

Choosing the Right Laptop—Key Features

Deciding which PC laptop to buy can be an overwhelming experience for many people. Let's take a look at the most important factors that go into deciding which laptop to buy.

Unfortunately, shopping for a laptop PC can be far more complicated than shopping for a desktop. With so many shapes, sizes, and features to choose from, you'll need to set aside plenty of time for research. If you're not sure where to start, take a look at the following features and decide what's most important to you.

Weight, Size, and Durability

First, you must decide which type of laptop will best suit your needs: ultra-portable, thin and light; midsize; and desktop replacement.

The lightest and smallest laptops are known as ultra-portables. These are designed for business travelers who need to take their computers with them wherever they go. Although these PCs are extremely compact and portable, there are a few drawbacks: smaller keyboards, fewer features, weaker performance, and very high cost. Nonetheless, this is the way to go if you spend a lot of time on the road.

If you're looking for the best combination of portability, features, performance, and cost, then a thin and light is the perfect choice for you. It's no wonder these have become the hottest category of laptops. Unlike ultra-portables, they have a decent sized keyboard, a larger hard drive, and a built-in optical drive. With these do-it-all laptops, you can leave the office behind without missing a beat.

Midsize laptops, or mainstream laptops, are typically the least expensive because they're not designed for a specific purpose. Instead, they give you everything you need to perform basic operations, including online communication and home entertainment. Although they're smaller than desktop replacements, they generally aren't recommended for travel.

Desktop replacements may be the largest and heaviest type of laptop, but they offer the most features and the best performance. Desktop replacements can be used for multimedia authoring, serious gaming, and even high-level digital audio/video work.

Processor and Memory As with any computer, the CPU (central processing unit) is the brain of the system and the most important decision you must make. The faster the processor's clock speed, which is measured in gigahertz (GHz), the faster it will perform. On average, normal users should have at least 2 GHz of processor speed.

Memory, or RAM (random-access memory), is temporary storage that provides the working space for your computer to operate. As a general rule, the amount of memory you'll need depends on the applications you'll be using. Also, you might benefit in the long run by choosing a laptop with easy-to-access memory slots. This allows you to upgrade memory so you can hang on to your laptop for much longer.

Drives The size of your hard drive depends on how much data you want to store. The average user will only need a 20GB or 30GB drive, unless you plan on storing thousands of pictures or hundreds of movies. But remember, capacity alone does not make a good hard drive—rotational speed is just as important. The faster the disk spins, the better your laptop will perform.

Unless you're on a strict budget, you should choose a laptop with a CD and/or DVD drive. Nowadays, some laptops offer DVD-rewritable drives that can store up to 4.7 GB. But if you don't need to store huge files, opt for the less expensive CD-ROM drive.

External drives offer additional storage and media options which plug directly into your laptop's USB connectors. Also known as flash drives, external hard drives allow you to transfer large amounts of data, and they come in various shapes and sizes.

Screen Size In most cases, screen sizes range from 11-17 inches (measured diagonally). If you value portability,

then smaller is usually a better choice, since size affects the laptop's overall weight. But remember, smaller screens might cause your eyes some discomfort. We suggest going to your local computer shop and testing out various comfort levels.

Battery Life For the most part, your laptop should have about 3-5 hours of battery life. But with all the peripherals these days like DVD-RW drives, video-out ports, and USB ports, battery life shouldn't be a huge concern. When all's said and done, weigh your options and try to get the most features for your money. Remember, you'll probably want to save some money in reserve to buy anti-virus software too.

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