

Exploring Windows 7



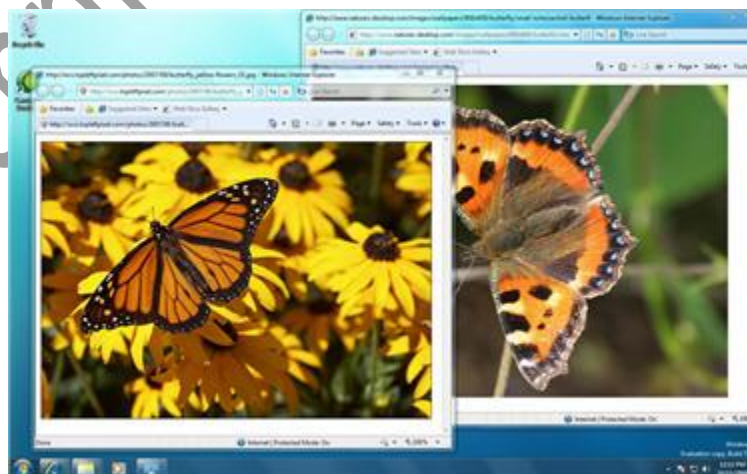
Are you wondering about the new Windows 7 operating system? Perhaps you are trying to decide if you want to upgrade from XP or Vista. Maybe you are thinking about buying a new computer and want to learn more about Windows 7 first. With these questions in mind, we explored Windows 7 and would like to share what we found with you.

In this lesson, we will **compare Windows 7 with previous Vista and XP** operating systems. In addition, we will discuss **performance improvements** and review the **major features**.

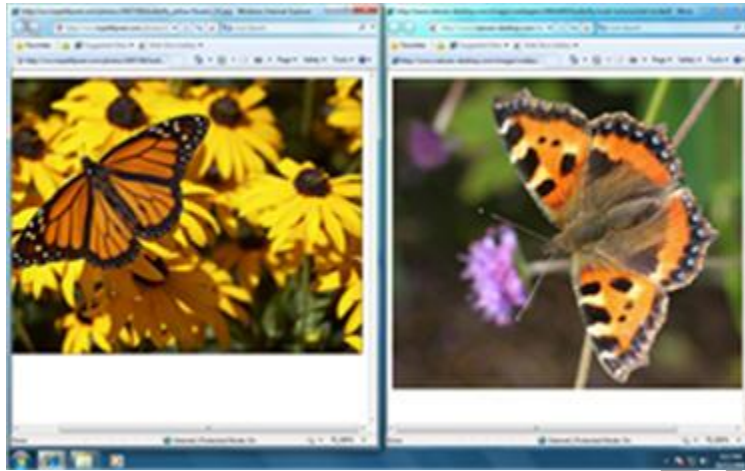
What is Windows 7?

Windows 7 is the latest version of a series of **Operating Systems** that Microsoft has produced for use on personal computers. It is the follow-up to the **Windows Vista** Operating System which was released in 2006. An operating system allows your computer to manage software and perform essential tasks. It is also a **Graphical User Interface (GUI)** that allows you to visually interact with your computer's functions in a logical, fun and easy way.

For example, in Windows 7 you can view two windows side by side by using the **Aero Snap** feature. This feature automatically sizes or snaps two windows to fit together on the screen thus allowing you the convenience of viewing them next to each other.



Two Windows Overlapping



Aero Snap View

Please note that Windows 7 is designed to work on PCs - you will need additional software if you want to use it on a Mac (Apple Macintosh Computer).

How is Windows 7 Different from Vista or XP?

Based on their customer feedback, Microsoft is promoting that it has simplified the PC experience by making a lot of functions easier to use, such as, better previewing on the **Task Bar**, instant searching for files or media and easy sharing via **Home Group** networking. They also claim improved performance by supporting **64-bit processing** which is increasingly the standard in desktop PCs. In addition, Windows 7 is designed to sleep and resume faster, use up less memory and recognize USB devices faster. There are also new possibilities with media streaming and touch screen capabilities.

The above are improvements for both the Vista and XP users. If you are already a Vista user then the improvements to Windows 7 are going to be more subtle. Vista users are likely already familiar with features like the **Aero** visual functions, the **Start Menu** organization and **Search**. However, if you are currently using XP, then you may require a bit of an adjustment period.

Improvements for both Vista and XP Users

- New Taskbar and System Tray
- Quick Desktop View button
- Improved Start Up, Sleep and Resume performance
- Improved power management saves memory and battery life
- Libraries to improve file access and organization
- Action Centre for system maintenance, backups, troubleshooting and more
- User Account customization of notifications
- Improved back up
- New wallpapers and themes
- Improved Gadgets
- New premium games include Chess Titans, Mah-jong Titans and Ink ball
- Advanced Calculator functions including saving history
- Improved networking via Home Groups
- Passkey protection with networks
- Device Stage for recognizing USB devices faster
- Windows Mail replaced by Windows Live

Changes and improvements from Windows XP only

- New Start Icon
- Aero Snap, Shake and Peek
- Desktop icons like "Computer" and "My Documents" are removed and accessed through the Start Menu
- Larger icons and hidden icons in the Taskbar
- Quick Launch toolbar has been replaced by pinning a program to the Taskbar
- Jump Lists for easier access
- A Search Bar in the Start Up Menu
- The "Run" command is accessed through the Start Menu's Search Bar
- Faster and smoother gaming components
- Parental Controls for monitoring computer use
- Update feature that eliminates web surfing for patches

Will Windows 7 Improve My Computer's Performance?

As previously mentioned, Microsoft is promoting that Windows 7 is designed to:

- Increase **Start Up** and **Shutdown** by 20 seconds
- Go to **Sleep** and **Resume** faster
- Use up less **Memory**
- Pop up **Search** results faster
- Reconnect to your **Wireless Network** more quickly
- Recognize **USB devices** faster

This is promising news, because slow wait time appeared to be one of the chief complaints regarding Windows Vista. Windows 7 also saves time by not booting up various devices during **Start Up** unless they are currently being used. In other words, if you are not using a Bluetooth device at the moment then Windows 7 will not waste time by running that program in the background. It will wait until you have plugged it in.

However, **performance tests** of Windows 7 indicate that actual improvements vary and greatly depend on the conditions of your specific computer and the programs you are running.

What Can You Do on Windows 7?

Aero

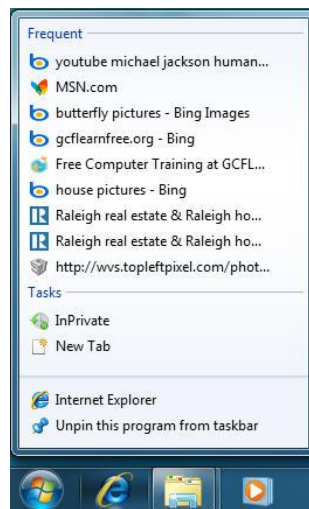


Sort through open windows with Aero Flip 3D

Aero is an interface that makes your visual interactions with the desktop fun and easy.

- **Aero Peek** makes your open windows transparent so you may see your desktop. It also allows you to peek at items in your taskbar for a thumbnail preview.
- **Aero Snap** is a quick way to resize your windows to make them easier to read, organize and compare.
- **Aero Flip** allows you to preview all your open windows from a central window or 3D view that you can flip through.
- **Aero Shake** allows you to take your mouse and shake only the open window you want to focus on and the rest will disappear.

Taskbar

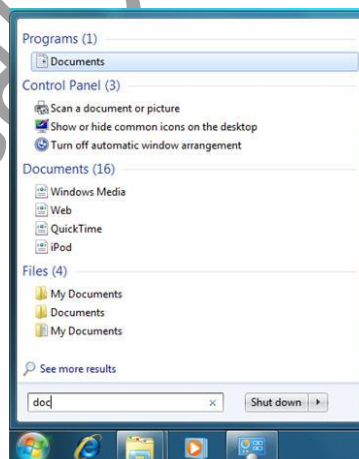


Get immediate access with Jump List

The **taskbar** is now more convenient to use with larger views and easier access.

- **Jump Lists** allow you to right click on an icon in the taskbar and immediately access items like music, videos or web pages that you use on a regular basis.
- **Pin** allows you to place programs on the taskbar and rearrange the order of the icons as you wish.
- **Action Centre** allows you to control the alerts and pop-ups you receive regarding maintenance and security.

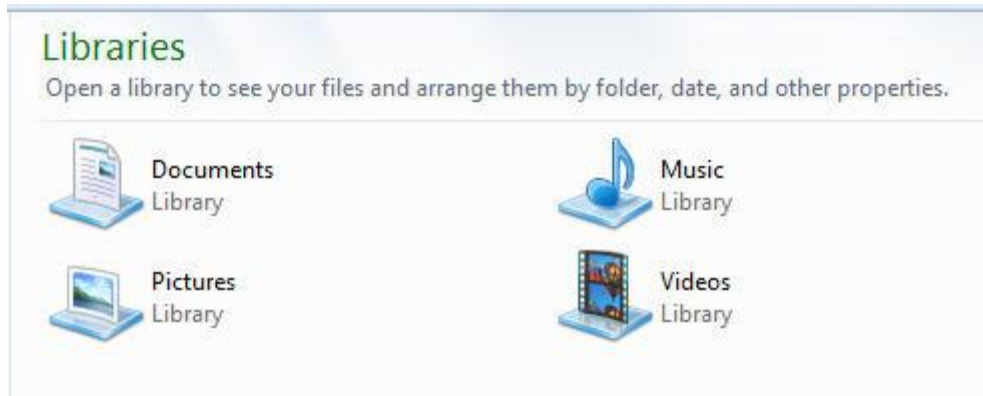
Search



Find documents fast with the new Search

As soon as you start typing in the **Search bar** of the Start Menu you will instantly see a list of relevant options grouped by categories with highlighted keywords and text. This allows you to easily scan for the documents, music, pictures and email you are looking for.

Libraries



Access your files in Libraries

Libraries allow you to organize your files in one place so they are easy to search and access.

Windows 7 has four default Libraries for documents, music, pictures and videos, however you can customize and create your own Libraries based on your needs.

Gadgets



Select Gadgets for your Desktop

You can select or download **gadgets** such as a slide show, calendar or weather update to add to your Desktop. The live updates of some gadgets like weather, stocks and feed headlines are quite convenient.

Additional Things you can do in Windows 7

- **Device Stage** - When you plug a device into your computer such as a camera, mobile phone or flash drive, a window will open up with a menu of popular tasks, status information and options for your device.
- **Windows Live Essentials** - Windows Live Essentials is free software that enhances the Windows 7 experience. It replaces Windows Mail and allows you to email, instant message, edit photos, blog, etc.
- **HomeGroup** - HomeGroup allows you to connect two or more PCs on a home network in order to easily share and access files and printers.
- **Windows Touch** - You can use Windows Touch with a touch-screen PC to browse and flick through the screen using your fingers with multitouch technology.
- **Remote Media Streaming** - With Remote Media Streaming you can access your music, pictures and videos stored on your home PC remotely using the Internet.

Exploring Windows 7



By now, you should have a better idea of what Windows 7 is all about. Now you can start considering if upgrading to Windows 7 will be a good choice for you. In making this decision, you may want to compare your desires with what your current computer is capable of.

While Microsoft is promoting that Windows 7 can be used on older computers that does not mean all of the features will be available or work the same as they will on a new computer. For example, we have found that some of the Aero features, like Peek and 3D, do not work on one of our three-year old, 32-bit computers.

In addition, upgrading to Windows 7 from the XP operating system is more complicated than upgrading from Vista. In the next lesson, we will review the cost and requirements for running Windows 7 which are important factors in making a decision.