

TOP 10 CD DRIVES & DVD WRITERS

		CD drives		Interface type	Average access time	Read/write/rewrite rate	Dimensions (wxdxh)	Internal/external	Weight	Packet writing and burning software	
				Data buffer size							
		1 MSI CR52-A2 0870 727 2100 www.msi.com.tw LAST MONTH 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £41 ex VAT • 1-year warranty • First review May 03 	EIDE 2MB	85ms	52x/52x/24x	148x194 x42mm	internal	0.9kg	Ahead Nero 5.5	
	Combining a low price with unbeatable features and good performance, MSI has the edge on the opposition. The CR52-A2 burned a 350MB CD-R in just under two minutes, while a CD-RW took three. The AWSS system, designed to cut out unnecessary vibrations, gives added protection from the dreaded buffer underrun.										
		2 Teac CD-W552E 020 8906 9111 www.teac.co.uk LAST MONTH 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £55 ex VAT • 2-year warranty • First review Jun 03 	EIDE 2MB	100ms	52x/52x/24x	149x198 x42mm	internal	1kg	Nero Express	
	The slightly pricey Teac took one minute 46 seconds to burn a CD-R and less than three mins to burn a CD-RW, making it the fastest CD writer we've seen in the Test Centre to date. The Intelligent Speed Control determines the highest writing speed available without risking errors, so you won't end up with an unusable disc.										
		3 Asus CRW-5224A 0870 429 3220 www.scan.co.uk LAST MONTH 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £43 ex VAT • 2-year warranty • First review Feb 03 	EIDE 2MB	100ms	52x/52x/24x	149x197 x42mm	internal	1kg	InCD, Ahead Nero 5.5	
The Asus offers competitive write and rewrite rates a few seconds behind those of the Teac. Burning errors are kept at bay with Partial-CAV technology that writes the outer and inner parts of the disc at different optimal speeds. The limited Nero Express is bundled with a generous number of blank CD-R and CD-RWs.											
	4 Benq CRW 5224P 01442 301 000 www.benq.co.uk LAST MONTH 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £39 ex VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Jul 03 	EIDE 2MB	100ms	52x/52x/24x	146x198 x42mm	internal	1kg	Nero Express		
It's the cheapest CD writer in our Top 10, but the Benq boasts similar specs to the other drives here. Burning a CD-RW took five and a half minutes and, although this isn't an absolute age, it still doesn't compare well with the opposition – the second-placed Teac did it in virtually half the time.											
	5 Asus CRW-5224A-U 0870 429 3220 www.scan.co.uk LAST MONTH 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £86 ex VAT • 2-year warranty • First review Jul 03 	USB 2.0 2MB	100ms	52x/52x/24x	156x226 x50mm	external	1.4kg	Nero Express		
The external Asus CRW-5224A-U is restricted to fifth position due to its £86 price tag. It offers excellent performance, though – one minute 57 seconds to write a 350MB CD-R – and is easy to set up, connecting as it does to a USB 2.0 port. If you need an external model then you won't do much better than this one.											

		DVD writers		Drive type	Interface type	CD-RW read/write/rewrite speeds	DVD read/write/rewrite speeds	Average access time	Burning software	
		1 Sony DRU-500A 0870 243 0056 www.sonyisstorage.com LAST MONTH 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £212 ex VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Spr 03 	DVD-R, DVD+R, DVD-RW DVD+RW, CD-RW	EIDE	32x/24x/10x	8x/4x/2.4x	200ms	Veritas RecordNow	
	The DRU-500A is the best DVD writer on the market. Thanks to its all-format facilities, it offers peace of mind that the drive won't be redundant in a few years time. Writing speeds are very respectable. In our tests we burned over 3GB of data to a DVD+R disc at a rate of 3.2MBps and 3.1MBps to a DVD-R disc.									
		2 HP dvd300e 0845 270 4142 www.hp.com LAST MONTH 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £250 ex VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Jul 03 	DVD+R, DVD+RW, CD-RW	USB 2.0, FireWire	40x/16x/10x	8x/4x/2.4x	125ms	Veritas RecordNow	
	The external dvd300e burned more than 3GB of data to a DVD+R disc at 5MBps, dropping to 3.2MBps on DVD+RW. This makes it one of the fastest writers we've seen and goes some way towards justifying the £250 price tag. HP's specially designed software is easy to use, making it ideal for the less technically minded.									
		3 Teac DV-W50EK 020 8906 9111 www.teac.co.uk LAST MONTH 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £195 ex VAT • 2-year warranty • First review May 03 	DVD-R, DVD-RW, CD-RW	EIDE	32x/16x/8x	12x/4x/2x	140ms	Nero Express	
Teac is known more for quality than low prices, but the DV-W50EK is a snip at £195. It wrote our 3GB test DVD-R in 16 mins 47 secs – almost a minute faster than the next best drive. DVD-RWs were disappointing, requiring nearly 20 minutes. If DVD-RWs are your speciality then there's faster models in the chart.										
	4 Pioneer DVR-A05 01753 789 500 www.pioneer-eur.com LAST MONTH 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £207 ex VAT • 1-year warranty • First review Spr 03 	DVD-R, DVD-RW, CD-RW	EIDE	32x/16x/8x	12x/4x/2x	140ms	VOB Instant CD/DVD		
The DVR-A05 burned over 3GB of data to a DVD-R disc at a rate of 5MBps, dropping to 3.3MBps when burning the same data to a DVD-RW disc. However, these speedy rates have been achieved at the expense of the Pioneer's CD writing ability. The software isn't the simplest to use so it's not ideal for novices.										
	5 Plextor PX-504A 00 32 2725 5522 www.plextor.com LAST MONTH 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £219 ex VAT • 2-year warranty • First review Jul 03 	DVD+R, DVD+RW, CD-RW	EIDE	40x/16x/10x	12x/4x/2.4x	140ms	Nero 5.5		
The PX-504A might have charted at number five but it's still a good DVD writer with a great software bundle so shouldn't be discounted. Although the Plextor is fast, it doesn't keep pace with the other Top 10 models, managing only 3.7MBps writing rates to DVD+R and 3MBps to DVD+RW.										

Buying advice: CD drives

There are two types of media format: CD-R and CD-RW. Writing to CD-R discs is faster, but the down side is that you can only write to them once. CD-RW discs, which allow repeated recording, are more expensive but offer better value for money. Data buffers, which tend to be around 2MB, protect against errors in the writing process. A 2MB buffer is the

absolute minimum you should look for when purchasing a drive. In terms of software, Ahead's Nero packages are currently the best available and are ideal for beginners. Easy CD Creator is another good program for novices. Most drive manufacturers usually bundle a few blank CD-R discs and, if you're lucky, perhaps a blank CD-RW too.

If you're not confident about opening up your PC and fitting an internal drive,

you simply have no space for another drive in your tower unit or you want to share the drive between more than one PC, you're better off with an external model. This will connect to your PC via a USB 1.1, USB 2.0 or FireWire connection.

However, for saving space and money, internal units are better. Installing this type of drive isn't a difficult procedure and most decent models will come with a step-by-step installation guide.