

Computers for Students

Students of all ages are using computers more often than ever. They are using computers for schoolwork, chatting, email, games, and surfing. However, choosing the right computer for a student can be a difficult task. Operating system, computer size hard drive size, processor speed, and available hardware and software all help determine what makes a computer a good buy.

Operating Systems

The debate over operating systems has been going on since computers were introduced. Today, the two most popular operating systems for computers are Windows and Macintosh. Windows-based systems account for almost 90% of the home and office computer market. However, it is important to note that the Macintosh operating system only runs on Macintosh computers because Apple does not license anyone else to use their operating system like Microsoft does with Windows. In addition, the popularity of the Windows system coupled with its near-universal compatibility means that virus creators tend to target the Windows systems over others.

According to recent studies, the Macintosh system is more stable than the Windows systems because of increased software and hardware compatibility.

However, there is more software available for Windows systems

Price

Computers have finally become an accepted appliance in the home, just like televisions. And, just like television prices, computer costs can vary greatly depending on what type you choose. Most manufacturers offer computers in three ranges: entry-level, midrange, and cutting edge.



An entry-level range computer can cost as little as \$500, but these computers are usually the slowest and smallest that a company has. A typical entry-level range Windows



computer will have a 566-733-megahertz (MHz) Celeron or Pentium III processor. A typical entry-level range Macintosh will have a 300-500MHz processor. In addition, these computers do not have much capacity for expanding or upgrading the system, hardware or software.

A midrange computer is the most popular computer among today's users. These



computers are priced between \$1,000 and \$2,000. Midrange

computers have processor speeds ranging from 866 MHz to 1.2 gigahertz (GHz) for Windows, and up to 500Mhz for Macintosh. These computers will have the capacity needed for expanding and upgrading the system, hardware, and software.

Cutting-edge computers are very expensive and not necessarily a good choice for the average computer user. Cutting-edge computers can cost up to \$3,000. Their processor speeds can be as fast as 1.7GHz. And while they will have all of the speed and storage anyone would ever need, today's average user would not utilize many of their features, especially in everyday use.

Laptops vs. Desktops

At first glance, most people would think that students would be best served by a laptop because it is portable. However, there are definite advantages and disadvantages to owning a laptop or a desktop computer. A laptop computer is more portable and conserves more space. But, you cannot add memory or other hardware to a laptop and many needed ports are not available without a port replicator or docking station.

On the other hand, while a desktop has space for more peripherals and most can be opened to add memory and other hardware, it can be cumbersome to move. It also obviously takes up much more room than a laptop. And, since you cannot carry your desktop system around

with you, all of the files you have on your desktop must be sent via email or transferred to a floppy disk or a CD if you are going to access them at another location.

Extras

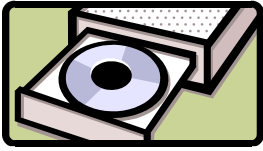
While a basic system will help a student get their word processing done, when you are purchasing a new student computer, take into consideration the other things the student will use the computer for. Speakers, monitors, DVD and re-writable CD drives may be extras that will make the computer and the user much more compatible.

Most computers you purchase today come with separate speakers. However, iMacs and most laptops come with internal speakers. Most standard speakers are suitable for listening to music, but better speakers could be a worthwhile upgrade for someone who uses the computer as a stereo or who plays a large amount of games. Better speakers cost \$40 or more.



Today, monitors are available in a wide variety of sizes. Flat panel monitors have the best quality, but their expensive price tag outweighs their strengths. Flat screen monitors are a better option for the price. A 17-inch monitor is a good size for desktop systems. If a student is using the computer for detailed graphics work, a larger monitor may be a wise investment. Laptops come with smaller monitors, but it is still possible to get a bigger monitor with a laptop system. A 14-15-inch monitor display is a good choice for a laptop system.

DVD and re-writable CD drives can also be excellent additions to a student computer.



A DVD drive allows you to use your computer as a TV to watch DVD movies. This is an especially nice feature with a laptop since you can watch movies even if you are away from home, in a car, on a plane, or in a hotel. A re-writable CD drive allows the user to save information to a CD just like they would to a floppy disk. This is great for transporting information between computers.

System Requirements

No matter whether you choose a Windows or Macintosh laptop or desktop machine, there are a few minimum requirements that should be considered. A good student computer should have a 700-800-MHz processor (Windows) or a 450-MHz processor (Macintosh). It should contain a 10-20-gigabyte (GB) hard drive with at least 128 megabytes (MB) of RAM. It should have enough ports to attach a variety of peripherals. A good student computer will allow the student to work and play without much difficulty.

References

Consumer Reports. <http://www.ConsumerReports.org>

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University of Houston Information Technology. Support Center Solutions: Operating Systems, Part III. <http://www.uh.edu/infotech/news/110300/scswin.html>

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