

Sheet1

Printer Decision Guide: What to buy

What type of printer is best for you? Here is a summary of the pros and cons of dot matrix, ink jet, desktop laser, shared laser, and color PostScript printers. These categories define the capabilities of most printers; unusual units may fall outside these deceptions.

Pros

Cons

Speed

Cost (street
prices are 10 to
30 percent lower)

Cost per page
Output quality

Color

Noise

Size

Paper

* Line printers are large, special-purpose dot matrix printers with very high speeds, high duty cycles, and the ability to handle large format printing.

** While laser print speed is not directly comparable with the speeds of dot matrix or ink jet printers, a score of 1 page per minute is within a range of 25 to 30 characters per second (for double-spaced text) or 50 to 60 characters per second (for single-spaced text).

*** Industry convention excludes the cost of paper (about 1 cent per sheet) from per-page costs.

Dot matrix Low-cost output. Can handle multipart forms and paper sizes up to 11 by 16 inches; line printers may handle even wider sheets.*	Ink jet Ultraquiet and compact. Excellent print on paper up to 17 by 23 inches. Speeds increasing as costs decrease; some models even have color.	Desktop laser Great print quality; very quiet; steadily decreasing prices. Most support scalable fonts.	Shared laser Great print quality and very high speed (especially with direct network hookups). May handle 11- by 17- inch paper, multiple bins,
Noisy. Print quality only average; limited by a lack of fonts and by slow LQ modes. advantage over lasers. 25 to 200 cps (0.4 to 0.8 ppm);** line printers can be faster.*	High per-page costs; output subject to streaking from moisture. Only a small price	and even auto-sensing. Significantly higher cost per page than dot matrix.	Require a network; harder to set up and maintain than desktop printers. Output is not graphs; extremely slow. 10 to 25 ppm.
\$200 to \$1,500 (usually under \$1,000); line printers, \$2,500 to \$7000.00	Portable versions, \$500 to \$750. Desktop versions, \$750 to \$1,250.	Personal, \$1,000 to \$1,600; desktop, \$1,500 to \$3,000. PostScript, \$500 to \$1,000 extra.	\$3,000 to \$20,000; direct network connection, up to \$1000.00
\$0.005 to \$0.01.***	\$0.05 to \$0.08.	\$0.02 to \$0.04.	\$0.02 to \$0.04.
24-pin LQ, very good; 9-pin printers,fair or poor.	Almost laser quality.	Excellent text; good graphics; poor photos.	Excellent text; good graphics; poor photos.
Via upgrade or special version; requires four-color ribbon.	Some models; quality improving.	Not available.	Only in the \$83,050 Canon CLC-500.
Loud and buzzy; slow in quiet mode.	Virtually silent.	Quiet.	Quiet.
Narrow-carriage models fit easily on a desktop; some are small enough to take on the road. Tractor-feed paper or continuous multipart forms; cut sheets.	Fit on desk corner; usually only a few inches high. Portable models fit in briefcases. Cut sheets. May need coated stock for top-quality output.	Start at 11 by 13 inches; may be slightly too big for the average desktop. Cut sheets, overhead film, labels, envelopes.	Range from desktop-size to so bulky that they require a separate stand or desk. Cut sheets, overhead film, labels, envelopes.

Color PostScript
High-quality color
output at high
resolution (300 dpi).
Can sometimes
approximate color
photographs.

Bulky, with high
hardware and page
costs. Output not quite
on a par with photo-

1 ppm.

A-size models,
\$7,000 to \$12,000.
B-size models, up to
\$15000.00
\$0.50 to \$1.00.
Great color, but
not perfect.

Standard.

Quiet.

Very bulky; can over-
whelm a small office.

Coated stock or film
required (except for the
Tektronix III PXi).