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| **Topic** | **Linux** | **Windows** |
| **Price** | The [Linux kernel](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/l/linux-kernel.htm), and the [GNU](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/g/gnu.htm) utilities and libraries which accompany it in most [distributions](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/v/variant.htm), are entirely free and [open source](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/o/opensour.htm). You can download and install GNU/Linux distributions without purchase. Some companies offer paid support for their Linux distributions, but the underlying software is still free to download and install. | Microsoft Windows usually costs between $99.00 and $199.00 USD for each licensed copy. However, Windows 10 is being offered as a free upgrade to current owners of Windows 7 or Windows 8.1 if they upgrade before July 29, 2016. |
| **Ease Of Use** | GNU/Linux operating systems have a steeper learning curve for the average user. They frequently require a deeper understanding of the underlying system to perform day-to-day functions. Additionally, troubleshooting technical issues can be a more intimidating and complicated process than on Windows. However, some distributions such as [Ubuntu](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/u/ubuntu.htm) and [Linux Mint](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/m/mint-linux.htm) are designed specifically to ease the transition from Windows to a Linux environment. | Windows is one of the easiest desktop operating systems to use. One of its primary design characteristics is user friendliness and simplicity of basic system tasks. Its ease lack of difficulty is considered a positive by users who want their system to just work. However, more proficient users may be frustrated by oversimplification of system tasks at the expense of fine-grained control over the system itself. |
| **Reliability** | Linux is notoriously reliable and secure. It has a strong focus on [process](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/p/process.htm) management, system security, and [uptime](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/u/uptime.htm). | Although Microsoft Windows has made great improvements in reliability in recent years, it's considered less reliable than Linux. Many of the sacrifices it makes in the name of user-friendliness can lead to security vulnerabilities and system instability. |
| **Software** | There thousands of programs available for Linux, and many are available as easy-to-install [software packages](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/p/packsoft.htm) — all for free. Also, many Windows programs can be run on Linux using compatibility layers such as [WINE](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/w/wine.htm). Linux supports a wider array of free software than Windows. | Windows commands the highest number of desktop users, and therefore the largest selection of commercial software. It also has the largest selection of video games by a wide margin. |
| **Software Cost** | Many of the available [software](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/s/software.htm) programs, utilities, and games available on Linux are free and open source. Even complex applications such as [GIMP](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/g/gimp.htm), [Open Office](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/o/openoffi.htm), and [Star Office](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/s/staroffi.htm) are available for free. | Although there are many free Windows programs, utilities, and games, the majority of the programs are commercial. |
| **Hardware** | Fifteen years ago, Linux struggled to support new hardware. Manufacturers often considered Linux support a secondary concern (if they considered supporting it at all). Furthermore, [device drivers](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/d/driver.htm) for Linux were created only by enthusiasts who devoted their own time and resources to making Linux compatible with new hardware. Since then, the Linux user base has grown exponentially. Today, the majority of hardware manufacturers give Linux support the same priority as Microsoft Windows. | Windows has a massive user base, so it would be madness for a consumer hardware manufacturer not to support Windows. As a Windows user, you can rest assured that your operating system is compatible with any hardware you might buy. |
| **Security** | Linux is a highly secure operating system. Although attack [vectors](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/v/vector.htm) are still discovered, its [source code](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/s/source.htm) is open and available for any user to review, which makes it easier to identify and repair vulnerabilities. | Microsoft has made great security improvements over the years. But as the operating system with the largest user base, especially among novice computer users, it is the primary target for malicious coders. As a result, of all major operating systems, Microsoft Windows is the most likely to be the victim of [viruses](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/v/virus.htm) and [malware](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/m/malware.htm). |
| **Support** | There is a massive amount of online support available for Linux, including [here on Computer Hope](https://www.computerhope.com/unix.htm). | Microsoft Windows offers integrated and online help systems, and there are thousands of informative books about Windows available for every skill level. |
| **Use Cases** | Linux is used by corporate, scientific, and academic organizations of every size. It's used to power the development machines and servers at [Google](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/g/google.htm), [Facebook](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/f/facebook.htm), [Twitter](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/t/twitter.htm), NASA, and the New York Stock Exchange, just to name a few. On the desktop, it is used by technically proficient users who prioritize system security and reliability, and by enthusiasts who want to learn more about computers and how they work. It's also used to give new life to older hardware, enable low-budget computing projects to succeed, and serve as the operating system on single-board computers such as the [Raspberry Pi](https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/r/raspberry-pi.htm). | Microsoft Windows is usually the operating system of choice for gamers, novice users, and business users who rely on Microsoft software. It doesn't run well on older hardware, however. Many Windows users are thrilled with the changes that Microsoft has introduced with Windows 10, so if you've never used it, now is a great time to try it out. |