

Laptop Buyer's Guide

Buying a laptop can often seem like an overwhelming process at times. There are so many options on the market today, and finding the right choice for your needs greatly depends on your own particular lifestyle and routine.

To help assist, we've put together a concise list of what we think you should look for in a laptop and added our top recommendations for the devices best suited to meet your personal needs.

Business Use

The pandemic [changed how and where](#) many people work and altered what we expect from our work laptops.

If you're working from home and not always working directly from a desk with an accessible outlet, you might find that you want more hours of battery life from your laptop. Or you might find that you need a computer that can easily handle a video call with a client, all of your email drafts, and a dozen open web browser pages without slowing down.

Whether you're working from home or back in the office, you'll likely need a laptop that works well with basic productivity applications, features a high definition webcam, and offers security protection for your data.

Our Recommendation: [Lenovo ThinkPad X1 Yoga \(Generation 5\)](#).



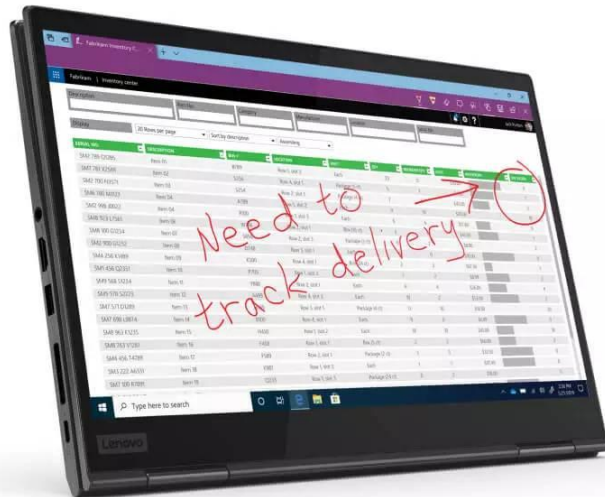
The ThinkPad X1 Yoga is a top-notch, two-in-one professional laptop. Its unique features, such as a screen-friendly stylus and buttons that can start a message or email at the touch of a button, make it well-suited to business needs.

It's built with classic ThinkPad features, including a durable, yet lightweight design and a quiet keyboard. The battery provides a whopping 19 plus hours of battery life, allowing you to disconnect from a power source and move around the office without fear of your laptop dying mid-email.

It also comes equipped with plenty of ports, including HDMI and four USB ports, for easy attachment to a dual monitor setup or hookup to projectors.

The Thinkpad X1 Yoga could offer a better webcam (sometimes its video quality is a bit hazy), but if you're pressed for high-definition webcam quality, you can easily invest in an external webcam.

With all these features, it's difficult to find a better all-around business laptop.



Home & Student Use

It's no secret that at-home screentime shot up over the past few years, so it's only natural that we're all demanding more from the laptops and devices that we use in our spare time. Working and learning from home completely changed what we need from our laptops.

If you need an at-home laptop or a great laptop for next semester, chances are that you're looking for something that's well-suited to a variety of productivity and entertainment purposes. So whether you need something to bring to the class for notes, browse and edit photos, or provide entertainment for a whole family, there's a laptop out there that's compatible with your needs.

Students often prefer a laptop that they can carry with them all day, do homework in the evening, and then use for binge-watching or light gaming at night. This makes battery life, a lightweight design, and adaptability crucial features for any student laptop.

If you need a laptop that can travel or stay in your bag all day, you should lean toward a 13- or 14-inch laptop. These options are generally also the lightest and still deliver long-lasting battery life.

One additional consideration that you should keep in mind as you select a laptop is your preferred operating system. Choosing between a macOS, Windows, or Chromebook laptop for many people will come down to personal preference and budget. If you like one system more or feel more comfortable with a particular OS, then it could be smart to make sure that your new laptop comes with that operating system.

Our Recommendation for At-Home Use: [Apple MacBook Air](#)



We've taken a look at laptops that emphasize flexibility of use, a great display, and connectedness between family devices and found that the Apple [MacBook Air](#) reigns supreme as far as multipurpose, at-home laptops go.

The MacBook Air remains a reliable and durable all-purpose laptop option. In 2020, Apple outfitted its MacBook Airs with a new, incredibly fast processor that can handle everything from video editing to handling windows full of dozens of internet browsing tabs. With its new M1 processor, we've seen that the MacBook runs quickly and doesn't lag.

Depending on what applications you have running, it can offer between eight and ten hours of battery life per charge.

If you plan on using your laptop for personal communication, I find that the MacBook's compatibility with FaceTime and iMessage makes it easy to carry out conversations with friends and family across multiple devices.

Our Recommendation for Students: [HP Envy x360 13](#)



If you need a laptop purely for educational purposes, we would recommend the [HP Envy x360 13](#), a fast, well-built, and stylish notebook equipped with the latest version of Windows 10.

It comes with a 360-degree hinge, responsive touchscreen, and a screen-friendly pen. In addition, it has a fairly large and colorful display that comes with vibrant visuals.

Its smart and flexible design makes it adaptable to the needs of any student, whether you're just using it for conventional study habits or you need something that acts more like a tablet. I also love how the screen responds to simultaneous touch and pen inputs, so there's no need to switch in-between input modes.

One of its best features is its 11 hours of battery life, which means nonstop work or play without worrying about where the nearest outlet is. It also comes packed with lots of storage and memory, which is great for file storage and lots of web browsing.

The Envy x360 also comes with a fantastic, "unhackable" built-in webcam and microphone, making it well-suited to online classes, work meetings, or long-distance calls to family and friends.



Gaming

If you're a gamer, you're probably looking for a laptop with lots of memory that offers a screen with a high refresh rate so that games look smoother while playing. The best gaming laptops will combine high-quality displays, sturdy frames, and powerful and speedy processing.

Manufacturers are putting powerful specs in thinner and more portable bodies. Their fast refresh abilities and bright graphics make them great not only for gaming, but also for other entertainment and work purposes.

In general, a bigger screen is more enjoyable for entertainment. However, if you need more "wow" or want to display large amounts of data, a larger 15-inch screen might be the best option for you.

A larger laptop also generally comes with more ports, making connecting external devices, storage, or even a wired keyboard easier.

Our Recommendation for New Gamers: [Dell G15 5511](#)



If you're new to gaming, the best laptop for you is likely to be the Dell G15 5511. This laptop was designed primarily with gamers in mind. It comes equipped with an 11th Gen Intel Core i7-11800H processor, running at 2.3GHz, 16GB RAM, and a 512GB SSD, making it more than capable of handling all of your gaming, work, and personal needs.

It's a sturdily designed computer that's not meant to be as light as productivity-gearred laptops. Instead, this laptop's sturdy frame is meant to work harder, faster.

The Dell G15 5511 comes equipped with 3 USB-A ports, a USB-C Thunderbolt 3/Display port in alternative mode, an HDMI port, an Ethernet port, and a headset jack.

Gamers should also note that the Dell G15 5511 comes equipped with an Alienware Command Center, giving this laptop the power of the same Game Shift technology used in Alienware systems for a slightly lower price.

Our Recommendation for Veteran Gamers: [Dell Alienware X15 R1](#)



If you're a more experienced gamer, the Alienware X15 R1 might be a better option for your needs. This laptop boasts a slim build, impressive memory, and high-definition 4K display— all necessary for an experienced gamer who expects performance and speed from their computer. On top of all of that, it's beautifully designed and incredibly sleek, like all Alienware products.

The Alienware X15's GeForce RTX™ 30 Series GPUs power the world's fastest laptops for gamers and creators alike. Its impressive 15.6-inch display gives you the most realistic ray-traced graphics and cutting-edge AI features. On top of that, it has an RGB keyboard and a light-up touchpad.

Like most gaming laptops, we've found that X15's battery life isn't great (averaging about four hours), but that's generally not an issue since most users typically won't need to use this laptop far away from an outlet.



Chromebook

Chromebooks have emerged as a great budget option, leaving behind their reputation as less advanced, limited options. They now offer a wide variety of applications and plug-ins that make Chromebooks a great option if you just need a laptop that has a long battery life, good keyboard, and enough power to meet your needs.

A good Chrome OS laptop or two-in-one can be incredibly useful and still easy on the wallet. The best Chromebooks are known to deliver good value. You can find a wide variety of budget ranges. Although you can get a higher quality product in the \$600 range, we found that you can still get many of the features needed from cheaper models.

Our Recommendation: [Samsung Chromebook Plus V2](#)



This two-in-one laptop runs on Chrome OS, but the Samsung design is what makes it worth your while. It has a great build quality and comes equipped with a powerful processor. The two-in-one design and built-in stylus make it an adaptable, great-value device.

The Samsung Chromebook Plus V2 offers a full HD 12.2-inch display with a resolution of 1920 x 1080, making it a great option for watching movies, browsing the Internet, or even making video calls.

This is incredibly well-suited to home and student needs and would even make a great starter laptop for a young adult.

When it comes to storage, the Samsung Chromebook Plus V2 offers a wide variety of options so that you can choose the amount of storage you need. You can choose from 32GB of internal storage and all the way up to 128GB. Along with the laptop's SD card slot (which offers the

possibility for external storage) and the option to sync files to Google Drive, a shortage of memory won't be an issue.

However, if you plan on doing a lot of writing on your laptop, you may want to note that this laptop's keyboard is not backlit and has shallow travel. If you're particular about the feel of your keyboard, I'd recommend trying this option out in store before bringing it home.

Budget

Setting a budget is a good place to start when shopping for the best laptop for yourself.

If you're looking for the fastest possible laptop with bright designs or a larger screen, you can likely expect to spend at least \$1,000. However, the good news is that you can get a slim, multi-functional, and incredibly effective laptop for less than \$300. Laptops in the \$500 to \$600 class sometimes offer more powerful processors (meaning a faster computer), higher definition screens, or more storage.

If budget is your priority, you should be prepared to compromise on one aspect or another of your laptop; however, whether that means settling for a slightly smaller screen, a flimsy keyboard, no touchscreen, or less storage or memory, you can still find a great value laptop that meets your needs.

Our Recommendation: [Acer Chromebook Spin 311](#)



If you're looking for a great overall budget laptop, Chromebooks offer some of the best variety and features. If you're hoping to spend as little as possible on a laptop, but still want top-notch

features, great battery life, and a smart two-in-one design, then this is a great pick for your needs.

The Chromebook Spin 311 is adaptable, lightweight, and incredibly budget-friendly. It comes with a 360-degree hinge that lets you transform the laptop into a notebook that's great for content creation, entertainment, or whatever else you need it to be. Best of all, it retails for only [\\$259.99](#).

Did I mention how light this laptop is? It's just 2.65 pounds, making it incredibly easy to transport around during the day. The high-definition touchscreen measures 11.2 inches. Even better, it has up to 15 hours of battery life so that it can meet your productivity needs all day and night.

If you're a Google or Android person, the Chromebook Spin 311 will feel incredibly familiar and easy to use. It offers more than two million Android apps, runs Gmail, and can back up all of your files to Google Drive for you.

More to Consider

When buying a laptop, it's important to ask yourself what you need out of a laptop, then plan around your budget. The best laptops are the ones that help you stay on top of all your different projects, the battery life to meet your needs, and the speed to power through everything you need to do.

All the different choices on the market can make the laptop selection process overwhelming, but we hope the options compiled above will help you select a laptop best suited to your personal needs.