

WiFi Standards

WiFi Standards Comparison

| | WiFi 4 | WiFi 5 | WiFi 6 | WiFi 6e | WiFi 7 |
|------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------|---|
| Launch date | | 2013 | 2019 | 2021 | 2024 |
| Standard name | | 802.11ac | 802.11ax | 802.11ax | 802.11be |
| Notable additions | | MU-MIMO | OFDMA TWT WPA3 Encryption + modulation + | | MLO +Modulation +Max channel width |
| | | | | | |
| Power and battery life | | - | Supports TWT | | |
| Security protocols | | WPA, WPA2 | WPA, WPA2, WPA3 (OWE) | | |
| Modulation | | up to 256-QAM | up to 1024-QAM | | up to 4096-QAM |
| Beamforming | | up to four antennas | up to eight antennas | | |
| Subcarriers (Resource units) | | - | Supports OFDMA | OFDMA | OFDMA |
| Multi-RU | | - | No | No | Yes |
| MIMO | Added | | | | |
| MU-MIMO | | up to 4x4 downlink unidirectional | up to 8x8 bidirectional | up to 8x8 bidirectional | up to 16x16 bidirectional |
| MLO (Multi-Link Operation) | | - | - | - | Yes |
| Frequency bands | | 2.4 GHz, 5 GHz | 2.4 GHz, 5 GHz | 2.4 GHz, 5 GHz, 6 GHz | 2.4 GHz, 5 GHz, 6 GHz |
| Channel width | | 20, 40, 80, 80+80, 160 MHz | Same | Same | Up to 320 MHz |
| BSS coloring | | - | Yes | | |

| | | | | | |
|---------|--|--|---|--|--|
| Latency | | | Reduced if all devices using the network are WiFi 6 and above, due to the above features. | | |
|---------|--|--|---|--|--|

MIMO (multiple-input and multiple-output)

Aka single-user MIMO.

Leverages spatial multiplexing, or space-division multiplexing, used to transmit independent channels separated in space.

In wireless communications, each spatial stream is serviced by...

MU-MIMO (multi-user MIMO)

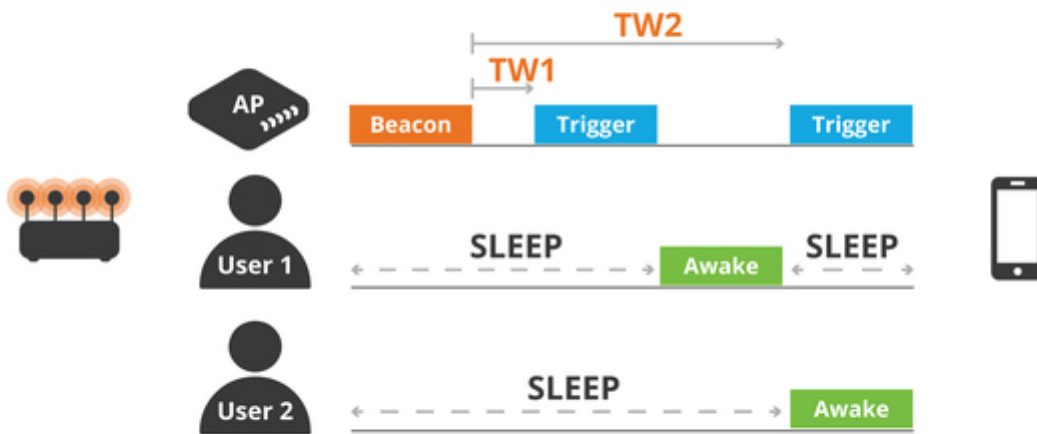
Target Wake Time (TWT)

[\[Source\]](#)

TWT enables devices to determine when and how frequently they will wake up to send or receive data. Essentially, this allows 802.11ax access points to effectively increase device sleep time and significantly conserve battery life, a feature that is particularly important for the IoT. In addition to saving power on the client device side, Target Wake Time enables wireless access points and devices to negotiate and define specific times to access the medium. This helps optimize spectral efficiency by reducing contention and overlap between users.

RESOURCE SCHEDULING SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVES DEVICE BATTERY LIFE

TWT : Target Wake Time



- AP and devices negotiate and define a specific times to access the medium
- Reduced contention and overlap between users
- Significantly increases the device sleep time to reduce power consumption

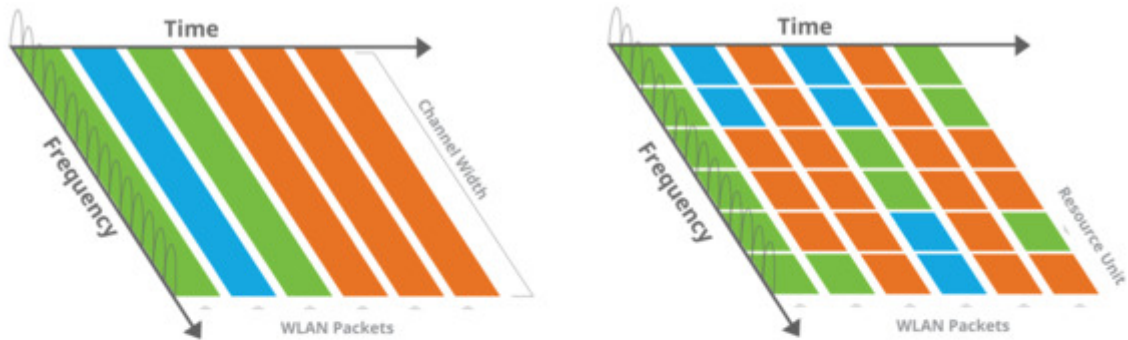
The Target Wake Time mechanism first appeared in the IEEE 802.11ah “Wi-Fi HaLow” standard. Published in 2017, the low-power standard is specifically designed to support the large-scale deployment of IoT infrastructure – such as stations and sensors – that intelligently coordinate signal sharing. The TWT feature further evolved with the IEEE 802.11ax standard, as stations and sensors are now only required to wake and communicate with the specific Beacon(s) transmitting instructions for the TWT Broadcast sessions they belong to. This allows the wireless IEEE 802.11ax standard to optimize power saving for many devices, with more reliable, deterministic and LTE-like performance. As Maddalena Nurchis and Boris Bellalta of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona noted in a recent paper, TWT also “opens the door” to fully maximizing new MU capabilities in 802.11ax by supporting the scheduling of both MU-DL and MU-UL transmissions. In addition, TWT can be used to collect information from stations, such as channel sounding and buffers occupancy in pre-defined periods. Last, but certainly not least, TWT can potentially help multiple WLANs in dense deployment scenarios reach consensus on non-overlapping schedules to further improve Overlapping Basic Service Set (OBSS) co-existence.

WPA3 Opportunistic Wireless Encryption (OWE)

[\[Source\]](#)

Multi-User, Multiple Input, Multiple Outputs (MU-MIMO)

Orthogonal Frequency-Division Multiple Access (OFDMA)



[The Benefits of OFDMA for Wi-Fi 6](#) - A technology brief highlighting Qualcomm Technologies' competitive advantage

OFDM subdivides the Wi-Fi channel into smaller frequency allocations called resource units. By partitioning the channel, parallel transmissions of smaller frames to multiple users occur simultaneously. For example, a traditional 20 MHz channel might be partitioned into as many as nine smaller channels. Using OFDMA, a Wi-Fi 6 AP could simultaneously transmit smaller frames to nine Wi-Fi 6 clients.

The Wi-Fi Alliance Whitepaper further explains the difference between uplink and downlink OFDMA.

Uplink OFDMA is one of the key features introduced by Wi-Fi 6 and is among the most significant differences relative to 802.11ac. Uplink OFDMA allows data frames to be transmitted simultaneously by multiple stations. This amortizes preamble overhead and medium contention overhead, which leads to high aggregated network throughput. Uplink OFDMA can provide additional gains by permitting greater transmit power level per device, subject to regulatory requirements, and thus signal coverage on the uplink, since the transmit power of each client device can be concentrated on smaller allocated resource units.

Downlink OFDMA allows multiple data frames to be transmitted in a single data unit to multiple stations,

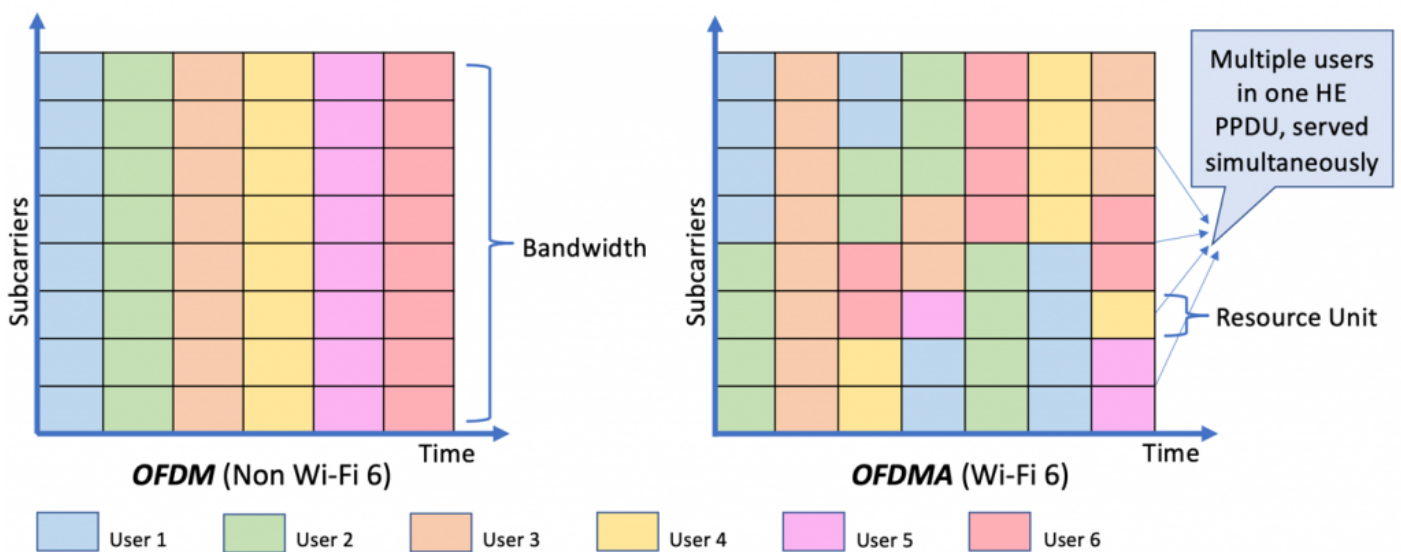
thus amortizing preamble overhead and medium contention overhead, leading to higher aggregated

network throughput. Downlink OFDMA can further optimize aggregate throughput by balancing the allocation of power between users at high versus low signal-to-noise ratios, subject to total power constraints and regulatory requirements.

Resource Units

[Cisco Blogs: Wi-Fi 6 OFDMA: Resource unit \(RU\) allocations and mappings](#)

In Wi-Fi 6, subcarrier spacing is 78.125 KHz.



Multi-Link Operation (MLO)

Wi-Fi 6 devices can only connect to one band at a time, either 2.4 GHz or 5 GHz.

Wi-Fi 7 devices can use MLO to connect to multiple bands at once, including 2.4 GHz, 5 GHz, and 6 GHz.

MLO allows devices to send and receive data on multiple bands at the same time. This can help reduce latency and improve reliability. MLO can also be used for load balancing by switching between bands to minimize contention.

Frequency bands

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