

- » Understanding what makes a Chromebook tick
- » Selecting your very own Chromebook
- » Using your Chromebook for the first time
- » Switching to Chromebook from Windows, Mac, or Linux

Chapter **1**

Choosing and Setting Up Your Chromebook

Google rocked the computer world in 2011 with the introduction of the Chromebook because there was nothing on the market quite like it. It was, and still is, an affordable laptop that offers an internet-centric platform. Today, more than 50 million Chromebooks are used in classrooms by teachers and students in blended learning environments that allow students to have unlimited access to educational resources. Chromebooks are also increasingly being used by businesses, remote workers, and digital nomads that need an inexpensive laptop that allows them to work from the office, home, or the nearest coffee shop. The Chromebook has evolved far from its humble beginnings and will likely be the only laptop you need.

In this chapter, I discuss what makes the Chromebook so compelling compared to other personal computers on the market. I also take an in-depth look at how to set up your Chromebook and prepare you to transition to Chromebook from Windows, Mac, or Linux.

A Chromebook is very easy to use and understand. Easier, I'd say, than a Windows computer or even a Mac. In fact, a Chromebook is about as easy to use as an iPhone, iPad, or Android.

Checking Under the Hood of the Chromebook

In short, a Chromebook is a laptop computer running Google's proprietary operating system, ChromeOS.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The *operating system* (OS) is the software that manages and schedules your computer's primary tasks and functions. You may have a little experience with other popular operating systems such as Windows, Linux, or macOS. Smartphones and tablets also have operating systems; Apple's iPhone OS is called iOS, iPadOS runs on Apple iPads, and the OS that runs on Android tablets and phones is called, um, Android.

ChromeOS is an operating system developed by Google to work primarily with web-based software on laptop and tablet computers. Your experience using your Chromebook will be very similar to previous experiences you may have had surfing the web with the Chrome web browser (or any browser). The Chrome web browser shares many similarities with other web browsers on the market, like Firefox, Edge, and Safari. (See Figure 1-1.)

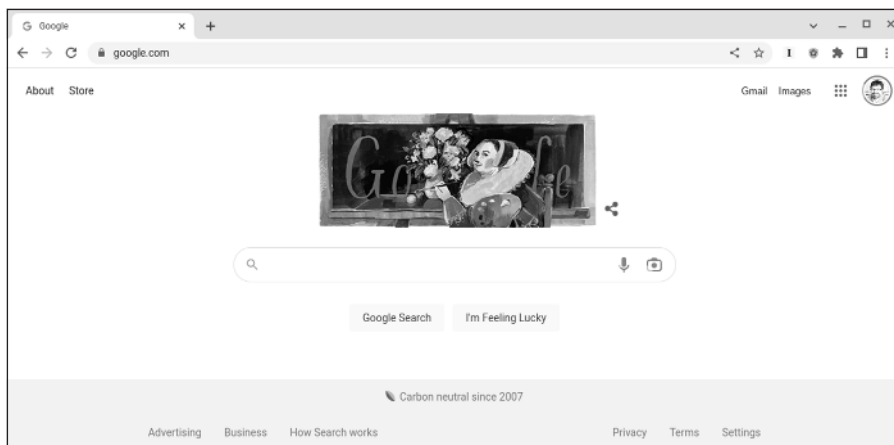


FIGURE 1-1:
The Google
Chrome web
browser.

Illustration courtesy of Peter H. Gregory

Except for the Chromebook Pixel Go, Google isn't manufacturing Chromebooks directly. Instead, Google has licensed several major laptop manufacturers to create them. Manufacturers such as Acer, ASUS, HP, Lenovo, Dell, Toshiba, and Samsung are all making their own Chromebooks with their own technical specifications. They all come with ChromeOS pre-installed.

The software

Much of what you will do on your Chromebook happens in the Chrome web browser. This is because many of the applications you will use on your Chromebook actually reside on the internet. This is one of the things that sets Chromebook apart from other computers: You don't need to install most applications on a Chromebook; instead, you access them from the internet. You find applications through the Chrome Web Store (dubbed CWS) and add them to your Launcher, which, in many cases, means nothing more than creating a bookmark for quick access through your Chrome web browser. This approach can be limiting in some cases, but these cases are rare. Thanks to the vast nature of Google's global computing ecosystem, thousands of great applications are at your fingertips.



REMEMBER

Although some Chromebook applications offer offline features and functionality, you need an internet connection to initially set up your Chromebook and be able to take advantage of everything your Chromebook has to offer. You may assume that Chromebooks are designed for an “always online” lifestyle, but once you have set up your Chromebook, you can definitely do things with it while offline as well.

The hardware

Unlike all other computers on the market that run macOS, Windows, or Linux, not much software is installed on your Chromebook, which means that your Chromebook doesn't need to have vast amounts of hard drive space, memory, or processing power. Most Chromebooks have 4 gigabytes (GB) of memory, at least 80GB of hard drive space, and a low-power processor.

The reduced technical features mean that Chromebooks use less power, which means longer battery life. It also means that Chromebooks have a drastically lower price tag than other computers. This explains why Google is gaining such a large share of the laptop market. For the things that most people do, a Chromebook is more than adequate and far less costly.

If you prefer a desktop computer running ChromeOS, plenty are available. These computers are called *Chromeboxes*. If you own or are thinking about getting a Chromebox instead of a Chromebook, 99 percent of everything you read in this book will still apply to you because most of what's in this book is about ChromeOS — the same OS that runs on Chromebooks and Chromeboxes.

Choosing a Chromebook

Given the online nature of ChromeOS, Chromebooks do not require extremely high-powered hardware to provide an excellent user experience. Even so, the great variety of manufacturers, models, and hardware specifications available can make choosing a Chromebook somewhat tricky.

If you are not yet familiar with computer terms like hard drives, RAM, SD card slots, or HDMI ports, you don't really need to understand any of these things to buy a Chromebook that will work for you. If you are shopping for your first Chromebook (even if it's the first computer you have ever purchased), go to a store with a good selection (three or more models) of Chromebooks and knowledgeable salespeople. If you buy the least expensive model with a screen size you can live with, you probably won't be disappointed. If you *do* want to understand the inner details of Chromebooks and make your purchase decision based on RAM, hard drive size, and ports, flip over to Chapter 20 for all those details.



TIP

Another helpful way to decide which Chromebook to purchase is to research models online. *PC Magazine* and other well-known publications have good reviews on Chromebook models that can help you pick one.

Setting Up Your Chromebook



TIP

You should have a wireless internet service when setting up your Chromebook. If you're using a stationary (home or public) wireless internet network or a portable device with an internet hotspot, you probably need to know the following:

- » The network name (like Smith Family Wi-Fi or ATT034)
- » The network password (usually a bunch of random letters and numbers, often printed on a sticker on your internet router)

If you don't already have a Google Account, you'll also need a landline phone or smartphone handy to verify your new account while you set up your Chromebook.

Turning on your device

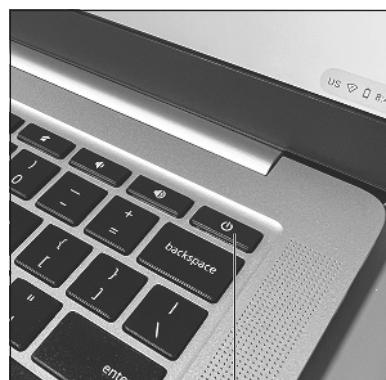
Regardless of the brand you choose, the Chromebook is built for speed — and you'll notice this speed the first time you turn on your device! To turn on your Chromebook, you may simply need to plug in the power cord and open the laptop. If your Chromebook doesn't turn on automatically, locate the Power button, which may be found on the top-right corner of the keyboard itself, or on the side or back

of the Chromebook. Look for the familiar power logo consisting of a circle with an intersecting vertical line. Figure 1-2 shows the Power button on the Lenovo C330 and the Samsung 303C. The Power button on your Chromebook is probably similar to one of these.

FIGURE 1-2:
The Power button
on two different
Chromebook
models: the
Lenovo C330 (a)
and the Samsung
303C (b).



Power button



Power button

Photos courtesy of Peter H. Gregory

When you turn on the device for the first time, a Chrome logo pops up on the screen, and within seconds, the computer powers on and displays the Welcome window. Click Get Started to begin setup.

I recently unboxed an HP Flagship 14 Chromebook and went through the setup. In addition to guiding me through the setup visually, it also spoke to me in a friendly, mechanical voice.

Selecting a language

When the Welcome window appears, it will most likely say Welcome in the English language. If you want to change your Chromebook to work in your language, click on the current language. The Choose Language and Keyboard window displays. When you click on Language, a list of available languages appears, and when you click on Keyboard, a list appears. (I wish it had an option for Pirate English. “Select your languaaaarge, matey!”)

Connecting to the internet

Next, you need to select a network to connect to the internet. If no network is available, I suggest holding off on attempting to set up your Chromebook until you can connect to an internet source.



TIP

If you're using a mobile device that can provide an internet hotspot, it's time to turn on the hotspot and find the network name and password.

You need to know the network name and possibly the password to connect your Chromebook to the internet for the first time. Just follow these steps:



REMEMBER

1. Select your network from the list of networks shown.

Your Chromebook may detect and display several other nearby home or business networks. You can ignore them.

2. If your Chromebook requests it, enter your network password.

After you select the network and enter a password, if applicable, the Wi-Fi bars onscreen fluctuate as your computer tries to connect. (Figure 1-3 shows the Wi-Fi signal icon.) After the connection is successfully established, the Continue button at the bottom of the dialog window becomes active.

If your Chromebook does not successfully connect to the Wi-Fi network, you'll see the error message `bad password` and you can try entering the password again. You can also select a different Wi-Fi network if you prefer.



TIP

3. Click the Connect button.

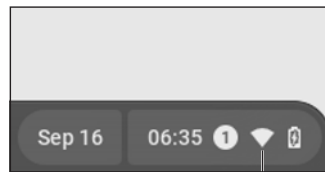


FIGURE 1-3:
The Wi-Fi signal icon.

Wi-Fi Signal Indicator

Photo courtesy of Peter H. Gregory

Agreeing to the Terms of Service

You may see a message that says `Your Connection is Not Private`. This issue is not something to worry about at this point.

If you've installed software or activated a device within the last ten years, you've likely seen a terms-of-service agreement. You can accept it by following these steps:

1. **Review the Terms of Service.**
2. **(Optional) When you're satisfied that you understand and agree to the terms, select or deselect the check box that sends usage stats back to Google.**



TIP

I recommend that you leave this box selected. The data is helpful for identifying and fixing bugs, creating new features, and making the Chromebook better for everyone! (Google and the NSA have all our information anyway, so why not?)

3. **Click Accept and Continue to move to the next step.**

Adult or child user

Next, the Chromebook asks if you are an adult or if you are setting up the Chromebook for a child. If you are setting it up for a child, you can then configure various rules about usage of the Chromebook, such as what apps can be used, which websites and types of websites that can be visited, and time limits.

Logging In for the First Time

To unlock all the features your Chromebook offers, you must first log in with a Google username and password. You can use your existing Google Account or create a new account at this time.

Logging in using an existing Google Account

You can log in by using your Google Account username and password:

1. **Enter your Google Account username into the Username field.**
2. **Enter your Google Account password into the Password field.**
3. **Click Login.**

Your Chromebook informs you about Chrome Sync, where your bookmarks, history, passwords, and other things in the Chrome browser will be synced across your Chromebook and other devices where you use the Chrome browser.



TIP

If you have an Android phone associated with your Google Account, you'll be able to agree to use certain features, such as unlocking your Chromebook with your Android phone. Sounds pretty cool to me.

This completes the initial login process.

ADDITIONAL AGREEMENTS

When logging into your Google Account, you may be asked to agree to Google Play terms of service. You will need to agree to this so that you can download apps.

You may be asked to agree to back up your app data to Google Drive. This can be handy if you want the added assurance that your data is always safe.

You may be asked for permission for your Chromebook to reveal your location to various apps that request it (such as Google Maps).

You will be asked whether you want to use the Hey Google voice assistant. If so, you'll be asked to say "Hey Google" and "Okay Google" a few times, so that your Chromebook will recognize your voice.

You may choose to use Google Assistant, and you need to decide whether Google Assistant will have permission to view the contents of your screen. I chose No to this option, and I won't be offended if you call me paranoid.



REMEMBER

If your Google Account uses Google Authenticator or Google Advanced Protection for logging in to Google, you'll need to log in to your Chromebook using those services for the first time. If this is your situation, your first login to your new Chromebook will be like logins you've done in the past on other computers.

Creating a new Google Account

You can create a Google Account by following these steps:

- 1. Under the userid field, click the More Options link; then click the Create Account option.**

The Chrome web browser launches and takes you to a set of pages where you can create your Google Account. Google asks you for your name, birth date, gender, and email address.

- 2. Complete each page and click Next.**

On this screen, Google wants to verify that you are a real human being. I assume that you are!

3. Enter your phone number and whether you'd rather be called or texted, and click Next.

Google will contact you in the manner you selected to provide you with a verification code. You can skip this step (and the next one) if you want. However, I suggest you provide a phone number, as this would be needed if you need to recover your Google Account.

4. Enter the verification code and click Continue.

5. Review the privacy agreement and other agreements and agree.

Pay attention to the agreement options. For instance, your Chromebook can send your location to apps you may use later. Uncheck this if you don't want your Chromebook revealing where you are. Also, you can choose whether Google Assistant can view your screen if you need help, and whether you want to use the "Hey Google" activated assistant. I checked No, but your preference may vary.

You may be shown a Chromebook tutorial known as ChromeVox. This accessibility feature reads the contents of the screen to you. Watch it if you like, or click Exit Tutorial to skip it.

You are now logged in to your Chromebook.

Using Chromebook as a guest

Logging in to your Google Account allows you to use all of Chromebook's functionality. However, you can still access many of these functions without logging in. Chromebook allows you to use the device as a guest by selecting the Browse as Guest option.



TIP

Letting a friend or family member use your Chromebook for a while is a great use of Chromebook's Guest feature.

If you browse the Chromebook as a guest and then later decide to register or log in as a user, you first need to exit Guest mode. You can log out by clicking the status area (on the bottom-right of your screen, where you see the time, battery, and Wi-Fi status) and selecting Exit Guest from the top of the list. (See Figure 1-4.) Exit Guest takes you back to the login screen.

FIGURE 1-4:
The Exit Guest
button.

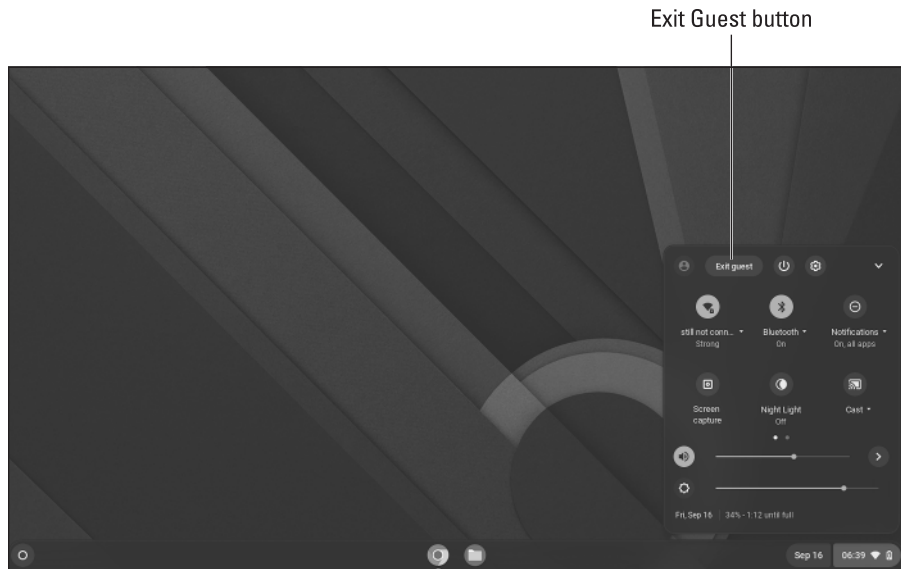


Illustration courtesy of Peter H. Gregory

Transitioning to a Chromebook from Mac, Linux, or Windows

Transitioning from a Mac, Linux, or Windows computer requires a few easy steps outlined in the following list. All these items are covered later in this book:

- » **Get a Google Account.** The section “Creating a new Google Account,” earlier in this chapter, shows you how to get a Google Account. Your Google Account is the key to nearly everything you do on your Chromebook moving forward.
- » **Move your files.** In Chapter 6, you can find out how to access your Chromebook hard drive, external storage, and Google Drive (where most of your files will reside after you make the leap to Chromebook).
- » **Get your Chrome bookmarks.** If you’ve signed in while using the Chrome web browser on other devices, your bookmarks, apps, and extensions will come with you to your new Chromebook! I cover bookmarks in Chapter 3.
- » **Find new apps.** Your Chromebook comes with several applications in your Launcher by default. You can, however, add new apps by navigating to the Chrome Web Store and adding them to your menu. In Chapter 5, you can look at some of the existing apps on your Chromebook and discover ways to locate and add new apps that are useful to you.

Where to Go Next

Now that you've completed the basics of setting up your Chromebook and logging in, what would you like to do next? Here are a few ideas:

- » Find out more about using your Chromebook. Go to Chapter 2.
- » Discover more about the Chrome browser. Go to Chapter 3.
- » Download and use other Chromebook apps. Go to Chapter 5.
- » Use office tools to create documents and worksheets. Go to Part 2.
- » Start working with music, photos, videos, and ebooks. Go to Part 3.
- » Explore advanced features (are you ready?). Go to Part 4.

A last word: If you find your initial Chromebook experience difficult or frustrating, don't give up! You'll soon develop "muscle memory" for common functions, and before long, you'll love the sheer simplicity and ease of use of your Chromebook.

