

Buying a Secondhand Laptop

This tutorial will tell you what to watch out for when purchasing a second-hand laptop. When assessing a secondhand laptop, bring a USB device such as a flash drive with you for testing ports, and headphones or ear buds if you may use them.



1. If it is running Windows XP or Windows Vista then do not buy it. Both operating systems have been essentially abandoned by all of the major software providers such as Microsoft and Google.
2. If you cannot see it for yourself before paying, I would advise against buying it. There are too many things that can go wrong. It might have issues the seller does not even realise. If you cannot see it but you are still keen to purchase it, ask the seller questions based on this document.
3. Compare the asking price with other sources such as TradeMe or ask an expert. Is it a fair price?
4. If it is more than four years old, do not purchase it. Once laptops hit the five-year mark, model specific parts like keyboards become hard to find.
5. Sit the laptop on a flat surface and lift the screen, checking it from every angle as you do so. If it does not open smoothly, the housing bends excessively, or cracks appear, then do not buy the laptop. Even a minor glitch here could become much worse later.
6. Grab the left-hand side of the screen down the bottom towards where it joins the main body of the laptop. Grip it, and gently move it (Figure 1). You should feel no significant play in the hinge. Repeat for the right-hand side. If either side moves significantly it might mean that the hinge mount plates have broken free of the main housing. The plate begins to act like a lever that will force the housing apart and potentially cause quite significant damage. Do not buy a laptop with this issue. Such problems often get worse with time.
7. Do not buy it if the screen is cracked, even if you can still see Windows loading. Cracks can get worse with time. Replacement screens typically cost at least \$240, sometimes much more.
8. Look for any exposed bare wires or other damage to the charger. Using damaged chargers can damage the laptop. Chargers are usually easy to replace if there is damage. Confirm you can replace it before purchase.
9. Check the battery is charging by looking at the power indicator at the bottom right of the screen in Windows.
10. Leave the laptop on for approximately ten minutes. Have a listen to the noise coming from any vents. This is the cooling fan. If it is high pitched or obviously struggling, then the fan is either in need of a clean or it may be damaged. Check the temperature. A little warm is OK but blazing hot is not. Do not purchase the laptop if this is the case without it getting examined by a professional first.
11. Make sure Windows has been fully reset and none of the previous owner's files and apps remain. If it has not been reset and you are unsure how to do it then ask the seller to do it or get a tech to do it. You can never be sure what the previous owner has done. It could be infested with viruses and spyware.
12. Test the touchpad thoroughly.
13. Make sure the Wifi is working by connecting to the seller's Internet.
14. Observe the performance of the laptop while you work. Is it fast enough for your needs?
15. Bring up something you can type in, such as the Google search bar. Press every key on the keyboard and make sure it works.
16. Play something on YouTube to make sure the sound works. Test the headphone jack if applicable.
17. Plug the USB device you brought with you into each USB port and make sure they work.
18. Check the screen for visual deformation. Small imperfections can get worse over time.



Figure 1: Testing a Hinge

If the laptop passes these tests, there is a good chance it will be a safe purchase. If in doubt, ask if you can take the laptop to an expert for an assessment before purchase.