

This guide was created on September 20th, 2009. Technology changes fast, be aware of that when using the standards I've noted, as well as those of other guides you read.

NETBOOKS, what to look for:

CPU / Chipset / Processor: This controls how fast your computer calculates. A better processor means a faster computer.

The most popular ones are (*arranged fastest to slowest*):

Intel Atom N280 (1.66GHz)

Intel Atom N270 (1.6GHz)

Intel Atom Z530 (1.60GHz)

Intel Atom Z520 (1.33GHz)

Intel Celeron M 353 (900MHz)

When it comes down to it, the differences between the Intel Atom N and Zs are negligible. However, while the Celeron M is probably cheaper, it is considerably slower. To give you an idea, 900MHz was available top-of-the-line circa the year 2000. Though today's laptops and desktops are hitting over 2GHz, 1.6GHz is just fine for a netbook.

Keyboards come in two sizes 80% or 93% (or 95%) of a regular keyboard. These percentages don't take into account the design features of each model. Thus, though it is possible to buy any netbook online, it is worthwhile to, at least, go to a brick-and-mortar store to try them out. Likewise, as the Lifehacker article on the [5 Best Netbooks](#) concluded, "...it's the little details—the spacing of the keys, layout of the **USB ports**—that really make the difference in how comfortable your mini-mini-computer will be in actual use."

RAM (Random Access Memory) is the computer's short-term memory. The more a computer has, the more it can do at once. Generally, one can also equate having more RAM with speed. Note: Netbooks don't need as much RAM as laptops or desktops since they do less. The standard amounts of RAM you'll find offered in mainstream netbooks are:

512MB, 1GB (1024MB), and 2GB.

1GB should be the baseline for most people. Occasionally stores will also put acronyms like DDR1, 2, or 3, SDRAM, and others. Don't worry about those.

Weight is sometimes a consideration if you'll be carrying your netbook around. Much of the time, it is difficult to get matching weight specifications between the manufacturer and retail stores because of the various configurations netbooks come in. The biggest factors dealing with weight are screen and keyboard size, battery, and type of storage memory.

For reference, some estimated weights of netbooks are:

Asus 1005 HAB: 2.4 lbs

Asus Eee PC 900 16G: 2.47 lbs

Asus Eee PC 1000HE: 3.2 lbs

Dell Mini 10V: 2.5 lbs

Dell Mini 10: 2.6 lbs

HP Mini 110 XP: 2.57 lbs

HP Mini 1116 NR: 2.25-2.5 lbs

HP Mini 110-1045DX: 2.57 lbs
Lenovo S10-2: 2.42 lbs
Samsung NC10: 2.8 lbs
Acer Aspire One: 2.95 lbs

As you can see, most netbooks weight between 2 and 3 pounds. 2.4-2.6 lbs seems to be the average.

Storage Memory: When notebooks just began to appear the amount of space they would contain was a concern because hard drives (the part of the computer that stores your programs) were larger, hotter, and used more energy than they do now. Fortunately, while those are still concerns, the user does not need to trouble himself with them, since current netbooks come with plenty of space.

There are two types of storage memory that netbooks have. The first is the traditional hard drive (HDD) which has moving parts inside. The second are called solid-state (SSD). These are basically internal flash drives which have no moving parts, hence solid-state.

160 GB hard drives with 5400 RPM, (this refers to the speed of the drive) seems to be a fine standard. Other options ranging from 80GB-240GB are also readily available. For solid-state drives, 16GB is the standard; this is tiny in comparison to hard drives; just to give you an idea, the modest music collection on my computer is 13.3GB. If you decide on a solid-state drive, remember that you'll have to consider how (or if) you'll be storing much on your netbook.

Battery: Netbook battery life is a subject of much contention since the manufacturer's estimates are so often inaccurate. Because netbooks do less than their larger counterparts, their battery life tends to be longer. Here's a breakdown of some stats:

What's it made out of? *Lithium-Ion, Lithium-Polymer. Standard is Lithium-Ion.*

Cells? *3-cell or 6-cell. Both are valid options.*

WHr (Watts-per-Hour)? *24, 28, 32, 48, 63. Frankly, while we know what this stands for, I admit that I haven't a clue what it measures in this context. I have a feeling it's one of those stats that manufacturers have decided to release to confuse consumers. You'll find that some manufacturers and retail stores release this information, while others don't.*

Most people buy netbooks so they can use them away from plugs. For this reason, I recommend spending a bit more money for a 6-cell Lithium-Ion battery. This will allow your netbook to comfortably last 3-7 hours without needing a recharge. Some manufacturer's claim that their netbooks will last up to 9 hours, based on costumer reviews, this is exaggeration.

Internet Connectivity:

Wired – All computers these days come standard with an ethernet jack for wired broadband connections. I'm not so sure about phone jacks for dial-up connections, actually, I'm not positive if these machines even have dial-up modems.

Wireless – With wireless internet beginning to become somewhat ubiquitous in big cities and small hotels, this is an important consideration. Wi-fi 802.11 b/g is standard, n is an option that's good to consider if you are willing to pay a little more. 802.11 n is a newer, more secure (and sometimes faster) wireless connection. Bluetooth is also an option on some netbooks, but that depends on individual needs.

Screen Size: One of the distinct features of netbooks is their smaller screen sizes (which contributes to the petiteness of the machines themselves). Here are the screen sizes you can choose from: 7" , 8.9" , 10" , 10.1" , 10.2" , 11.6" , 12.1". Concern yourself more with finding the screen size that works best for you rather than the acronyms that come after it. Like keyboard, display quality is one of those intangibles that's best to test for yourself.

Price: Aside from screen size and processor type, the price of netbooks is what distinguishes them from laptops and desktops, though with some high-powered netbooks (not an oxymoron anymore) this is starting to change. In my opinion, a computer should not be considered a netbook if it is over \$500. A good range to think about is \$200-\$400, of course, this all depends on specific configurations. One more note on price: the market for technology is very competitive meaning there's always something for sale; be on the lookout for a good deal. They're not at all difficult to find.

Who makes netbooks you should buy?

First-row: Dell, Asus, Samsung, Hewlett-Packard, Toshiba, Acer, Sony.

Second-row: MSI, Velocity Micro, Gateway, Compaq, Lenovo.

Final Considerations: A few final things to remember when purchasing a netbook:

Netbooks do not come with optical (CD/DVD) drives, so if you intend to watch movies or listen to CDs on your computer, you'll either have to purchase an external one or download movies from the internet.

In the same vain, netbook speakers are typically weak. Do not expect high quality sound.

Before making your final decision, think about what type of slots you need (USB, VGA, HDMI, MultiMediaCard, etc.); there's nothing worse than finding out you don't have a certain plug right when you need it. Think also about quality of webcams (which vary among netbooks that have them built-in), and software. Any programs you need will either have to be preloaded on the computer, or downloaded from the internet.

Moreover, some programs that you use on your laptop or desktop may not run on a netbook. Make sure to check the requirements of the programs you use most. An example of a program not working is digital camera software due to the small screen size (and consequently limited resolution) of netbooks.

Finally, when it comes to operating system, on some netbooks, Windows XP Home Edition (w/ service pack 3) is the default, which is just fine. If you run into a linux-based system like Ubuntu, worry not; this is a speedy operating system that comes with a number of useful free programs pre-installed. It functions as a suitable Windows replacement and is considerably cheaper (free, actually). Just know that Ubuntu will not run Windows programs, so no Microsoft Office (it does come with the excellent OpenOffice.org, which works with MS Office formats, I know, I've been using it exclusively for years).

I'll just leave you with this: guides like this and others on the 'net are nice and useful, but nothing beats doing a little research. Netbooks are cheaper than other computers, but that isn't a reason to throw away \$300 on a machine that doesn't meet your needs. Resist the impulse purchase. Figure out your needs. Look for a good deal. **Good luck!**