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MSN Shopping Buyer's Guide

## Watches

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The wristwatch was invented in the late 1800s, and since then this portable resource has reflected the technological and cultural shifts of its time. Whether you want a watch for professional polish, strict sports-related timekeeping, high-fashion flair or just a casual way to keep your eye on the hour, it's helpful to arm yourself with a few background basics before you buy.

### Types of Watches

There are a myriad of styles and price points on offer, from low cost, hyper-trendy watches that are most decidedly not heirloom material, to meticulously crafted models made of the finest materials that are, well, timeless. Variation in look, construction and operation are all important considerations, but there are two main differences in wristwatches, and these are the internal mechanisms, or "movements," that power the timekeeping functions.

- **Quartz Movements** are powered by a battery current passing through a quartz crystal. The oscillation drives the step motor that controls the movement of the watch hands. At 32,000 vibrations per second, these are the most accurate movements, losing only a handful of seconds each month. Convenience is a key advantage as batteries last an average of 1.5 years, and there's no need to wind the watch. Quartz movements are also typically less expensive than their mechanical cousins.
- **Mechanical Movements** harken back to the great tradition of watchmaking and many of these models will give you superior longevity. Complex mechanics, including spring-driven oscillators, are powered either by manual winding, or, in an "automatic" watch, the motion of the wearer's arm provides the kinetic energy needed to keep the time. The majority of prestigious watch brands employ this skillfully-made movement.

### Key Features

Watches are such a ubiquitous part of our time-pressed age, and such a popular style statement, that you're sure to find a combination of features that fits your mood, lifestyle, or profession.

- **Case Materials** determine a good percentage of the purchase price. Depending on your activity level, taste and discretionary income, you can buy anything from a [solid gold watch](#) to a [funky all-plastic model](#). Precious metals are obviously going to cost the most. [Sterling silver](#) can be a terrific bargain, while [yellow](#) and [white](#) gold are used to lustrous effect, and [platinum](#) is reserved for the most luxurious examples. Both men and women can find cases encrusted with [diamonds](#) and other precious gems, but the biggest bling is typically reserved for the girls. [Stainless steel](#) is an elegant and durable metal used on a whole slew of mid-range watches, and [titanium](#) goes one better — it's both lighter *and* stronger than stainless.
- **Band Types & Materials** come in two main varieties — the bracelet and the strap. A bracelet is usually made of metal, and constructed in links. Straps are made from fine leathers, exotic skins, faux materials, rubber, nylon, and fabric. Most watches allow you to remove straps and replace them at your whim.
- **Crystals, Dials & Faces** add durability and beauty to your timepiece. The crystal covers the watch face and, depending on its material, resists scuffing. Sapphire crystals are the toughest to scratch, while mineral crystals provide fairly adequate protection for regular wear. Be extra careful when sporting watches with plastic and acrylic crystals, as these are the least scratch-resistant. Dials and faces can really amp up the dazzle quotient when layered with precious metals, gleaming mother-of-pearl, or jewels marking the hours.

- **Complications** are both useful and fanciful extras that add modern pizzazz, old-world elegance or extra complexity to the piece. Common timekeeping tasks include chronographs that act as a sort of fancy stopwatch, all manner of calendar windows, and retro-styled moon-phase indicators.
- **Water Resistance** can mean the difference between a watch that keeps on ticking and one that's kicked the bucket. Although none are truly waterproof, you'll easily find models that can bear the intense immersion and pressure of scuba diving, an occasional dip in the pool, or a random sink splash. However, no matter how resistant, watches shouldn't be worn in a hot tub, bath or shower.

### How to Choose

It's a safe bet that you'll purchase more than a few wristwatches in your time, and these handy devices will likely serve more than one purpose. Whether you want a funky blink-and-you'll-miss-it fad on your wrist, a seriously sturdy sports watch, an enduring classic, or an awe-inspiring piece of fine jewelry that just happens to tell the time, there's a model out there that will fit perfectly.

When grabbing a trendy watch based on its momentary mojo, stick with quartz movements, plastic, rubber or aluminum cases, acrylic crystals and inexpensive, interchangeable, bands of different texture and color. Play around with digital displays and other retro-cool touches and don't worry too much about water-resistance ratings. And even though these varieties may be inexpensive, keep them away from magnets, as they'll fry the quartz movement.

Picking a sports watch calls for a little more caution. You'll want something that will stand up to the rigors of the game, but with a bit of dash for your cash. Keep materials in mind. Rubber may not be flashy stuff, but it's truly comfortable, impervious to sweat, and can take some hard shocks. Titanium is another good, albeit more expensive, option, and it's best worn during no-contact activities like golf, running and rowing. A chronograph is almost a pre-requisite when considering this category, as its smaller sub-dials can measure time to the split-second. For even more versatility, look for rotating bezels that also function as timers.

Your everyday timepiece, whether worn to the office, on errands, or just socializing, need not be dull or "sports casual." A mid-range watch with sleek lines and classic design will survive through many a burned-out fad and compliment almost everything in your wardrobe. Steer clear of anything overly fancy, loud or plastic, and look for sturdy, time-tested elements like leather bands, mineral crystals, uncluttered faces, and dependable stainless steel or gold-plated cases. Practical movements, like a calendar window, will keep you up to date.

Choosing your special occasion watch should be a slow and informed process. Depending on the designer, merchant and model, these high-end beauties can be a relative bargain or a splurge that rivals your last car purchase. Quality of materials and workmanship is of utmost importance here, so don't be swayed by seeing a particular timepiece on a certain media mogul or vapid pop star. Key qualities include bands of fine leather or reptile skin, bracelets and cases forged from solid precious metals like gold or platinum, intricate complications, faces glimmering with lustrous inlays and sparkling gemstones, and inner mechanisms that will last through generations. Pay special attention to the amount of product the company manufactures, as some well-known and pricey brands send millions of mass-produced watches to the market each year. The finest watchmakers typically stress quality over quantity.

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