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Understanding downgrade rights

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Important: the information on this page is intended for system builders and the downgrade rights that apply to their customers. If you are a customer of a direct OEM, please contact your OEM for more information about downgrade rights. If you are a direct OEM, please contact your Microsoft Account Manager.

Downgrade and down-edition rights are an end-user right that Microsoft offers to customers for certain OEM products which meet the technical requirements for a Windows software downgrade. Downgrade rights are documented in the Microsoft Software License Terms that customers accept upon first running Windows and Windows Server software. Thanks to downgrade rights, end users who have acquired a later version of the software (such as Windows 10 Pro or Windows Server 2012 R2 Standard) can use an earlier version of the software until they are ready to migrate to a later version technology.

If a product includes downgrade rights, the license terms for that product will indicate which earlier versions of the software may be used.

Downgrade rights will vary depending on if the software was acquired via volume licensing, OEMs, or full packaged product (FPP).

Downgrade rights for Windows software

The following OEM versions of Windows software are eligible for downgrade rights.

WINDOWS 10	WINDOWS 8.1	WINDOWS 7
Windows 10 Pro includes downgrade rights to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Windows 8.1 Pro Windows 7 Professional 	Windows 8.1 Pro includes downgrade rights to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Windows 7 Professional Windows Vista Business 	Windows 7 Professional and Windows 7 Ultimate include downgrade rights to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Windows Vista Business and Windows Vista Ultimate Windows XP Professional, Windows XP Tablet PC Edition, or Windows XP x64 Edition <p>Note Other OEM Windows 7 versions (for example, Windows 7 Home Basic and Windows 7 Home Premium) do not include downgrade rights.</p>

Note downgrade rights are only available as long as Microsoft provides support for that earlier version, as outlined in the [Windows lifecycle fact sheet](#).

Steps for an end user to downgrade Windows software

To downgrade eligible Windows software, end users must:

- Purchase a PC preinstalled with Windows software.
- Accept the Microsoft Software License Terms.
- Perform the downgrade process to the eligible downgrade product using the media/key from a genuine, previously licensed OEM or retail product.

The downgrade process

Follow these steps to downgrade to an earlier version of Windows software:

- Use genuine Windows media and a corresponding product key for the version of Windows that is eligible for downgrade. The media/key should come from a previously licensed product from the OEM or retail channel.
- End users who are licensed separately through Microsoft Volume Licensing (VL) may provide their VL media and key to a system builder to facilitate the downgrade on their own systems.
- Insert the downgrade-eligible version of Windows media and follow the installation instructions.
- Enter the product key.
- If the software was previously activated, it cannot be activated online. In this case, the appropriate local Activation Support phone number will be displayed. Call the number and explain the circumstances. When it is determined that the end user has an eligible Windows license, the customer service representative will provide a single-use activation code to activate the software. Please note that Microsoft does not provide a full product key in this scenario.
- Activate the software.

For scenarios involving large volume downgrades, end users are encouraged to consider VL which provides the benefits of reimaging rights and volume activation, which can make the process of downgrading much easier.

Authorizing a third party to exercise downgrade rights for an end user

Because downgrade rights apply to end users, they are not designed for third-party facilitation, which has many complications. Also, such facilitation is not suitable for carrying out on a large scale.

Downgrade rights for Windows Server software

The following OEM versions of Windows Server software are eligible for downgrade and down-edition.

WINDOWS SERVER 2012 R2 SKUS	WINDOWS SERVER 2012	WINDOWS SERVER 2008 R2	WINDOWS SERVER 2003 R2, 2003, 2008
Windows Server 2012 R2 Datacenter	Datacenter Standard	Datacenter Enterprise Standard	
Windows Server 2012 R2 Standard	Standard	Enterprise Standard	
Windows Server 2012 R2 Essentials	Includes downgrade rights to an earlier version of: Windows Small Business Server Essentials		End users may downgrade to any other version as long as they have the appropriate media and keys.
Windows Server 2012 R2 Foundation	Includes downgrade rights to an earlier version of: Windows Server Foundation		

Steps for an end user to downgrade Windows Server software

To downgrade Windows Server software customers must:

- Purchase a Server system licensed with Windows Server software.
- Accept the Microsoft Software License Terms.
- Perform the downgrade or down-edition process to the eligible downgrade/down-edition product using the media/key from a genuine, previously licensed OEM, retail or Volume Licensing Server product.

To perform a downgrade to an earlier version of Windows Server software, end users must follow these steps:

- Use the Windows Server media and a corresponding product key for the version of Windows Server that is eligible for downgrade.
- The media/key should come from a previously licensed version.
- The media and key used to perform the downgrade must be from the same channel (example: retail, OEM, or VL).
- End users can use the following media types for their downgrade:
 - Retail (full packaged product)
 - System builder media
 - VL software media in accordance with the Microsoft OEM Volume Licensing License Terms.
- Install the downgrade-eligible version of Windows Server media.
 - Follow activation guide to install the software.
 - If activation fails, follow the trouble shooting wizard or call your local [Activation Support](#) call center and explain your circumstances.
- [Find answers to your Windows Server downgrade or down-edition questions.](#)
- [See additional details about downgrade rights.](#)

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