

Clean Install vs Upgrade

When to wipe and reinstall Windows, and when an in-place upgrade is safe.

01 What it is

A clean install erases the drive and installs a fresh copy of Windows. An in-place upgrade installs the new version over the old one and keeps your files, apps and settings. The choice decides how much you keep and how many old problems come with you.

02 Why it matters in a UAE IT job

Help desk teams reinstall Windows constantly: for new staff laptops, for slow or infected PCs, and for Windows 10 to Windows 11 moves. Picking the wrong method can delete a user's data or carry a broken profile into the new system.

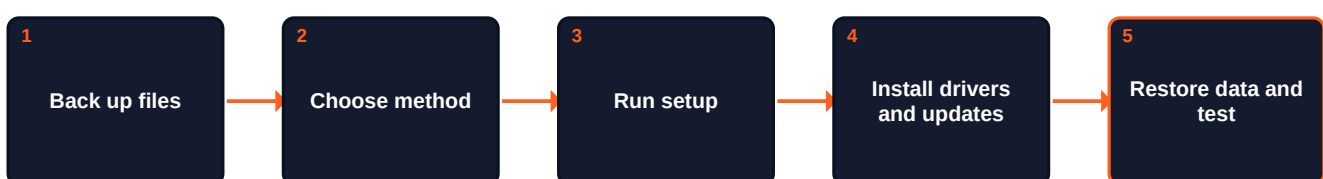
Employers trust a fresher who asks about backups first and who can explain the trade-off in one sentence.

03 Key terms

Term	Meaning
Clean install	Wipes the system drive and installs Windows from scratch.
In-place upgrade	Installs over the existing Windows, keeping files, apps and settings.
Reset this PC	Built-in reinstall that can keep or remove personal files.
Installation media	A bootable USB drive or ISO file used to install Windows.
Boot menu	A one-time menu (opened with a key such as F12) to choose which device to boot from.
TPM 2.0 / Secure Boot	Security hardware and firmware features required by Windows 11.
Driver	Software that lets Windows talk to hardware such as Wi-Fi, graphics and touchpad.

04 How it works

For a clean install you boot from a USB drive, delete the old partitions during setup, and let Windows create new ones. For an upgrade you run setup from inside the running Windows and choose to keep files and apps. A clean install gives the cleanest result, an upgrade is faster and less disruptive when the current system is healthy.

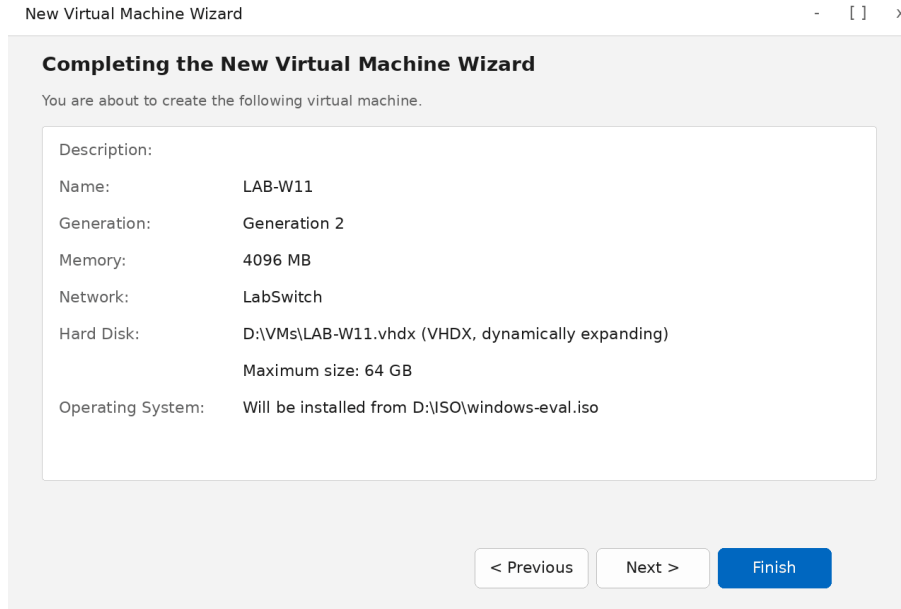


The backup step comes first for both methods.

05 Hands-on lab

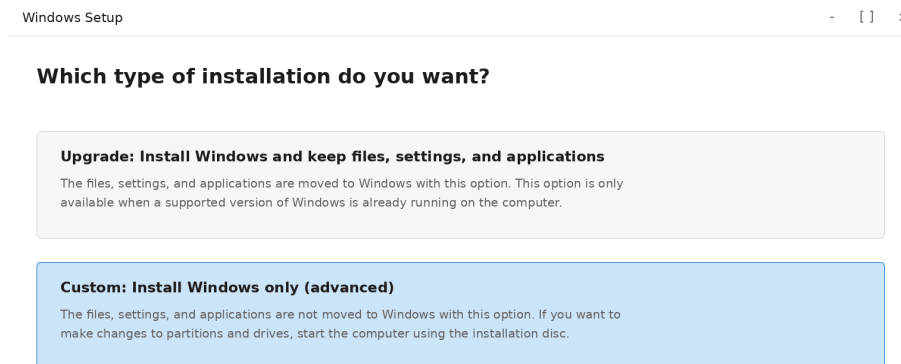
Goal: perform a clean install in a virtual machine and document each stage. Use a VM only, never a real work PC. You need a Windows ISO from Microsoft and a hypervisor such as Hyper-V or VMware Workstation.

Step 1. Create a new VM, attach the Windows ISO and note the VM settings you chose (memory, disk size, firmware type).



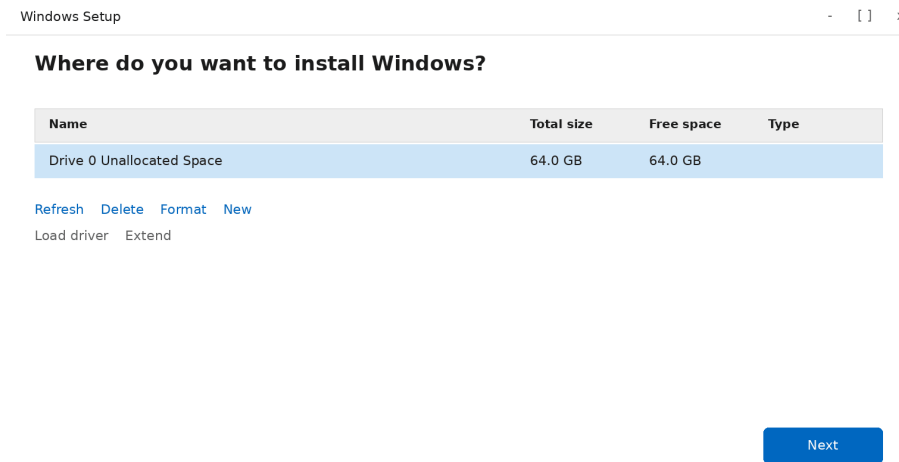
Illustrative mockup of this screen (fictional names). Your screen may look slightly different.

Step 2. Start the VM and press a key when you see 'Press any key to boot from CD or DVD'. Choose Custom: Install Windows only.



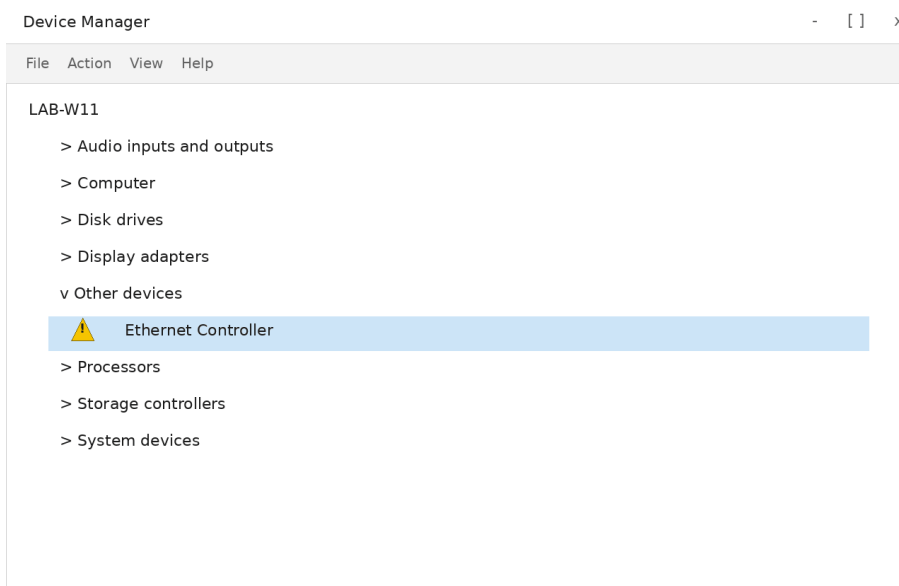
Illustrative mockup of this screen (fictional names). Your screen may look slightly different.

Step 3. At the partition screen, delete all existing partitions on the virtual disk and select the unallocated space.



Illustrative mockup of this screen (fictional names). Your screen may look slightly different.

Step 4. Complete setup. After first sign-in, open Device Manager and note any device with a warning icon.



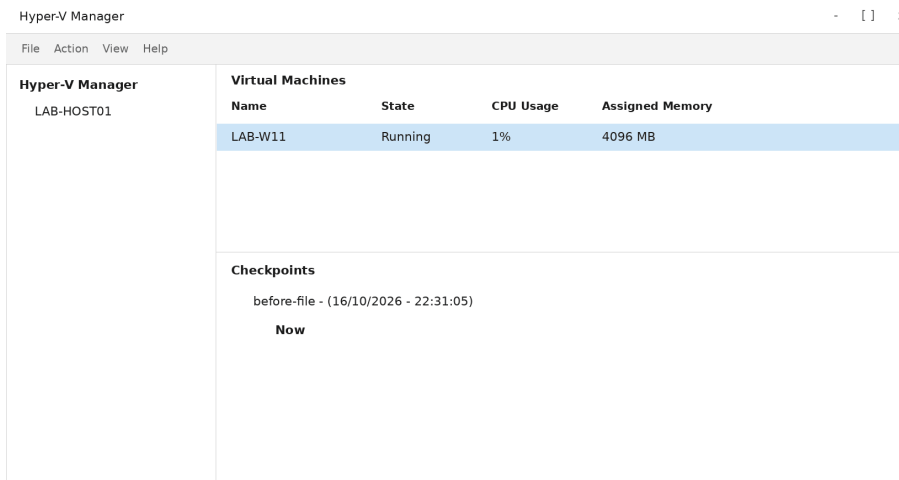
Illustrative mockup of this screen (fictional names). Your screen may look slightly different.

Step 5. Run Windows Update until no updates remain and write down how many restarts it took.



Illustrative mockup of this screen (fictional names). Your screen may look slightly different.

Step 6. Create a file on the desktop called before.txt, take a checkpoint, then write one paragraph explaining how a backup and restore would work on a real laptop.



Illustrative mockup of this screen (fictional names). Your screen may look slightly different.

06 Common mistakes

- Starting without a verified backup. Confirm you can open the backed-up files first.
- Choosing an upgrade to fix a slow PC. Old problems, bad drivers and malware can come with you.
- Forgetting licence keys, saved Wi-Fi details or browser data that the user needs.
- Missing the boot menu key and landing back in the old Windows. The key varies by maker, so check before you start.
- Skipping drivers and updates after the install and handing back a PC with no Wi-Fi.

07 Five interview questions

1. When would you choose a clean install over an upgrade?

When the PC is slow, unstable or infected, when the hardware is being reassigned to a new user, or when you want a known-good baseline. I would always back up first.

2. What does an in-place upgrade keep?

Personal files, installed apps and most settings, if you choose to keep them during setup.

3. A user says their files vanished after a reinstall. What do you do?

Stay calm, stop writing to the drive, check backups and OneDrive or Known Folder Move, and look for a Windows.old folder if it was an upgrade. Then explain the lesson and always confirm a backup in future.

4. What do you check before installing Windows 11?

TPM 2.0, Secure Boot capability, 64-bit CPU on the supported list, at least 4 GB RAM and 64 GB storage, and that drivers exist for the hardware.

5. What is Reset this PC and how does it differ from a clean install?

It reinstalls Windows from within the system and can keep or remove personal files. A clean install from USB wipes the drive and gives full control of partitions.

08 Check yourself

1. Which method removes everything on the drive?

- a) In-place upgrade
- b) Clean install
- c) Windows Update

2. What is the first step before either method?

- a) Format the USB
- b) Buy a licence
- c) Back up files

3. Which method keeps apps and settings?

- a) In-place upgrade
- b) Clean install
- c) Neither

4. A PC is slow and infected. Best choice?

- a) Upgrade
- b) Ignore it
- c) Clean install

5. Which feature does Windows 11 require?

- a) A DVD drive
- b) TPM 2.0
- c) Two monitors

Answer key: 1-b, 2-c, 3-a, 4-c, 5-b

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