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# The Best Laptops for College Students, According to Experts

By Jordan Bowman



gist



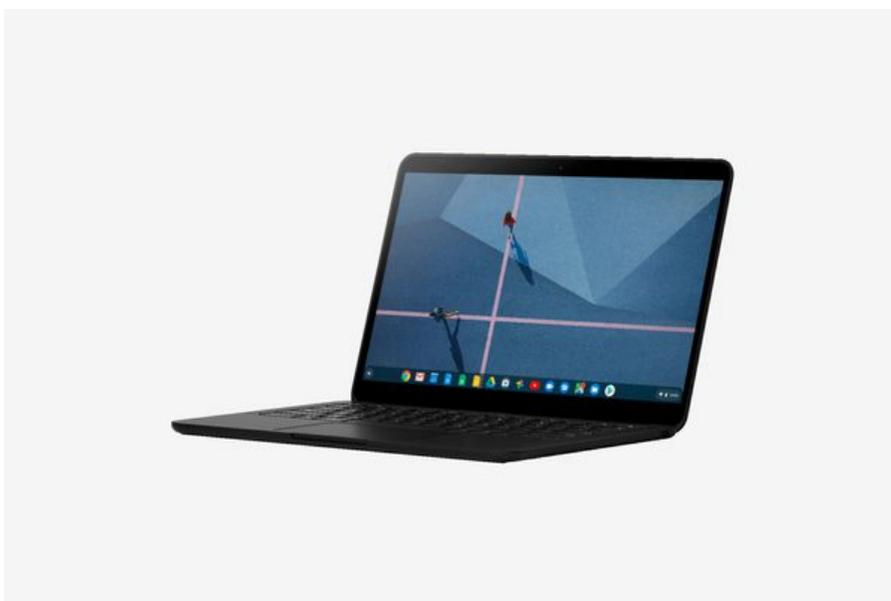
*As a tech writer for the Strategist, Jordan Bowman covers everything from headphones to speakers to computers (and also happens to be interested in menswear and*

Photo: MGM

Choosing a laptop for college is a big decision that's heavily influenced by your budget and your day-to-day needs. "It really depends on what you're going to do with your laptop and what your major is," says Sue Tiger, manager of [Tech Zone at the University of Illinois](#). "We have only a couple colleges with specific recommendations: Architecture requires a very high-end PC, and education may require a medium-size, middle-of-the-road Macbook Pro." Since the majority of students will use their computers to surf the web, take notes, answer emails, attend Zoom classes, and use word processors like MS Word or Google Docs, most midrange laptops — or maybe even a [good Chromebook](#) — will be sufficient. Just make sure you find something rugged, says Charlie Regan, CEO of [Nerds on Site](#). "You're going to spill things on it. You're going to drop it."

Tiger also suggests checking what systems your campus uses before making your purchase. "If you have a Mac and your campus mainly supports Windows, she warns, "you can be out of luck." This doesn't mean your laptop is unusable, but you may have to jump through some extra hoops for access to applications for certain classes or even printing around campus.

We spoke to Tiger, Regan, and six other computer repair and tech experts about the best machines for every type of student. Here are their recommendations.



## Google Pixelbook Go

From \$935

Regan says Nerds on Site is ordering a hundred Chromebooks at a time to keep up with demand. "It's a functional computer, but it doesn't have all the bells and whistles. It's a remarkable bargain, and we haven't experienced much in the

way of breakdown,” he says. Zilberman says that at 2.3 pounds, the laptop is “easy to carry.” Plus, he notes that “the magnesium body makes it very durable and robust.” It’s also fast-charging and has an impressive eight-hour battery life.



### **Samsung Chromebook 4+**

**\$299**

“Chromebooks represent a pretty solid value,” says Tony Larson, an IT professional. Zilberman likes this option from Samsung, calling it “a great device that is well rounded and appropriate for any student. It’s slim and pretty light.”



### **Dell XPS 13 Laptop**

**From \$979**

Our colleagues at the Verge named the XPS 13 the “Best Laptop You Can Buy,” and many of our experts liked it too. “When <https://nymag.com/strategist/article/best-laptops-for-college-students.html>

it comes to a premium laptop that's perfect for a few years of college, the Dell XPS 13 two-in-one is my pick," says Austin Evans, a tech YouTuber. The latest XPS 13 redesign led to a more compact machine "but still packs a 13.4" touch screen with a taller 16:10 aspect ratio, giving it a little bit of extra screen real estate. It'll even give you the ability to do a *little* bit of gaming," he says. The XPS 13 is almost entirely made of aluminum, "which makes it very durable and able to withstand drops and scratches," Zilberman says. "And the keyboard is designed to last."



## Apple MacBook Air - 13-inch, 8 GB RAM, 256 GB SSD Storage

\$949

~~\$999~~ now 5% off

"This is my go-to Mac laptop for back to school," says Jason Snell, host of the tech podcast *Upgrade*. "I recently bought one for my daughter as she prepares to go back to college, so I've put my money where my mouth is." The Air has enough power to do most anything, including editing HD video. Alan Zilberman at Laptop MD also recommends the Air because of its reliable operating system, updated scissor-style keyboard, and great hardware. "It's light, slim, and easy to carry," he says.



## Apple MacBook Pro 13-inch

\$1,299

“I always recommend starting with a 13-inch MacBook Pro,” says Tyler Stalman, a photographer and tech podcaster, of what has become the de facto laptop for creators. “I love taking photos and making movies, so I feel like that extra power and port you get compared to the MacBook Air is always worth the upgrade,” says Stalman. Regan likes Apple laptops for their durability. He even chucks them on the floor from time to time to show his customers how rugged they can be. The Pro has a bright screen, 256GB or more of storage, a smooth trackpad, and up to ten hours of battery life.



## Apple MacBook Pro 16-Inch

\$1,879

~~\$2,000~~ now 6% off

“If you want more power and a bigger screen and you can deal with a heavier machine, the Mac 16-inch is your best bet,” Tiger says. Zilberman agrees, calling the 16-inch MacBook Pro his personal top choice “because of its ability to supersede the performance of most laptops or tablets on the market today. It’s great for practically any laborious task or application due to its outstanding internals and unmatched reliability compared to all other devices of this nature.” It can run multiple operating systems, like MacOS or Windows, which gives you a lot of flexibility when it comes to running certain applications. “The only cons of this device are the weight and size. So plan to keep it on your desk for the most part,” Zilberman says.



## HP Pavilion X360

~~\$730~~ now 4% off

\$700

Zilberman likes this two-in-one laptop because it “is cost-efficient, with a touch screen, 256GB solid-state drive, and a durable body.” The 14-inch screen and 8GB of RAM should be more than enough to get most students through their coursework. “The only con is, it’s not very light,” Zilberman says.



## Acer Aspire 3 Series 15

\$550

According to Miguel Melendez, a PC expert at [B&H Photo Video](#), this laptop “has very good specifications for students or just about any office worker and comes at a very good price.” It has 8GB of ram and 512GB and, like the HP above, is heavier than other options. (It weighs about four pounds.)



## Lenovo Ideapad 5

~~\$799~~ now 13% off

\$699

Melendez also likes the Ideapad, which he considers a great deal. “It comes with Office Home & Student, which is usually something most students will need to purchase,” he says. The Ideapad is a tank, with a bright 15-inch screen, 16GB of RAM and 512GB of storage. This means it’s perfect for multitasking, so you can edit photos and work on documents with relative ease. And because of the massive storage capabilities, you can save documents, photos, and videos without having to worry about maxing out your hard drive.



## Apple iPad Air

\$499



## Logitech Combo Touch Keyboard Case

\$150



## Apple Pencil

\$125

If you're looking for something even more portable than a Chromebook, Snell recommends the iPad. "Some students could probably do fine with an iPad Air and a good case, such as the Logitech Combo Touch and an Apple Pencil," he says. Plus, "Apple's got some new iPad software coming this fall that improves pencil input, especially for note-taking." iPads are also able to run Google docs and other programs on Safari with relative ease nowadays.

*The Strategist is designed to surface the most useful, expert recommendations for things to buy across the vast e-commerce landscape. Some of our latest conquests include the best [acne treatments](#), [rolling luggage](#), [pillows for side sleepers](#), [natural anxiety remedies](#), and [bath towels](#). We update links when possible, but note that deals can expire and all prices are subject to change.*

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