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Nancy C. Muir





# Laptops For Seniors

5th Edition

**by Nancy C. Muir**

**for  
dummies®**  
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## Laptops For Seniors For Dummies®, 5th Edition

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# Introduction

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Computers for consumers have come a long way in just 35 years or so. They're now at the heart of the way many people communicate, shop, and learn. They provide useful tools for tracking information, organizing finances, and being creative. And, they've become far more portable with all sizes and weights of laptops available.

During the rapid growth of the personal computer, you might have been too busy to jump in and learn the ropes, but you now realize how useful and fun working with a computer can be. In fact, for seniors, the computer opens up a world of activities and contacts that they never had before.

This book can help you get going with your laptop quickly and painlessly.

## About This Book

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This book is specifically written for mature people like you — folks who are relatively new to using a computer and want to discover the basics of buying a laptop, working with software, and getting on the Internet. In writing this book, I've tried to take into account the types of activities that might interest a 55-plus-year-old who's discovering the full potential of computers for the first time.

## Foolish Assumptions

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This book is organized by sets of tasks. These tasks start from the very beginning, assuming you know little about computers, and guide you through the most basic steps in easy-to-understand language. Because I assume you're new to computers, the book provides explanations or definitions of technical terms to help you out.

All computers are run by software called an *operating system*, such as Windows. The latest version is Windows 10, Creators Update. This book covers features in the original release of Windows 10 and modifications to those features, as well as new features in the Anniversary Update released in 2016 and the Creators Update released in 2017. Because Microsoft Windows–based personal computers (PCs) — including laptops — are the most common type of computer, this book focuses on Windows 10 functionality.

## Beyond the Book

In addition to the material in the print or e-book you’re reading right now, this product comes with some access-anywhere goodies on the web. Check out the free Cheat Sheet for a checklist for buying a laptop, computer care and maintenance tips, and Windows keystroke shortcuts. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and type **Laptops For Seniors For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

## Where to Go from Here

Whether you need to start from square one and buy yourself a laptop or you’re ready to just start enjoying the tools and toys your current laptop makes available, it’s time to get going, get online, and get computer savvy.



**1**

**Get Going!**

## **IN THIS PART . . .**

Buy a laptop.

Find your way around Windows 10.

Manage your laptop's power.

Set up your display.

Get help with accessibility features.

Set up your printer and scanner.

## IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding what you can do with a laptop
- » Getting an overview of the hardware
- » Appreciating software
- » Understanding the difference between desktops and laptops
- » Choosing a laptop
- » Selecting a version of Windows
- » Determining your price range
- » Understanding displays
- » Getting more out of your battery life
- » Using USB ports for storage or DVDs
- » Choosing features for faster performance
- » Determining how you'll connect to the Internet

# Chapter 1

# Buying a Laptop

If you've never owned a laptop and now face purchasing one for the first time, choosing a laptop can be a somewhat daunting experience. There are lots of technical terms to figure out and various pieces of *hardware* (the physical parts of your laptop such as the monitor and keyboard) and *software* (the programs that allow

you to use the computer to get things done, such as creating documents and playing games, for example).

In this chapter, I introduce you to the world of activities your new laptop makes available to you, and I provide the information you need to choose just the right laptop for you. Remember as you read through this chapter that figuring out what you want to do with your laptop is an important step in determining which laptop you should buy. You have to consider how much money you want to spend, how you'll connect your laptop to the Internet, and how much power and performance you need from your laptop.

## Understand All You Can Do with Laptops

Congratulations — in your life you've been witness to a remarkable revolution. In just a few decades, computers have moved from being expensive behemoths that lived in corporate basements to being personal productivity and entertainment tools. They empower people to connect around the world in unprecedented ways, and they make common tasks much easier to handle.

The following list walks you through some of the things your laptop will enable you to do. Depending on what activities are important to you, you can make a more-informed purchasing choice.

» **Keep in touch with friends and family.** The Internet makes it possible to communicate with other people via email; share video images using built-in video recorders or webcams (tiny video cameras that capture and send your images to others); and make phone and video calls using your laptop and Internet connection with services such as Skype. You can also chat with others by typing messages and sending them through your laptop using a technology called *instant messaging* (IM). These text messages are exchanged in real time, so that you and your grandchild, for example, can see and reply to text or share

images immediately. Part 3 of this book explains these topics in more detail.

» **Research any topic from the comfort of your home.** Online, you can find many reputable websites that help you get information on anything from expert medical advice to the best travel deals. You can read news from around the corner or around the world. You can visit government websites to get information about your taxes and Social Security benefits, and go to entertainment sites to look up your local television listings or movie reviews.

» **Address greeting cards, letters, or home inventories.** Whether you're organizing your holiday card list, tracking sales for your home business, or figuring out a monthly budget, computer programs can help. For example, Figure 1-1 shows the Jacquie Lawson e-greeting card site with lots of options for creating electronic cards to send to your friends' email inboxes.

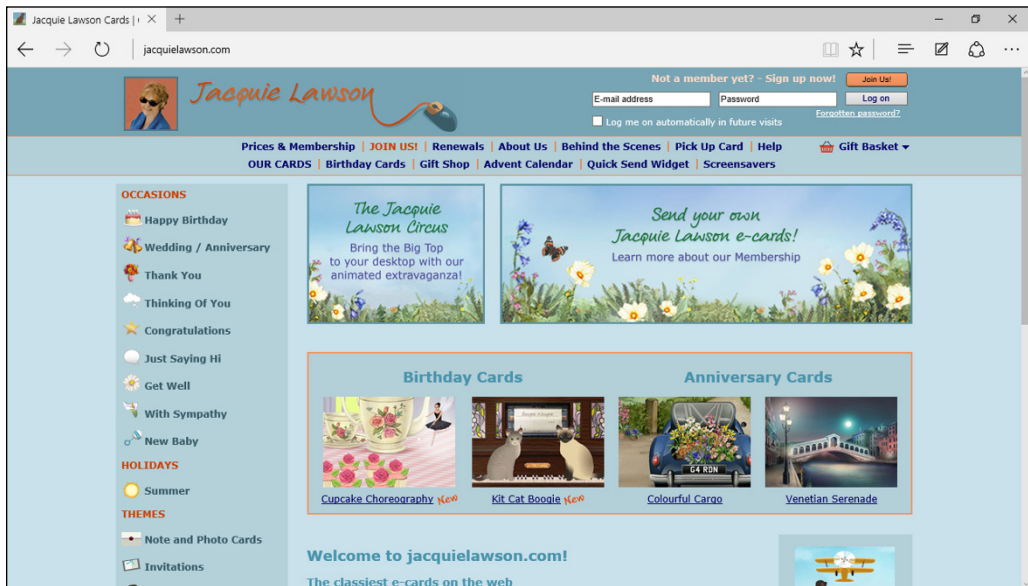


FIGURE 1-1

» **Pursue hobbies such as genealogy or sports.** You can research your favorite teams online (see Figure 1-2) or connect with people who have the same interests. The online world is full of special-interest discussion groups where you can talk about a wide variety of topics with others.

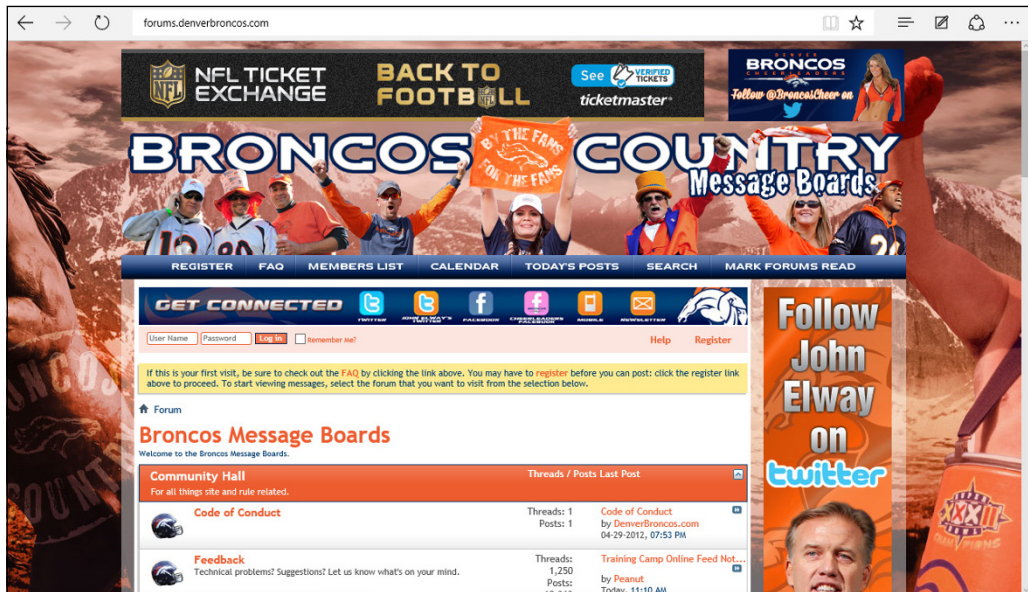


FIGURE 1-2

» **Play interactive games with others over the Internet.** You can play everything from shuffleboard to poker and even participate in action games in virtual worlds.

» **Share and create photos, drawings, and videos.** If you have a digital camera or smartphone, you can transfer photos to your laptop (called *uploading*) or copy photos off the Internet (if their copyright permits it) and share them in emails or use them to create your own greeting cards. If you're artistically inclined, you can create digital drawings. Many popular websites make sharing your homemade videos easy, too. If you have a digital video camera or smartphone and editing software, you can use

editing tools to make a movie and share it with others via video-sharing sites such as YouTube or by email. Steven Spielberg, look out!

- » **Shop online and compare products easily, day or night.** You can shop for anything from a garden shed to travel deals or a new camera. Using handy shopping site features, you can easily compare prices from several stores or read customer product reviews. Websites such as [www.nextag.com](http://www.nextag.com) list product prices from a variety of vendors on one web page, so you can find the best deals. Beyond the convenience, all this information can help you save money.
- » **Manage your financial life.** You can do your banking or investing online and get up-to-the-minute data about your bank account, credit card balances, and investments. And if you're online savvy, you can do this all without fear of having your financial data stolen (see Chapter 15 for more about online safety).

## Overview of Hardware

Your computing experience is made up of interactions with hardware and software. The *hardware* is all the tangible computer equipment, such as the body of your laptop containing the monitor, central processing unit, touchpad, and keyboard.

Your laptop hardware consists of

- » **A central processing unit (CPU)**, which is the very small, very high-tech semiconductor *chip* that acts as the brains of your computer. The CPU is stored in your laptop along with the other nuts and bolts of your computer.
- » **A monitor**, which displays images on its screen such as the Microsoft Windows screen, a video you watch from an online entertainment site, or a document in a software program.

Today, more and more laptops sport touchscreen monitors, which allow you to use your finger on the screen to provide input to the computer.

- » **A keyboard**, which is similar to a typewriter keyboard. In addition to typing words, you can use a keyboard to give the computer commands such as selecting, copying, and pasting text.
- » **A touchpad**, which you also use to give your computer commands. This little device offers a more tactile way to provide input. You move a pointer on the screen by using a built-in pointing device, which might be in the form of a touchpad, or a small button. Slide your fingertip around the touchpad. This moves the pointer around onscreen. You position this pointer on an onscreen button or menu name, for example, and then click the left or right side of your touchpad, which causes an action. You can also tap and drag your fingertip to select text or an object to perform an action on it (such as deleting a file or making a line of text bold). You also have the option of attaching a physical wireless mouse to your laptop; a small transmitter that you place in a USB port on your laptop enables the mouse input.
- » **Peripherals**, such as a printer, speakers, webcams, wireless mouse, and headphones. These may or may not come with your laptop when you buy it. Your laptop comes with slots (called *ports*) where you can plug in various peripherals.

## Appreciate Software

*Software* is what makes the hardware work or lets you get things done, such as writing documents with Microsoft Word or playing a game of solitaire. You can install software (also known as *programs*, *applications*, or *apps*) on your laptop or use a version from an online website. Here are a few basics about software:

- » **You use software to get your work done, run entertainment programs, and browse the Internet.** For example, Quicken is



a financial management program you can use to balance your checkbook or plan for your retirement.

- » **Software used to run your computer is called an operating system.** Some examples of operating systems are Apple's OS X for Mac computers and Microsoft Windows. This book deals mainly with Windows 10 Creators Update and the programs it runs.
- » **Some programs come preinstalled on your laptop; you can buy and install other programs as you need them.** For example, a computer always has an operating system because the operating system runs all the other programs. Also, some programs are included with a Windows computer, such as WordPad, a simple word- processing program, and Music and Video apps.
- » **You can uninstall programs you no longer need.** Uninstalling unwanted programs helps to free up some space on your laptop, which helps it perform better.
- » **Software programs called *utilities* exist to keep your laptop in shape.** An *antivirus* program is an example of a utility used to block or spot and erase computer viruses from your system. Your *operating system* also includes some utilities, such as those that optimize your hard drive or restore your system if either one is experiencing problems.

## Understand the Difference between a Desktop and Laptop

The fact is that when it comes to performing computing tasks, a desktop and laptop are pretty much identical. They both have an operating system such as Windows 10 or Apple's OS X. They both contain a hard drive where you store data and computer chips that process data, and they both run software and access the Internet.

Where a desktop and laptop differ is their physical appearance, size, and weight. Here's a rundown of the key differences:

» **Appearance:** A desktop computer is typically encased in a tower, into which you plug a separate monitor, keyboard, and mouse. (Some newer models called all-in-ones have the brains of the computer incorporated into a monitor base.) A laptop has all its parts in one unit, as shown in Figure 1-3. The central processing unit (CPU) — chips, monitor, keyboard, and touchpad (a laptop version of a mouse) — all fit in one compact package. Like desktop computers, laptops include slots called ports for plugging in other devices (called peripherals), such as a little toggle that acts as a transmitter for a wireless mouse or printer.

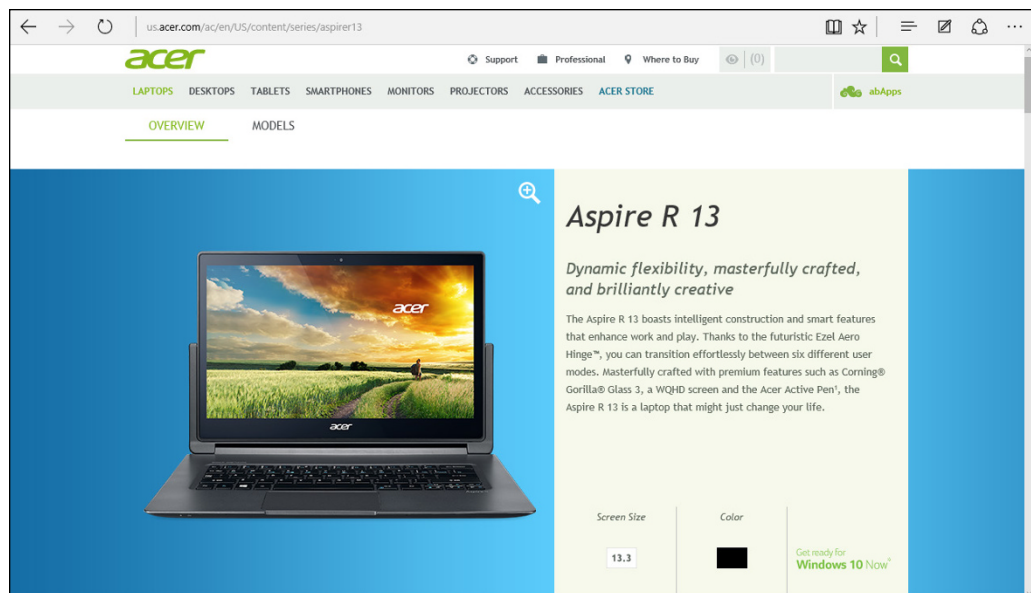


FIGURE 1-3

» **Power source:** A laptop contains a battery that you charge by plugging it into a wall outlet. You can run the laptop off a charged battery or plug the laptop into a wall outlet so battery charge isn't a concern.

- » **Portability:** Having a battery and coming in a more compact package makes a laptop more portable (although some larger models are a bit hefty to tote around); a desktop stays put on a desktop as a rule.
- » **Extras:** Many laptops today do not include a CD/DVD drive and therefore require an external drive, like the one shown in Figure 1-4, to be attached if you need to install or work with software, music, or videos on DVDs.

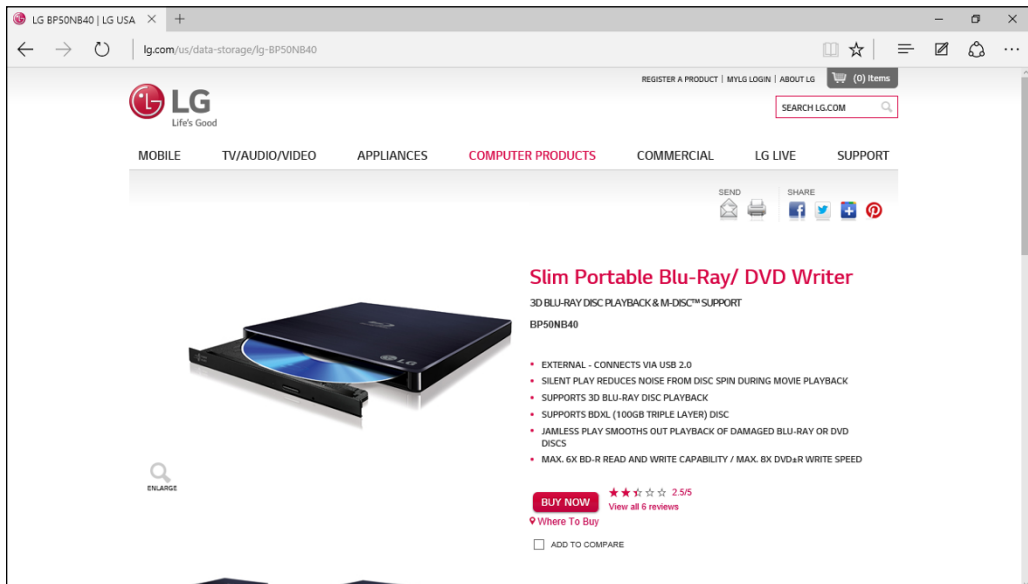


FIGURE 1-4



TIP

If you like the tablet format, consider a 2-in-1 laptop. With these, you can remove a keyboard from the monitor portion of the laptop that then functions as a tablet, or rotate the monitor to rest on the back of the keyboard. The Microsoft Surface is an example of this format.

## TABLETS VERSUS LAPTOPS

What's the difference between a laptop and tablet? Tablets, also called *slates*, are more like a hefty pad than a computer. There is no keyboard and no mouse. Instead, you tap the screen to make choices and enter text. The onscreen keyboard is even smaller than a laptop keyboard, but there are physical keyboard and mouse accessories that you can use with tablets to make input (typing text and commands) easier. Tablets also have super battery life at as much as 10 hours — almost a month in standby mode (when you're not actually using them). Tablets connect to the Internet using either Wi-Fi or 3G/4G technologies (Wi-Fi is a network that is in close proximity to you; 3G/4G is what your cell phone uses to connect virtually anywhere). 3G/4G models require that you pay a data usage fee to a mobile phone provider.

Tablets, which are available from many manufacturers (iPad from Apple, the Fire tablet from Amazon, Galaxy from Samsung, and so on), weigh about 1.5 pounds (more or less). Tablets were first planned as devices for consuming media (watching videos and listening to music, to you and me). Whether used to read e-books, play games such as Scrabble, browse the Internet, play music, or watch movies, these devices have proven incredibly popular. Tablets are a big hit with business and educational groups. Applications (called *apps*) range from credit card readers for retail businesses to eReaders such as Kindle and reasonably robust productivity tools such as word processors and spreadsheets.

However, tablets are pretty darn small. If you want a computing solution that's comfortable to work on at a desk for a few hours and pretty easy to take on the road, a laptop still has some advantages over a tablet.

## Choose a Laptop

Just as there are many styles of shoes or mobile phones, you can find several styles of laptops. Some are smaller and more portable, whereas others are essentially desktop replacements with large screens and a bit of heft. There are different operating systems installed on laptops to make everything run, and some excel at certain functions such as

working with graphics or playing games. Here are some features you should consider when choosing a laptop.

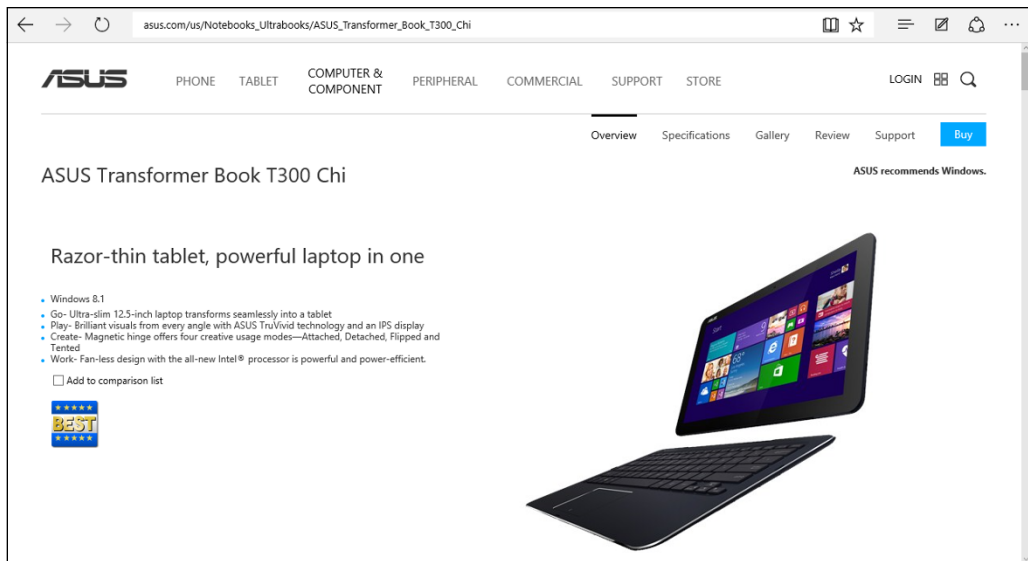
» **Operating system (OS):** An OS is the software that allows you to start and shut down your computer and work with all the other software programs, manage files, and connect to the Internet. Windows is probably the most common computer operating system, and this book focuses mainly on its features.

Mac laptops from Apple are also very popular. These use Apple-specific software including the Mac operating system referred to as OS X. Many software applications written for Windows are also available for the Mac. You can also set up your Mac to run the Windows operating system, which gives you the best of both worlds.

Some computers run on a freely available operating system called Linux, which has functionality similar to Windows. Chromebooks from Google use the Linux-based Chrome operating system and come pre-loaded with lots of Google apps.

» **Laptop design:** A *laptop* is a portable computer, weighing anywhere from two to ten pounds. Touchscreen laptops allow you to tap on items on the screen and use an onscreen keyboard to get things done, or write on the screen with a special stylus called a digital pen. The monitor, keyboard, and touchpad are built into a laptop. Note that if the monitor is damaged, you have to pay quite a bit to have it repaired, or you can hook it up to an external monitor. Laptops are perfect if you want to use your computer mainly away from home or you have little space in your home for a larger computer. Consider design and weight when purchasing a laptop.

» **Laptop variations:** The thinnest and lightest ones (as light as two pounds) are called *ultrabooks*. A 2-in-1 laptop allows you to either rotate the monitor to rest on the back of the keyboard or remove the monitor portion so you can use the laptop like a tablet. When you have removed the physical keyboard from the screen of a 2-in-1, you have to use the touchscreen feature to interact with it. Figure 1-5 shows a 2-in-1 laptop.



**FIGURE 1-5**

» **Pictures and sound:** If you work with a lot of *visual elements* (for example, photographs, home movies, or computer games), consider a laptop that has a good graphics card. Games often involve sound, so a high-end sound card might also be useful. Laptops with more sophisticated sound and image capabilities are often referred to as *gaming* or *multimedia* models, and they typically require a large-capacity hard drive to handle these functions. Because the capabilities of these cards change all the time, I don't give you exact specifications for what's considered high-end; instead, ask the person you're buying the laptop from whether the system can handle sophisticated sound and graphics.



**TIP**

One clue that the model has better support for higher-end graphics is if it has a *discrete* graphics card (that is, a card separate from the CPU) versus one built in to the CPU (called *integrated graphics*).



**TIP**

Tablets such as iPad, Amazon's Fire tablet, and Microsoft Surface offer many computing capabilities, such as reading and working on simple documents, connecting to the Internet to send and receive email, playing games, listening to music, and so on.