

Office 2016: What's new?

Best new features that **do not** require Office 365

First up, here are the key features that don't need an Office 365 subscription.

Best new features that **do** require Office 365

Here are the most useful new features that need Office 365 or additional Microsoft servers such as SharePoint.

Word, Excel, and PowerPoint 2016: Smart Lookup

The new Smart Lookup feature lets you find facts and such through the Bing search engine. It can see the context of selected text by examining surrounding content and then try to provide relevant results. I usually jump out to a browser to do a search, but I can see how this adjustment might make work a little easier.

Word, Excel, and PowerPoint 2016: Tell Me

Sometimes you don't want help, you only want answers. You want the exact tool you need, not instructions on where to find it. The new Tell Me feature lets you type a few words and get the exact one-click link to the relevant tool. Don't teach me how to fish; hand me the fishing pole, please.

Outlook 2016: Recent documents

Have you ever finished a document (an invoice, a spreadsheet, a PowerPoint presentation) that you want to email, but it's buried who knows where in your PC's folder structure? Until you find it, you can't attach it to that email. The new recent-documents feature in Outlook 2016 shows you the documents you've recently worked on in the Office apps, so you don't have to hunt for them on your PC. When I saw this feature, I asked myself, "Why didn't they think of this years ago?" I'm happy it's here now.

Excel 2016: New charts

It's always good to have a few new visual features in Excel, especially for charts. Excel 2013 brought some new PivotChart features, Slicers, and Flash Fill. Excel 2016 goes further, adding six new chart types: Waterfall, Pareto, Treemap, Histogram, Box & Whisker, and Sunburst. I've spent a lot of effort making waterfall financial charts in my day, and that option is a real time-saver.

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Word 2016: Real-time co-authoring

If you have documents shared through OneDrive, OneDrive for Business, or SharePoint Online, you can now group-edit them in real time, such as seeing Word changes reflected in real time to all users who've opened the document. And Word 2016 makes it easier to share those documents to others in the first place.

Outlook 2016: Cloud attachments

When attaching files saved in OneDrive, OneDrive for Business, or SharePoint, you can now send documents as attachments (the traditional method) or as links to saved files. If you send links, you avoid the sprawl of document copies, and you create a one-stop location for edits to a document. If the documents are stored in OneDrive or SharePoint, you can assign various permission levels to them.

Outlook 2016: Office 365 Groups

The new Office Groups option is aimed at teams. You can create your own groups in Outlook 2016, then use those groups across other applications for collaboration. It's like having a project folder accessible to all team members across their Office apps, available from within the email client you likely have open all day anyway. Office Groups already existed in Outlook Web App, but now you can use it in the Outlook 2016 desktop client as well. (Mobile users need to use the separate Office 365 Groups app.)

Sway: Digital storytelling

A new app in the Office portfolio (it debuted on iOS earlier this year), Sway makes it easy to create and share presentations that in design more resemble an e-book or e-magazine layout than a traditional slide. It's a great way for teachers to quickly create interesting content for students.

Office 365 Planner: Teamwork organization tool

This new tool (which will enter public beta in early 2016) for teamwork organization will let you create plans, assign tasks, set due dates, and update status. Microsoft says Office 365 Planner is much simpler to use than typical project management software, and it's accordingly designed for basic planning needs.

Skype for Business: Conversations

One of the new features added to Word, Excel, and PowerPoint is the ability to use Skype for Business (still called Lync on the Mac and iOS) to collaborate and communicate while working on documents. You can IM or video-call someone with Skype from the new Share pane built into the new Office applications.