

# SO, YOU WANT TO BUY A NEW COMPUTER?



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Lately, there has been a greater need to have better computers. Perhaps it's because so many more people are working from home or more students are doing virtual education. In fact, I get asked this question at least once a week within my network of influence. In response, I have some questions to ask them: What do you want to do with it? What is the purpose? Do you want it to be portable or will it stay at the house? These are critical questions to answer for yourself. Other questions arise, too. Do you want a laptop or a desktop? Would a tablet or a Chromebook meet your needs? How much do you want to spend? Usually, the answer becomes clear just from this initial questioning.

If you are looking to work from home or you have students doing virtual school, the answer will generally be a laptop. Why? Because it's portable, flexible and most laptops can do what you need. I'm sure you've seen advertisements for Chromebooks, and they're economically priced. A Chromebook is essentially an internet-only computer where the browser is the operating systems (as opposed to a Windows or a Mac operating system). Chromebooks have their uses, primarily in educational settings, where the subset of applications are solely internet-based. If you want to install other applications that aren't browser-based, you're going to want a laptop.

What about a tablet? Tablets are more powerful, but they're restricted to applications that run on the tablet (either Android or Apple IOS). You can use a tablet like a laptop, but there are obviously things a tablet cannot do.

If you can accept those limitations, then a tablet might work.

Why not a desktop? Well, if you plan on seldom moving your computer and have no plans to pop down to the coffee shop with your desktop in tow, then that could work. However, most people want the flexibility to have their computer be mobile, thus, a laptop is a better choice. You also can buy accessories like dual monitors and external keyboards and mice to make your laptop have that desktop feel.

Now that I have sold you on a laptop (*changing!*), what more do you need to know? Size matters. An 11-inch laptop and a 17-inch laptop are just that different. An 11-inch screen may be too small to see, and a 17-inch laptop may be too heavy to easily lug around. You must do what is right for you based on how you plan to use it. Go to a store where you can see them and pick them up. You don't have to buy from there, but you can try out the look and feel.

Should you choose Windows or Mac? That question often is a matter of personal preference and money these days because Macs and PCs mostly can do the same things. A Mac is more expensive but quite honestly, requires less maintenance by the user. I bought a Mac for my wife years ago because I was tired of spending all my free time fixing her Windows PC. A PC is significantly less expensive and for some, that alone is the deciding factor.

What about all those letters and numbers and two and three letter abbreviations? Those things matter, since you'll want a better processor. If it's an Intel processor, they go from I3 to I7 and generally, the higher the number, the better. Same is true with RAM — 4 GB will never be enough. You need at least 8 GB of RAM, and preferably more. Your hard drive size isn't as important as it used to be, and there's now solid state drives (SSD) that are fast but have limited capacity. You always can add an external drive to store files, but you need to get enough hard drive space to store applications, so 256 GB is a minimum for a hard drive.

Video capabilities also matter. Laptop video cards are underwhelming, so look for one with a better video card, also measured in gigabytes of RAM.

Another factor to consider is the number and type of ports the laptop has on it. You need at least three USB ports and an HDMI port for video output capabilities. All laptops have wireless capability built in and some have a standard network jack as well. If you are concerned, look at the battery life as well.

One of my recent tricks of the trade is to buy gaming laptops for everyday use. They come with more than enough processor, RAM and video capabilities to play high-end games, but that also means they can do all that you want, too.

If you have time to make a purchase, I also recommend you get it from a reputable seller. The cheapest one on Amazon Marketplace may not be the best option for you. Google the make and model number you are interested in and see what people are saying about it. There are manufacturers I won't buy from just because of the reported problems. You can look at back-to-school or holiday specials but often, they're selling a lower-class PC with limitations. Caveat emptor.

I admit the options and information can be overwhelming, but remember, you will use this computer every day. We all know a computer can be the greatest source of frustration imaginable, so do your research, get what you need and revel in the joy of how much easier this purchase has made your life. 🌞



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