

Win7 No re-format non-destructive Install.

Microsoft won't tell you this, but you can do a fast, no re-format, non-destructive, re-install of Windows7 or Vista, without damaging your user accounts, data, installed programs, or system drivers.

That means you may never have to do a full, from-scratch re-install again, even when your system is misbehaving so badly that a full re-format-and-re-install seems the only answer!

As I'm sure you know all too well, from-scratch re-installs are ordeals. They take hours and when a re-install is done, you still have to recreate all your settings, re-install all your software, and so on. It can take days to do a fully recovery.

Windows' little known, in-place re-install takes only a fraction of that time. When you're finished, your Windows installation is just as it was before, except that, all the system files are fully repaired.

This non-destructive re-install ability, has been in Windows since XP. But — for reasons unknown — Microsoft has never made non-destructive re-installs an official repair. In fact, it's not even listed in Win7 System Recovery Options.

Although the re-install process usually works reliably, it's not infallible. Deep-seated system errors, customizations, hardware trouble, or other variables may foil your re-install efforts. Having a complete and current backup is a sensible precaution.

For Vista users!, the process is nearly identical to that in the rest of this guide.

If you installed SP1 on your computer, it means your Upgrade DVD is without SP1, and the operation will fail, giving you 3 options.

Option 1 (Simple)

Download a copy of your OS in ISO format from:-

<http://www.mydigitallife.info/windows-7-iso-x86-and-x64-official-direct-download-links-ultimate-professional-and-home-premium/>

and burn to a CD. (I prefer using ImgBurn) or Windows7's built-in burner.

Option 2 (Harder)

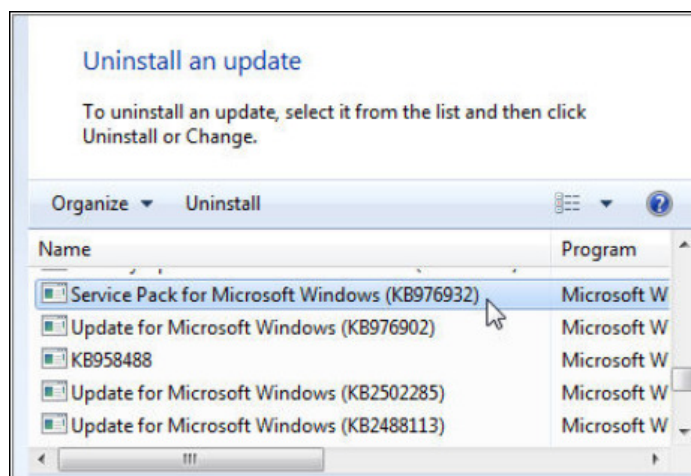
Borrow one from a friend, as long as it's the same 32 or 64-bit version as your installation + SP1.

A standard Win7 DVD actually contains all editions of Win7. For example, a 32-bit Win7 DVD has all the files for the 32-bit editions, Win7 Home Premium, Win7 Professional, Win7 Ultimate, and so on, BUT NOT SP1. Your license key unlocks whichever edition you paid for.

This means it's perfectly legitimate for you to use someone else's Win7 setup DVD to install Windows on your system, as long as you use your own, original, paid-for product key during installation. Sharing disks is fine. Sharing keys is not. The 25 character product key is usually found on a sticker on your computer or in the paperwork that accompanies a retail copy of Windows 7.

Option 3 (Hardest)

Uninstall SP1 from your computer. As below.



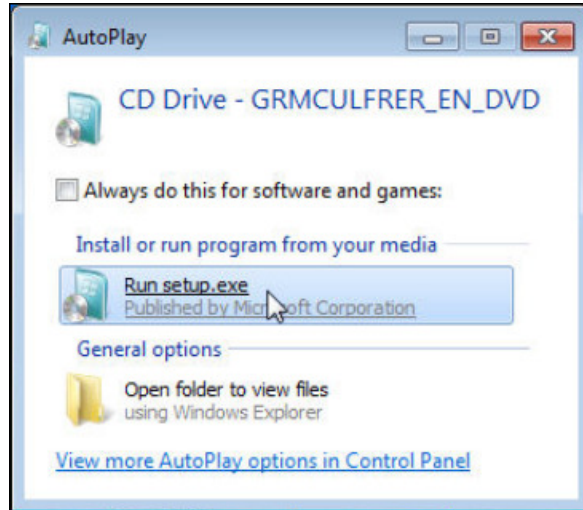
Windows7 Uninstall an update feature makes it a cinch to get the SP1 files deleted.

Open Control Panel's default view and click on Uninstall a program. In the left-hand pane of the uninstall applet, select View installed updates. When the Uninstall an update dialog box opens, scroll down to SP1 — listed as Service Pack for Microsoft Windows (KB976932) — and select Uninstall.

The system will churn for a while, but when it's done, SP1 will be gone — and you'll be able to use an original Win7 setup DVD to repair your system.

Start your Win7 in-place re-installation.

With Windows running — or limping, if it's badly broken — insert the Win7 setup DVD/CD. When the AutoPlay dialog box pops up, click to run setup.exe. Alternatively, you can run setup.exe manually by navigating to the DVD drive and selecting the setup file.



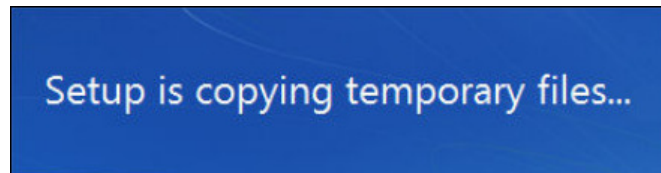
Run the Win7 installation DVD's setup.exe from inside your current Windows, either via AutoPlay (shown above) or by manual selection.

When setup starts, the User Account Control asks whether you want to make changes to your PC. Answer Yes.

After a few moments, the Win7 installation process starts.

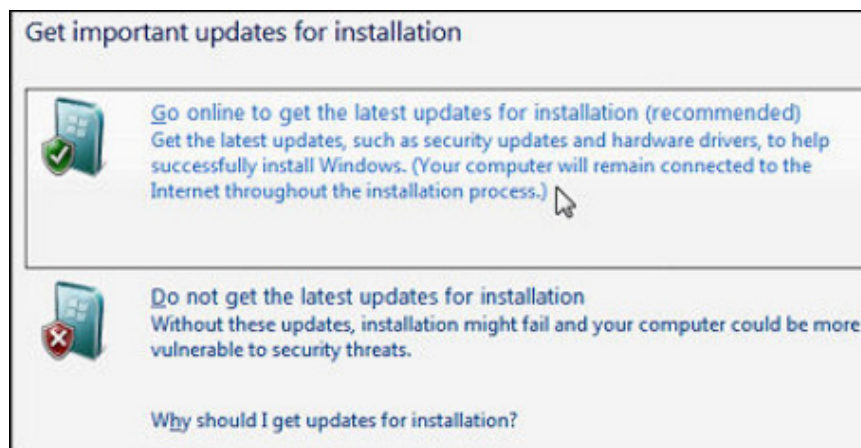


When asked, click Install now to get the ball rolling.



Screens such as this one are just FYI and requires no user intervention.

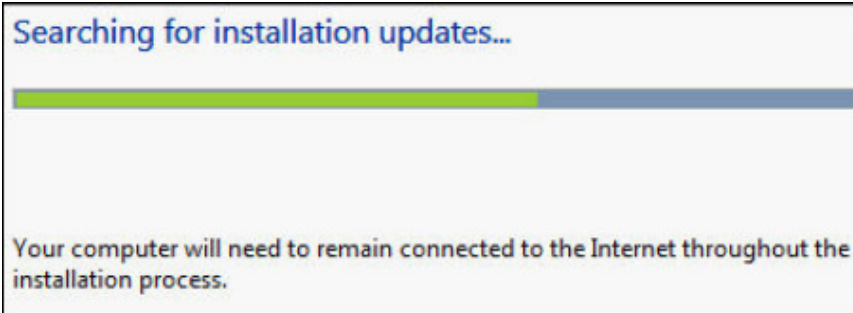
After several moments, you'll be asked whether you want to check online for updates related to the installation process. I recommend that you allow this online access to ensure essential files are current.



It's usually smart to allow the setup program to check for installation-related updates.

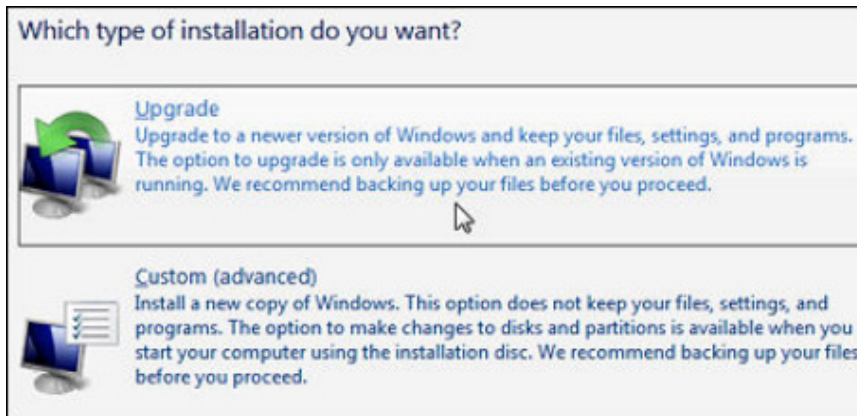
You can accept or reject the **I want to help make Windows installation better** option shown further down in the same dialog box. Your re-install will proceed in the same way, regardless of your answer.

Assuming you allowed it, Windows then goes online to collect essential updates.



It normally takes only a few moments to collect any needed installation updates.

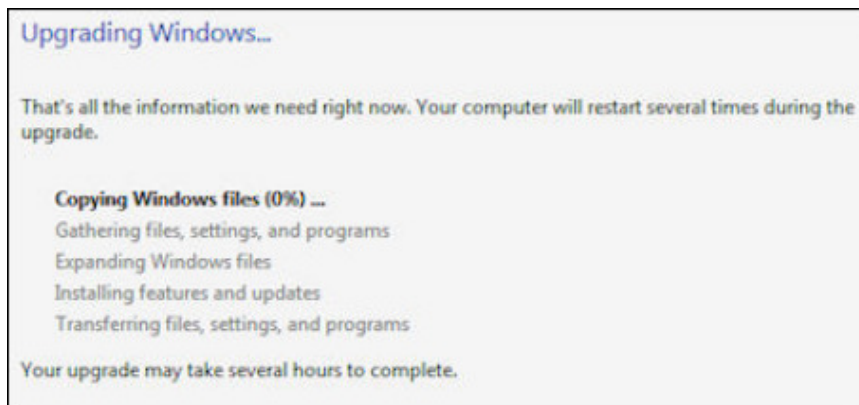
Now we come to the heart of the matter. Windows asks you 'Which type of installation do you want?' but there's no Re-install option listed. Instead, you have to bend the normal installation routine to your wishes by selecting the upgrade option.



Tell Windows a little white lie — that you're upgrading, even though you're really not.

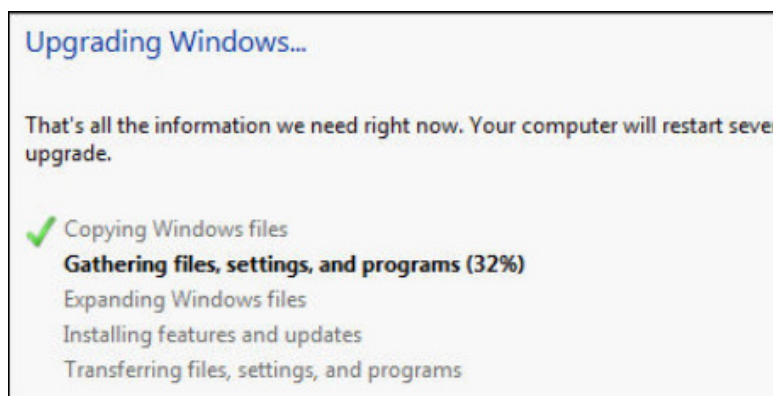
You're not really upgrading; you're re-installing the same version of the OS that's already on the PC. But the upgrade option leaves your files, settings, and programs in place, undisturbed. By pretending that you're upgrading, you can trick the setup program into doing an in-place reinstall!

And then, finally, the installation process begins in earnest.



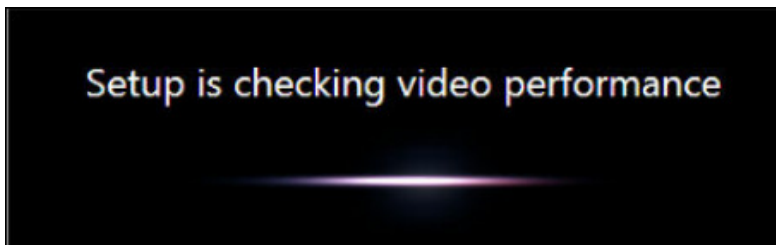
Depending on the complexity of your setup and speed of your Hardware, re-installation could take several hours

There's no need for you to baby-sit the installation; no further user input is required until near the end. As you check in from time to time, note the progress indicators to keep track of the installation's progress.

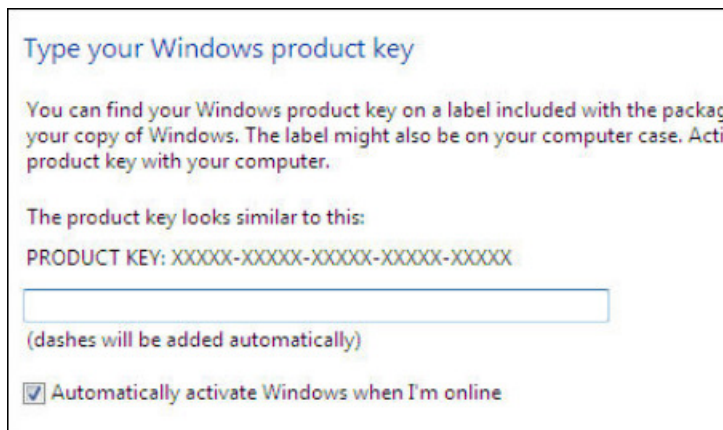


The progress bar at the bottom of the screen and the numeric indications (e.g., percent complete) let you easily monitor the process.

Windows will reboot several times during the installation.



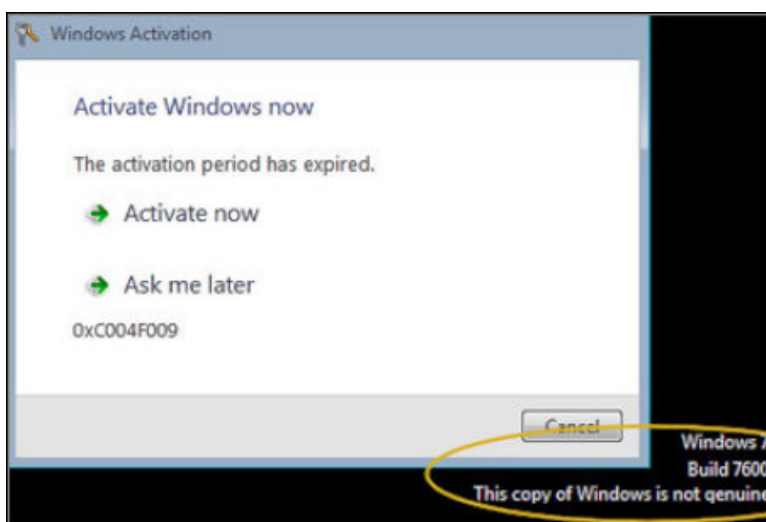
At the end of the installation process, you're asked to enter the product key from your original installation disk.



When prompted, enter your original product key.

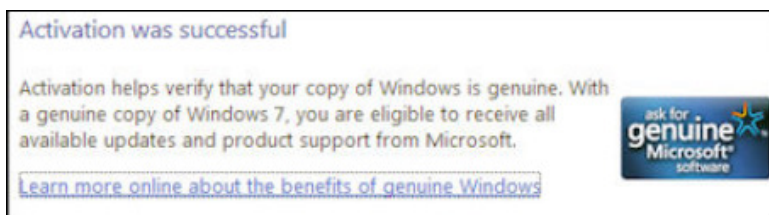
You can also elect to either Activate immediately or wait. Unactivated copy's of Windows get only limited access to Windows Updates and related services. I recommend activating without delay so you have immediate access to all Windows Update services.

If you delay activation, your desktop background will be set to an ominous black with the words This copy of Windows is not genuine in the lower-right corner. You'll also see an Activation nag screens, as shown below.



Unactivated Windows gets an ominous desktop background and recurring nag screens.

Personally, I think it's simpler and better to just activate and get it over with.



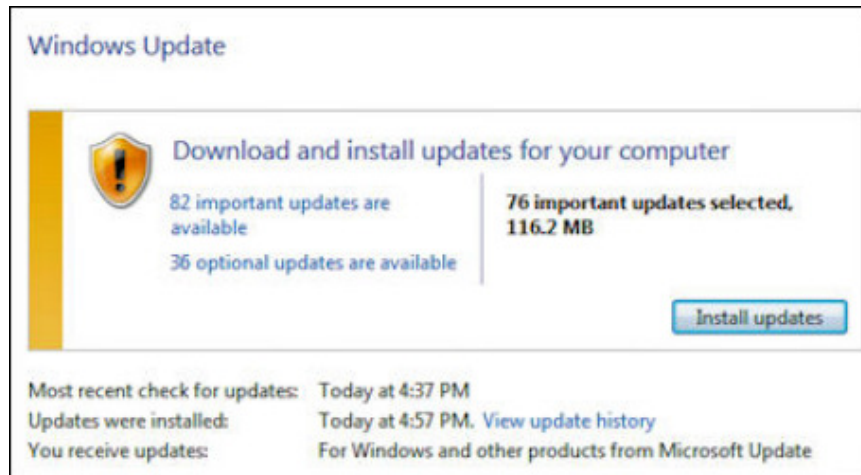
Once it's activated, your re-installed Windows desktop background can be set normally, and no further activation nags will appear.

By the way, activation is not a one-time-only thing, Microsoft allows for periodic reactivations of a given product key. Unless you've done several reactivations in a relatively short time, you should have no trouble. But if you do, just follow the remedies listed in the Activation Failed dialog box. As long as your product key is legit, Microsoft will work with you to resolve an accidental activation mishap.

Your Win7 re-install is almost done!

At this point, the basic re-install is finished. Your Win7 setup now has fresh copies of all the original system files. All that's left is to bring the installation up to date.

This generally takes several iterations of running Windows Update. Run WU once, let the updates install, and then reboot. Repeat until WU reports that no further updates are available.



Your new Windows installation immediately needs to be brought up to date with the latest security patches from Windows Update. Don't put off this step!

When you're done, you'll have a fully refreshed, up-to-date copy of Windows with all your essential files, settings, and programs intact and working. In fact, if all has gone as planned, the only significant change you'll notice is that the original problem is gone!

With just a smidgen of luck and this article, you'll never again have to face a dreaded, start-over-from-scratch re-format/re-install of Win7!

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