



# The Ultimate “Should I Use Linux?” Checklist

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You may have heard from a handful of people around the Web (myself included) that you should try to switch to Linux if you can, especially if you're still lingering on Windows XP. But deciding whether switching to Linux isn't so easy, because Linux isn't perfect and sadly not for everyone — although we'd like to think that.

So for those who aren't sure how to evaluate the efficacy of Linux for themselves, I have created a simple guide that can walk you through the criteria you need to look at. Since you want an operating system to work for you without any issues, it's safe to assume that any major issues that you find along the way are enough reason to choose not to use Linux. So for example, if you discover that your webcam does not work under Linux, and you know that you need to use your webcam on a regular basis (such as for online meetings), then Linux is probably not for you (at least for now). There are a few other details to consider for each criterion, but I'll just talk about that when we get there.

## Test Your Hardware



Testing hardware support is key because you won't use Linux if nothing will work, and you won't have to worry about everything else if you find this is the case. Testing hardware support is rather easy, however. All you need to do is create a bootable USB drive that has a Linux live environment ISO written to it. Once you've created one, you can boot into the live environment and play around with Linux as if it's actually installed when it's really not. From here, you can try various things to see if they work. Things to check are:

- WiFi: Most chipsets should work out of the box, but some need a little help. Broadcom chipsets just need the proprietary driver that can be installed in the Additional Software dialog of Ubuntu. Adding these drivers may be different for other distributions.

- Ethernet: This should work out-of-the-box 99% of the time.
- Speakers: Work almost always. If you don't hear anything, make sure that the speakers aren't set to mute — sometimes you think the speakers don't work at all when that's really the only "problem".
- Microphone: Works often, but not as often as the speakers. Be sure to check this.
- Webcam: Works most of the time, although some Apple products have lower rates of success.
- Function keys on your keyboard such as display brightness, keyboard backlight brightness, media controls, and more: These have a 50% chance of working perfectly. If they don't work, see which ones specifically don't work and whether you really need to use them or not.
- Ports, including USB, HDMI, etc: These should work, but it's good to check. USB really shouldn't be an issue, but video ports like HDMI are more important to test.
- Graphics card: Does it perform well? Try a few games if you can. If you are running a newer AMD or NVIDIA graphics card, you'll probably want to use the proprietary drivers. You can't test these in a live environment, because they require that you restart, but when you restart a live environment you lose everything.
- External devices such as your printer: Printers are important to test. Some work flawlessly (this is more the case for HP printers), but others are complete duds.

Ubuntu even has an application called System Testing which you can also use to test out various hardware in your system.

If you're testing any of these hardware items and you find that they don't work and there isn't an obvious remedy, don't give up just yet! Head to Google, type in your computer make and model (say Apple MacBook Pro Retina), the keyword "Linux", and what isn't working. So an example search (without the quotes) would be "apple macbook pro retina linux webcam". From these results, you can see whether others had any problems getting it to work and what their fixes were.

## Software Requirements



Next, you'll want to look at your use case. Usually, if you have simpler requirements, Linux is much more likely to be a good fit. Think about all of the applications that you use on your current operating system. If you do a lot of things in a web browser, email client, office application, and

image editor, then you'll be good to go. Linux equivalents include Firefox/Google Chrome/Opera, Evolution/Thunderbird, LibreOffice, and GIMP. For your specific application, check out our [Best Linux Software page](#), look at our guide to [making Linux a genuine Windows replacement](#), or do a quick Google search to see if there's a Linux version or alternative.

It's also worth looking into web apps and browser extensions that may do what you need. For instance, thanks to fast Internet access and the rise of Chromebooks, people using Chrome browsers are able to use a huge selection of web apps and Chrome apps for image editing, word processing, [desktop publishing](#) and more.

If you have more extreme requirements, however, such as macros in your office suite applications, or special functions in Photoshop that GIMP can't do, or some very specialized software that doesn't have any other alternatives that work under Linux or on the web, then Linux may not be for you. This problem is getting rarer by the day, but it still exists for some.

## Gaming



The same thing also applies to gaming. There are more and [more popular games](#) out for Linux now thanks to Steam, but Windows still has the much larger selection. Take a look at the games that you can play, and see whether those that you simply cannot sacrifice work under Linux (whether natively or [through the use of WINE](#)). If not, then Linux may not be for you.

## Is Linux For You?

If you were able to look through this entire checklist and discover that Linux takes care of all your needs, then there's no reason why you shouldn't make the switch! It's easy to learn, very fast, and much safer. If, however, along the way you found that something you value was severely lacking, then it might be best to wait until Linux has improved enough for your needs. While I'd love for Linux to work for everyone, that isn't quite the case (yet).

Image Credit: [woman sleeping at her desk](#) Via Shutterstock, [Forrestal\\_PL](#)