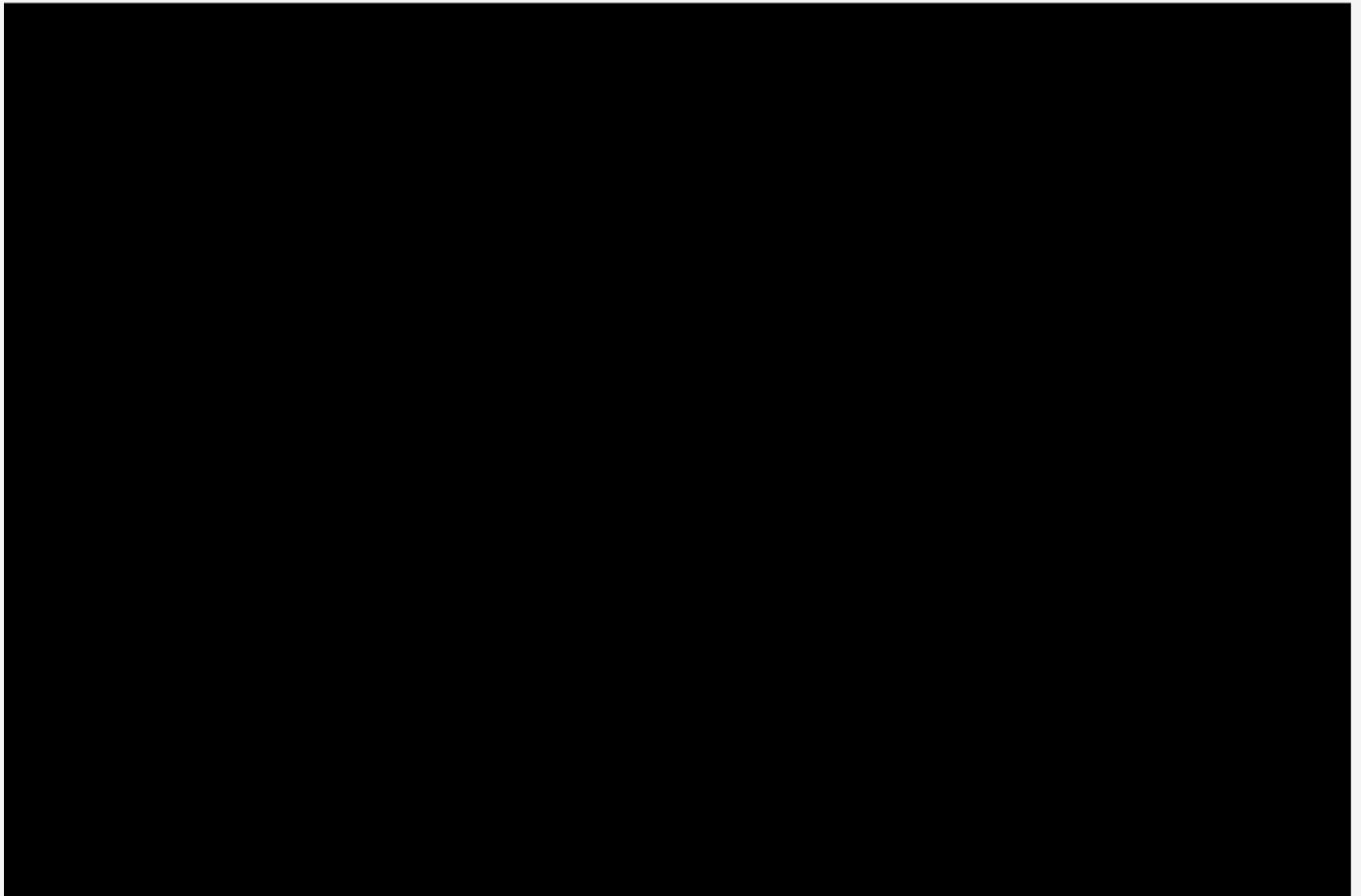




## MOBILE

# Android vs. iOS: Which smartphone platform is the best?

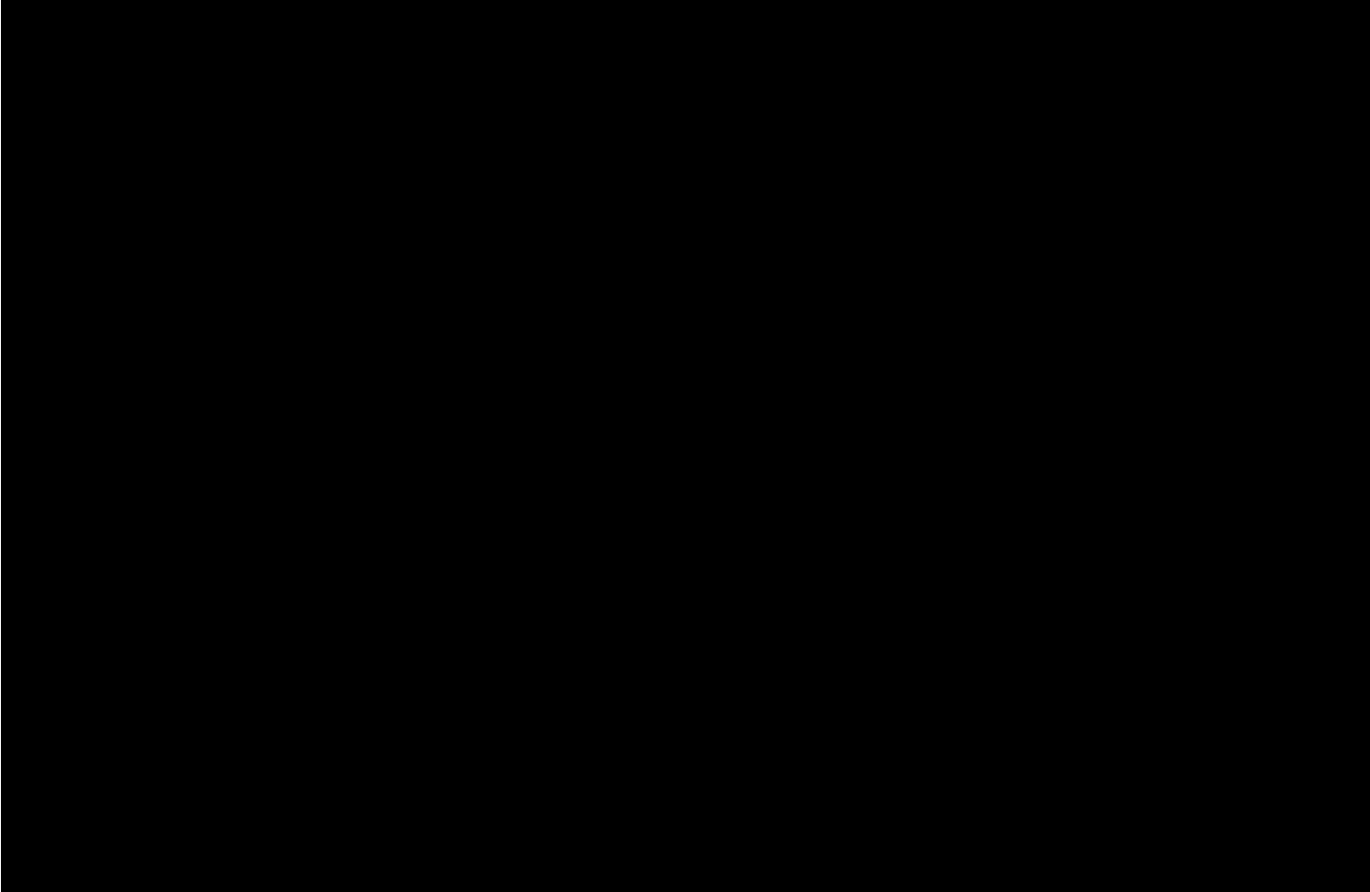
By **Simon Hill** — Posted on July 3, 2018 - 12:00PM



If you're buying a new smartphone today, chances are very good that it will run Google's Android or Apple's iOS mobile operating systems. These two platforms accounted for more than 99 percent of all new smartphones shipped in 2016, and that rose to 99.7 percent last year, according to [IDC](#). Microsoft has [thrown in the towel](#) with Windows Phone, BlackBerry makes Android devices now, and there are very few other options worth considering.

The good news is that both smartphone operating systems are excellent. They have far more in common than what divides them, but there are some important differences that you'll want to consider. We're going to pit Android against iOS in several categories here and pick a winner for each one. Ultimately, the best platform for you depends on you. Pick the things that matter most to you, count the wins in those categories, and you have a recommendation.

## Affordability



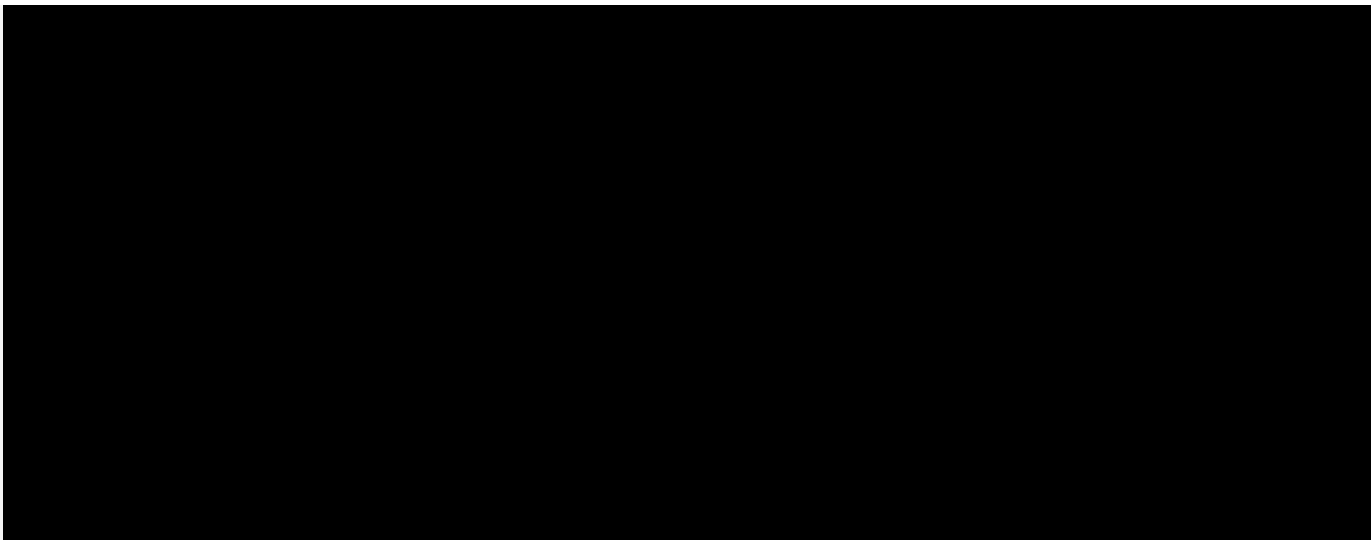
Apple has always been at the top end of the market in terms of pricing, but the [iPhone X](#) took things to a whole new level with a starting price of \$1,000. The iPhone 8 Plus starts from \$800 and the iPhone 8 from \$700. If you don't want to spend that much, then you can go for the 2-year-old iPhone 6S at \$450 or the diminutive iPhone SE at \$350. That's as cheap as it gets unless you delve into the secondhand market.

For sheer scale and variety, nothing competes with Android. You can spend a lot if you want to, for example, Google's [Pixel 2 phones](#) and Samsung's [Galaxy Note](#) line almost match Apple's iPhone pricing, but there's also a huge choice of low-cost handsets from a wide variety of different manufacturers and the platform has been deliberately optimized to run on low-end hardware. The fact that Android also leads the field in free apps makes it the natural choice for the budget-conscious.

**Winner: Android**

## **Apps**





Simon Hill / Digital Trends

Let's start with a look at the numbers. This is roughly how many apps you'll find in the Google Play Store and the Apple App Store:

- Android apps: 3.5 million
- iOS apps: 2.2 million

Truthfully, numbers aren't the best metric because most of us only use a handful of apps and the most popular ones are available on both platforms. Traditionally, iOS has been a more lucrative platform for developers, so there has been a tendency for new apps to appear there first, but that is changing as Android's market share continues to grow. In the U.S., iOS still leads the way, but developers elsewhere are increasingly targeting Android first.

The Play Store still has a higher percentage of free apps than the App Store. But the best mobile games still land on iOS first and they don't always come to Android. Ultimately, quality beats quantity and so this is a narrow win for iOS.

**Winner: iOS**

## App Store





Julian Chokkattu/Digital Trends

It's difficult to organize millions of apps and games and neither Google's Play Store or Apple's App Store does it perfectly. Overall, we think Apple's [redesigned App Store](#) in iOS 11 provides a better browsing experience on your phone and does a better job with curated recommendations. The Play Store is easier to search and you can queue and install apps from the web browser on your PC or laptop.

We like the fact that you can buy apps using your fingerprint via TouchID on iPhones, but you can set up the same thing for the Play Store on Android phones with fingerprint sensors. The Play Store wins points for having a [no quibble refund policy](#) within 2 hours of purchase. There are some questionable apps in both stores, but Apple is generally stricter about blocking certain types of apps. That can be a good thing for overall quality, but it's a bad thing if you're into something like [game emulators](#) for classic consoles. The App Store edges the win for usability and curated content.

**Winner: iOS**

## Alternative app stores and sideloading

It's relatively easy to sideload apps on Android. Tick a box in the settings, download an APK and you're set. There are also a lot of [alternative Android app stores](#) beyond the Play Store, but sideloading can open you up to the risk of malware. Apple is opposed to third-party app stores. If you want a wider choice of apps and easy sideloading then your choice is obvious.

**Winner: Android**

## Battery life and charging





Simon Hill/Digital Trends

As one of the biggest bugbears for smartphone owners, battery life is a huge factor. It's difficult to compare the two platforms because there's no common hardware. We could say iOS is optimized to squeeze the most out of the battery per mAh rating, but you can buy an Android device with a much bigger battery that will easily outlast the iPhone.

Both Android and iOS allow you to see your battery usage at a glance, broken down by app, but only Android shows an estimate of how much battery life you have left. They both offer power saving modes that can extend your battery life by limiting performance, connectivity, and other power-sapping features, but precisely how it works is generally more customizable on Android.

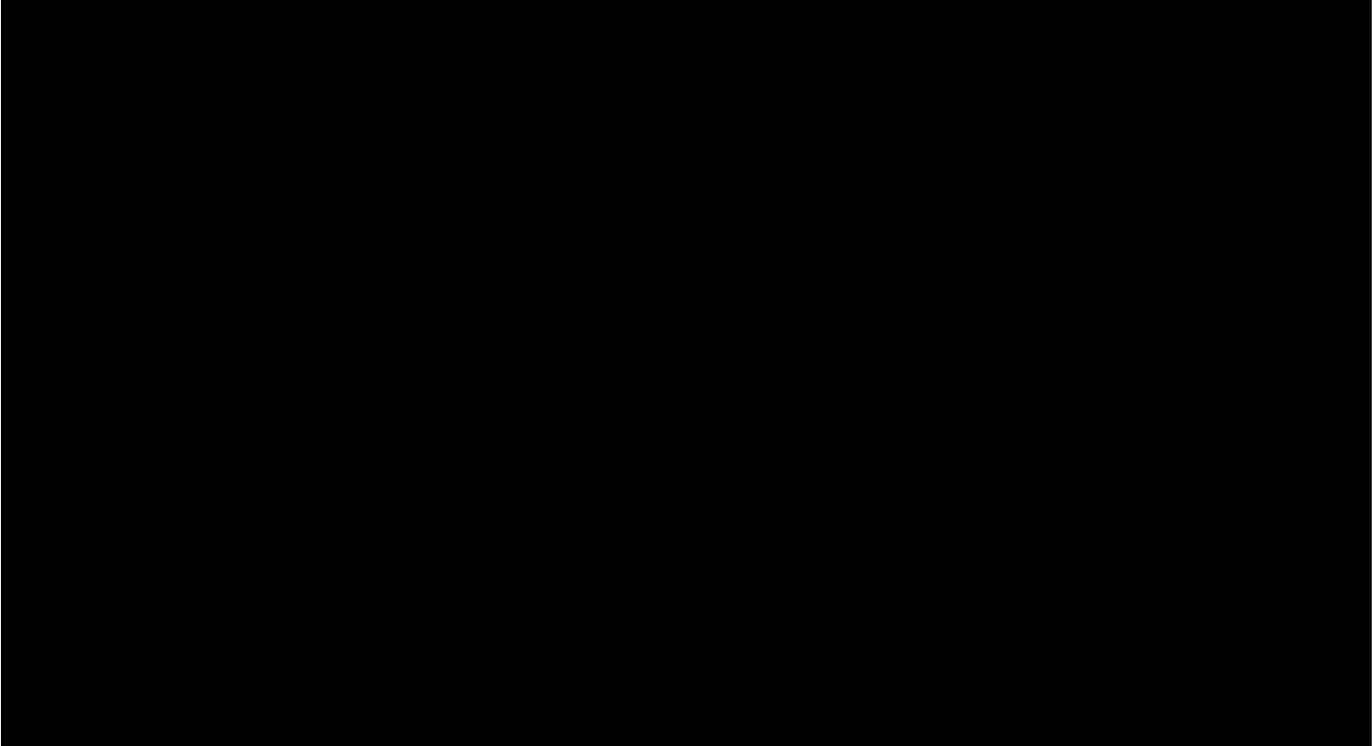
For a long time, Android had an advantage in the charging department, because many Android phones offered fast charging capabilities and wireless charging. However, [Apple's iPhone 8, 8 Plus](#), and [iPhone X](#) all offer wireless charging and fast charging. It's worth noting you have to buy the fast charging adapter separately, whereas it's usually provided in the box with an Android phone.

This category is far from clear cut, but comparing similarly priced Android phones with iPhones, they tend to have longer battery life and they always have fast chargers included in the box, so Android gets the win.

**Winner: Android**

## Updates





Apple's iOS offers consistent and timely software updates and security patches. If you want the same experience on Android, then you must buy one of Google's Pixel phones. This is how iOS version share breaks down according to [Mixpanel research](#):

- iOS 11: 89.82 percent
- iOS 10: 7.18 percent
- Older: 3 percent

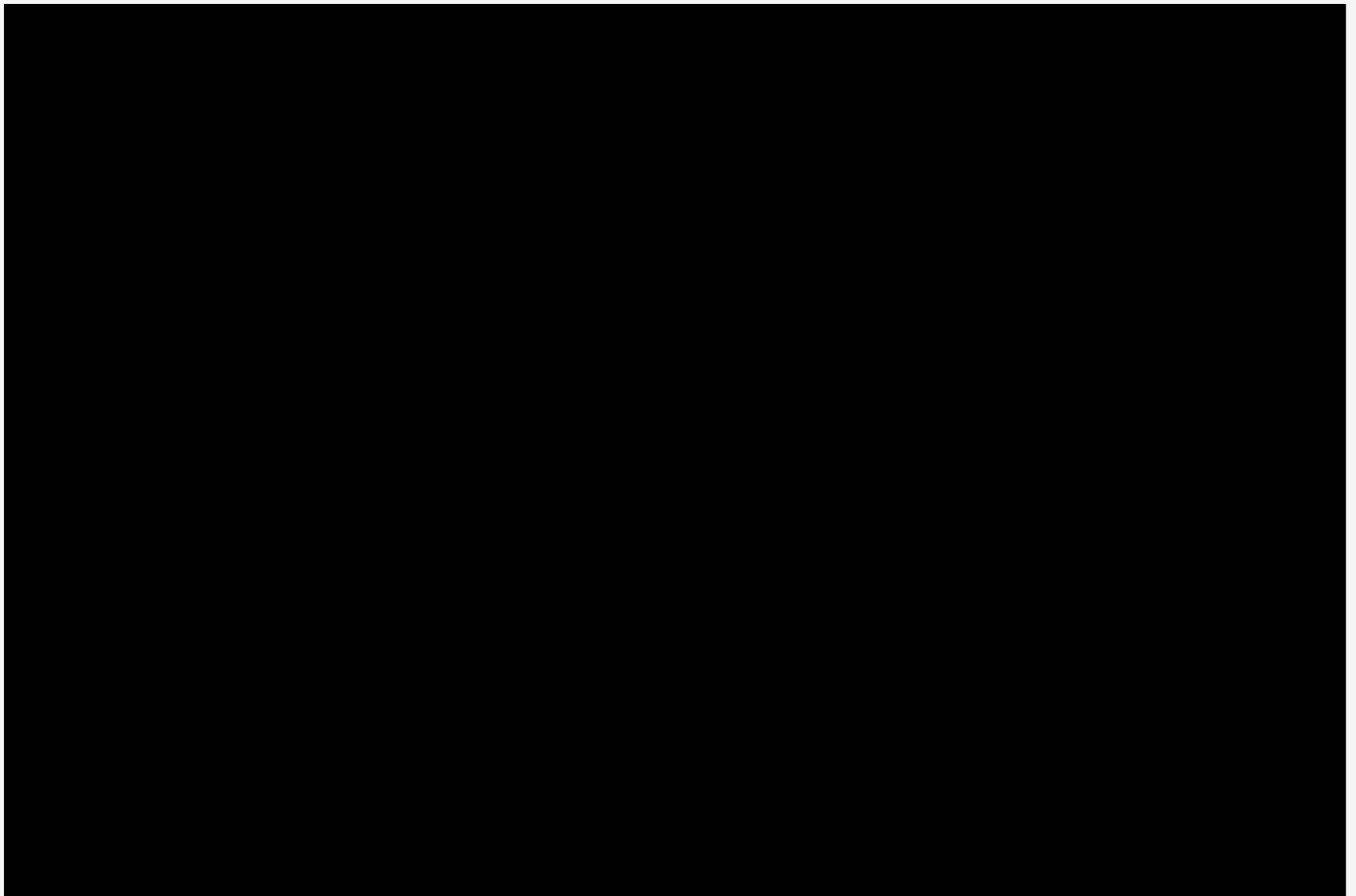
Almost 90 percent of all iOS devices are now running the latest version. By contrast, only 0.5 percent of Android devices are running the latest Android 8.1 Oreo. This is how Android breaks down according to the official [Android Developer website](#):

- Android 8.1 Oreo: 0.8 percent
- Android 8.0 Oreo: 4.9 percent
- Android 7.1 Nougat: 8.2 percent
- Android 7.0 Nougat: 22.9 percent
- Android 6.0 Marshmallow: 23 percent
- Android 5.1 Lollipop: 17.6 percent
- Android 5.0 Lollipop: 4.8 percent
- Android 4.4 KitKat: 10.3 percent
- Older: 5 percent

If you want the latest features, bug fixes, and security updates, then you should choose iOS.

**Winner: iOS**

## Customizability



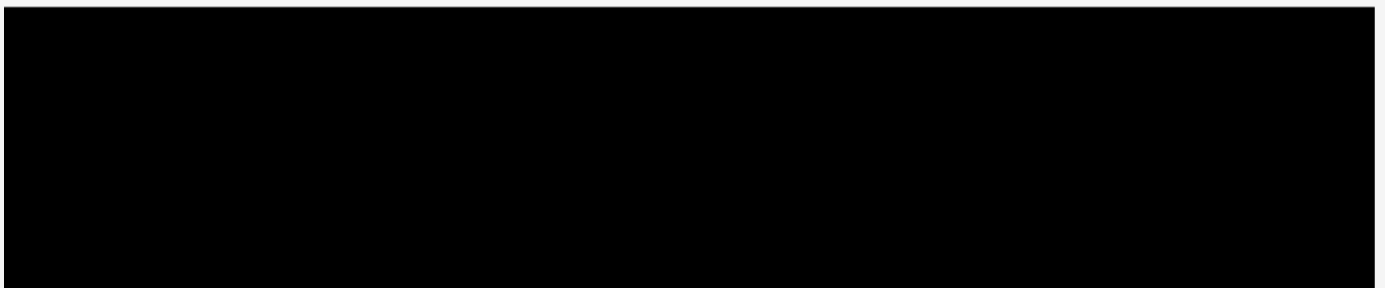
Simon Hill/Digital Trends

This has always been one of Android's main strengths. It's very easy to theme your phone, you can set up the layout you want on your home screen, add [widgets](#) and shortcuts, and even change your entire user interface with [launchers](#).

You can set backgrounds in iOS and there's limited support for widgets, but you don't have anything like the same level of freedom. Android also allows you to set up third-party apps as your default options for many things that are still locked down in iOS. If you enjoy tinkering, or you want a truly unique, personalized look for your home screen, then Android is the platform for you.

**Winner: Android**

## Accessibility





Julian Chokkattu/Digital Trends

The perception that Android is more complicated than iOS prevails, but there's no need to dive into customization options if you don't want to. Both platforms offer a good range of accessibility features.

If you're looking for a device for an elderly relative, or a technophobe then you'll find some specialist offerings on Android, but they tend to scale down what's possible. Manufacturers like Samsung also include options like "Easy mode" which make the interface bigger and simplify the whole experience, or you can opt for a third-party app to do the same. There are lots of good apps aimed at the elderly on Android and iOS.

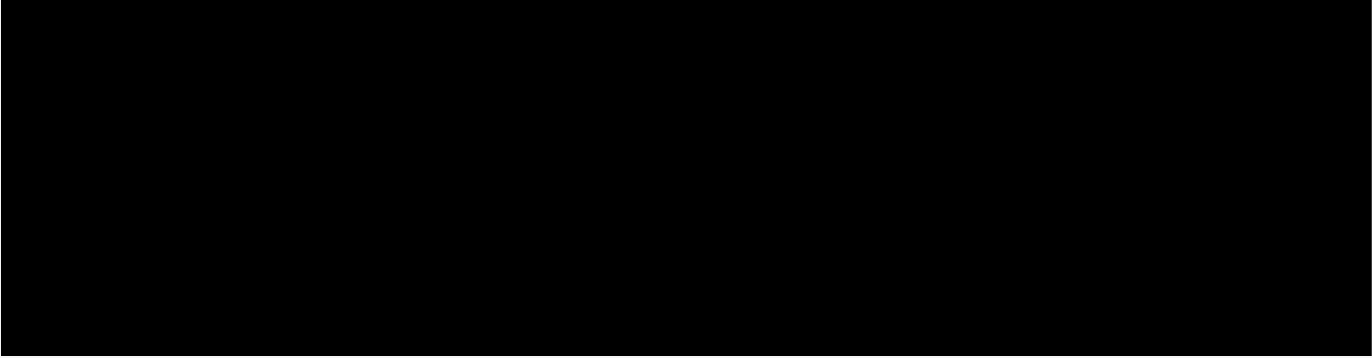
Ultimately, iOS is simpler and easier to use in some important ways. It's uniform across all iOS devices, whereas Android is slightly different on devices from different manufacturers. We also think iOS is less cluttered and more streamlined than most Android phones, although Google's stock Android is every bit as elegant and accessible.

**Winner: iOS**

## Calls and messaging







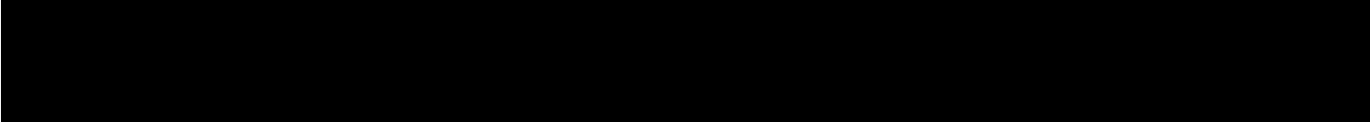
Basic calling and messaging functionality is good on both platforms, but it can be confusing on Android. Google appeared to be folding everything into Hangouts, which allows messages, SMS, video chat, group chat, and more via Wi-Fi or your data network, but then it somewhat [confusingly released Allo and Duo](#). There's also Android Messages, which used to be called Google Messenger, and it's the default texting app. To make matters worse, you'll find many manufacturers like to offer their own alternatives. Many Android phones come with their own messaging and dialer apps in addition to Google's messaging apps, or they eliminate the Google apps. It looks as though [Chat, based on the new Rich Communication Services](#) (RCS) messaging standard will unify things, but it will be a while before it's available on all Android phones.

FaceTime and iMessage come pre-installed on every iPhone and iPad, so it's remarkably easy to connect with your friends and family. While [iMessage is very easy to use](#), it works best when communicating with other iPhone users. You'll find third-party app integration, fun stickers, GIFs, and much more in iMessage. We give iOS the win for its consistency and ease of use.

**Winner: iOS**

## Email



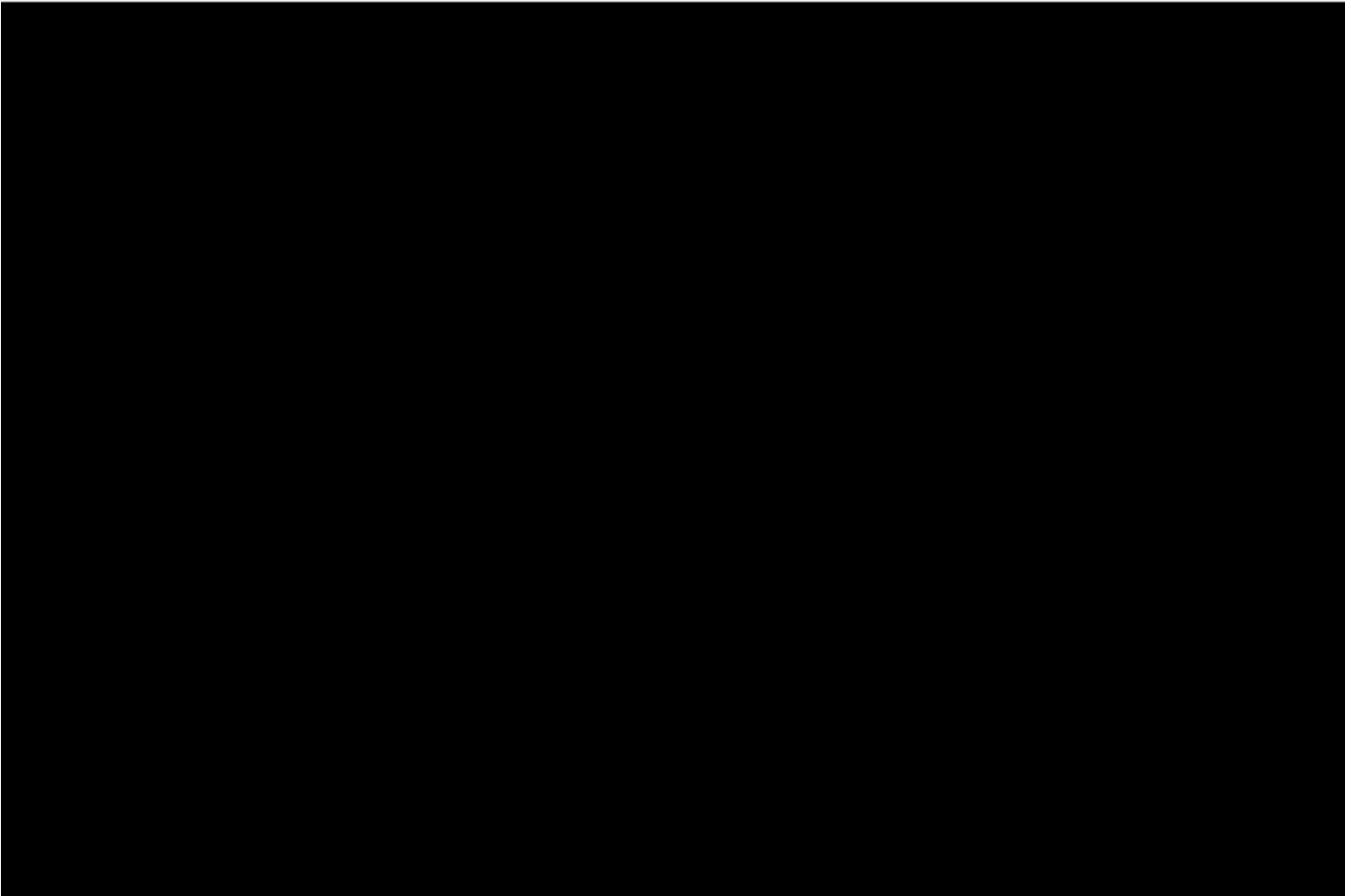


The default email apps on Android and iOS are very easy to use and quick to set up. You can pull in multiple email accounts and view them in a single inbox if you desire. Android and iOS have a huge range of [third-party email apps](#) available as well. However, [Gmail](#) is a stronger default email app than iOS' Mail. Since Gmail is the most popular email address system in the world, it makes sense that the Gmail app would be a winner. You can also add email addresses from different providers in Gmail with ease.

The only issue is that Android phones often offer alternative email apps made by the manufacturers, which may or may not be good.

**Winner: Android**

## Maps



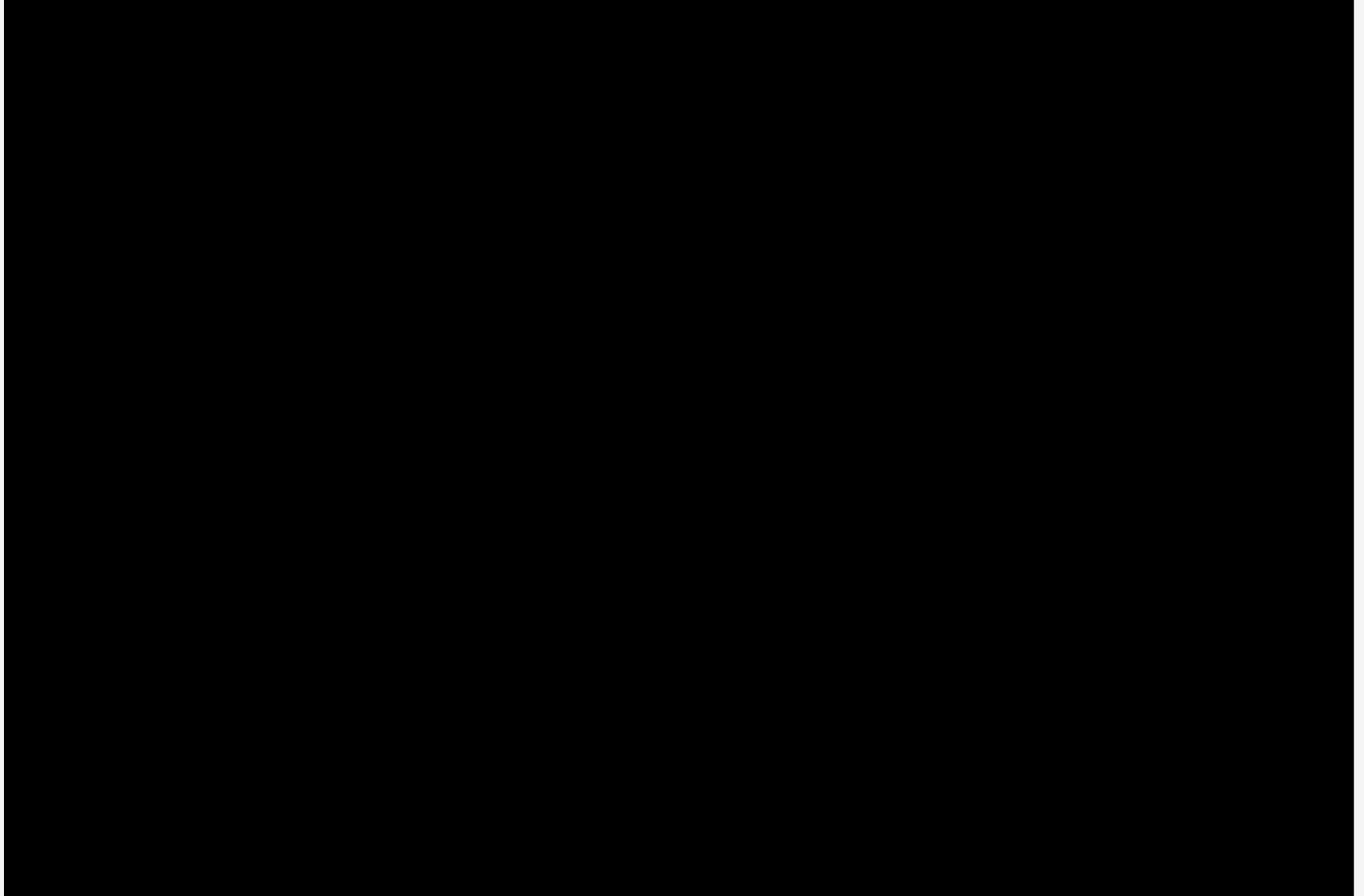
As the newer navigation system, Apple Maps did not have a great start, but it has improved significantly. Key features are similar, you can download maps for offline use, get accurate estimates based on current traffic conditions, and find turn-by-turn directions for driving or walking. You'll also find public transit and ride-booking integration. They all work well and should get you where you're going.

One thing that Google Maps offers that Apple Maps doesn't is cycling directions. Overall, the scale and quality of

Google Maps is unsurpassed. It has more points of interest and it is generally more detailed than Apple Maps, but the accuracy can vary from place to place. Given the choice we'd always pick Google Maps and, though you can get it on iOS, it's better on Android because it's the default navigation app.

**Winner: Android**

## Camera



Julian Chokkattu/Digital Trends

This is a difficult category to call. In the past, we've argued that Apple does the best job capturing lighting, coloring, and other details, but the latest Android smartphones are casting a lot of doubt on that assertion. Google's Pixel 2 and Pixel 2 XL boast the best cameras we've used so far, but the iPhone 8 Plus and iPhone X come close.

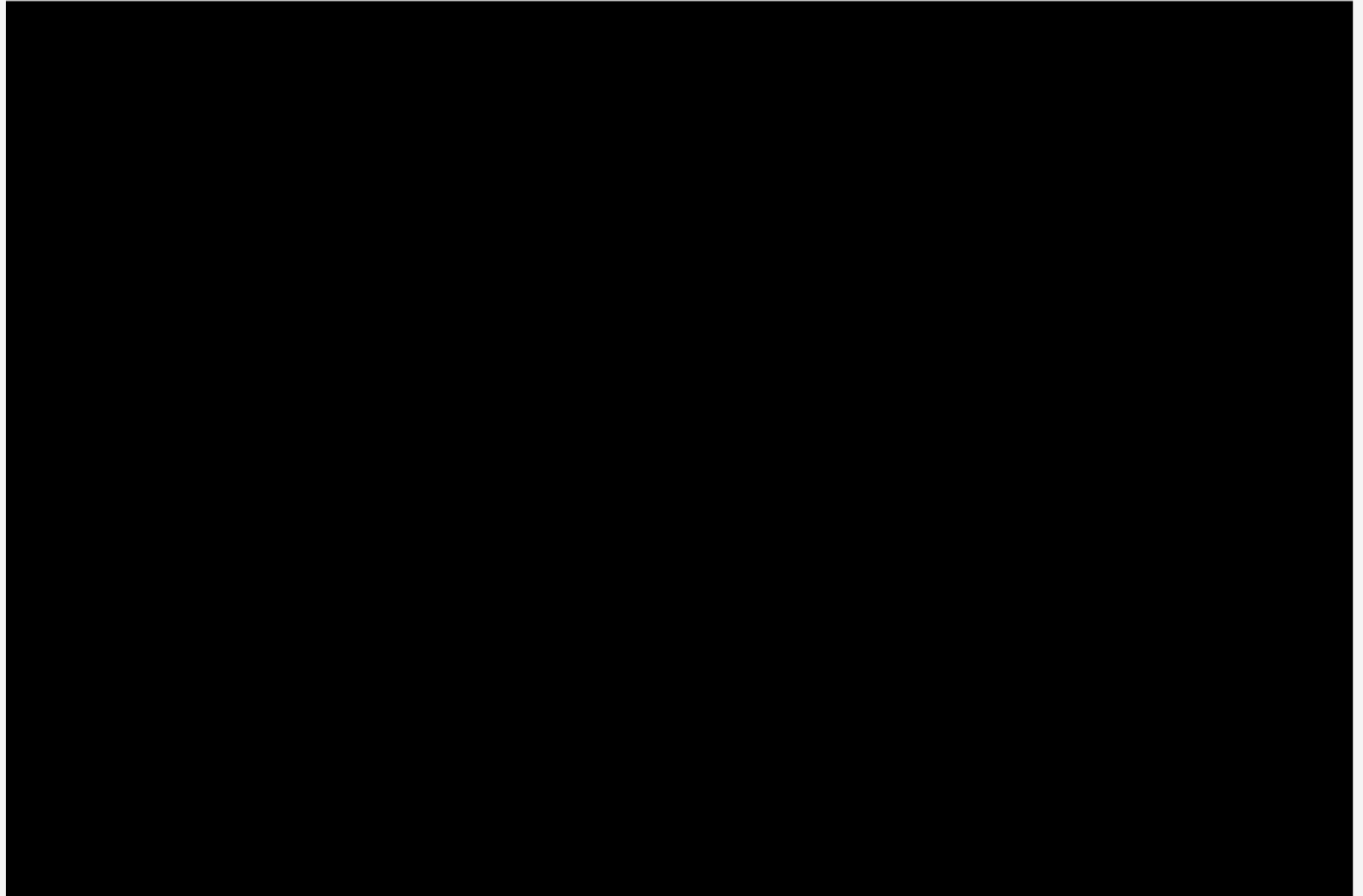
While most of the current crop of Android flagships sport good, or sometimes great, cameras, there's a fair bit of variance and the camera quality of many mid-rangers doesn't come close to the quality of iPhone cameras. As you'd expect, most budget Android phones have lower quality cameras.

The camera apps on both platforms are very good and very fast. For ease of use and best results without tweaking, the iOS camera app takes the cake. There's more variation on Android simply because OEMs tend to add their own camera apps with lots of features, some good, some a bit gimmicky. We're going to give this one to iOS, but with the caveat that the top Android phones, particularly the Pixel 2, offer the best smartphone camera experience around.

experience around.

**Winner: iOS**

## Photo backup



If you use the Photos app in Android, then you can automatically back up all your photos and videos. There's no doubt that Google Photos is the best option because it offers unlimited free storage, provided you don't mind the 16-megapixel limit for images and the 1080p resolution limit for video.

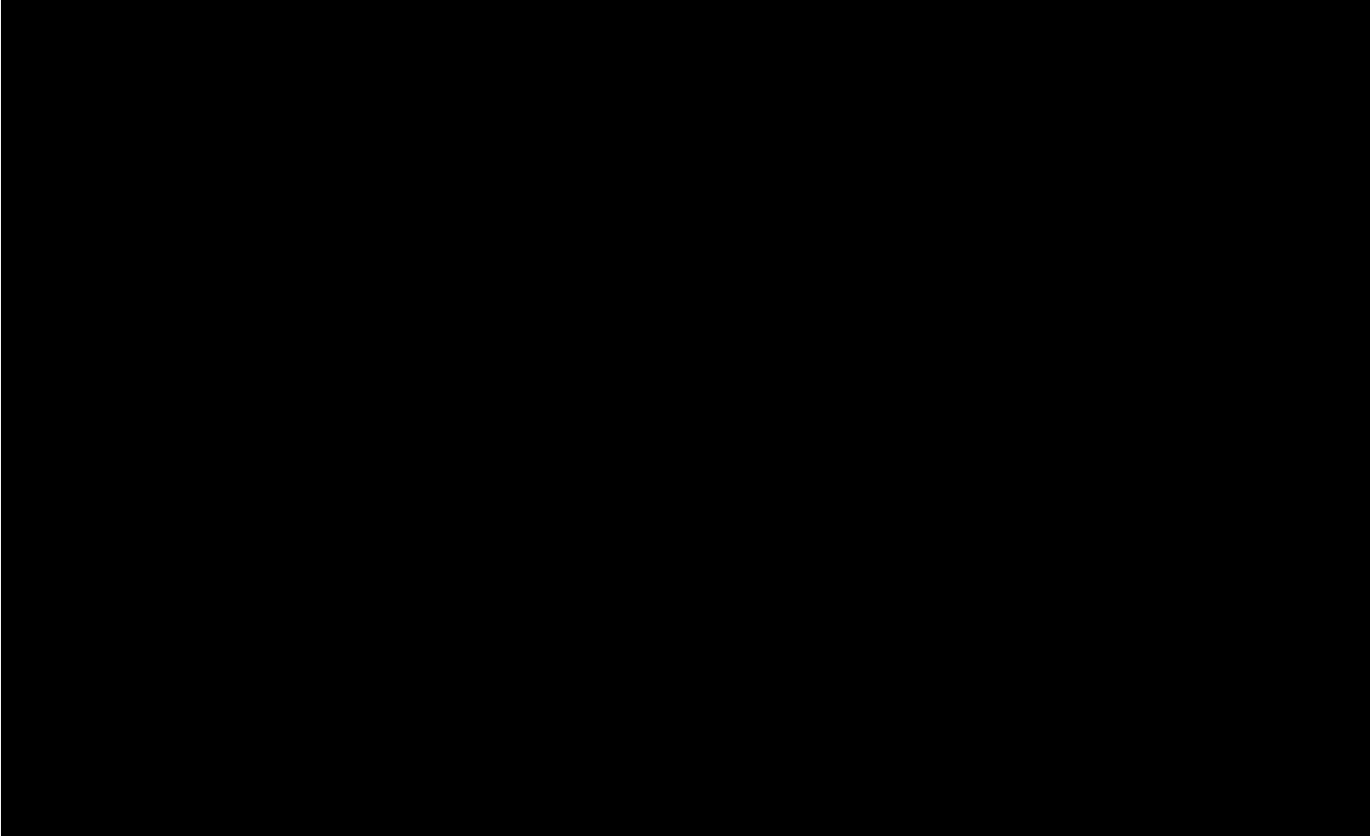
You can back up photos and videos at the original resolution with iCloud or Google Photos, but you only get 5GB of free space with iCloud, compared to 15GB with Google Drive. You can also back up unlimited photos and videos in full resolution with Google Photos if you own a Google-branded Pixel phone.

This category is complicated by the fact that the default on iOS is iCloud, but you can also use Google's Photos on iOS. However, since most people go with the default option, we're giving Android the win here.

**Winner: Android**

## Cloud services





Apple is still lagging when it comes to cloud storage and automatic backups. Google Drive offers 15GB for free and has cross-platform support. You only get 5GB with iCloud, and it only works with Windows, Mac, and iOS.

If you need a lot of additional space, then Google Drive was the cheapest at \$2 per month for 100GB (\$24 for the year), but Apple dropped its prices to match. Apple charges \$1 per month for 50GB. They both offer 1TB for \$10 per month.

Android's cloud storage is easier to use and more effective than iCloud, though you can use Google Drive on an iPhone, whereas iCloud is iOS only.

**Winner: Android**

## **Voice assistants**





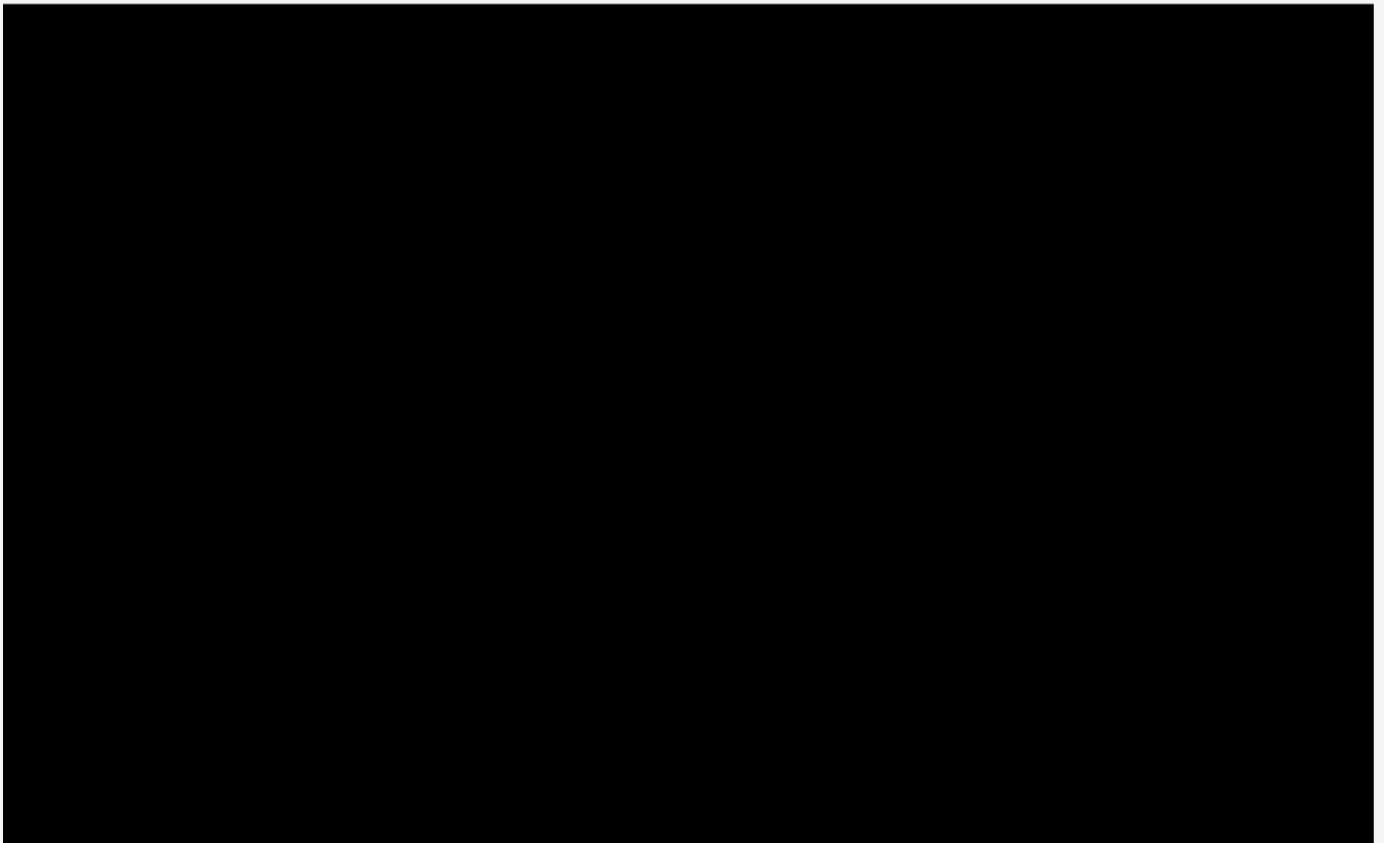
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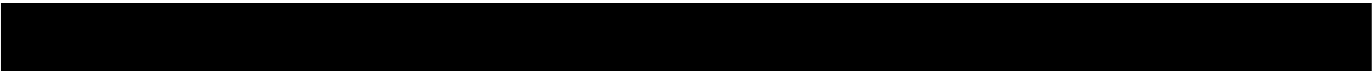
You can do many of the same things with Apple's Siri as you can with Google Assistant, but Siri is more like a straightforward helper for setting calendar appointments, searching the web, or making calls. Google Assistant has an extra layer. It can pre-emptively offer useful suggestions, and it has a more conversational side that offers up entertaining games and contextual information based on what you're doing. It's smarter and more versatile than Siri.

The addition of Siri Shortcuts in iOS 12, allowing you to set up voice commands to trigger groups of automated tasks, is a big step in the right direction and Siri is also beginning to make more suggestions based on your iPhone usage, but for now, Google Assistant can do more.

**Winner: Android**

## Security





Much has been made of the supposedly “toxic hell stew” that is Android, but the threat of malware is exaggerated. The truth is that most people will never encounter a problem because they don’t go outside the Play Store for apps. Specific manufacturers like [Samsung](#) have taken extra efforts to beef up security for the enterprise market. But the slovenly nature of updates on many Android devices can seriously delay important security patches.

Speedy updates are now more important than ever because security breaches are becoming more serious. Android is behind in the update world, unless you have a stock Android device, and so it’s less secure. Because millions of Android phones are still running software that’s years old they can be vulnerable to serious hacks like [Heartbleed](#) and [Stagefright](#).

Apple is already firmly entrenched in corporate America and has also worked on improved security for general consumers, most notably with Touch ID and FaceID in the [iPhone X](#). The tight oversight that Apple has on apps and the ability to push updates out to more devices, more quickly, gives it a definite edge over Android. The company also encrypts data in iMessage and its other apps.

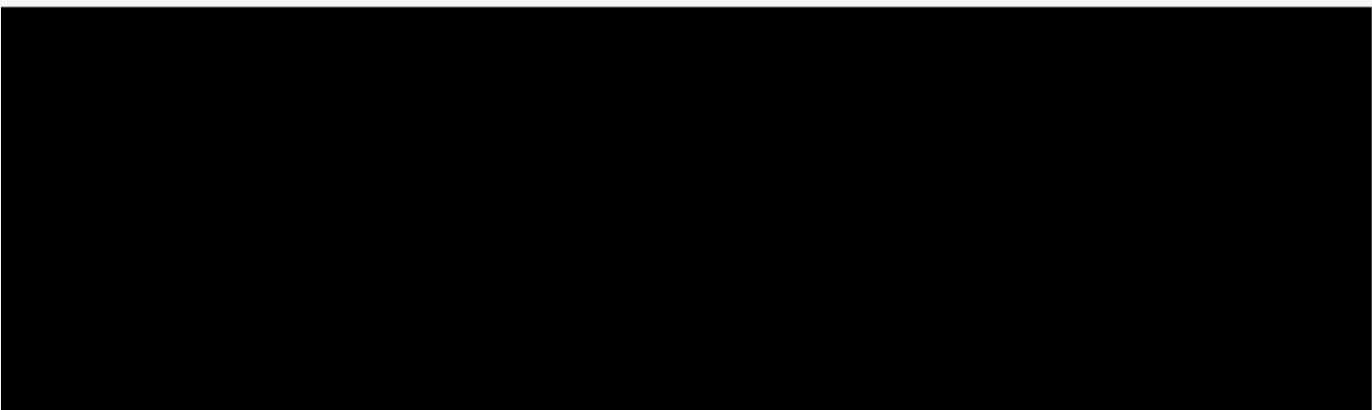
Apple prioritizes user privacy, so you can feel safe knowing your personal data is not stored or read by Apple. It is all encrypted, too. Meanwhile, Android encrypts some data, but your privacy is less protected. Google mines your data for information that it can use to sell better ads and market products to you. Your data is also stored and read to provide you with a better AI experience.

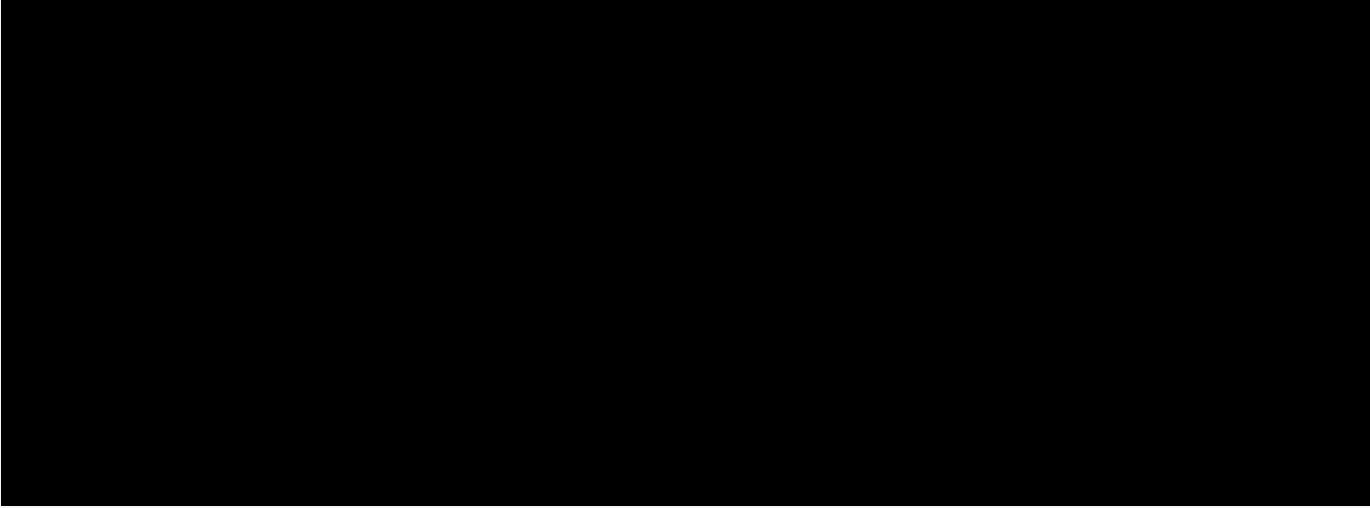
Google claims it’s committed to fully protect user privacy and still provide the AI services it offers, but some security experts and Apple argue that Google presents a false choice between privacy and AI. Apple even went to war with the FBI to guarantee your right to encryption. It’s hard to beat that kind of dedication.

There’s no denying that iOS is the most secure platform and the one that best protects user privacy. If you care about your privacy and security, go with an iPhone.

**Winner: iOS**

## **Rooting, bootloaders, and jailbreaking**





We've looked at [how to root your Android phone or tablet](#) before. It's not for everyone, but if you want root access and complete control over your device, then rooting is the way to get it. Rooting gives you access to more apps, the latest OS updates without waiting, new software skins to get the aesthetic you want, the chance to get rid of bloatware from carriers and manufacturers, potential tweaks to boost your device's speed and battery life, and more.

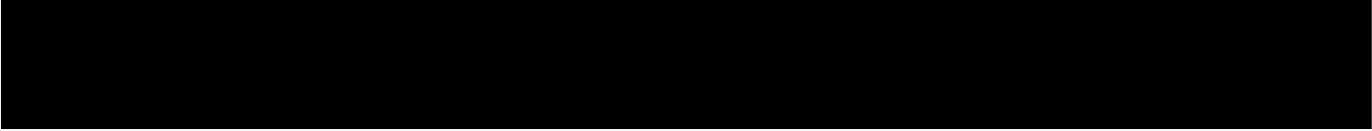
Many Android OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) also offer a way to unlock the bootloader, which determines how the operating system loads up on your device. Apple is completely opposed to this kind of thing. Jailbreaking is an option for iOS, which lets you download and install apps from outside the App Store and bypass some other limitations.

**Winner: Android**

## Cases and accessories







## Native Union Dock

The average iPad or iPhone owner spends more money on more things than the average Android device owner, and Apple has built up a great ecosystem of peripherals for its phones and tablets. There are far more peripherals and cases aimed at the iPhone than any other device, but something like Samsung's Galaxy S9 would be a close second.

On the other hand, Android devices have adopted the Micro USB or USB-C standard, whereas Apple insists on its proprietary Lightning cable, which means it's much easier to find a charger if you're not an iPhone owner. This often means you have to splash out on an overpriced Apple adapter. Peripheral manufacturers may still go after iOS as their main target, but it's very rare to find something without Micro USB or USB-C support.

Another mark against Apple here relates to its abandonment of the standard 3.5mm audio port, which started with the iPhone 7 and iPhone 7 Plus. You do get an adapter in the box, but it's easily lost and the choice of headphones sporting 3.5mm audio jacks far exceeds those with Lightning connectors. Of course, now some Android phones are axing the headphone jack in favor of USB-C audio, so this may not be a difference for much longer.

It's also important to note that Apple's ecosystem of products all work together exceedingly well. The iPad, Apple Watch, MacBook, and HomeKit products all work together in perfect harmony. MacOS, WatchOS, and iOS are all well connected, making it easy to have all Apple products on the same page.

Since Android phones are produced by many different manufacturers, product ecosystems vary. Samsung has a great ecosystem, for example, and Android phones have support from Home, Chromecast, and Android Wear. However, it's not quite as seamless.

Overall, taking all available accessories into account, you have more choice with an iPhone, so iOS takes the win here, but with caveats.

**Winner: iOS**

## Conclusion

Numerically speaking, Android wins 10 categories and iOS wins 8 categories, but iOS wins in some of the more important categories — we don't think rooting or alternative app stores are as important for most people as accessibility or security, for example. It's very difficult to compare the two. Because Apple controls the hardware and the software, you'll find that iOS offers a more uniform experience across devices.

A straight comparison of the latest versions of Android and iOS wouldn't be very representative of most people's experience, because most Android devices aren't running the latest version. The experience you get is further

experience, because most Android devices aren't running the latest version. The experience you get is further complicated by the fact that most Android smartphone manufacturers add their own user interface on top of Google's stock Android. As a result, there's quite a big difference between using Google's Pixel 2, the Samsung Galaxy S9, and the LG G7 ThinQ, for example.

If you do decide to go with an Android device, make sure you do a little research and look at the version of Android it runs, the manufacturer skin on top, and the manufacturer's record for software updates.

Ultimately, different categories will be important to different people, so you should pay attention to the ones that count for you and make your decision based on that. If security and privacy are an important factor, then the iPhone is the obvious choice. If battery life is top of your list and you want to be able to customize your phone, then choose Android. Both Android and iOS are mature, feature-packed platforms with far more similarities than differences, and we can heartily recommend either.

## Editors' Recommendations

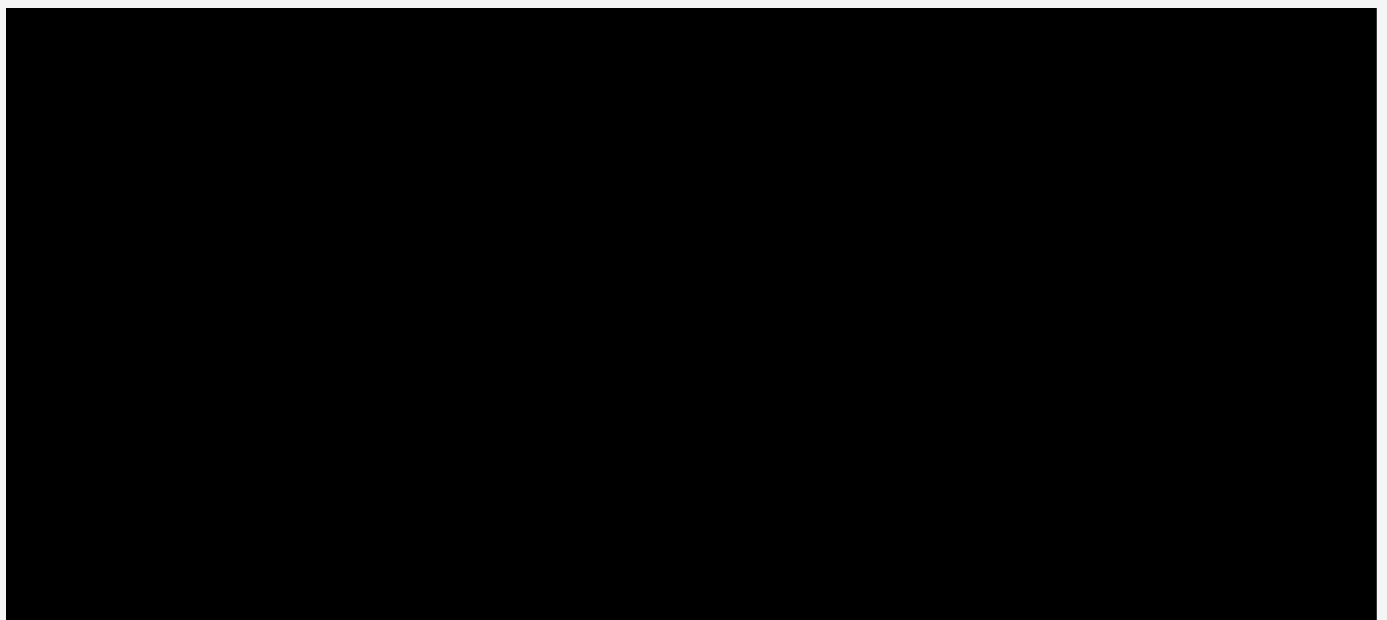
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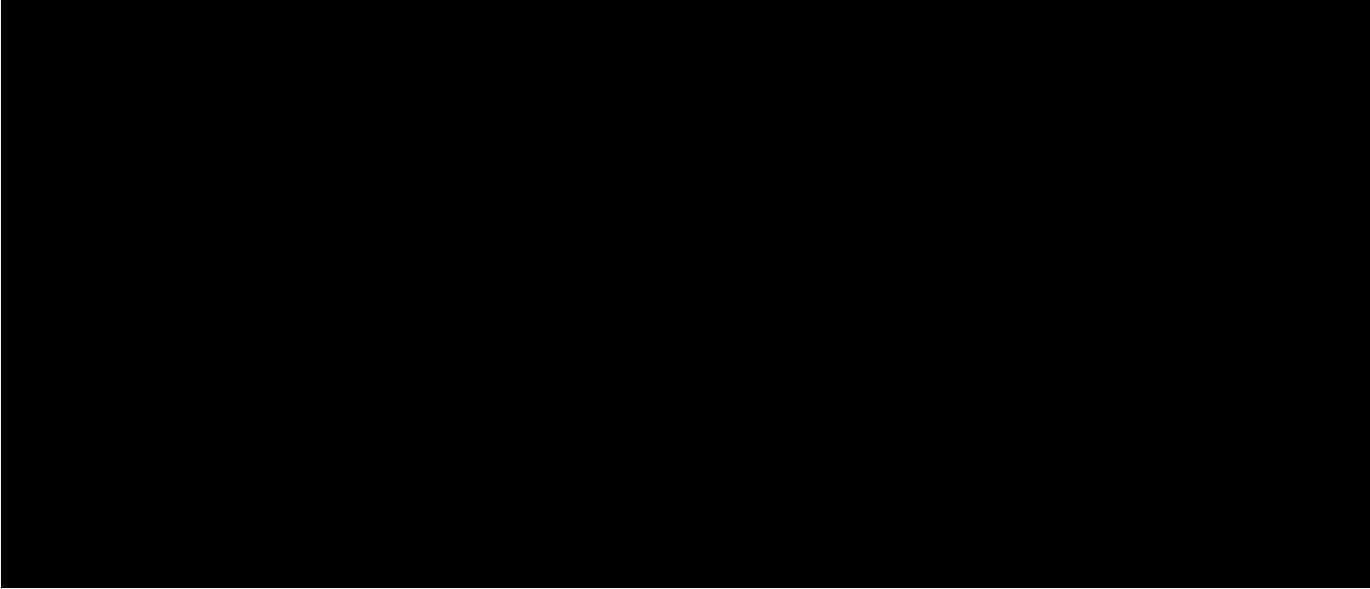
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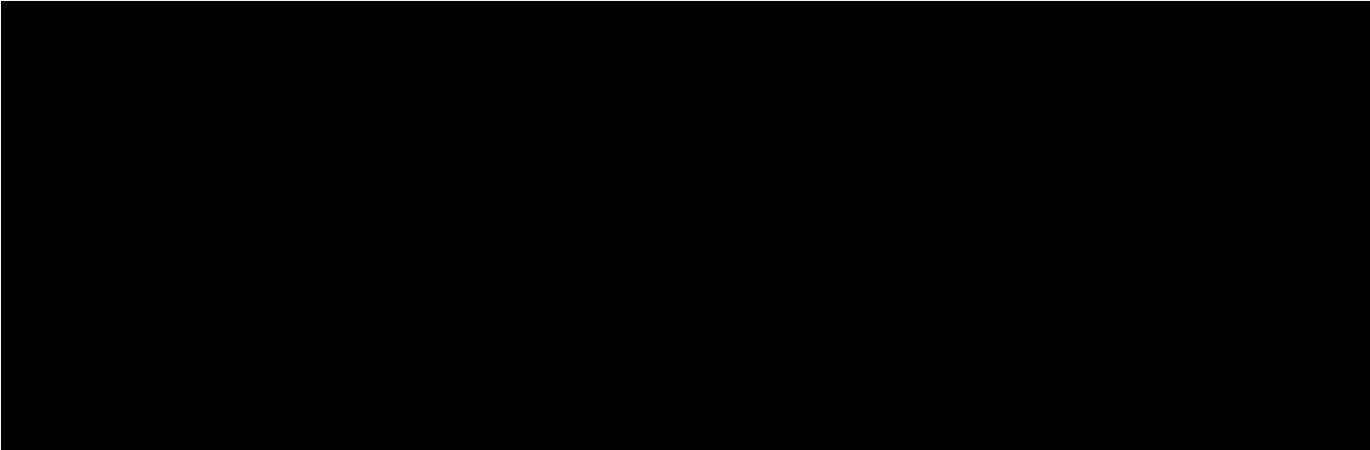
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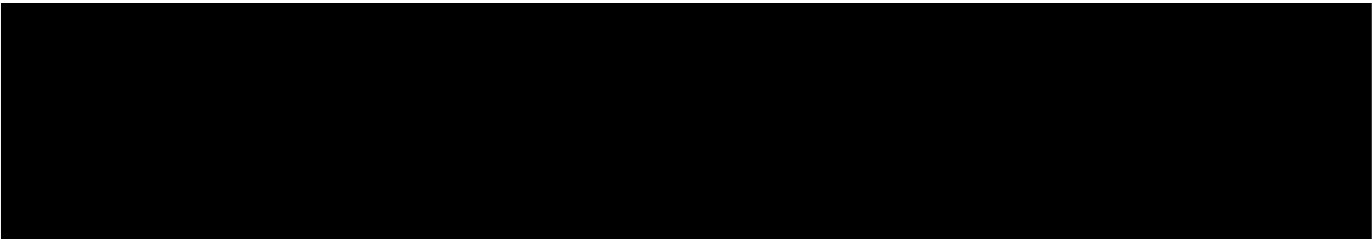
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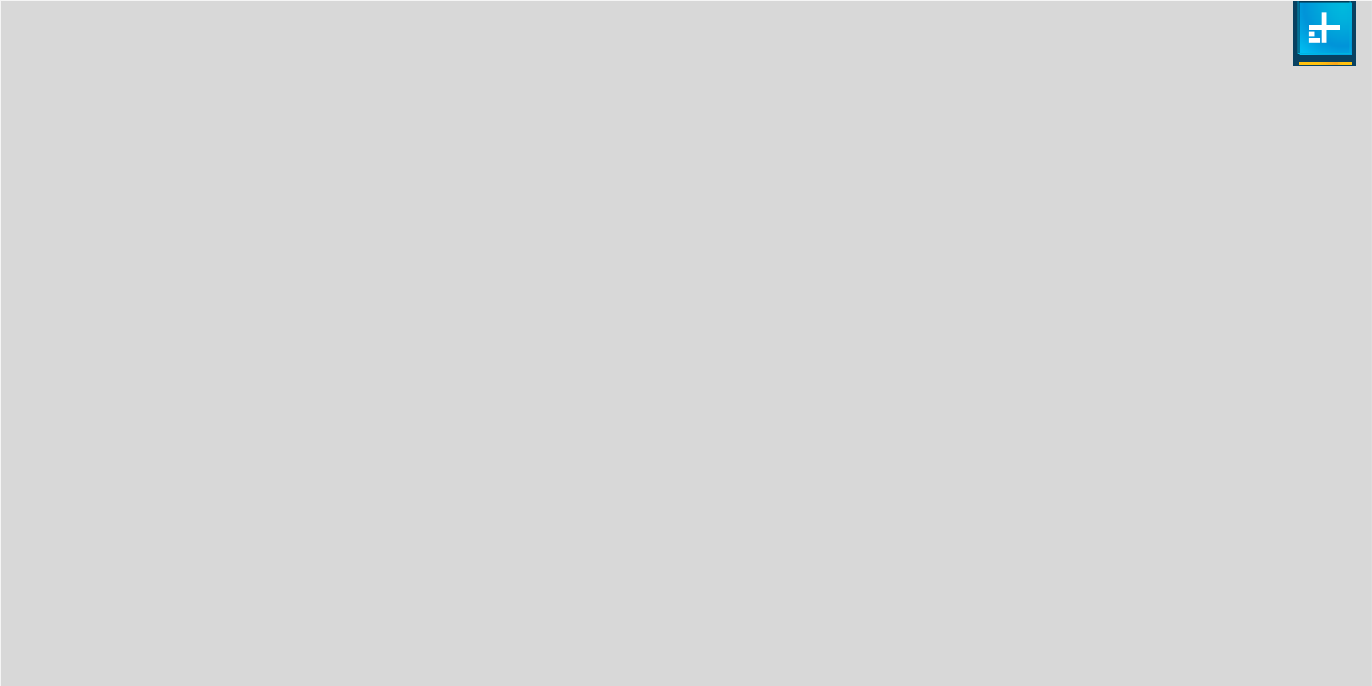




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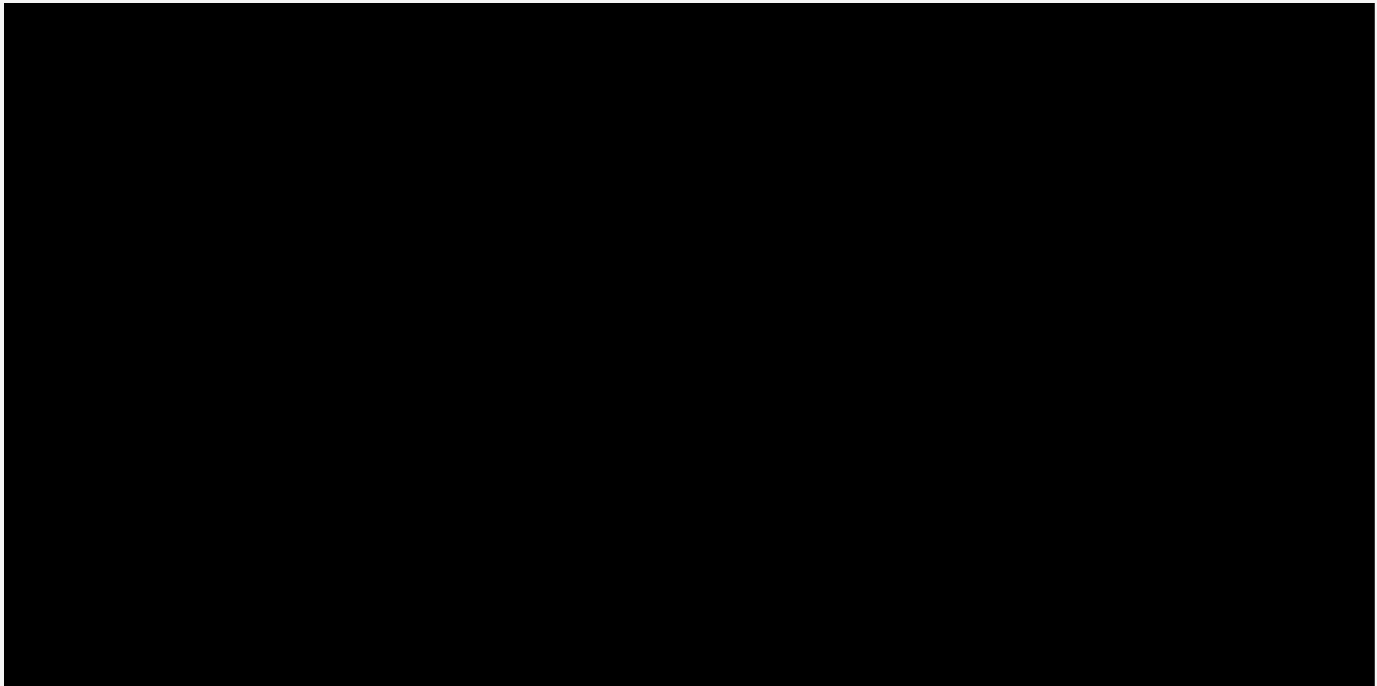
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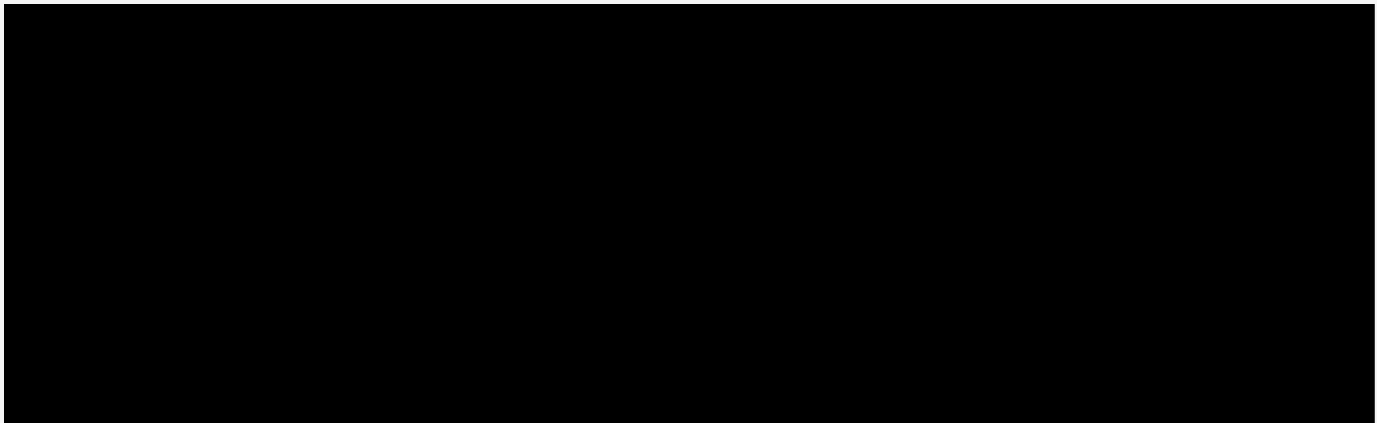
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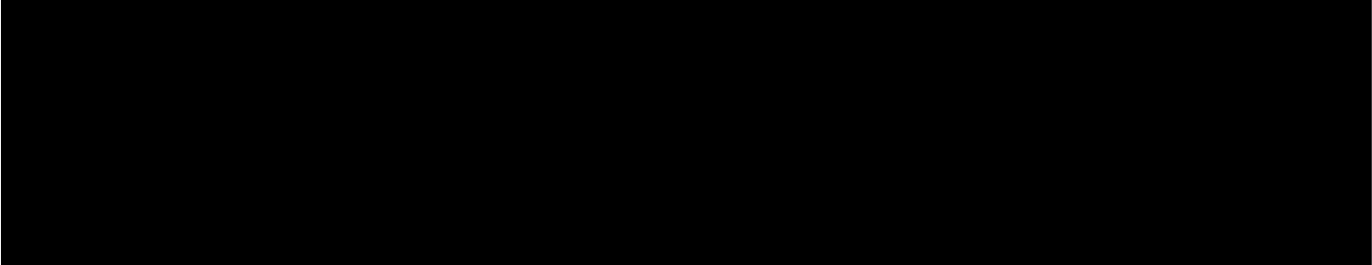
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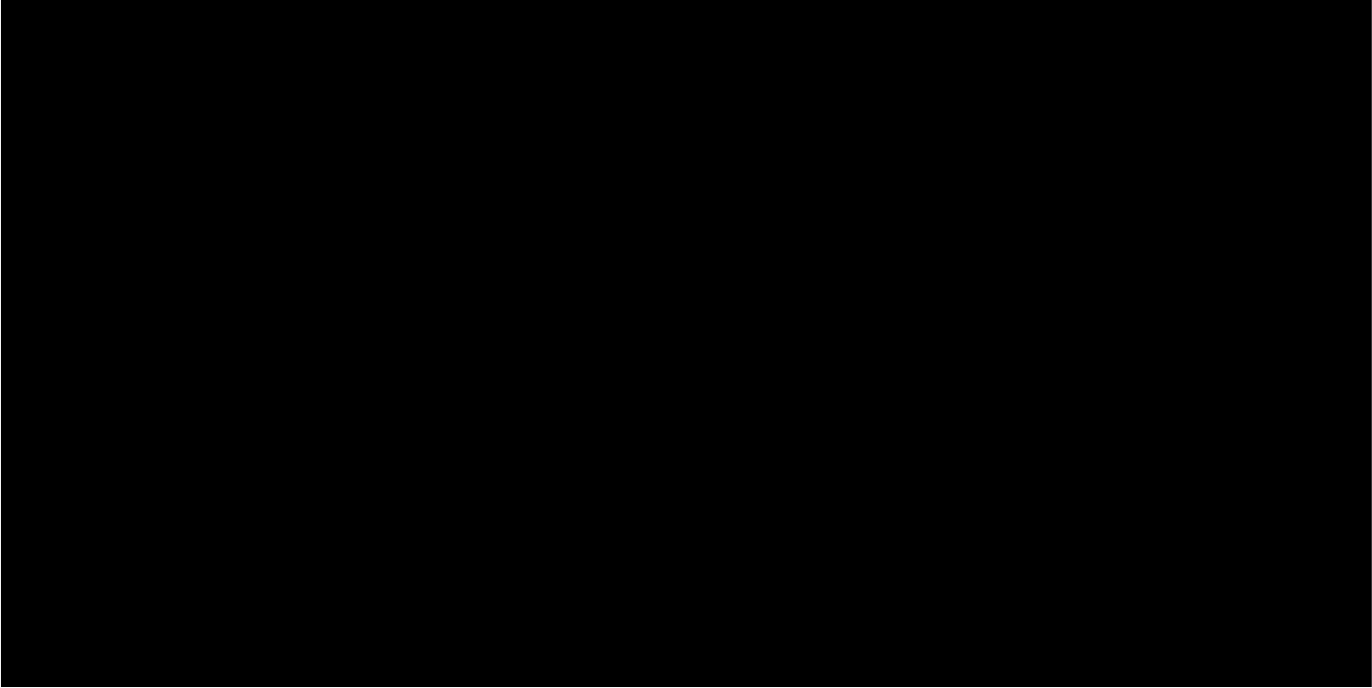
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