worldwide.