Words, WordPad, Word

Microsoft will make changes to all of the word processing and text editing choices in Windows and Office this year. There seems to be a common theme of making text editing easier, which means fewer choices and fewer options, and of making the comparison between Office (purchased) and Microsoft 365 (rented) somewhat more favorable to subscribing.

Office 2024 Approaching

Microsoft has not yet announced when Office 2024 will be released, but the preview versions are available now, and the last three versions were released in October, so that's likely again this year. Changes this time around:

- Publisher is discontinued. For desktop publishing, a good open source alternative is Scribus, from https://www.scribus.net
- Teams is a separate download, and note that there is Teams, free, which is part of Windows 11, and Teams, subscription, which becomes a separate product starting in April 2024. Uninstall free Teams before installing paid Teams–they coexist badly.
- Actual new features aren't announced yet. I don't expect AI, because Microsoft is selling Copilot AI as a feature in Word and Outlook as part of a larger subscription bundle at a $20/month/user surcharge, for Enterprise (large corporate) accounts only, so far.

The split of Teams away from subscription Office reduces the price of Office Business Standard by $2.25/month for subscribers who choose the new "Microsoft 365 Business Standard (no Teams)" option.

5 Year Support

Note that the security patch life of the one-time purchase Office versions has been shrinking.

- Office 2010 security patching ended in Oct 2020, after ten years, the same as 2013, 10 years ending in 2023.
- Office 2016 & 2019 have the same end date of 10/14/2025, so that's 9 years and then 6 years.
- Microsoft Office 2021 leaves extended support in 2026, 5 years.
- And the new 2024 product is listed as also having the 5-year lifecycle.

The shorter cycle increases the cost per year of Office one-time licenses, probably to encourage more subscription sales.

Does this affect my recommendation for replacing Office versions? Well, most one-time purchases of Office are for new computers. But at 5 years, the computers will consistently outlast the security-patched life of Outlook. Email software is the front line for blocking incoming email scams, and 90% of hacks now start in email phishing messages. Not using Outlook? Sure, Word and Excel require saving incoming files locally before editing them, so standard antivirus/security endpoint software has a chance to check them in advance, and links in those files have to go through the usual Edge, Chrome, and Firefox browsers, which are all currently receiving security patches. So old Office versions for non-Outlook users are OK, IMO. Standard disclaimers still apply:

- Schedule your backups.
- Update your software.

- Test your backups.
- Backup offsite.
- Keep some backups immutable or offline.

There are better mail options than outdated Outlook software, in any case.

- Outlook (New) is not Outlook; it's the built-into Windows successor to the Mail app and the old Outlook Express program. It's free, and adequate for personal use, if you can use it–it only works on a very limited set of account types, mostly IMAP (stored on-server) accounts.
- [Thunderbird](#) is still an excellent free choice, from Mozilla, the authors of Firefox, and it's compatible with all email accounts.
- For users of Microsoft accounts, which are just free logins to Microsoft servers, the online/mobile-app version of the Office suite, including Outlook, is free, with the cautions that it is running in the web browser, not locally, and the file storage is online. The free version is just called 'Microsoft 365', and includes 5Gb of cloud file storage.
- The online paid version of Office, including online Outlook, is called 'Microsoft 365 Basic,' has 100 Gb of online OneDrive storage, and costs $19.99/year.

And Microsoft 365, which is the subscription Office bundled with extra services and optional mail hosting, has continuous security and feature updates for as long as you're using it, if Microsoft deems that your computer is up to it. The staggered updates based on what chips are in your computer are designed to

allegedly provide a bug-free and uneventful patch experience, with fewer and shorter reboots, but still no announcement of "No update for you" when the Microsoft servers don't see that you have hardware known to work well with the updates they would otherwise be offering. Less nagging and fewer sales pitches, in this case, means fewer tech support chats with Microsoft. It's an uneven balance. That basically means that you have to keep track of whether your office suite is up to date yourself; Microsoft rarely takes the opportunity to warn you or try to sell the upgrade.

I'm seeing a change in how Microsoft uses the term 'Microsoft 365'. It was a subscription to Office. Now, it's a Microsoft account that is required to use Copilot AI, and includes the online cloud-based Office, for free. There's also a 5Gb OneDrive account, which can be upgraded with either software subscriptions (above). But just to make things more complicated, some listings in the Microsoft store exist for "Microsoft 365 (Office)". Microsoft is very consistent in using trademarks in different ways each day of the week, and it looks likes another batch of that will ship sometime around October. Just be careful to read the descriptions of any Microsoft product carefully to see which product variant is wearing a trademark today.

Notepad and WordPad Changes

Notepad is getting spell check with autocorrect in a future Windows Update. That's OK for light-duty writing purposes, but some technical users use Notepad to edit setting files or web pages, and the last thing we need is to have silent automatic "fixes" to highly-formatted and sensitive text. If that's how you use Notepad, stop now, and switch to a plain text editor. I'll recommend either of these products:

- EditPad (Lite or paid versions) from https://www.editpadlite.com

- NoteTab (Light or paid versions) from https://notetab.com

WordPad is, or will soon transition to was, the rich-text editor build into Windows, with basic formatting, and capable of reading and writing a variety of text and word processing formats. The app will no longer receive updates, and will be removed "in a future release of Windows."

A great replacement for WordPad, and a great free office suite, is still LibreOffice:
https://www.libreoffice.org/

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