

So you want to buy a computer.

Here is a list of things to consider:

1. What do you want to use it for?

This is the key question. Why do you want a computer? Are you using it for emailing?

Skype (video calls)? Paying bills? Buying on eBay or Gumtree? Facebook to find out about the grandchildren? Record keeping? Photography and photobook making of all the trips you've taken?

2. How much do you want to pay?

You can buy a cheap computer for a few hundred dollars or go to the expensive end of the market and spend a few thousand.

3. Should you buy Windows or Apple?

Bias on the writer's part is towards an Apple, but most people own a Windows-based computer. Talk to David at a U3A computer class, talk to other computer owners, go and have a play in one of the shops and talk to the sales people.

4. A Desktop or a Laptop?

This will largely come down to what you want to use it for. If you have a limited space or travel, you might want a laptop (or consider a tablet if there are a lot of flights involved). They are easy and convenient to use but may not have the same power as a desktop.

5. What screen size do you want?

How good are your eyes? Most laptops have screens of around 13" or 15". Some are now tending towards 12" to make them smaller.

Desktops have a much larger screen. There are a few tricks to reading webpages and documents that you can learn about in our U3A computer classes.

6. What Processor speed should you get?

The processor (CPU) is the speed of the computer. You will need to be thinking AMD or Intel Core i3, i5 or i7 - Intel is more expensive but has better performance and reliability.

7. How much memory (RAM) do you need?

This allows you to run more than one program at a time and use more data for things like photos. 4Gb is the smallest amount you should consider. 8Gb is better.

8. What size storage (Hard drive)?

For a laptop, 256Gb should be fine. For a desktop, 500Gb - 1Tb. You should also consider an external hard drive for backing up your computer/some files (eg photos).

9. What about the graphics card?

The video card is what lets you view video files and animations

10. If you buy a Windows-based computer, which brand?

There are lots to choose from - Sony, HP, Lenovo, Dell, Toshiba and others.

11. What programs will I need?

This depends on what you want to use your computer for. A word processing program is essential. A spreadsheet program is very handy. These are available both for purchase (the most popular being Microsoft Office) and free versions (a good example being Open Office). A Photo editing program can be handy if you intend to do a lot of playing around with the photos you take - again both come both for free and for purchase. Some computers come with pre-loaded programs. For example, Apple computers has word processing, spreadsheet, audio-visual, music and photo editing programs pre-installed.

12. What peripherals will I need?

A printer/scanner is pretty much essential - again, lots to choose from. Maybe a mouse if you buy a laptop