

Microsoft Office & Alternatives

Microsoft makes the world's standard for an office suite (Word processing, Spreadsheet, and Presentation) with many competitors trying to match them with alternatives. You can save yourself money and complexity by getting the right version that meets your needs.

What Do You Need?

- Word Processing “Word” and Spreadsheet “Excel” are must haves for all users. Presentations “PowerPoint & Sway” are needed by a smaller percentage with even less people needing a Database “Access”. Some suites also include eMail “Outlook”, video chat meeting tools “Skype/Teams”, draw graphics and flowcharts “Publisher”, digital note taking “OneNote”, and math formula editing “Equation Editor”.
- Do you need to open, create, edit and exchange official Office files like .DOCX, .XLSX, and .PPTX files? Most alternatives use a proprietary file format, but let you export to and import from a Microsoft format. Determine your needs for what file formats are supported to read or import and what file formats are supported to save or export. Not all will preserve formatting when exporting from or into Microsoft Office, which can be a problem when sending documents back and forth with people.
- Local device software versus Cloud-based software verses. Cloud-based requires nothing to install or keep updated, very low CPU or memory used, but you do need a connection to the Internet.
- Cloud-based file storage versus local file storage.
- Devices or OSs supported.
- Collaboration – Between products and people. Important in business, but also with clubs, or organizations you may be involved with. Co-author or make edits and comments in a document in real time instead of sending and merging files.
- For most free options, support or assistance is done using a forum message or FAQ.
- All solutions support basic features. Not every option supports advanced features like Macros or Unlimited File Size. Try options with your most complex files to see if they have what you need. Other examples of advanced features that may not be available:
 - Word Processing – Tables, Styles, Mail merge, Macros, Track Changes
 - Spreadsheets – Pivot Tables, Charts, Macros
 - Presentation – Edit Master Slides (Layout/Designer), Animation

Microsoft Options & Alternatives

Microsoft 365 is the name for services formerly known as Office 365.

Microsoft 365 Personal (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, Outlook, Skype, Sway, Publisher, and Access). \$69 per year, one user, up to 5 devices, and 1TB OneDrive storage. Software runs on Windows and Mac with files local or OneDrive. Includes advanced security for all your devices, free updates, and free unlimited chat or phone support.

Microsoft 365 Family (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, Outlook, Skype, Sway, Publisher, and Access). \$99 per year, up to 6 people, up to 5 devices per person, and 1TB OneDrive storage per person. Software runs on Windows and Mac with files local or OneDrive. Includes advanced security for all your devices, free updates, and free unlimited chat or phone support.

Office Home & Student 2021 (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and OneNote). \$149-\$40 one time for one user on one device, no updates, no additional OneDrive storage, and free 60 day support via chat or phone. Software runs on Windows and Mac with files local or OneDrive. Microsoft also sells similar versions like Office 2021 Professional Plus and Office 2021 Home and Business that range \$149-\$50.

Office on the web <https://www.office.com>, formerly Office Online (Basic versions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and OneNote). Free Cloud-based with your files on OneDrive. If all you need are the basics, this is an option worth trying before paying for features you may never use. You need a free Microsoft account which comes with 5GB of OneDrive storage or pay \$1.99 a month for 100GB of storage. List of features or limits of Office on the web: <https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/office365/servicedescriptions/office-online-service-description/office-online-service-description>

Alternatives

Google <https://drive.google.com> (Docs, Sheets, Slides, Forms, Meet, Chat, and Gmail). Free Cloud-based with your files on Google Drive. Apps for Android and iOS also available. If all you need are the basics, this is an option worth trying before paying for features you may never use. You need a free Google account which comes with 15GB of Drive storage or pay \$1.99 a month for 100GB of storage. Google Workspace for business starts at \$6 month per user. Uses web fonts, so some conversion issues. Some advanced features can be added with “Add-ons” plug-in integrations. I use this option for most of my files and PC Club files.

LibreOffice (Writer, Calc, Impress, Draw, Math and Base) Free. Runs on Windows, Mac, and Linux with files local or remote (Google Drive, MS OneDrive, etc.). Based on OpenOffice like the Apache option below. Has a very strong and dedicated user base who rave about it. A flexible interface that can feel a lot like Office, but it doesn't have any integrated cloud storage or collaboration tools. Includes a database that most other free options do not have. I recommend and use this free option if you need more than basics that MS Office on the web or Google provide.

Apple Office Suite/iWork (Pages, Numbers, and Keynote). Free. Runs on Mac with files local or Apple iCloud. Also an online version that anyone can access for free though iCloud. Good for basics. Microsoft file Export and compatibility is a problem with fonts, layouts, and image sizing. Good option if you have a Mac.

Apache OpenOffice (Writer, Calc, Impress, Draw, Base, and Math) Free. Runs on Windows, Mac, and Linux with files local. A basic open source software suite. Complex macros and formulas may have problems. Weak for presentations.

WPS Office (WPS Writers, WPS Spreadsheet, and WPS Presentation). Free but ads (\$30 year no ads). Runs on Windows, Mac, Linux, iOS, and Android with files local or use 1GB of free cloud storage. Customizable interfaces so you can decide on the menu style you like most. It also supports tabbed document editing.

FreeOffice (TextMaker, PlanMaker, and Presentations) Free. Runs on Windows, Mac, Android, and Linux, You can choose classic Windows style menus or the more modern ribbon view. Includes free FlexiPDF Basic, with many features of Adobe's PDF editor. No thesaurus.

Zoho Docs (Writer, Sheet, and Show) Free to \$80 year. Cloud-based and includes ZoHo cloud storage. Good Sharing and Collaborating. Geared for companies that do not want a MS or Google solution. For personal use the cost of \$60-\$80 a year, you can get the real MS Windows 365. Companies like Nike and the BBC are users.

Additional Links and Information

- Do not do a Google search for “Free MS office”. 100% of the sites will install a virus or are a scam.
- Microsoft OneNote – Free download or Cloud-based. Note-taking software for free-form information gathering and multi-user collaboration. Like the software Evernote. It gathers users' notes, drawings, screen clippings, and audio commentaries. Additional features in the paid version. I use the free version and highly recommend it.
- Microsoft Sway - Free presentation program that lets you create slideshows, newsletters, resumes, blogs, and more. Additional features in paid version. I have not tried yet.

Carondelet Tech Help Resources: <https://carondeletvillage.org/tech-help-resources/>
Questions or comments can be sent to TCKreuzer@gmail.com