Guide to the Perfect* Personal Device

*nothing will ever be perfect, but it's good to try.

Introduction

Welcome to High School! So, you've heard the magical term "BYOD" and have gone...what's that all about?

It means "Bring Your Own Device", a new phenomenon which is sweeping the educational sector. It's all about making learning personalised; you learn what you need to learn in an environment that suits you. Well, now we're suiting the technology to suit you.

Schools generally have enough funding to purchase machines for groups of classes; let's say on average at ratio of 1:10 (One computer to every ten students). Obviously, this isn't ideal because some of the best learning experiences use technology, and with the funding we get this would only give you access to the technology every other day, for maybe a session.

So, in comes BYOD, which puts a device into **every** student's hands and allows them to access a huge amount of resources and valuable experiences.

So...the question is: which **one**?

You're going to say there is no easy answer, aren't you?

...yes.

Because there isn't an easy answer. With a massive amount of devices out there you have just a large a choice to make about the right one, but there are some details that we can help with.

First: the main thing you should think of when selecting the right device for your child's education is: your child's education.

- How does your child best learn / interact with technology?
- How old is your child / what year are they entering?
- What kind of electives will they be interested in?

I only mention electives because their core classes are always the same: English, Humanities and Social Sciences, Mathematics, Science and Health/Physical Education.

The electives is where your child may differ from everyone else, either to the Arts, Technologies, or other electives such as the Sports Sciences or Outdoor Education.

In Year 7/8, students should really be experiencing as many different electives as possible. Year 9/10 is where your child will first begin to specialise in a particular elective.

Most devices also have a 4-5 year life span when software begins to outpace the hardware. This which is why our first device recommendation starts at Year 5.

My First Device – Year's 5-8

Welcome to the first device your child will use at school!

Before we get to the options, lets go through some of the basics that you'll need to know.

1) The Device's wifi MUST be WPA2 Enterprise compliant. Which means it needs to have been built within the last 3-4 years. There is a handout from the ACT Directorate of Education and Training which can help make sure your device works in this environment.

2) Your device must be able to connect with our Google Apps for Education environment. Which is pretty much EVERY device out there, so that shouldn't limit your choices.

3) The device SHOULD have at least a 6 hour battery life. On average, your child will be using the device in class, at least 3-4 lessons out of every 5. These lessons are all 55 minutes long, so do the math and that's a little under 4 hours. Some things will run through the battery faster than others, which is one of the reasons teachers advise student to not use their devices during break times, and another reason not to play games on their devices unless they are at home...or they've made them in our game design class.

- software with high graphics loads (games)
- movies/videos
- Recording or camera use

Knowing that, here are the suggested devices for Years 5-8:

The Chromebook

Available from: Dick Smith Electronics, JB Hifi, Online Retailers

Pros:
- The Chromebook is an fantastic little device which students in Years 5-8 can get a lot of use out of. It has a 10 hour battery life so if the student is practicing good Device Hygiene* then they shouldn't ever be out of power at school.
- The device is specifically designed for Google Apps for Education and is the Chrome browser itself, so it has no issues accessing an web based systems that the school uses (Schoology, Mathspace, etc...)
- Not many peripherals required. You can get a mouse if you need it, but the Chromebook is basically a little laptop, so it has a keyboard and mousepad, and some models even have touch-screens which aren't a requirement but can be useful.

Cons:
- ...anything else. You can write documents, slideshows, spreadsheets, create and submit essays and other creative items, but it is dependent on the Chrome Store for anything else (which does have a lot of great tools available). The Chrome Book doesn't have much in the way of serious video editing or graphic design tools...but in Year 5-8 students don't quite need that yet.

The iPad/iPad Mini/iPad Pro

Available from: ...lots of places

Pros:
- 10 Hour battery life. Unless students are watching a LOT of videos and playing games on their iPads (which they shouldn't be...), the device will last all day as long as it is charged during the night.
- You get access to most of the services provided by Google Apps for Education, but not all, and not to the same level as a Chromebook or full laptop. The access is still enough to get all their work done, but getting access to Google sites has to be done through the browser: there is no app available.
- "There is an app for that" – you can get video editing software, graphic design software, almost anything through the app store. The only thing which is not really accessible for iPads is any software used in the schools Robotics or Computer Science classes.
- Mathspace – the app was designed for tablets so it is the best way to experience the software.

Cons:
- Peripherals – the iPad needs a few. If you want a keyboard: you have to buy it. Also, cases are a requirement as dropping the iPad normally marks the end of the screen, and since the screen is the main input, if it doesn't work than the iPad won't.
- Google Apps – as stated before, you can access all the important parts of Google Apps, but not all of it.

Which one do I get?
- The Mini, Air, Pro? Which one? My advice is which ever one your child is comfortable using, typing on for extended periods (those 1000 word essays are a good test) and editing their work on.
- ...if your child seriously wants an iPad Pro, then they'd better have a career as a graphic designer in mind since that is the main purpose for the Pro which really needs the Apple Pencil and keyboard (an extra $200+) to take full advantage of its capabilities.

Samsung Galaxy Tablets / Android Tablets

Available from: ...also, lots of places.

The Android tablets have very similar capabilities to the iPad series. Each should be able to fill the same functions listed under the iPad section, with easier integration of the Google Apps platform, considering the Android system is built and maintained by Google.

My next device – Years 9-12

Now is the time to start thinking about your next four year device, and what kind of area your child is going to specialise in.

Each of the pro's and cons in the devices listed in the Year 5-8 section still apply here, with only a single addition:

Laptops

There are a variety of laptops on offer, and they begin to offer the freedom for students to install their own software and more powerful versions of tablet or web based systems they have been using.

The same guidelines apply for laptops as they do for any other device: 5 to 6 hour battery life, WPA2 Enterprise compliant, but the good thing is that they will be compatible with Google Apps for Education since you can easily download the Chrome browser, or run it in any other browser.

One of the most common laptops we've seen used at school is the **Macbook Air or Pro line.**

The Macbook Air

Available in the 11 or 13 inch screen, the Macbook Air has been an excellent device for students to use. Sporting a 10 hour battery life, fast hard drive which boots up quickly, and a range of in built software for media creation/editing and document creation, the only con is the price.

In addition to the cost, you'd also be wanting to get the upgraded warranty, a laptop bag and possibly a case for the device as well, and a portable USB3 hard drive for any large media files the student maybe working with...but the Air should easily last the full four years of it's use through High School and College.

The Macbook Pro has all the advantages of an Air, however it's processor is much more powerful. The Pro is the recommended device for Digital Media/Photography/Film students. The **Air** can perform the same function as the pro, it will just render files slower.

Various PC Laptops available such as Acer, HP or Lenovo devices will also work. A newer Windows 10 device should have the same functionality as the Macbook laptops, and some will have touchscreen functionality as well if that is a preference.

With the multitude of devices out there, the minimum specifications you should be looking at are between 4 and 8 gig of Ram and an Intel Core i5 processor (or the equivalent)

The only exception to this is students who are intending on doing the Game Design courses in both High School and College, and Digital Media classes in Photoshop and the Adobe suite. These students should consider devices with a minimum 8 - 16 gig of RAM and also look at the costs for the Adobe Creative Cloud suite. The Adobe suite is available on school computers but students will need copies if they intend on continuing their work outside of school hours.

What else do I need?

Not much else.

Remember, this technology is expensive, even if you only purchase it once every four years. Ideally you want the device to last the distance, so investing in carry bags, protective cases/shells, extra warranty and reinforcing good behaviours with your child will help with that.

Software is the next big question we get, and also one where the answer differs between classes.

The good news is that each student in a Directorate school gets access to both **Google Apps for Education** which has email, single use or collaborative documents, spreadsheets and slideshows (which can be downloaded into their Microsoft formats), and 30gig of cloud storage.

Students ALSO get **5 free** copies of the Microsoft Office suite, which includes **Word, Excel and Powerpoint.** These copies can be installed on **five separate devices** and only require the students School ID and Password to login.

So, the majority of the software the students will need already comes pre-installed on these devices, including movie/music making software and image manipulation software on the Apple devices. Anything else the students need will depend on the electives they study, if it's not web based and accessible to everyone.