Laptop Buying Guide

Make an informed decision and you'll end up with a laptop you can enjoy for years of solid service.

Platform: Windows, MacBook or Chromebook?

1. **Apple laptops** include all versions of Macbook (E.g., Macbook Air, MarbookPro) and are all produced by Apple. They come with the latest Apple operating system, an assortment of Apple software, and select software from other vendors. Most productivity and especially creative software bundles offer a version that will run on Apple computers.
2. **Windows laptops** differ from Macbooks in many ways. First, they all include the latest version of Microsoft Windows operating system (currently Windows 11). A second important difference is that you'll find Windows machines produced by a variety of manufacturers including HP, Asus, Acer, MSI, Dell, Gigabyte, and many others.
3. **Chromebooks** operate using Google's Chrome operating system or Chrome OS, which was designed to leverage cloud-based applications like G-Suite.

Types of laptops

1. **Everyday Laptops** cover most laptops including Macbooks, many Windows laptops, and Chomebooks, intended to be a default choice for someone who needs a portable machine that can do just about anything.
2. **2-in-1 laptops** enable the screen to fold right back over the device creating two devices at the same time: a laptop, and a tablet.
3. **Gaming laptops** are Windows machines with high end components needed to run video games—one of the most demanding tasks for a PC—inside a portable case.

Laptop components

When searching for a laptop online at Best Buy, you will find most of the main components listed right at the top of a product page next to the product name.

1. **CPU: cores and clock speed:** Think of the CPU as the brains of the operation. Higher clock speed and the more cores a CPU has, the better because this means it can perform multiple instructions quickly. Intel is currently releasing 12th generation Core mobile processors with Intel's Evo standard. AMD has its Ryzen series of mobile processors. And then there's Apple's M1 and M2 chips, with a huge boost in performance over previous Apple laptops.

2. **RAM: what is it and how much do you need?** RAM (or Random Access Memory) is where the laptop stores information it's currently using. The general rule of thumb is that there is no such thing as too much RAM. Usually a *minimum* of 8GB of RAM will be installed, and often 16GB. With Chromebooks. 4GB of RAM is the current standard. Don't forget, many laptops ship with the RAM soldered to the motherboard, which means you don't have the option of upgrading later on. So plan for what you might need in a few years.

3. **Storage: SSD vs HDD and capacity** HDD or Hard Disk Drive is the technology that's been used for onboard storage for decades. It's a spinning platter with a magnetic head, it works well and it's inexpensive. SSD (Solid State Storage) has become the preferred choice in recent years. Like RAM, experienced PC owners will tell you that there is no such thing as too much storage. Laptops (other than Chromebooks) equipped with an SSD typically start at 256GB and go up to 1TB.

4. **The display** Never take the display for granted. This is the component you'll be interacting with the most and it can make or break your laptop experience. It also dictates the overall size of the laptop and can have a very big impact on price. Display sizes on most laptops range from 13 inches to 17 inches. Key considerations: resolutions (HD/ 4K); aspect ration (usually 16:9); advanced features like HDR (important for gaming); touchscreen (not available on Macbooks)

Other features worth considering

- Wireless connectivity
- Ethernet may be a requirement for professional users
- Ports for USB accessories, memory cards and video output
- Keyboard and trackpad
- A webcam and microphone(s)

- Built-in speakers,
- Battery life
- Weight

Final consideration: How upgradable is a laptop

Desktop PCs can be upgrade in many ways: from the case to the power supply, video card, CPU, and beyond. Laptops are largely sealed units and at most are limited to adding more RAM or storage, or replacing the battery.