I typically upgrade my machines with:

sudo apt-get update && time sudo apt-get dist-upgrade

Below is an excerpt from man apt-get. **Using upgrade keeps to the rule: under no circumstances are currently installed packages removed, or packages not already installed retrieved and installed.** If that's important to you, use apt-get upgrade. If you want things to "just work", you probably want apt-get dist-upgrade to ensure dependencies are resolved.

To expand on why you'd want *upgrade* instead of *dist-upgrade*, if you are a systems administrator, you need predictability. You might be using advanced features like [apt pinning](http://wiki.debian.org/AptPreferences) or pulling from a collection of [PPAs](https://launchpad.net/ubuntu/+ppas) (perhaps you have an in-house PPA), with various automations in place to inspect your system and available upgrades instead of always eagerly upgrading all available packages. You would get very frustrated when apt performs unscripted behavior, particularly if this leads to downtime of a production service.

upgrade

upgrade is used to install the newest versions of all packages

currently installed on the system from the sources enumerated in

/etc/apt/sources.list. Packages currently installed with new

versions available are retrieved and upgraded; under no

circumstances are currently installed packages removed, or packages

not already installed retrieved and installed. New versions of

currently installed packages that cannot be upgraded without

changing the install status of another package will be left at

their current version. An update must be performed first so that

apt-get knows that new versions of packages are available.

dist-upgrade

dist-upgrade in addition to performing the function of upgrade,

also intelligently handles changing dependencies with new versions

of packages; apt-get has a "smart" conflict resolution system, and

it will attempt to upgrade the most important packages at the

expense of less important ones if necessary. So, dist-upgrade

command may remove some packages. The /etc/apt/sources.list file

contains a list of locations from which to retrieve desired package

files. See also apt\_preferences(5) for a mechanism for overriding

the general settings for individual packages.