

Watch Buying Guide



Watch Buying Basics

What to Know Before You Buy

Do more than make a style statement with your watch. When you invest in a quality timepiece, these watches can last for years. Our buying guide can help you understand different watch types and options, so you can make an informed decision and select a watch that can be worn for years to come.



Giving you a better way to buy

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At A Glance



Getting Started

Even the best-dressed can get tripped up when it comes to buying the right watch. Watches are complex, can be expensive and there are a lot of choices out there. So what should you know when shopping for one? You can start by asking yourself a few questions.

When will you be wearing it?

What will you use it for -- work, going out, lounging around or playing sports?

What additional features do you want your watch to have?

Watch Types and Options

Once you've determined when and how you'll wear your watch, you are ready to pick a style. Before shopping, take a look at the main types of wristwatches and some of their parts.

Analog, Digital or Analog/Digital

An analog watch has a face that holds hour and minute hands, and either numbers, markers or Roman numerals to display a 12-hour day. It is considered the more formal, classic watch type, and is perfect for business, dates and formal events.

Digital watches either have an LCD (liquid crystal display) or LED (light emitting diode) face that displays the time in numeric form (for example, 2:50). They are considered more casual than an analog watch.

Analog/digital watches have both an analog and a digital face. They are utilitarian and are great for work and daily routines.

Battery, Quartz or Mechanical (hand-wound)

Digital watches are powered by an ultra-small watch battery (the kind you usually see by the checkout counter in electronic stores).

Quartz watches are analog timepieces that use a battery and a tiny quartz crystal to power the watch. They keep extremely accurate time (within a minute each year).

Mechanical watches are powered by a complex array of gears and springs. These watches can command a hefty price as a result of their superior craftsmanship. Unfortunately, the ancient art of hand-wound watchmaking remains imperfect. Mechanical watches lose about an hour a year and must be wound regularly.

Case

This is the watch's frame. When it comes to watches, the case can be round, rectangular, square, and sometimes even polygonal.

The case finish can be shiny, matte, patterned, or inlaid with jewels and other crystals.

Watch cases are usually made of a metal -- steel, titanium, gold, silver, and platinum being the most common. Getting a watch with a case (and band) made from the latter three precious metals is more expensive, but many watchmakers mix the precious metal with less valuable alloys for a more affordable timepiece.

Luxury watches are crafted of the finest materials available.

For many people, a luxury watch is a bracelet and case made of 18-karat yellow gold. White gold is an elegant choice, especially among women's luxury watches, and rose gold is becoming more common in high-style timepieces. Platinum, though rare, is another high-end material for watches and has a silvery white luster. Luxury watches, especially those designed with multiple functions, are also available as well-made stainless steel timepieces.

Watch Crystal

This transparent cover protects the watch face. It can be made from plexiglass, mineral (traditional) glass or synthetic sapphire -- an ultra-hard, clear, man-made crystal.

Plexiglass is the cheapest of watch "crystals." It's the least likely to shatter, but the most likely to scratch.

Mineral glass, on the other hand, is more likely to shatter, but less likely to scratch.

Synthetic sapphire costs the most, but it's the most scratch-resistant. However it breaks quite easily vs. other options.

Band Type

If you have an analog timepiece (whether quartz-powered or hand-wound), your watchband will either be made of leather (usually black or brown) or the same kind of metal used on the case. On high-end watches, look for hand-stitched bands. In general, straps are more casual than bracelet watches, but they are popular and can be quite exquisite in design.

Digital watches, such as sports models and gadget watches, usually have plastic bands.



Nontraditional Watch Types

Sport Watches

Sports watches are sleek, durable and made from high-quality plastic composites. The most common sports watch is the classic water-resistant diving watch. Nowadays, the market is packed to the gills with such timepieces. Sports watches can incorporate odometers, altimeters, compasses, GPS technology, blood pressure and pulse monitors. There are a range of other gadgets for the person leading an active lifestyle.

Gadget

Gadget watches are highly functional for the student, techie or engineer. They contain even more tech goodies (such as calculators, digital cameras or e-mail applications) than their loaded sports model cousins.



Water-Resistant

Many people shopping for watches want a timepiece that is waterproof. A watch cannot be completely waterproof because it is made of many different parts, but a water-resistant watch is a great investment. Many water-resistant watches can be worn while swimming, showering and diving. Men's watches and ladies watches can be water-resistant, and these pieces are available in a range of styles. Consider these facts when shopping for a water-resistant watch:

Construction: A water-resistant sport watch or dive watch will have rubber, nylon or Teflon gaskets set on the crystal and chronograph pushers on the case back. A waterproof sealant lines the case of a good water-resistant men's or ladies watch.

A screw-down crown: Screw-down crowns (also sometimes called a screw-in crown) are standard on dive watches. A screw-down crown has gaskets and will create a tight seal for the watch case when it is screwed in.

Maintenance and care: Water-resistant watches should have gaskets changed whenever the battery is replaced or when doing routine maintenance. Chlorine, perfume and other chemicals can harm the gaskets or sealant. Limit exposure to these materials or have your watch tested often for water resistance.

Testing: Water resistance is tested in measurements of atmosphere (ATM). Each ATM denotes 10 meters of static water-pressure. This is not the depth to which a watch can be worn. Many watch cases will list the basic measurement of 1 ATM as "water-resistant." These watches will withstand small splashes of water but should not be worn while washing the hands or submerging the hands in water.

Diver's watches: Purchase a diver's watch if you spend a lot of time snorkeling or deep sea diving. A dive watch usually has a screw-down crown and a screw-down case back. The water-resistance rating for these watches will be at least 20 ATM (200 meters/660 feet). Many high-end watches feature a helium release valve.

Water-resistance ratings: Use these guidelines to choose the right water-resistant watch:

3 ATM: meters/100 feet: Suitable for everyday use. No swimming.

5 ATM: 50 meters/165 feet: Suitable for short periods of swimming. No diving or snorkeling.

10 ATM: 100 meters/330 feet: Suitable for swimming and snorkeling.

20 ATM: 200 meters/660 feet: Suitable for high-impact water sports and some diving.

Diver: 150-200 meters/500-660 feet: Suitable for scuba diving and passes ISO regulations.

Proper Fit and Match

Whatever watch you choose, it should fit snugly, not move up and down when you move your arms and should not leave an imprint on your wrist.

Watch FAQ:

Which movement is the most accurate?

In general, quartz movements are more accurate than mechanical movements. It is common for watches to have some variation in timekeeping; a watch model is deemed accurate if it gains or loses the same amount of time every day. The average quartz watch has a variance of 0.5-2 seconds per day. The average mechanical or automatic watch has a variance of 3-5 seconds per day.

What are the “jewels” of a watch movement?

When a watch description lists the jewels, as in “17-jewel automatic movement”, it is referring to the gems used as bearings in the finished movement. The jewels are usually synthetic rubies, which is a harder substance than metal. The gears of a watch will wear down over time due to the constant friction caused by metal rubbing against metal. Watchmakers place the synthetic rubies on highly stressed parts to increase durability and keep the movement in alignment. Mechanical, automatic and a few quartz watches have jewels. Timepieces like chronograph watches will have a higher number of jewels.

What is an automatic watch?

An automatic watch is a mechanical watch that uses the motion of your wrist to wind the mechanism. Automatic watches are easy to maintain because they will never need to be wound manually if they are worn regularly. An automatic watch can be wound if it is unworn for a period of time and it will usually start ticking again right away with a gentle shake.

What is a kinetic watch?

A kinetic watch is similar to an automatic watch, but it has a quartz movement, making it slightly more accurate. Kinetic watches contain small oscillating weights that capture the movement of your wrist and convert it into energy. This energy is stored and released as needed.

Appendix A - Watch Glossary

Band

A strip of leather, rubber, cloth or metal that attaches to the case and wraps around the wrist. Metal bands can be resized by adding or removing links; leather bands offer several buckle holes for the best fit.

Bezel

A metal ring that frames the dial of a watch. On many watches, the bezel displays minute increments and can be rotated in one or both directions. Divers use this function to measure elapsed time.

Case

Attached to the watchband, this metal covering surrounds the bezel and dial of a watch and protects its internal parts from dirt and damage. Some cases are built to resist water from entering the watch.

Chronograph

These watches include multiple time measurement functions independent of the timekeeping. These functions can include stopwatches, timers, measurement of one-hour intervals, measurement of fractions of a second or elapsed time.

Clasp

The device used to fasten each end of a watchband, bracelet or necklace together. Clasps are traditionally made of metal and include several designs.

Crown

A metal knob located on the side of a watchcase and used to set the watch to the correct time and date. Some watches have multiple crowns to control other functions and settings.

Crystal

Typically made of glass-like substances such as plastic, the crystal is the clear cover over the dial of a watch that protects it from dirt, scratches and internal damage. High grade watches usually have synthetic sapphire crystals.

Dial

The front display of a watch that includes the markings and hands. It is covered by the crystal and enclosed within the case.

Hands

Thin, light strips of metal that are secured in the center of the watch face and point to the hours, minutes or seconds.

Markings

The time increment symbols located on the watch dial.

Subdial

The small dials located on the watch face that display chronograph functions of the watch such as the stopwatch, timer, elapsed time measurement, date, day of the week and moon phase.

Tachymeter/Tachometer

A function that measures time and distance to determine speed. Tachymeters are typically used to measure high rates of speed.

Water-Resistance

This feature denies water and moisture from penetrating inside the watch case. No watch is completely waterproof, but several can withstand rain and splashing. Water resistance is measured in ATMs (atmospheric pressure). This number is usually printed on the back of the case.

