

Should I buy a custom or pre-built mechanical keyboard?

When exploring mechanical keyboards, you can purchase a pre-built keyboard or customize your own. The question is which one should you choose?

Mechanical keyboards are customizable and look cool, and can enhance your computing experience. Gamers and typists often like them because they can be customized for better accuracy and response.

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Advantages of custom mechanical keyboards



To get a premium keyboard with specific features, consider building your own mechanical keyboard. Here are the advantages of custom mechanical keyboards.

Unique design

A big advantage of building your own mechanical keyboard is the ability to choose from a variety of housing materials, while pre-fabricated keyboards are mostly made of plastic and aluminum.

Building your own keyboard allows you to choose from materials like wood, copper and ceramic, enhancing the aesthetics and sound of your typing. This also means there are more keycap designs and color options.

Custom keyboards let you choose keycaps based on your preferences, such as your favorite game, movie, or color. You can buy keycaps from stores like Drop for unique options, Osume for limited minimalist editions, and

Akko for affordable designs.

The keyboard's construction also allows you to choose its size, from as small as 40% to as large as 100%.

More choices of parts and styles

There are a wide variety of keyboard switches online, starting at around \$0.20 per switch. When choosing a switch, it's important to consider the type of switch, whether linear, tactile or clicky.

Typing enthusiasts can choose Drop Halo Clear tactile switches for a distinctive feel or Glorious Panda tactile switches for a satisfying tactile feel when typing. Some notable gaming switches include Akko Wine Red (similar to Cherry MX Red), Glorious Lynx (very light), and Gateron Oil King (heavier, ideal for intense gaming).

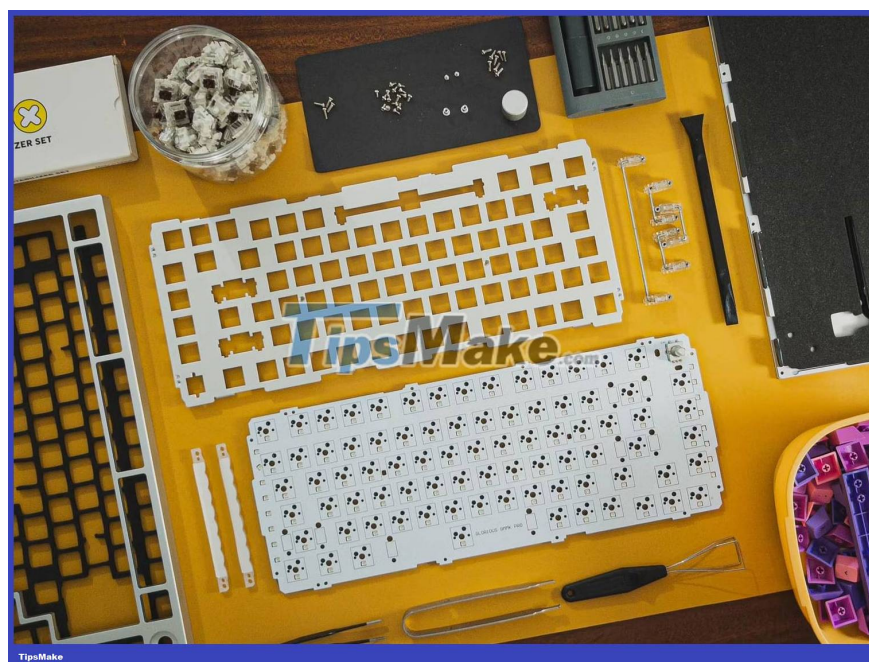
You can customize almost every aspect of the switch, including the switch material, spring weight, and click smoothness. Depending on the switch type and setup, these adjustments can provide a soft or strong typing feel and create a variety of different typing sounds.

Custom keyboards offer both soldered and changeable PCBs, allowing you to easily change switches or securely solder them. They also allow upgrades to enhance the typing experience.

Higher quality parts

Custom mechanical keyboard kits often include aluminum and copper housings, giving them a more premium feel than pre-assembled keyboards. Additionally, custom keyboard enthusiasts often prefer screw-on mounting to the PCB and have extensive customization options.

Disadvantages of custom mechanical keyboards



Custom mechanical keyboards allow customization of components such as the base, switches, and keycaps. However, these keyboards also have disadvantages that may deter potential users from choosing them.

Higher price

Custom-designed keyboards can be expensive, ranging from about \$200 to more than \$500, depending on the quality of the keyboard components and special added features.

You will need to purchase the soldering iron and necessary components to create a custom keyboard. The main components you will need to build a mechanical keyboard include the PCB (printed circuit board), case, backplate, stab (keyboard stabilizer bar), switches, keycap and USB cable.

Needs assembly time

Building a mechanical keyboard from scratch can be time-consuming, taking hours or days. Beginners often run the risk of running into compatibility issues and potentially damaging customizable components.

Advantages of built-in mechanical keyboards



If you've never used a mechanical keyboard and are unsure about the different board and switch options, purchasing a pre-installed keyboard is a sensible decision.

No assembly required

When you buy a pre-made mechanical keyboard, you can use it right away.

Guaranteed

Buying a pre-built keyboard is safer if you're worried about troubleshooting a mechanical keyboard. They are ready to use and the seller or manufacturer will address common keyboard problems.

The downside, however, is that opening certain keyboards, like the Razer BlackWidow V4 75%, will void their warranty. Building your own keyboard means you take full responsibility for problems.

Usually cheaper

Pre-built keyboards are ideal for users on a budget who want to use them right away without worrying too much about appearance or typing feel.

You can easily find high-performance pre-built mechanical keyboards for under \$100 from popular brands, including Razer, Corsair, and Royal Kludge.

One of the best budget-friendly keyboards is the ROYAL KLUDGE RK61, a 60% gaming keyboard designed for small spaces and portability. The keyboard has a replaceable PCB, offers Bluetooth connectivity, and can run for up to 13 hours on a single charge.

Improved software

Many custom mechanical keyboards have open source firmware, like QMK for programming, supporting features like RGB customization, key combinations, and multi-layer setups. However, they often lack the software integration found in popular pre-built keyboards, like Logitech's GHub or Razer's Synapse.

Disadvantages of built-in mechanical keyboards



Pre-built keyboards may be easy to find but have quite a few drawbacks. These include limited customization and warranties, limited sizing options, and sometimes overpriced, lower-quality builds.

Many pre-made mechanical keyboards have soldered switches, limiting the ability to change them. However, some keyboards, like Logitech's G Pro X and Xtrfy's K5, offer replaceable switches.

Manufacturers of pre-built keyboards often use switches from brands like Cherry and Gateron, resulting in many keyboards with similar typing experiences. On the other hand, custom keyboard builders can choose switches from any manufacturer for a unique key feel.

That means you can easily change the keycap on most built-in keyboards to your liking. However, make sure the keycap fits your keyboard as some brands use non-standard key sizes.

Should I buy a custom or pre-built mechanical keyboard?

Custom mechanical keyboards let you customize almost everything, including the layout, switches, and keycaps to your preferences. They cater to individuals looking for specific features not found in pre-built keyboards and customization enthusiasts with the right skills or budget.

The built-in keyboard is ideal for those who like performance, engaging software, and minimal customization. Choosing a pre-built keyboard allows you to try out a mechanical keyboard, explore your preferences, and ultimately find or create the perfect custom keyboard.

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