Determine which computer fits your mobile computing needs. Before purchasing a notebook computer, determine whether a traditional notebook computer, netbook, or Tablet PC will meet your needs. If you spend most of your time working on spreadsheets, writing and/or editing documents, sending and responding to e-mail messages, or using the Internet, then a traditional notebook computer will suffice. If your primary use will be to access the Internet while traveling and you are not concerned as much with processing power or hard disk capacity, consider a netbook. If you need a computer in class or you spend more time in meetings than in your office, then the Tablet PC may be the answer.

Purchase a notebook computer with a sufficiently large screen. Notebook computers typically include a 12.1-inch, 13.3-inch, 14.1-inch, 15.4-inch, or 17-inch display. Netbooks have screens as small as 7 inches. For most users, a 14.1-inch display is adequate. If you intend to use the notebook computer as a replacement for a desktop computer, however, you may opt for a 15.4-inch or 17-inch display. Some of the notebook computers with these larger displays weigh more than 10 pounds, however, so if you travel a lot and portability is essential, consider a lighter computer with a smaller display.

Be sure the notebook computer has an optical disc drive.Most notebook computers include an optical disc drive. Although DVD/Blu-ray Disc drives are somewhat more expensive, they allow you to play CDs, DVDs, and Blu-ray Discs using your notebook computer and hear the sound through earbuds. If you decide to purchase a netbook, it might not include an optical disc drive. Instead, you might need to purchase an external optical disc drive.

If possible, upgrade components at the time of your purchase.Upgrading the memory, processor, and hard disk storage on a notebook computer usually is less expensive at the time of initial purchase. Some disk storage is custom designed for notebook computer manufacturers, meaning an upgrade might not be available in the future.

Determine the ports needed.If you know the purpose for which you plan to use the notebook computer, then you can determine the ports you will need. Most notebook computers have common ports, such as a video port, audio port, network port, FireWire port, and multiple USB ports. Netbooks typically have fewer ports.

Purchase a notebook computer with an integrated Web cam.If you will use the notebook computer to connect to the Internet and chat with friends online, consider purchasing the computer with an integrated Web cam.

Check with your wireless carrier to see if it offers netbooks for sale.Most wireless carriers now offer wireless data plans allowing you to connect to the Internet from almost anywhere with a cell phone signal. Some wireless carriers now are selling netbooks with built-in capability to connect wirelessly to the Internet using a wireless data plan.

Ensure the computer has a built-in wireless network connection. A wireless network connection (Bluetooth, Wi-Fi a/b/g/n, WiMAX, etc.) can be useful when you travel or as part of a home network. Increasingly more airports, hotels, schools, and cafés have wireless networks so that you can connect to the Internet. With a wireless home network, a notebook computer can access the Internet, as well as other computers in the house, from any location to share files and hardware, such as a printer, and browse the Web. Most wireless home networks allow connections from distances of 150 to 800 feet.

Consider purchasing a second battery.The trend among notebook computer users today is power and size over battery life. In addition, some manufacturers typically sell the notebook computer with the lowest capacity battery. For this reason, be careful in choosing a notebook computer if you plan to use it without access to electrical outlets for long periods, such as an airplane flight. You might want to purchase a second battery as a backup. If you anticipate running the notebook computer on batteries frequently, choose a computer that uses lithium-ion batteries, which last longer than nickel cadmium or nickel hydride batteries.

Purchase a well-padded and well-designed carrying case. An amply padded carrying case will protect your notebook computer from the bumps it will receive while traveling. A well-designed carrying case will have room for accessories such as spare optical discs, pens, and paperwork. 🞍