

CHROMEBOOK VS. TABLET:

WHICH SHOULD YOU BUY?



TABLETS

VS



CHROMEBOOKS

LAPTOP
ENRICH YOUR **MOBILE** LIFE

Chromebook vs. Tablet: Which Should You Buy?



On the surface, they seem quite different. Tablets are mostly considered content-consumption devices, whereas Chromebooks are often viewed as cheap laptop replacements. But as the app and keyboard options improve for slates, and Chromebooks learn to do more offline, you might be wondering which type of device is the better investment. Chromebooks start at \$199 (\$249 with touch). Smaller tablets cost about the same as Chromebooks, but slates with larger displays cost \$379 and up .

So, which is the better choice for you? We considered your everyday needs — from portability and display to productivity and battery life — to determine whether tablets or Chromebooks are the better buy.

Portability

Most large tablets are half the weight of Chromebooks. The iPad Air, ASUS Transformer Pad TF701T and Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1 (2014) are 1.05, 1.28 and 1.23 pounds, respectively. In comparison, the HP Chromebook 11, Acer Chromebook C720 and Samsung's Chromebook Series 3 weigh 2.2, 2.6 and 2.4 pounds, respectively. That pound or so can make a big difference if you're carrying your tech all day.



The average full-size tablet is also smaller than a Chromebook. The iPad Air is just 9.4 x 6.6 x 0.29 inches, and the Note 10.1 measures 9.57 x 6.75 x 0.31 inches. Chromebooks, such as Samsung's Series 3 (11.4 x 8.1 x 0.7 inches) and Acer's C720 (11.34 x 8.03 x 0.75 inches), are generally larger, mostly because they are full-size laptops with keyboards.

Smaller tablets are just a fraction of the size and weight of a Chromebook. For example, the 7-inch Kindle Fire HDX weighs only 10.7 ounces.

Companion docks for tablets add significant heft, but the combined packages still typically weigh less than a Chromebook. The Surface 2 running Windows RT weighs 2.05 pounds with its Type Cover, and the iPad Air weighs 2.1 pounds when you add a third-party keyboard like the Belkin Slim Style Keyboard. Plus, slates boast on-screen keyboards, so you can ditch a physical setup for true portability.

WINNER: Tablets. Although Chromebooks feel sturdier as clamshells, tablets let you travel more lightly and decide whether to use the keyboard or leave it behind.

MORE: Tablet Buyers' Guide 2013: 5 Questions to Ask Before You Buy

Display

With the exception of the very pricey Chromebook Pixel, Chromebooks are lagging in the resolution department. Most models sport displays with 1366 x 768 pixels, which is fine for everyday tasks such as surfing the Web and watching movies, but not ideal for viewing high-res photos or playing games. So far, only the \$299 Acer Chromebook C720P and Chromebook Pixel (\$1,299) feature touch screens.



Display resolutions are inching higher and higher on tablets, with Apple, ASUS and Samsung tablets sporting resolutions of 2048 x 1536 pixels and higher for crisp, detailed images. Even smaller tablets offer sharper displays for less money. The Kindle Fire HDX and Nexus 7 both pack 1920 x 1200p screens.

Slates also boast brighter screens, with the average tablet measuring 359 lux on our brightness meter. The Chromebooks we've seen had dimmer screens of 271 lux (HP's Chromebook 11), 176 lux (Samsung Series 3) and 120 lux (Acer C720).

WINNER: Tablets. Higher resolutions, brighter screens and having touch screens come standard make tablet displays better.

Pointing Devices

Yes, you use your fingers on a tablet, but using them for precise tasks can be less than ideal. For instance, when you want to select text or tiny cells on a giant spreadsheet, nothing beats a touchpad and cursor. Touchpads come on all Chromebooks. Plus, you can hook up an external mouse for a traditional desktop experience.



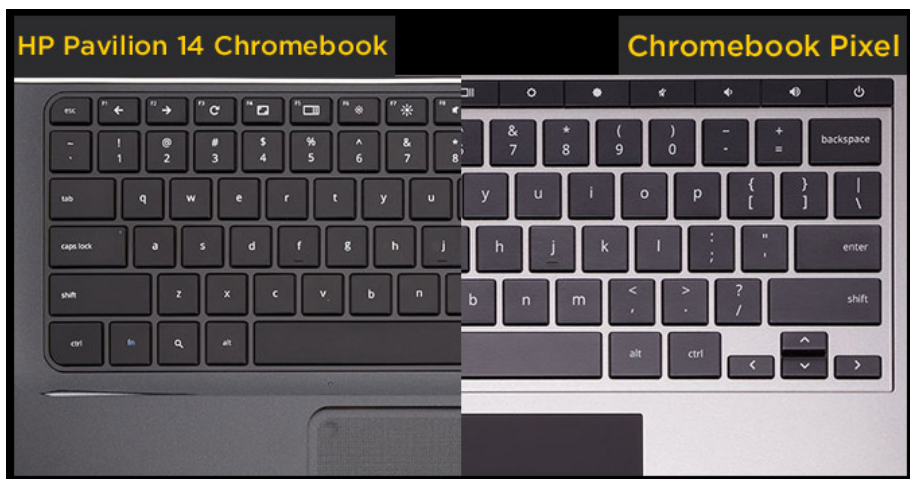
If your pointing device of choice is a stylus, plenty of hardware options are available for tablets, including models with a built-in pen (such as the Samsung Galaxy Note series) and third-party options for other slates like the iPad.

WINNER: Chromebooks. We prefer the traditional point-and-click experience on Chromebooks, particularly when trying to get work done.

MORE: Best Chrome Apps 2013

Keyboard and Typing

Chromebooks, by their very nature, come with a full-size keyboard attached. The typing experience varies, but the models we've tested from Acer, HP and Samsung all offered responsive layouts. You'll also find shortcut keys for Chrome OS functions, such as Forward, Back and Search.



Third-party keyboards for tablets such as the iPad Air range in price from \$79 to \$149. You'll find plenty of good options from vendors like Belkin and Logitech, though the responsiveness usually doesn't measure up to that seen on Chromebook keyboards.



Both ASUS and Microsoft make proprietary keyboard docks for the Transformer Pad TF701T and Surface tablets, respectively, that cost in that same price range. Third-party, generic Android keyboards cost less (starting at \$15), but

sometimes exhibit flex and may have compatibility issues with your slate.

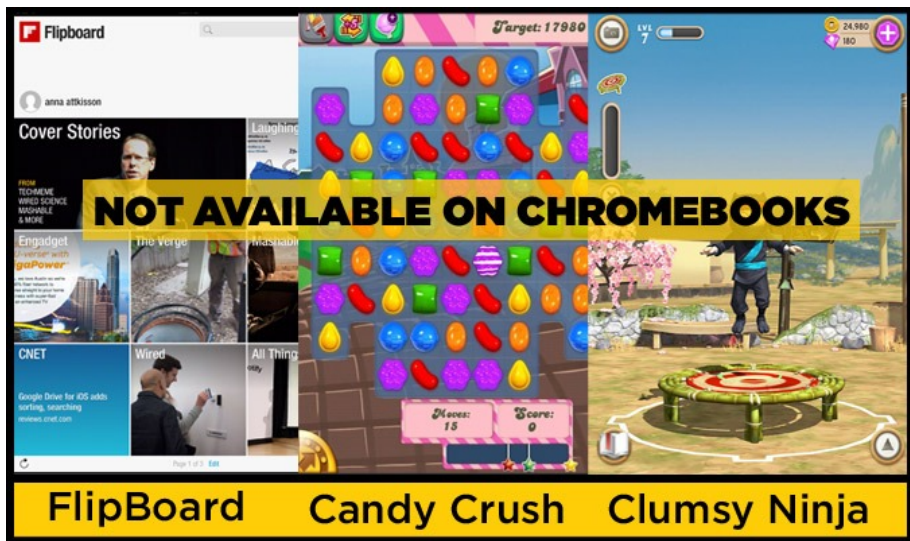
WINNER: Chromebooks. Integrated keyboards work better and tend to offer a more comfortable typing experience.

App Selection

Since Chromebooks run Google's own Chrome OS, you can only use Chrome apps on them. You won't be able to install traditional laptop software, such as the Microsoft Office suite or Adobe Photoshop. There are Chrome apps that are adequate substitutes for those programs, such as Google Docs and Pixlr Editor, but they may not be as full-featured.

Google says there are tens of thousands of apps available in the Chrome Web Store, all of which can be used on your Chromebook. Compare this to the 800,000 and growing Android apps and 475,000 iOS apps available for tablets, and it's obvious Chromebooks have a lot of catching up to do.

While games such as "Angry Birds" and "Cut the Rope" are available in Google's app store, you'll miss other titles, such as Instagram and Vine, which don't offer browser-based versions. Of the top 10 free and paid apps in the Apple App Store and the Google Play store, only 12.5 percent of titles were available from their original makers, including Weatherbug, Bitstrips, YouTube, Facebook and Hatch (for Twitter).



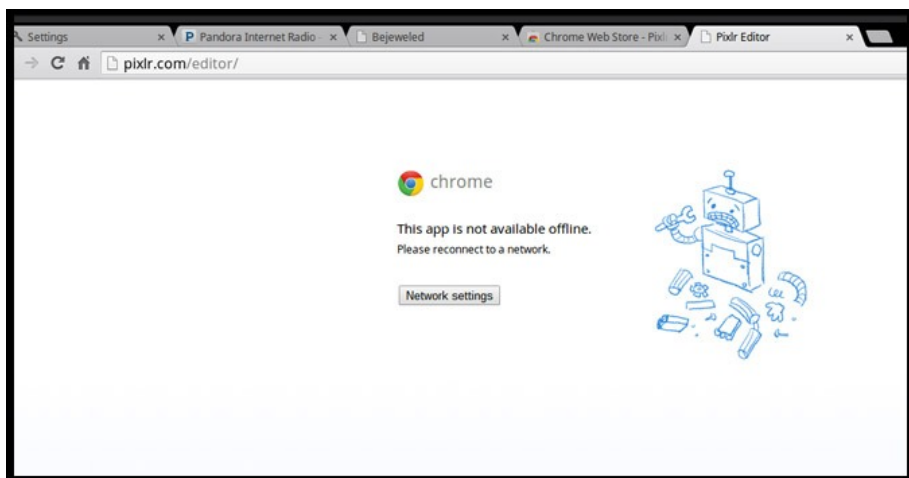
Others — including “Candy Crush,” Snapchat and “Clumsy Ninja” — aren’t officially available, but imitation versions abound. Most of them are also free. Granted, many iOS or Android apps simply don’t work on Chromebooks or laptops because they are designed only for mobile use.

WINNER: Tablets. Whether it’s an Android, Apple or even Windows tablet, app selections are generally better for slates.

MORE: 25 Best Android Apps

Offline Capability

Both tablets and Chromebooks rely on an Internet connection, but Google’s platform is more limited. It’s true that hundreds of apps work offline in Chromebooks, including Google’s own Drive, and third-party titles such as “Angry Birds” and diagram editor Gliffy. However, you will have to enable Offline Mode on Chromebooks to use your email or documents when you’re not connected to the Internet. Also, apps such as Pandora, Pixlr Editor and “Bejeweled” do not work without a connection.

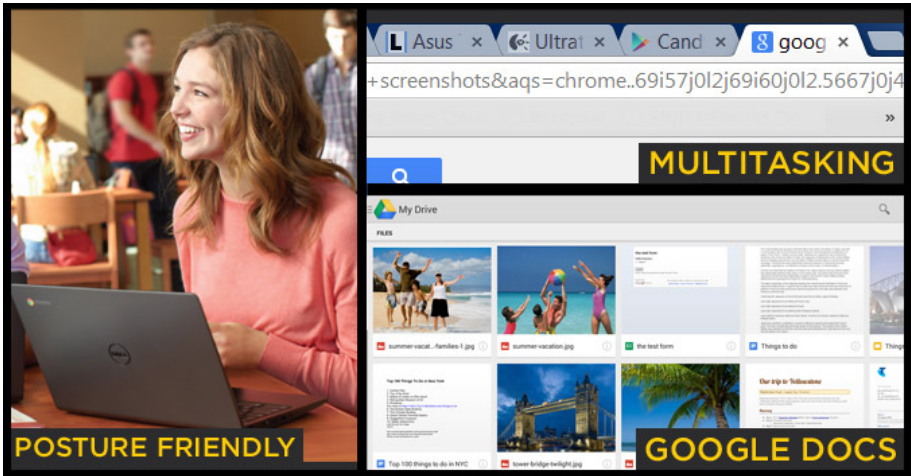


A huge selection of apps downloaded to tablets — whether it's productivity apps like Pages, games such as "Riptide GP 2," or photo- or video-editing apps — can be used offline.

WINNER: Tablets. Chromebooks can do some things offline, but tablets are more versatile without a 4G or Wi-Fi connection.

Productivity

With Google Docs, familiar keyboard shortcuts (Ctrl-Z, Ctrl-X, Ctrl-V) and a posture-friendly setup, Chromebooks are companions for getting real work done. Multitasking is also fairly easy, as you'll mostly be shifting between tabs in the browser. You can also use the system bar to switch between apps.



iOS tablets benefit from Apple's free iWork suite, as well as a wide range of third-party office suites. You can use Google Drive on Android or the Google-owned QuickOffice (in addition to multiple third-party options). And several Windows tablets (running Windows RT and cheaper options running Windows 8.1) come with Microsoft Office and Student built in.

Windows tablets and Android devices from Samsung and ASUS offer nifty multiwindow and multitasking software, allowing you to see more windows on the screen at once.

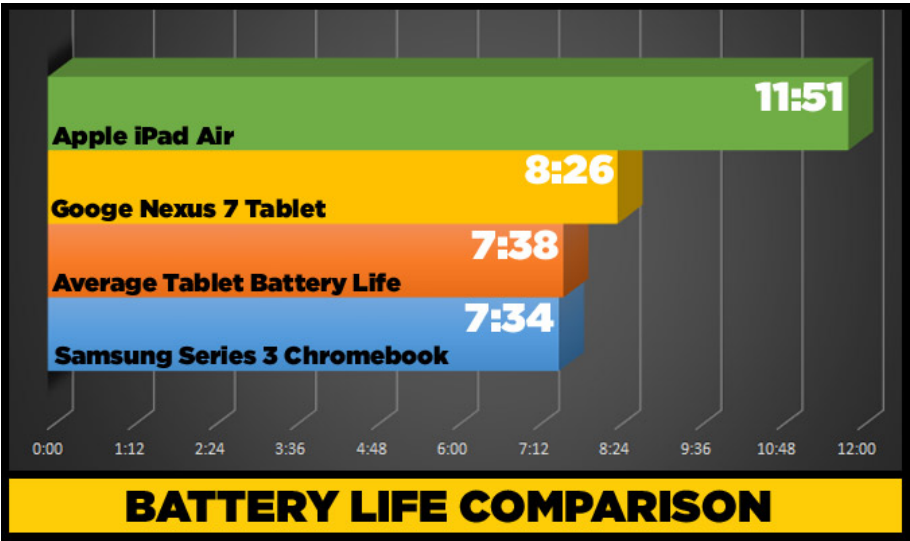


Although they were initially designed for reading and entertainment, tablets have improved on the productivity front. There are plenty of office apps that let you create documents, spreadsheets and presentations.

WINNER: Tie. Although Chromebooks have the advantage of a built-in keyboard, tablets offer office suites that are just as robust as Google Docs, as well as better multitasking features.

Battery Life

Chromebooks and tablets both tend to last a long time on a charge, but the best slates offer better endurance. The average slate runs about 7 hours and 38 minutes on a charge, according to our LAPTOP Battery Test (continuous Web browsing over Wi-Fi). However, some models last considerably longer. For example, the iPad Air lasted nearly 12 hours on our test, and the Nexus 7 lasted 8.5 hours.



We loaded the same test on the Samsung Series 3 Chromebook, which lasted a good but shorter 7 hours and 34 minutes. Other Chromebooks couldn't run our battery test, but we streamed video on Hulu for 6.5 hours on the Acer C720.

WINNER: Tablets. In general, tablets last longer on a charge.

MORE: 10 Tablets with the Longest Battery Life

Value

Both tablets and Chromebooks cost less than the average laptop, but Chromebooks are getting significantly cheaper than the high-quality tablets on the market. For instance, the Acer C720 is available for \$199 via Amazon and Best Buy. The sleek, long-lasting Samsung Series 3 now costs just \$249 on Newegg and other channels, while HP's Chromebook 14 gives you a larger screen (14 inches, compared with 12 inches or less on other Chromebooks) for \$259 on Newegg.

In comparison, the iPad Air (starting at \$499), Surface 2 (starting at \$449) and 2014 Galaxy Note 10.1 (\$549) all cost more — and that's without companion keyboards. Adding one — such as the Belkin QODE Ultimate Keyboard Case (\$129) for the iPad Air, or a Zegg Folio with Backlit Keyboard (\$99) — brings the total cost to \$598 for the Apple slate. The Surface 2's Touch Cover (\$79) brings its total starting cost to \$528, while Samsung's Galaxy keyboard dock for the Note 10.1 adds \$99 to its \$549 price tag, setting you back \$648 in total.











While smaller tablets — such as the Dell Venue 8 and ASUS MeMO Pad HD 7 — start at just \$199, you would have to shell out extra for a keyboard, making it less of a bargain. You can also get some tablets with keyboards for just \$349, such as the ASUS Transformer Book T100, but that's more expensive than a Chromebook.

WINNER: Chromebooks. Larger slates have a higher starting price, and you need to spend more to get a keyboard for a tablet.

Verdict

Ultimately, your decision between a Chromebook and a tablet should be based on how you're going to use your new device. If you're looking for a cheap laptop alternative and want a built-in keyboard, a Chromebook is a safe bet. Overall, though, tablets win this face-off, taking five rounds out of nine, and tying in one more. Chromebooks won three rounds outright (Keyboard and Typing, Pointing Devices, and Value), and tied in one (Productivity).

SCORECARD FACE-OFF

	TABLETS	CHROMEBOOKS
Portability		
Display		
Pointing Devices		
Keyboard and Typing		
App Selection		
Offline Capability		
Productivity		
Battery Life		
Value		
TOTAL POINTS	6	4

Tablets are more portable (even when you throw in a keyboard or dock), tend to offer brighter displays and feature a much wider array of apps than Chromebooks do. And while Chromebooks are more capable than they once were in terms of offline capability, you can still do more with a tablet. Plus, the better tablets last longer on a charge than your typical Chromebook.

If you're going to use your new device primarily for going online, a Chromebook might be a better bet than a big-screen tablet, if you want to save cash. For our money, however, a tablet is the better investment.

THE WINNER



TABLETS



Recommended by

AUTHOR BIO



Cherlynn Low

Cherlynn joined the Laptopmag team in June 2013 and has since been writing about all things tech and digital with a focus on mobile and Internet software development. She also edits and reports occasionally on video. She graduated with a M.S. in Journalism (Broadcast) from Columbia University in May 2013 and has been designing personal websites since 2001.

Cherlynn Low on

