

Licensing Windows 365 and Windows 11 Virtual Desktops for Remote Access

This brief applies to all Microsoft Licensing programs.

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Summary

Windows 11 can be used to deploy secure and centrally managed remotely accessed virtualization solutions to workers at scale. Customers looking to virtualize Windows 11 have a variety of ways to deploy and license their virtual machines (VMs). This brief describes how to license Windows 11 running on remote VMs. This brief does not apply to virtualizing locally on a licensed device.

Notes:

- This brief addresses Windows 11 and 10 licensing for Microsoft Commercial Licensing customers only. For the purposes of this brief, Commercial Licensing programs include all Volume License programs, CSP, and the Microsoft Customer Agreement. Windows 11 licensed solely through your OEM device generally does not include virtualization entitlements, with some exceptions. Please see your OEM license agreement for more details.

Generally, and with limitations found below, you must have one of the following licenses to deploy and remotely access a virtual machine running Windows 11:

- Windows 10/11 Enterprise E3/E5
- Windows 10/11 Education A3/A5
- Windows 10/11 Education Student Use Benefit
- Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device with Software Assurance
- Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device without Software Assurance
- Windows VDA E3/E5
- Windows VDA per device
- Microsoft 365 F3/E3/E5
- Microsoft 365 A3/A5
- Microsoft 365 Business Premium

Once assigned, **User licenses** allow licensed users to remotely access Windows 11 VMs from any device. **Device licenses** allow any user of the device to access Windows 11 VMs from the licensed device.

Virtualization Methods

How you can virtualize Windows 11 depends on your license, your licensing program, and the means of virtualization. Different licenses and licensing programs confer different virtualization entitlements. The below sections explain which licenses and Commercial Licensing programs offer which virtualization entitlements.

Windows 11 can be virtualized and accessed remotely using three primary methods:

- Windows 365
- Azure infrastructure or Azure Virtual Desktop
- Desktops virtualized on on-premises servers or outsourcers' servers

Notes on Qualifying Operating Systems (QOS):

- Windows Enterprise licenses (such as Windows Enterprise E3) are sold as upgrade licenses to Windows Pro and have a QOS prerequisite. This means that a user must have a device with a QOS to be eligible to be assigned a Windows Enterprise license. Please see [[Windows 11 qualifying operating system requirements | Licensing Brief](#)] for more information.
- Microsoft 365 licenses, however, do not have a QOS prerequisite. This means that any user can be assigned a Microsoft 365 license, regardless of their underlying device. Users that acquire a Microsoft 365 license with Windows Enterprise licenses included (such as Microsoft 365 E3) can therefore use the below Windows Enterprise remote virtualization rights without the need for a QOS.

| License (any Commercial Licensing program) | Access virtualized Windows remotely |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Windows Enterprise/Education | QOS required |
| Windows VDA | Not required |
| Microsoft 365 | Not required |

Windows 365

Windows 365 is a software-as-a-service (SaaS) solution that delivers a personalized Windows experience from the Microsoft Cloud to a Windows 365 Cloud PC accessible on any device. Each Cloud PC must be assigned to an individual user.

Windows 365 is available in three ¹ editions:

- **Windows 365 Business** is made specifically for use in smaller companies who want ready-to-use Cloud PCs with simple management options. Windows 365 Business does not require any other Microsoft licenses.
- **Windows 365 Enterprise** is for larger companies that want unlimited seats for creating Cloud PCs. It includes options to create Cloud PCs based on custom device images, allowing robust management options and full integration with Microsoft Intune. To use Windows 365 Enterprise, each user must be assigned an eligible Microsoft license.

Windows Hybrid Benefit is a licensing benefit that reduces the cost of Windows 365 Business if you already use a Windows 11 Pro or Windows 10 Pro on a device. Savings vary by Windows 365 Cloud PC configuration and region. To use and access Windows 365 Enterprise with Windows 11, users must be licensed with each of the following:

- Windows 10/11 Enterprise/Education, Intune, and
- Azure Active Directory P1/P2.

In addition to being available independently, all these licenses are also included in Microsoft 365 F3/E3/G3/E5/G5/A3/A5/Business Premium/Student Use Benefit.

| License (any Commercial Licensing program) | Windows 365 Enterprise |
|---|------------------------|
| Windows 10/11 Enterprise E3/E5 | • |
| Windows 10/11 Education A3/A5 | • |
| Windows 10/11 Education/Microsoft 365 Education Student Use Benefit | • |
| Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device <u>with</u> Software Assurance | |
| Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device <u>without</u> Software Assurance | |
| Windows VDA E3/E5 | • |
| Windows VDA per device | |
| Microsoft 365 F3/E3/E5 | • |
| Microsoft 365 A3/A5 | • |
| Microsoft 365 Business Premium | • |

¹ **Windows 365 Government (U.S. only):** Windows 365 Government provides the same benefit and capabilities as Windows 365 Enterprise.

Azure infrastructure or Azure Virtual Desktop

You can run Windows 11 in virtual machines on Azure infrastructure or through Azure Virtual Desktop. Azure Virtual Desktop is a secure remote desktop and app virtualization service running on Azure. It's the only cloud virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) solution that provides support for Windows 11 multi-session, an exclusive cost optimization capability. Azure Virtual Desktop gives you full control over configuration and management and allows you to deploy and scale your Windows 11 desktops and apps in minutes with the built-in security of Azure.

- To use and access Azure Virtual Desktop with Windows 11, users must be licensed with an eligible user license. Per-device licenses are not eligible for Azure Virtual Desktop.
- Eligible user licenses acquired through all Commercial Licensing programs include the entitlement to virtualize on Azure Virtual Desktop.
- (Note that some RDS CAL licenses with Software Assurance also entitle access to Windows Server sessions on Azure Virtual Desktop).

| License (any Commercial Licensing program) | Azure infrastructure | Azure Virtual Desktop |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Windows 10/11 Enterprise E3/E5 | • | • |
| Windows 10/11 Education A3/A5 | • | • |
| Windows 10/11 Education/Microsoft 365 Education Student Use Benefit | | • |
| Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device <u>with</u> Software Assurance | | |
| Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device <u>without</u> Software Assurance | | |
| Windows VDA E3/E5 | • | • |
| Windows VDA per device | | |
| Microsoft 365 F3/E3/E5 | • | • |
| Microsoft 365 A3/A5 | • | • |
| Microsoft 365 Business Premium | | • |

Desktops virtualized on on-premises servers or outsourcers' servers

You can run Windows 11 virtual machines on your own on-premises server or on a server that is managed by an Authorized Outsourcer. The right to run your software on Authorized Outsourcers' servers is conveyed through product-specific virtualization rights and the Flexible Virtualization Benefit. Each eligible Windows 11 licensed user is entitled to access up to four virtual machines. For more information about the Flexible Virtualization Benefit, refer to the [\[Flexible Virtualization Benefit | Licensing Guide\]](#). However, if the outsourcer is not deemed an Authorized Outsourcer (*see definition below*), only Windows VDA E3/E5 licenses confer virtualization entitlements. Eligible licensed users or devices may access up to four virtual machines.

Authorized Outsourcers are third parties Microsoft allows you to use to host and manage virtualized instances of your software on servers in their data centers (shared or dedicated). Authorized Outsourcers are all third party hosters that are not designated as "Listed Providers" in the document found here: <https://aka.ms/ListedProviders>.

| License (any Commercial Licensing program) | On-prem server or server managed by Authorized Outsourcer | Dedicated server managed by Listed Provider |
|---|---|---|
| Windows 10/11 Enterprise E3/E5 | • | |
| Windows 10/11 Education A3/A5 | • | |
| Windows 10/11 Education/Microsoft 365 Education Student Use Benefit | | |
| Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device <u>with</u> Software Assurance | • | |
| Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device <u>without</u> Software Assurance | | |
| Windows VDA E3/E5 | • | • |
| Windows VDA per device | • | |
| Microsoft 365 F3/E3/E5 | • | |
| Microsoft 365 A3/A5 | • | |
| Microsoft 365 Business Premium | | |

Scenarios

The following examples illustrate how you can license Windows 11 virtual machines in different remotely accessed environments.

| Scenario | Remote Access Description | Licensing Solution |
|---|---|--|
| Mixed Windows 11 and Windows Server session desktops | Users access both Windows 11 virtual machines and Windows Server sessions (apps or desktops). | Users or devices accessing Windows 11 virtual machines and Windows Server sessions will need both an eligible Windows 11 license and Windows Server access licenses (Windows Server CAL and RDS CAL). Windows 11 desktops hosted on Windows Server would also require the same CALs. |
| Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) | Users bring their own devices to work and access Windows 11 virtual machines. These personal devices do not have qualifying operating systems (for example, Windows 11 Home and Mac are not QoS in most cases ²). | Because these users do not have qualifying operating systems on their primary devices, they need a Windows VDA license or a qualifying Microsoft 365 license to access Windows 11 virtual machines. |
| Contractor PCs | You provide Windows 11 virtual machines for your contractors/vendors to access via their own devices. | You must assign your contractors/vendors a Windows VDA license or a qualifying Microsoft 365 license to access your Windows 11 virtual machines. |
| Development/Test Windows Virtual Machines | An organization has a group of developers who need to test an application across multiple Windows 11 images running on Azure Virtual Desktop. | Users licensed with Visual Studio subscriptions or MSDN Platforms with active Software Assurance may use Azure Virtual Desktop for development and test purposes. Alternatively, these developers may access Azure Virtual Desktop under any eligible Windows or Microsoft 365 user license. |
| Windows Hybrid Benefit for Windows 365 Business | An organization wants to buy Windows 365 Business with Hybrid Benefit. | Users must be the primary user of a Windows 11 Pro or Windows 10 Pro licensed device, and that device must be their primary work device. To maintain your discounted pricing, during any subscription term in which you access the Windows 365 service, you must also access the service from your Windows 11 Pro or Windows 10 Pro licensed device at least once during that same term. |

² Please see [[Windows 11 qualifying operating systems requirements | Product Terms](#)] for more information.

Summary Table

| License | Windows 365 Enterprise/ Government | Azure infrastructure | Azure Virtual Desktop | On-prem server or Authorized Outsourcer's server | Dedicated server managed by Listed Provider |
|---|------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--|---|
| Windows 10/11 Enterprise E3/E5 | • | • | • | • | |
| Windows 10/11 Education A3/A5 | • | • | • | • | |
| Windows 10/11 Education/Microsoft 365 Education Student Use Benefit | • | | • | | |
| Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device <u>with</u> Software Assurance | | | | • | |
| Windows 10/11 Enterprise per device <u>without</u> Software Assurance | | | | | |
| Windows VDA E3/E5 | • | • | • | • | • |
| Windows VDA per device | | | | • | |
| Microsoft 365 F3/E3/E5 | • | • | • | • | |
| Microsoft 365 A3/A5 | • | • | • | • | |
| Microsoft 365 Business Premium | • | | • | | |

Note: License availability varies by Commercial Licensing program. Refer to the [Product Terms](#) for more information.

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