Students: Laptop Purchasing Guide

Last Modified on 08/01/2022 12:42 pm EDT

This article reviews **general guidelines** for a typical student purchasing a laptop for four years of College.

See also:

- New to Bryn Mawr College? Start Here!
- Students: What tech to bring to College
- Software for Personal Devices

For information regarding specific requirements, please **contact the department of your major**.

Operating system

Both **Microsoft Windows** and **Apple's macOS** will work at Bryn Mawr. If you aren't sure which you'd prefer, consider what software you'll need to use as well as any differences in pricing.

LITS **does not recommend** Chromebooks/ChromeOS due to their limited support for third-party software. See Example configurations for low-cost alternatives.

Recommended hardware

CPU/Processor: **4 or more cores**

Your CPU is integral to the performance of your laptop; we recommend at least a **quad-core processor**. For limited web browsing and word-processing, a dual-core can be sufficient.

CPU Manufacturer	Recommended Brands
Intel	Core i5 or Core i7
AMD	Ryzen 3, Ryzen 5, or Ryzen 7

Comparing two laptops?

Memory/RAM: **8GB or more**

Memory matters when multiple programs, windows, or browser tabs are running or open. We recommend at least **8 gigabytes (8GB)**, but 12GB or 16GB can make a significant difference.
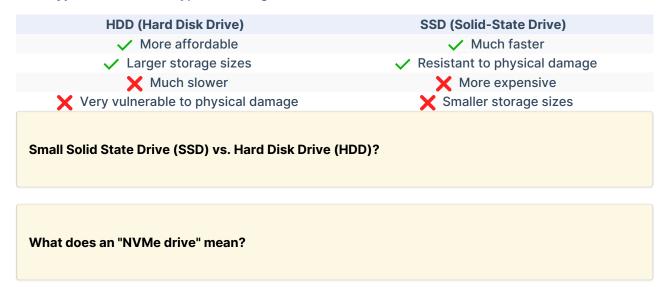
Can I upgrade RAM later?

RAM vs. Intel Optane Memory

Storage Drive: **256GB (or larger) SSD**

Your storage drive holds all the data on your computer. Its performance is based on **size** and **type**.

- **Size:** We recommend at least 256GB; keep in mind your operating system can use up to 30GB!
- **Type:** There are two types of storage: HDDs and SSDs

HDD (Hard Disk Drive)	SSD (Solid-State Drive)
✅ More affordable	✅ Much faster
✅ Larger storage sizes	✅ Resistant to physical damage
❌ Much slower	❌ More expensive
❌ Very vulnerable to physical damage	❌ Smaller storage sizes

Small Solid State Drive (SSD) vs. Hard Disk Drive (HDD)?

What does an "NVMe drive" mean?

Warranties

Extended basic warranty

While most laptops come with a brief pro bono warranty, we highly recommend purchasing **a 4-year**

extended warranty. For those four years, this will ensure any failed components will be repaired at no additional cost.

> **Can I extend my warranty?**

Accidental damage protection

A basic warranty won't cover spilling coffee on your new laptop or knocking it off a desk. As such, we also highly recommend purchasing **a 4-year accidental damage protection plan**. This may eat into your budget, but it is usually much cheaper than the price of repairing or replacing a laptop.

Additional considerations

- **Get hands-on:** go to a store and physically interact with it[1]
- **Size and weight:** Is it comfortable to use and easy to transport?
- **Overall build quality and design:**
  - How do the trackpad and keyboard feel?
  - How much does the chassis flex when you type?
  - Does the hinge feel strong and durable?
  - How bright is the screen's max brightness?
- **Available ports:** How many & what types[2] of ports are present?
- **Battery life:** many reviews include battery life tests
- **Wireless connectivity:** must support WPA-2 Enterprise

> **MacBooks and Keyboard Reliability?**

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[1]*Otherwise, pay close attention to the return policy.*
[2]*Some USB Type-C ports support charging, data, and video output; other's don't. Be sure to check.*

Example configurations

Last updated: June 5, 2020

Below are recommended specifications we would look for at a range of price points.

NOTE: You should always research what is available to you. This list is **not** comprehensive or necessarily up to date, and the models linked below are examples, not recommendations.

Before Purchasing: Always look for reviews

	Affordable (Less than $600)	Mid-Range ($600-$900)	High-End ($900+)
CPU	Intel Core i3/i5 AMD Ryzen 3/5	Intel Core i5 AMD Ryzen 5	Intel Core i5/i7 AMD Ryzen 5/7
RAM	4-8GB	8+ GB	16+ GB
Storage	256GB SATA SSD	256GB NVMe SSD	512GB NVMe SSD

Prices listed do **not** include the recommended warranty & protection plans.

Considering a MacBook?

Questions?

If you have any additional questions or problems, don't hesitate to reach out to the **Help Desk**!

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