

COMPUTER GURU — by Don Benjamin

The Donald and Nancy Light Technology and Literacy Lab Programs
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Buying a Windows PC

Here's a simple guide to use when buying a Windows computer. Next month, we'll provide a guide for Apple computers.

Picture it: BestBuy. 2023. You're in the computer department, confronted with myriad laptops ranging from \$400 to \$1500, and a Gen Z salesperson approaches. "So, what do you want?"

First, we suggest you purchase a laptop computer, not a desktop PC (the "tower" thingy that's the size of a breadbox) because 1. You don't want to schlep your desktop computer to our tech lab (or anyplace else) when you need help, 2. Desktop computers take up lots of space, and 3. They're more expensive than a comparable laptop. Furthermore, you can connect a monitor, keyboard, and mouse to a laptop to create the desktop PC experience and still come out ahead on features and price.

This table lists two laptop specifications: 1. A basic configuration that will easily handle web surfing, word processing, and email, and 2. An upgrade setup that will let you edit photos and videos without breaking a sweat.

| Feature | Description | Basic Configuration | Upgrade Configuration | Notes |
|---|---|---|------------------------------|--|
| Central Processor | Runs programs | Intel Core i5 or AMD Ryzen 5 | Intel Core i7 or Ryzen 7 | Upgrade if you edit photos or videos |
| Random Access Memory (RAM - gigabytes) | Super-fast memory available to run applications | 8 GB | 16 GB | Upgrade if you edit photos or videos or run multiple applications simultaneously |
| Main Storage (gigabytes) | Stores your applications and data | 256 GB Solid State | 528 GB (or more) Solid State | Solid-state drives are much faster than spinning disks |
| Display Definition (pixels) | Screen resolution (clarity) | Full High Definition 1920 x 1080 pixels | At least 2560 x 1440 pixels | More pixels = clearer images |
| Price | | \$400 - \$500 | \$600 and up | Discounts are easy to find |

Screen Sizes

Laptop screen sizes generally fall into three groups: 12" to 14", 15" to 16", and larger than 16". And while larger laptop screens make documents easier to read, you can connect a laptop to a desktop monitor for an expansive view. (Note: Today's laptops require monitors with an HDMI connection.) You can even use the laptop screen along with the monitor, allowing you to, for example, view your email on one screen while you write a letter on the other.

Where to purchase your computer

I'd buy a laptop computer from a "bricks-and-mortar" store, like BestBuy, Costco, or Staples, where you can try the keyboards and check the screen resolution. These stores often discount their laptops, sometimes by several hundred dollars. It's also easier to return a laptop to a local store if you have a problem.

Setup

New PC's come with Windows 11, which is essentially Windows 10 with nicer graphics, improved menus, and enhanced security features. The computer will walk you through the setup and help you establish a Microsoft account (if you don't have one) or ask you to enter your ID and password if you do.

Once Windows is set up, you'll copy your documents from your older PC. This step is a snap if you used OneDrive to back up your documents. Then you'll install your software, like Zoom, Microsoft Office, Photoshop, and so on, and you're all set.

If you need help setting up your new computer, just fill out the help request at princetonsenior.wufoo.com/forms/technology-assistance-request, and we'll be in touch!