

# What is Vista?

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**W**indows Vista is Microsoft's new Operating System (OS) that will replace XP. Vista has been under development for 5 long years, and is finally ready to go with new capabilities, an updated interface, improved security features, and updated applications.



The Graphical User Interface, or GUI, has been updated with the default Windows Aero Glass look, with sleek, pretty glass-like graphics and subtle animations. Some of it is simply eye-candy, and older systems may not be able to display all the glorious wonder of Glass, but there are improvements in functionality because of this new look, and besides, who wants a new OS if things don't look a little different? If you have a recent computer with adequate video processing power, this thing is beautiful. There are new methods of navigating and using the files on your computer, a new Start Menu, and a Sidebar on the desktop that contains "gadgets", or mini-applications.

Besides the visible difference that Aero Glass provides, there are major changes in the way you will interact with Vista.



Instant Search is a part of almost every function within Vista. With this improved Search function, you can enter a word, partial word, or phrase, and Windows will find and display all instances containing that search term. Instant Search can be found in all Explorer windows, and even the Start Menu, allowing you to search for a

program name instead of looking for it in a list. If you find that you are performing the same searches, you can save searches and return to them repeatedly.

The Command Bar, found in all Explorer windows, contains tasks consistent with the contents of the file or folder that you are working with. In other words, if you are working with a picture, commands will show in the Command Bar that you would typically use with pictures.

Vista has improved security features, such as Microsoft's Windows Defender, a real-time malware scanner that acts to prevent or remove spyware or adware. Windows Vista now includes Parental Controls, which were previously only available as third-party applications. Other improvements include an improved firewall (which debuted in XP SP2), a better Windows Update experience, and User Account Controls. Vista also includes the recently released Internet Explorer 7, which has improved handling and protection against phishing attacks and fraudulent websites. Whether these security improvements prove to be that much more effective remains to be seen.

## Applications Within Vista

**A**s in previous versions of Windows, Microsoft has included several applications that aim to increase your productivity.

### Windows Mail

Outlook Express finally gets an update! Windows Mail provides Instant Search, Junk Mail and phishing filters, and the ability to read newsgroups. It is worth noting, however, that you can no longer access web e-mail accounts like Hotmail or Google Mail (GMail) through Windows Mail. If you need a free e-mail client that will access these accounts, try [Mozilla's Thunderbird](#).

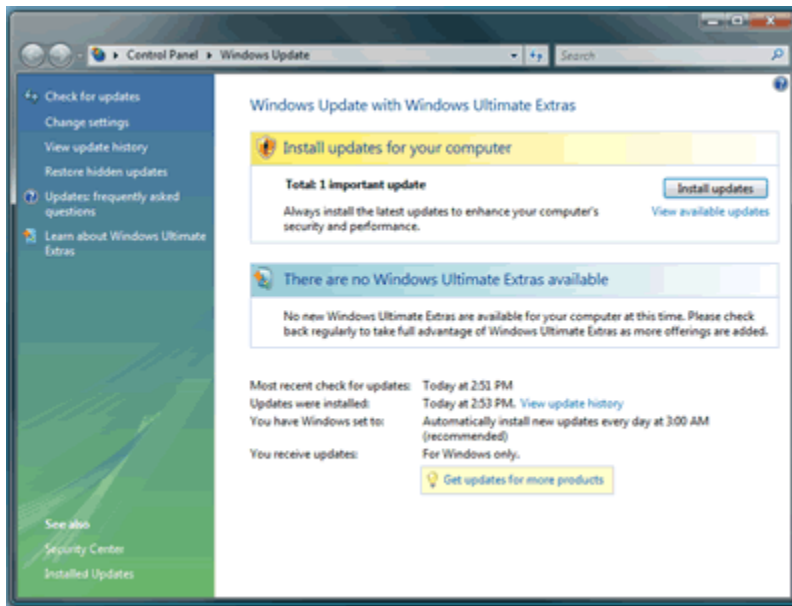
### Windows Calendar

Windows Calendar contains some of the functionality that has been present in the full version of Outlook. Calendar will allow you to plan and manage your activities and create appointments. You can share your calendar with family and friends either on the same computer, or even online!

### Photo Gallery

The new Windows Photo Gallery provides a way to search, sort, edit, print, display and share your photos and videos.

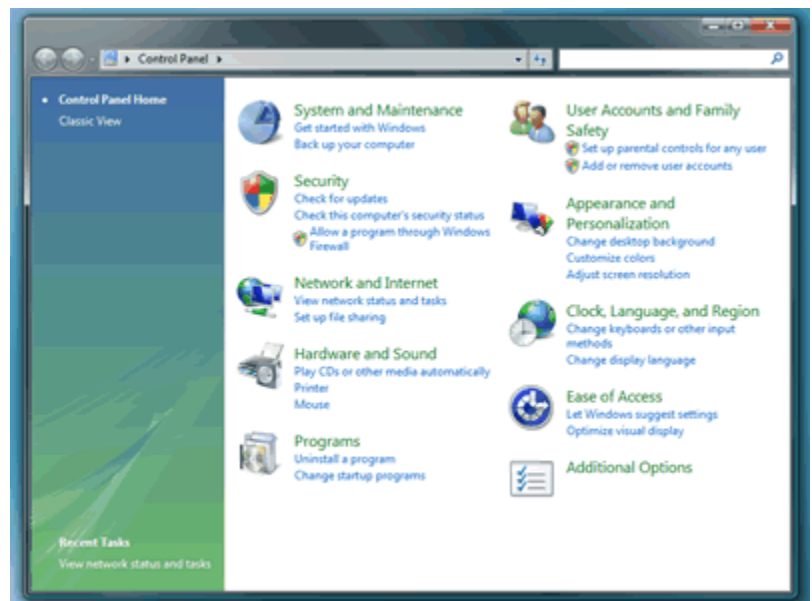
## Windows Update



As in Windows XP, Windows Update can automatically download and install updates, both Critical and Recommended. In Vista, however, you can now schedule or postpone required restarts until it is convenient for you, instead of having to restart right away, regardless of the work you are doing.

## Control Panel

The Control Panel now contains more visible options in the Category View, instead of having to go hunting in categories for the function that you want. You can, of course, select the Classic View to see each individual Control Panel option. You can also use Instant Search to search for a function within the Control Panel.



## How Do I Buy Vista?

**T**here are four ways to have Windows Vista installed on your computer. These are the versions of Vista that are available.

**Retail:** Vista is available in stores and online.

**Buy a New PC:** You can purchase a new computer that has Vista preinstalled. You may find it a challenge to get XP on a new computer anymore, though with a new computer, why would you want to?

**Express Upgrade:** If you purchased a new computer prior to January 2007, it should have come with a coupon from Microsoft for a free or postage-paid copy of a comparable version of Vista.

**Anytime Upgrade:** After Vista is installed, you can use the Anytime Upgrade feature to upgrade to a higher version of Vista, without having to go out and purchase an entire new copy. For example, Home Basic users will be able to use this feature to upgrade to Home Premium or Ultimate. Home Premium and Business customers can use Windows Anytime Upgrade to upgrade to Windows Vista Ultimate. Here is how this is done: when you buy a copy of Vista, you will essentially get all versions on one DVD. This way, Microsoft does not have to print several different versions of DVDs. You are purchasing the CD key for the product you choose. If you want to upgrade to a higher version, you do it in Windows, connect to Microsoft, pay a set amount to upgrade, and you in turn receive a new CD key. This new key unlocks the features that are in the higher version, which are then installed. This feature is found at *Control Panel>Windows Anytime Upgrade*.

## What versions of Vista are available?

Barring the minor versions that are available for special business and international uses, there are four main versions of Vista that are available.

**Home Basic:** Full Version: \$199.00, Upgrade: \$99.95



Vista Home Basic is the entry-level, very basic interface. This version is dumbed-down, and, in my opinion, the one version to stay away from, no matter how cheap it is in the store.



**Home Premium:** Full Version: \$239.00, Upgrade: \$159.00

Vista Home Premium will be the mainstream version of Windows. It will be offered most by the PC manufacturers, and for good reason. This version has the most well-rounded mix of features and usability for most users.



**Business:** Full Version: \$299.00, Upgrade: \$199.00

Vista Business adds advanced networking, advanced Backup and Restore, data synchronization for mobile PCs, and a different Fax and Scan center. This is geared more toward small to medium-sized businesses.



**Ultimate:** Full Version: \$399.00, Upgrade: \$259.00

Vista Ultimate will blend the Business and Home Premium versions. There are some add-on features that will be available through Windows Update, but only for Vista Ultimate. Power users will probably want this version, but really only because it will have just about everything that Vista has to offer.

## Can I buy an Upgrade Version?

**N**ow it's time for some good news and some bad news.

**Do you run Windows 95, 98, 98SE, ME or NT?** If you run any of these older versions, you do NOT qualify for upgrade pricing. You will need to either buy a new computer (really the cheaper way to go), or

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purchase a Full version of Vista. To be honest, if you are using an older version because your computer is older, it will not run Vista anyway (at least not where you'll enjoy using it).

**Do you run Windows 2000 or any version of XP (Home, Pro, Media Center, Tablet PC)?** You can purchase an Upgrade version of Vista. However, know that depending on the version of XP that you own, and the version of Vista you're trying to install, you may not be allowed to perform an in-place upgrade (just over-writing your copy of Windows, and keeping all your programs and data). You may have to perform a clean install (wipe out your copy of XP, and you'll have to reinstall all your programs).

A few caveats:

- Plan on backing up all of your existing data and any install files you have, whether you are doing an upgrade or a full install. That's just good practice.
- It's always better to do a clean install whenever you install Windows. You'll avoid any of the built-up gunk that may be in your system, and any troubles that you may not know about. And your system will be just plain faster.

## Is My Computer Ready for Vista?

It is time to be thinking about your computer upgrade or replacement plans, with Vista in mind.

If you have a new machine (1 to 2 years old), I'd just buy Vista if you want to.

If you're in the market for a new machine, you can buy a computer with Vista loaded. This is the easier way to get Vista, since you don't have to install it.

## So how much computer do I really need?

Per Microsoft's Windows Vista website, the minimum supported hardware to run Vista is as follows:

VISTA CAPABLE

VISTA PREMIUM

MY RECOMMENDATION

A modern processor (at least 800MHz).	1 GHz 32-bit (x86) or 64-bit (x64) processor.	Intel Core 2 Duo or AMD x64 processor
512 MB of system memory.	1 GB of system memory.	1 GB of system memory; ideally 2GB
A graphics processor that is DirectX 9 capable.	A graphics processor that is DirectX 9 capable, with 128 MB of graphics memory.	256 MB (or more) graphics card, preferably PCI Express slot. I wouldn't get onboard video (runs off the motherboard)
	40 GB of hard drive capacity with 15 GB free space.	250 (or more) GB SATA hard drive
	DVD-ROM Drive.	DVD Burner: Vista will provide for DVD burning within the OS
	Audio output capability.	
	Internet access capability.	

If you want to run Vista and your applications with any kind of speed, I REALLY suggest avoiding a computer labeled as "Vista Capable". Capable implies "yeah maybe it'll run it, as long as you don't expect too much". You're not going to save any real money in the long run. Buy a "Vista Premium Ready" machine, and you may actually enjoy using your computer.

Keep in mind that when you read "Minimum supported hardware" or even "Suggested hardware" on a box for ANY kind of software, that is to be taken with a mighty big grain of salt. These numbers are an ABSOLUTE minimum, and I really wouldn't want to run software on a system like they suggest.