

# Buying a computer

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*Buying a computer can be a confusing experience. There are many products available, with great differences in price. Computer technology is changing all the time, so it helps to do your homework before you buy.*

## Understand what's available

Understanding how a computer works and what the jargon means will help you to choose the right kind of system for your requirements.

- Check the technology section of the newspaper, or computer magazines.
- Ask trusted friends and colleagues for their advice and recommendations.
- Look through ads and the directories to get an idea of the range of stores and what they have to offer. To shop for value and variety in computers compare the quotes from larger and smaller stores.
- If you have access to the web, look at some of the material that's available in the computers and magazines sections of the major search engines.
- To get a handle on the jargon, go to Webopedia ([www.webopedia.com](http://www.webopedia.com)). Information can also be found on the Australian Consumers' Association website [www.choice.com.au](http://www.choice.com.au).

## What kind of computer do you need?

Before you buy, you should be clear about what you want to do with your computer. Salespeople and even 'experts' who mean well may try to persuade you to buy expensive packages with features that you'll hardly use. The type of hardware and software you buy should suit your real needs for the next few years. You will need to decide whether a desktop or a portable laptop computer best suits your needs.

Have a look at different models of a few well-known brands and compare prices and features. As a rough rule of thumb, if you need a computer to play games and work with photographs, graphics, video and sound files, you need the expensive high-end model with lots of power. You'll also probably be up for a hefty software bill.

If you want a computer primarily for word-processing and spreadsheets, the lower-end model will be adequate. You will probably still need to pay for software, depending on what software the retailer includes in the package, and you should make sure you can upgrade the computer's speed and memory if your needs become more complex.

## Big brand or custom built?

With ready-to-go brand name packages, you have the guarantee that all the hardware is compatible and well matched. Systems that are built specifically for you require more homework, but may save you money.

## New or second hand?

Second hand or refurbished computers are cheaper, but you should be careful to buy from a registered business rather than at auctions, swap meets, online or from private dealers. You'll have more chance of redress if things go wrong.

## Buy, lease or flexi-rent?

Leasing has advantages if you will be using the computer for work as well. Just remember to read the fine print of any contracts, and be clear about all the costs involved and what you are getting in return for your money.



## Shopping around

- Choose retailers close to you, so it is easy to keep contact with them in the future.
- Salespeople don't always have your best interests at heart, so it's a good idea to bring along someone whose advice you can trust.

Be wary of dealers who try to pressure you into buying certain systems, who don't bother explaining or answering questions, or who don't seem very knowledgeable. Just move on to the next store, and take all the time you need.

## Quotes

- Get quotes from at least three different stores. Get them in writing, with every component listed. That way you can make sure that you're getting everything you need, and you can make real comparisons. Don't automatically go for the lowest price. There may be a difference between cheap prices and true value for money.
- Ask about after-sales service and support. It's very important and should be part of the quote.
- Consider warranties carefully when comparing deals. They don't always offer the same level of protection.
- Never make a down payment or sign anything just to get a preliminary quote.

## Questions to ask before you buy

### Hardware

- Will this system be able to do all the things I want it to?
- Can you demonstrate how this system works?
- Can this computer be upgraded? Is it worth upgrading this system in a few years time?
- Can I compare monitors to check actual display size and quality?
- Do I get all the instructions and manuals?
- Are all necessary cables included?
- Will they set up the computer for me, load the software and show me how it works?

Make sure you have a good idea of what your needs are before you start shopping around.

It's easy to be tempted by the latest and greatest in computer technology, but extra features mean a higher price.

## Software

- Is this the latest version of the software?
- Is the software a fully functional version that can be upgraded?
- Does the software manufacturer have a helpline or support website?
- Do I get the original CDs for any software that is pre-installed?
- If I don't get the original CDs for pre-installed software, how will I be able to re-install or recover it when I need to?
- Do I get all the manuals, licences and certificates of authenticity for the software I'm buying? The retailer should supply all these things upfront, and not leave them for you to send away for or download from the Internet.

## After-sale service and support

- What after-sale service and technical support does your store offer?
- Do you have a helpline I can call rather than bring in my computer each time?
- Do you have a call-out service? Does it cost anything?

## Warranties

- Are warranty repairs done at my home, at the store, or away at the manufacturer's premises?
- Does the warranty include all freight, labour and parts?
- What costs will I still be liable for under warranty?
- Can I buy an extended warranty from the manufacturer?
- Under which circumstances will the warranty be voided?
- Does the warranty cover software?

## Payment and delivery

- What is your store's return and refund policy?
- Can I pay most of the amount on delivery, after the computer has been set up and checked?

## We are available

Consumer Protection provides free advice to both consumers and businesses on their rights and obligations under consumer legislation.

You can visit one of our offices or call our Consumer Protection Advice Line on 1300 30 40 54 (cost of a local call statewide).

### Regional offices:

Goldfields/Esperance . (08) 9021 5966  
 Great Southern ..... (08) 9842 8366  
 Kimberley ..... (08) 9169 2811  
 Mid-West ..... (08) 9964 5644  
 North-West ..... (08) 9185 0900  
 South-West ..... (08) 9722 2888