

The Tech Buying Checklist

26 questions to answer before you spend money on a laptop, phone, tablet, headphones or an e-reader. Tick each one. Anything you can't tick is worth checking before you pay.

Before you buy anything

- ☐ I know the three things I will use it for most, and I've ranked them.
 - ☐ I've set a budget that includes accessories, a case and any warranty.
 - ☐ I've checked the price at two or more retailers on the same day.
 - ☐ I've checked whether a newer model is due in the next two months.
 - ☐ I know the return window, and who pays for return shipping.
 - ☐ I know how long the warranty lasts and what it covers.
 - ☐ I've read at least one review that lists real downsides.
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Laptops

- ☐ At least 16 GB of memory (it usually can't be upgraded later).
 - ☐ Enough storage for three years: 512 GB or more for most people.
 - ☐ A battery life figure tested by a reviewer, not just the maker.
 - ☐ The ports I need, or I've budgeted for a dongle or dock.
 - ☐ A screen bright enough for where I work: 300+ nits indoors, 500+ near windows.
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Phones

- ☐ Software updates promised for at least five more years.
 - ☐ It works on my carrier's network bands.
 - ☐ The storage tier fits the photos and videos I keep now.
 - ☐ I've checked the trade-in value of my current phone.
 - ☐ I know what a screen or battery repair costs.
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Tablets

- ☐ The apps I rely on exist for this platform.
- ☐ I've priced the keyboard and stylus, which are often extra.
- ☐ Storage is enough, because most tablets don't take memory cards.

Headphones and earbuds

- ☐ They support my phone's best features (codec, spatial audio, multipoint).
- ☐ Noise cancelling was measured by a reviewer, not just claimed.
- ☐ Battery life with noise cancelling on covers my longest day.

E-readers

- ☐ It works with my bookstore and my library app.
- ☐ The screen is 300 ppi or sharper.
- ☐ It has a warm light for night reading, and it's waterproof if I need that.

When to buy. Prices are usually lowest around Black Friday and Cyber Monday in late November, during Amazon's July and October sales, and just after a new model launches (the old one drops). Avoid buying in the month before a known launch.

Stuck between two or three options? The Tech Buying Decision Kit scores them on what matters to you, works out the true cost per year and tracks prices for you.

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