Should I Upgrade to Windows 10?

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Windows 10 is finally here. You've seen some of its best new features, even heard what it's like to use every day. But you might be wondering if you should upgrade. For some, it's free, a great update, and a foregone conclusion. For others it's better to wait, or think about other options. Let's see where you fall.http://lifehacker.com/the-best-new-f...

Remember: If You Qualify For a Free Upgrade, You Have a Whole Year to Redeem It

Many of you will (or already have) see that "Windows 10 has finished downloading: Install Now?" dialog on your desktop and instantly click. You might even be looking around the web right now for methods to make sure your turn in line comes sooner. That's fine—but keep in mind that if your computer qualifies for a free upgrade, you have a full year to cash in on it.

That means that if you haven't done the things you should before you install a new operating system—back up your data, update your drivers, and make sure your applications are compatible—there's plenty of time. Plus, if you discover that any of your favorite apps, games, drivers, or hardware just won't work in Windows 10, you can wait for the manufacturer or developer to address that before you get on the upgrade bandwagon. In short, don't be in a hurry just because it's free, or just because the install package is sitting on your computer, right there, waiting for you to double-click it.http://lifehacker.com/theres-no-excu...

We haven't heard of anything that flat-out *doesn't work* in Windows 10, but that doesn't mean there isn't something. Even if one obscure tool you use hasn't updated, it could destroy your workflow. Do your due diligence and make sure you're ready. Plus, if you have reason to wait, you just don't like being first in line, or would prefer to let others shake out the bugs, Microsoft gave you that full year on purpose. Take as much—or as little—time as you need.

Who Can Probably Upgrade Now

With that out of the way, there are some people who, once you've prepped your PC, don't need to hesitate if you don't want to. Tweakers, bleeding-edge enthusiasts, people who have been running the beta or the tech preview: You can all upgrade right away. For the rest of us, here's a general list of people who should definitely get Windows 10:

- **Windows 8/8.1 Users**: We've never been on the hate wagon for Windows 8, but it's also not fair to say it was entirely without problems. Well, if you're comfortable with Windows 8, Windows 10 improves on almost every aspect. It also brings back some of the things from Windows 7 you had to install third-party tools to get. For you, it'll be an evolutionary upgrade, packed with features you'll find useful, but not transformative or difficult to get used to. The only Windows 8 users who might want to hold off are the ones who paid for (and use) Windows Media Center, since Windows 10 doesn't support it, and will actually remove it during the upgrade.

- **Windows 7 Users Willing to Embrace Change**: If you've been running Windows 7 and are interested in some of the new features Windows 10 offers (Cortana on the desktop, virtual desktops without third-party tools, much-improved Aero Snap, the all-new Action Center for notifications, and more)—not to mention the ones that came with Windows 8 (like those lightning fast boot times, many security improvements, or tighter integration with your Microsoft account, OneDrive, or Xbox)—upgrade as soon as you're ready. Your hardware and drivers, PC games, and apps will all continue to work (again, nothing major has hit our radar that's just outright broken.) Best of all, your upgrade is free as opposed to the hundred bucks Microsoft wanted for Windows 8. However, again, if you rely on Windows Media Center, you'll lose it, so keep that in mind.

Let's just get it out in the open: Windows 10 is a worthwhile upgrade for most users and most PCs that can support it. We've been testing it here for months, both in technical preview and in beta. Like any new OS, it'll take a little getting used to, and some things you may be familiar with have moved around. Stability-wise, it's solid. Functionality-wise,

there are definitely its share of quirks and inconsistencies, and some things we miss, but nothing so serious you should avoid it entirely.

Who Should Wait and Check Back in a Few Weeks or Months

Like we mentioned earlier, if you qualify for a free upgrade, you have a year to watch as people get hands-on, long-term experience with Windows 10 before you decide to join them. If you wait until after July 29, 2016, you're stuck paying retail price. There are some people who'll have to pay retail price anyway (I'm looking at you, Vista and XP users.) Either way, many of you will be better off waiting to see how things shake out.

- **Windows 7 Users Who Are Skeptical or Hate Change**: If you're a die-hard Windows 7 user, hated Windows 8, or hate change in general, waiting is your best option. Time, and more research, might bring you around. If you're eligible for a free upgrade, you can take it slow and set aside time to upgrade and customize your PC afterward. You'll just have time to get your bearings and do your homework. See how quickly others embrace Windows 10, and then make your own call.

- **Anyone Waiting on Software Updates or New Drivers**: This may go without saying, but if you have important hardware for which the manufacturer is planning an optimized or updated Windows 10-compatible driver, hold off until you get it. If you have a critical app that for some reason works in Windows 7 or 8 but has issues in Windows 10, hang tight until the developer gets around to updating it. Most developers we've seen have taken advantage of the long technical preview and public beta period to test and update their apps and drivers, but there are probably some stragglers.

- **Anyone Who Wants to Wait for a Patch or Two, or for the Bugs to Shake Out**: Some of you may even want to hang tight just to see if other people report bugs first. You know the mindset: "don't do Microsoft's beta testing for them" (which doesn't totally apply, since the beta is over now) and all that. Let other people work out the kinks and then install after a few patches or a service pack comes in. A lot of people have reported quirks and issues, things that come with any new OS, that impact their work, but their experience may not be yours. For example, Ars Technica thinks this is Microsoft's best OS yet...or will be once the bugs are fixed. Their sentiment isn't alone. Most reviewers, us included, think Windows 10 is great, and a few patches and updates will make it even better. You might want to wait for those updates.

If you've gotten anything from the list above, it's that *there's no rush to upgrade*. Wait and see how things shake out, and for a patch or two while Microsoft addresses the bugs and quirks people are uncovering. For example, Microsoft removed DVD playback from Windows 10. That's not really a problem, and there's an update coming that'll bring it back, but our favorite video player for Windows, PotPlayer, and the ever-trusty VLC can handle it just fine right now. Maybe you like Windows Media Player and want to wait for that update.

If you're skeptical, wait and see how other people's experiences go. Try it yourself on someone else's computer, or head to a Microsoft store or electronics store to try it yourself. For those people with older computers, ineligible for the free upgrade, you have all the time in the world, since you'll have to pay for Windows 10 either way. Don't get us wrong, we think that if you fall into one of the points above, you'll eventually want to upgrade, just maybe not *right away*.

Who May Not Want to Upgrade at All

Of course, with every new operating system, there are some people who just shouldn't bother with it at all. In this case, the people who really consider Windows 10 fall into a few simple groups, and probably already know who they are:

- **Anyone Relying on Windows Media Center**: As we mentioned above, Windows 10 means the end of Windows Media Center. If you had it already, you'll lose it, so if you rely on it, you may just want to stick with Windows 7, or Windows 8 with the WMC add-on. There are alternatives, of course, including Kodi (formerly XBMC) or Plex, but neither handles things like live TV the same way that WMC does, and if your setup is built around WMC, you'll probably want do your homework, choose an alternative that works best for you, and migrate on your own time, if at all.

- **Windows Vista Users**: Windows Vista is a lot like Windows 8.1. By the time the furor around it died down and a few service packs were released, it was pretty solid. Vista users can expect support from Microsoft, including patches and security updates, well into 2017, and considering Vista systems don't qualify for the free upgrade to Windows 10, you may want to hang tight instead of dropping the $119 retail price. Particularly if you stash the money and save up to buy a new computer that comes with Windows 10, as PC World notes.
- **Windows XP Users**: If you're still running Windows XP, there's probably a reason, and you know it. That said, there's no guarantee that an XP machine meets Windows 10's system requirements, and combined with the fact that the upgrade will cost you full price, we'd hesitate to tell you to upgrade. If you're still rocking XP on older hardware, it's time for a new computer. If that's not an option, we have some other suggestions.

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Of course, there's one more group of people who won't want to upgrade to Windows 10: People who are perfectly and completely happy with what they have now, or either don't use Windows or are leaving Windows entirely. We're sure some of you are running Windows 7 who'll never *ever* upgrade for any number of personal or aesthetic reasons. Similarly, if you're no fan of the direction Windows has taken and you're planning a move to OS X or Linux, clearly Windows 10 isn't for you either.

The Bottom Line: A Solid Upgrade for *Almost* Everyone

At the end of the day, Windows 10 is a solid upgrade. We've tested it, we think it's an improvement over Windows 8.1 and Windows 7. The upgrade is easy. If you're running Windows 8 it's near-seamless, though Windows 7 users should be ready for a longer, albeit still simple, experience. There's nothing about it that should grind your work to a halt, but there might be some bugs and quirks to get used to. Of course, if you're skeptical, take your time and make the decision to upgrade on your own, based on your own research, experiences, and the apps you run.

It helps that Microsoft made Windows 10 available in technical preview and beta so early, and that so many people have been playing with it. All that time has given us time to tweak it, customize it, and highlight issues. Odds are any problems you run into have been solved (or at least documented) by someone else, and developers have had plenty of time to get their software ready to ship. Aside from the issues that come with any new OS, and the flurry of patches to fix them that we'll see in the next few weeks, there should be relatively few surprises. Just, as always, make sure your data is all backed up before you take the plunge.

Title illustration by Tina Mailhot-Roberge.