

# **How To Buy A Laptop Computer**

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# Table Of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
2. Factors To Consider.....	4
The CPU.....	4
Amount Of RAM.....	4
Amount Of Graphics Memory.....	4
The Laptop Display.....	5
The Battery.....	5
The Keyboard and Pointing Device.....	5
The Hard Drive.....	5
The Optical Drive.....	5
Laptop Weight.....	5
Communications.....	6
3. Top 10 Laptop Shopping Tips.....	6
4. Good Places To Shop For Laptops.....	8
5. Laptop Shopping Checklist.....	9
6 Conclusion.....	10

## 1. Introduction

Can't decide which model of laptop to buy? How do you choose a laptop that will meet your computing needs and yet does not burst your budget? Choosing a good laptop computer can be very difficult. You are faced with so many models and specs that you don't know where to begin!

Well, help is here! Read on and find out what you need to consider before buying a laptop. Once you go through the points below, you will have a much clearer picture.

## 2. Factors To Consider

How do you choose laptop that's just right for you? Well, when buying a laptop, you need to consider factors beyond performance and weight. There are many additional things like screen dimensions, battery life, and keyboard and connection options which you have to think about.

Let's look at some of the factors one should consider when buying a laptop.

### The CPU

One of the first things you need to consider in a laptop is the CPU. The latest laptop CPUs include Intel's Core Duo and Core 2 Duo processors which outperform older single-core Intel processors (e.g. Pentium M). Other laptops use the AMD Athlon Turion 64 X2 dual-core processor - which is also a good performer. In general, however, if you're looking for a laptop, I'd advise you to look for one with an Intel Core Duo processor. You can also read this guide to find out more.

### Amount Of RAM

The amount of RAM in the laptop is very important. If you're not short of cash, my advice is to get at least 1GB of RAM - that is the minimum you need to get newer PC applications to run fast. Also remember that you can always add more memory to your existing laptop. You may be interested in this short guide on how to install new memory modules into a laptop.

### Amount Of Graphics Memory

Laptop graphics are another feature you will want to consider. Typically, I'd say you should go for 128MB of dedicated video RAM. Also, ensure that the graphics memory is used solely for graphics use and not shared with the main memory. If you intend to play games on the laptop, then look for advanced 3D graphics chips with about 256MB to 512MB of dedicated graphics memory. Be prepared to fork out a lot more cash though.

### **The Laptop Display**

You will also want to take a look at the laptop screen. Laptop screens have recently become bigger. Most of them have gone widescreen so you can watch movies or edit spreadsheets more comfortably.

If you intend to use the laptop from home a lot, then I'd go for a 17-inch wide screen. If you are more concerned about portability or if you travel a lot, then laptops with screen sizes of 12.1 or 13.3 inches might suit you better. There are also 14.1- or 15-inch screens for laptops, but I believe manufacturers are shifting away from these models.

### **The Battery**

Here's another critical factor - laptop battery life. I personally find it very frustrating to have my notebook power run out after 15 minutes at Starbucks. What you need to do is to buy a laptop that has about 3.5 hours of battery life, running on a Core Duo or Core 2 Duo processor. Make sure you question the retailer on how long the battery can last - a short battery life is usually a deal breaker for me.

### **The Keyboard and Pointing Device**

Some people believe that the keyboard and pointing device on a laptop is important. If you have big fingers, you might be more comfortable typing on a larger notebook keyboard than a small one. Make sure you try the laptop out - get the feel of typing and navigation before you buy the laptop.

### **The Hard Drive**

In the laptop hard drive department, what can I say? More is better. These days, you can get a notebook hard drives coming in sizes of 160GB or more. You can also get SATA hard drives if you have more cash.

### **The Optical Drive**

I'd usually recommend getting a laptop with a rewritable DVD drive as a minimum. One thing you need to know is that some laptops sacrifice a DVD drive in exchange for a lighter weight and portability. If you don't think you need a DVD drive all the time, then you might want to get a model that doesn't have one.

### **Laptop Weight**

Another thing to note is the weight of the laptop. Now, when you buy a laptop, always remember that the total weight includes the notebook AND the AC adapter, any external modules, and their cables. These can add up to quite a bit of weight.

## Communications

These days, you will find that most laptops come with at least two USB 2.0 ports - I'd recommend that as a minimum. If you do a lot of video editing, then a FireWire (IEEE 1394) port also becomes essential.

You should also check for good network capabilities. Make sure your new laptop has built-in ethernet capability, a built-in wireless connection and also built-in Bluetooth (if you need to transfer data between your mobile phone and the laptop).

Some of the laptops also include card slots for removable media such as CompactFlash, Secure Digital and MultiMediaCard. If you take a lot of digital photos, then this feature might matter to you.

## 3. Top 10 Laptop Shopping Tips

Here are 10 important laptop shopping tips you should always bear in mind:

### **Tip #1: How will you use the laptop?**

One of the problems when you buy a laptop is that you pay for features you don't really need. One of the best ways to avoid paying too much is to consider how you will use the laptop. If it is mostly for word processing, then settle for a cheaper machine. If it is for gaming, then you need a more powerful one.

### **Tip #2: Think of features you will not compromise**

You should also be aware that there are some basic features in a laptop you should NOT sacrifice. For example, for me, if I were buying a laptop, I'd choose (as a minimum) - an Intel Core Duo or Core 2 Duo processor, 2GB of RAM, 160GB of hard drive, a very small screen size and a super long lasting battery. Your list of critical feature may vary.

### **Tip #3: Remember you can pick and choose**

Most vendors will let you custom-build your own laptop. This is a good thing, because you can just pick those features you need and not pay any extra. You can easily purchase a faster notebook by accepting a smaller hard drive or DVD drive, for example.

### **Tip #4: Think Carefully About Extended Warranties**

If you're shopping for a laptop (or any other consumer electronics for that matter), be wary of extended warranties. Extended warranties are a way for the dealer to get extra cash from you upfront "in case" your laptop fails in the future. Now seriously, the build of most laptops nowadays is pretty solid, I've not seen many laptops fail for the first few years unless you do something silly like drop it on the floor. If you take care of your laptop carefully, you should not need an extended warranty.

**Tip #5: Buy Laptops Online**

If you want to buy a Dell, HP or Lenovo laptop, do note that most of these brand name manufacturers have need solid deals online. So visit these online stores and see if you can save any money. Chances are, there are some very attractive deals going on during different seasons (e.g. Back to School or Christmas sales). Don't miss out on these.

**Tip #6: Question The Laptop Salesman**

Don't believe in everything the laptop salesman says. Get the specs of the laptop you want and do some of your own research. Then question the laptop salesman and ask him to recommend alternative or cheaper models with the same functionality. If the salesman is worth his salt, he will be pretty good at suggesting alternatives so you get the best deal. Remember, a laptop is a big investment and I'd definitely feel more comfortable shelling out cash if I know exactly what I'm paying for.

**Tip #7: Be Careful Of Auction Sites**

There are many, many laptops on sale in eBay or other auction sites. While I would not discredit used laptops, be sure you check up on the seller and try to view or test the laptop before paying money. There are a lot of laptop scam artists sitting on eBay and most of the scam stories I hear don't have happy endings.

**Tip #8: Keep Those Laptop Accessories In Mind**

Another tip is to remember that you usually need to buy some accessories to accompany a laptop. Try to see if the laptop dealer has a good deal that packs in these extras. For example, you might want to get an extra battery module, or perhaps a pen drive or more RAM. If you can, see if the dealer can structure a good deal for you that includes these extras.

**Tip #9: Inspect The Laptop**

Too many people trust the laptop dealers. You should always check and inspect the contents of a new laptop you are buying. Check the screen to see if there is damage. Check the chassis for scratches or discoloring. Also, switch on the laptop and see if you can perform normal stuff like web surfing and word processing. Play a DVD or a movie file and see if the sound and color produced by the laptop is ok.

**Tip #10: Check The Replacement Period**

If a new laptop you purchase is fault, most laptop manufacturers allow you to return it for a new unit. But they only allows this within a couple of days of purchase. Check to make sure you can return the laptop to the dealer when you return home to find it faulty. A rough guideline for this replacement period should be about 7 to 14 days.

## 4. Good Places To Shop For Laptops

Here is a list of laptop manufacturers' websites and specialty laptop stores which might have good laptop deals.

### Laptop Manufacturers

<http://www.lenovo.com>

<http://www.toshiba.com>

<http://www.hp.com>

<http://www.sony.com>

<http://www.dell.com>

<http://www.acer.com>

<http://www.alienware.com>

<http://www.apple.com>

### Specialty Stores

<http://www.newegg.com>

<http://www.bestbuy.com>

<http://www.circuitcity.com>

<http://www.tigerdirect.com>

## 5. Laptop Shopping Checklist

Here is a handy laptop shopping checklist that you should print out the next time you're out shopping for a new machine.

Question	Remark
What CPU does the laptop use?	Most newer laptops come with Intel's Core 2 Duo processors these days.
Does the laptop have enough RAM?	Try to go for at least 1 GB of RAM, preferably 2 GB.
Does the laptop have graphics memory you need?	Usually 128 MB or graphics memory is enough. If you want to play 3D games, go for 512 MB of memory.
Does the laptop display suit your needs?	Do you need a small 12 to 13 inch screen or a large 17 inch screen? A general purpose laptop usually has a 14 to 15 inch screen.
Does the laptop battery last long enough?	Good laptop batteries should last at least 3 hours.
Is the keyboard and pointing device on the laptop suitable for you?	The keyboard should be comfortable to type on and the pointing device should be easy to operate.
Is the laptop hard drive large enough for you?	The more space the better. Try to go for at least 160 GB of space.
Does the laptop come with an optical drive?	Try to make sure it comes with a DVD writer. Newer laptops have Blu-ray drives. Some laptops also have a detachable optical drive.
What is the weight of the laptop?	Do you need a super light ultraportable (3 pounds or less in weight) or a heavier desktop replacement (more than 6 pounds in weight)? A general purpose laptop is about 5 to 6 pounds in weight.
What are the communications options on the laptop?	A good laptop should come with ample USB ports (at least 3), Firewire, Bluetooth, wireless connections and maybe a HDMI port.

## 6 Conclusion

I hope this report has shown you the ins and outs of buying a laptop. Remember, a laptop is an expensive device. It will also be something you bring along anywhere you go. Hence, it is critical that you do proper research and find the correct laptop to suit your needs. So do remember the above tips the next time you're in the market for a laptop, and happy shopping!

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*Gary Hendricks runs a website about laptops. To learn more about laptops, laptop accessories and access a wide variety of how-to articles, be sure to visit his website at <http://www.best-laptop-guide.com>.*

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