

I Tried The iPhone X — And The Killer Feature Is Its Size

[Nicole Nguyen](#)/Oct 30, 2017 - BuzzFeed

The iPhone X has the 8 Plus's killer cameras, in a size that's much better for small hands.



iPhones have had the [same thick borders](#) — what Apple lovingly calls the “forehead and chin” — sandwiching the top and bottom of the display for a decade. Meanwhile, Android phone screens have literally been pushing boundaries.

For the past few years, Samsung, LG, and Pixel displays inched [closer and closer](#) to the hardware’s edge, with bright-as-heck screens that spill over the sides and disappear into their surroundings like infinity pools. This iPhone user, trapped by iMessage and the comforts of iOS, looked on longingly, wondering when I, too, would get a phone that looks more *Minority Report* and less like something from the early ’00s.

Then, this September, Apple unveiled the iPhone X. All-screen comes to those who wait.



Instead of a home button, there’s just screen. Instead of a “forehead” at the top, there’s a an inch and a quarter-long “notch” that looks like a tiny manila folder flap, squeezed in between more screen. And that, friends of the internet, is the most significant

hardware design update this rectangle with rounded corners has gotten since Steve Jobs first announced the iPhone in 2007.

It got a new price tag too. The iPhone X, which arrives in stores (and, for those who pre-ordered, ships) on Friday, Nov. 3, is the most expensive iPhone ever. It costs \$999 for 64GB (and \$1,150 for the larger 256GB version), not including the case you'll want to protect your phone because screen repairs now cost \$279 out of warranty. For comparison, the new 64GB iPhone 8 Plus costs \$799 and its screen repairs cost \$169.

I've been living with the iPhone X for a week, and I'll say right off the bat: This phone isn't for everyone.

Do you *need* an edge-to-edge display and facial recognition and the ability to turn yourself into an animated poop emoji? Of course not.

The X (technically pronounced "ten," but call it whatever you want) is really only for people who use the **heck** out of their phones. I'm talking about a ton of photo taking, video shooting, social-media performative exhibiting, gaming, web browsing, etc. This is a device for a power user, not a casual smartphoner who texts and uploads an Instagram every once in a while. The iPhone 7 or 8 (or, hell, even the [iPhone SE](#)) are totally sufficient for those folks.

But is it a damn good phone? Yes it is.

That said, the iPhone X and I were not off to a great start.



I opened the box, peeled off the screen sticker slowly, because I'm dramatic (and also it's the best part of this job), and powered up the phone for the first time. Then I accidentally pressed the flashlight shortcut on the lockscreen and swiped up, which took me to the setup page. Tried to swipe down from the top right corner, the new gesture for Control Center. Nada. Tried swiping down from anywhere. Nada again.

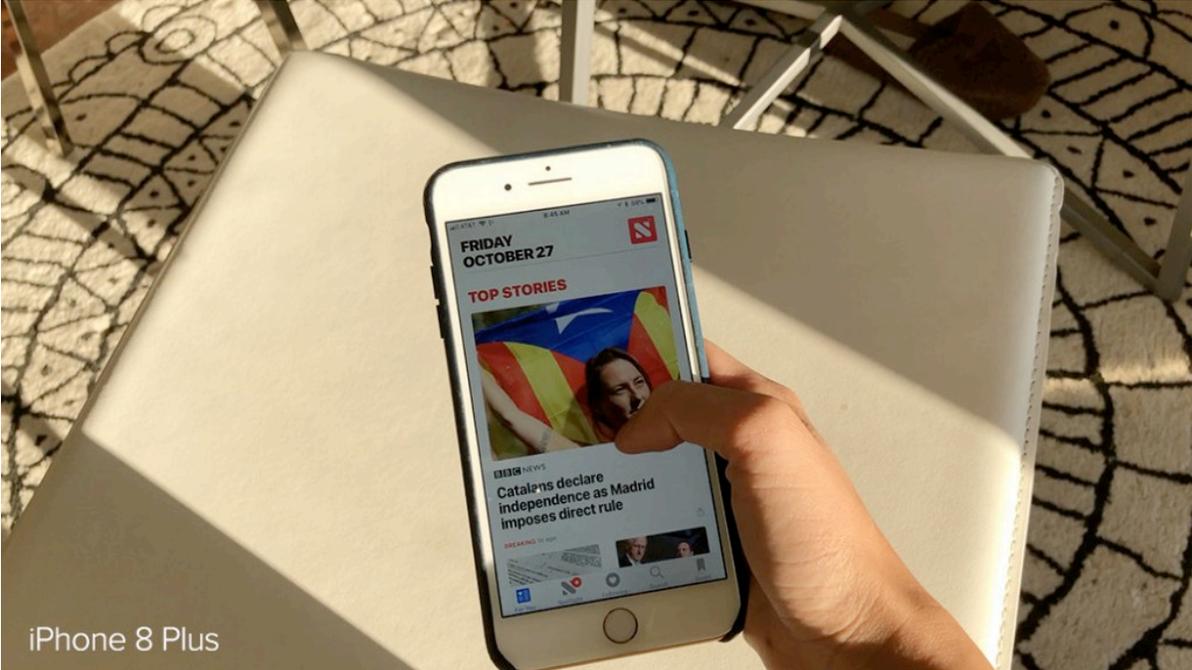
So I set up the phone with the flashlight on. And that was my first five minutes with the iPhone X.

(I will also mention that for the first two days, while I was finishing setup and downloading a ton of apps, the phone felt warm, like a mug fresh out of the microwave. But since then it's been cool, except for when I was shooting 4k video all day.)

The iPhone X's display is OLED, instead of the LCD that older iPhones have.

OLED's main advantage is that it's very bright and high contrast. Compared with other iPhones, it's much easier to read text, watch videos, and, put simply, *see* the screen, especially in direct sunlight and even with sunglasses.

Its display is 5.8 inches diagonally, which is larger than the 8 Plus's 5.5-inch display, but slightly taller and skinnier.



iPhone 8 Plus



iPhone X

Once I learned the new finger choreography, using the new xOS was fine. But for the first day or two, I was a hot swiping mess.

The home button, the iPhone's longtime escape key, has been replaced with a slew of different swipes and volume control/power button combos. Swipe up to get back to the homescreen. Swipe down from the top right for the Control Center. Swipe up from the bottom and hold to go to the app switcher. Press and hold the side button to activate Siri. Press and hold the side button and volume button to turn the device off...and so on and so forth.



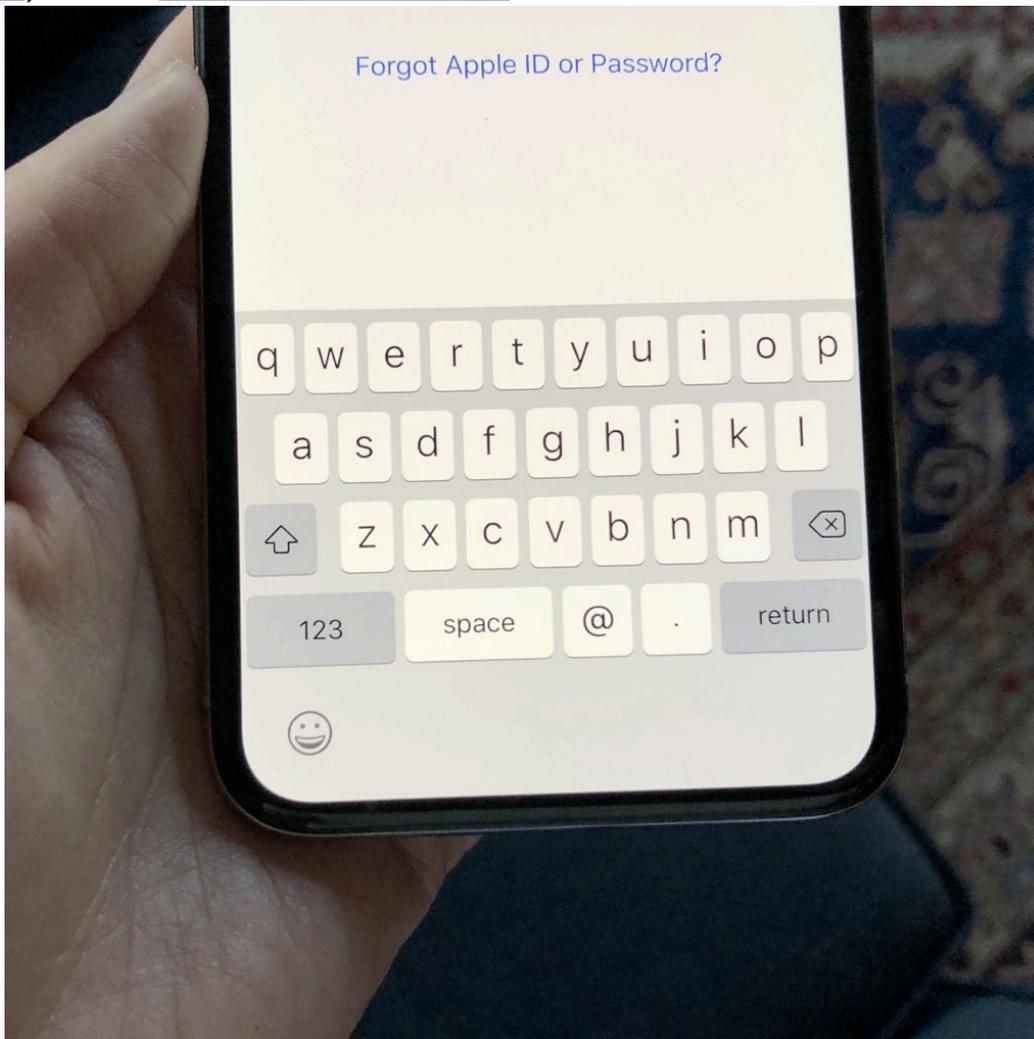
Some gestures are easier to get than others. The app switcher swipe, which sends you some gentle haptic feedback once in switch mode, is particularly satisfying, and takes about the same amount of time as double-clicking the home button.

But Reachability (a setting that pushes the top of the screen down to make it more accessible to your thumb) is tough to get used to. It's enabled by swiping up from the bottom and then throwing the app window down, and most times I don't get it on my first try. I

still suck at Reachability, and find the double home button tap on older iPhones much easier.

The all-screen experience is mostly wonderful (even with that controversial notch), but some details feel.

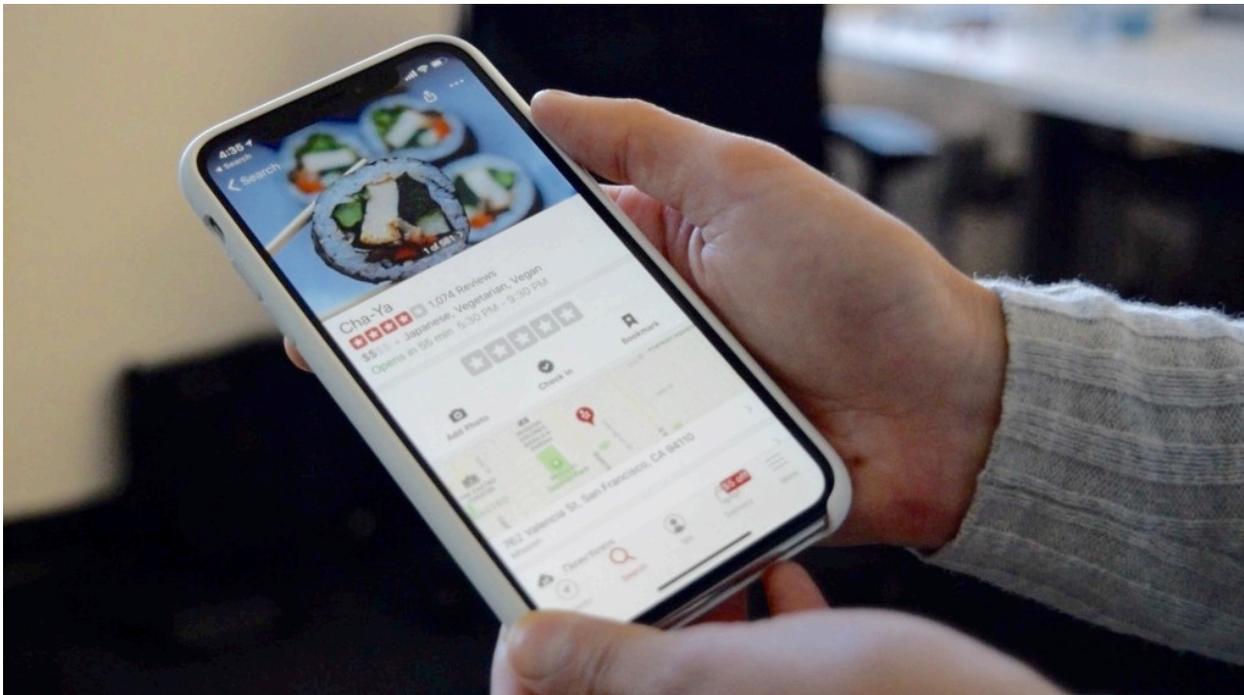
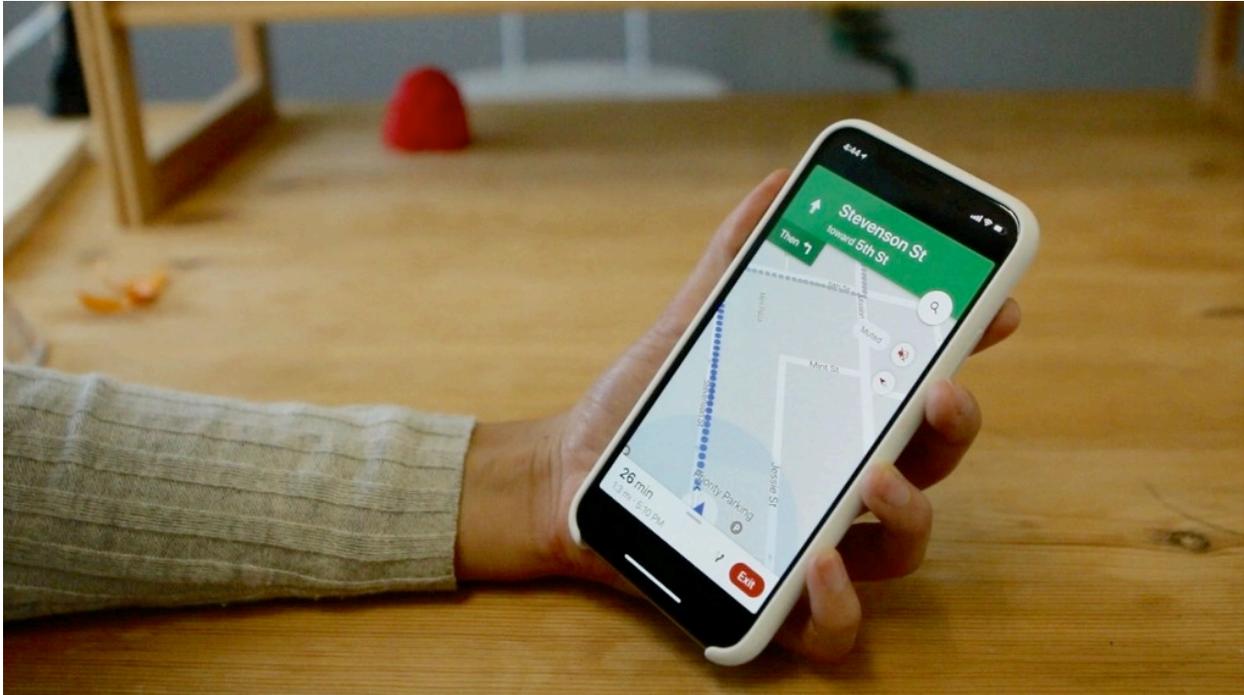
The time is now on the very top left of the screen, while cellular, Wi-Fi, and battery symbols are squeezed into the top right corner. The “notch” in the middle, where the front-facing camera and all of the facial recognition tech are packed in, has been called “[bad](#),” “[dumb](#),” and “[an absolute affront](#).”



Whatever. I don't feel strongly about the notch either way, but it's really the *other* end of the screen that feels awkward. It's when

the keyboard, in any app, is on screen (which, for me, is most of the time): There's all this dead space on the bottom, where Apple could have put common punctuation, frequently used emojis, or literally anything, but instead left it blank. Other full-screen apps on other phones put navigation or other design elements in that area, and it doesn't look crowded or cramped. It looks fine. It's puzzling why Apple didn't put something more useful down at the bottom, or why it didn't add a row of numbers or emojis up top and push down the keyboard to make it more thumb-accessible.

Speaking of full-screen apps, there are already a handful optimized for the iPhone X, including Facebook, Twitter, Yelp, Messenger, Pocket, LastPass, Lyft, Uber, WhatsApp, and Instagram, in addition to iOS's default apps like Safari and Notes. Apps that aren't optimized have an old "forehead-and-chin" border, making the phone feel like an iPhone 6 or 7 or 8. Unsurprisingly, none of the Google apps have been updated yet. Neither has Spotify or, weirdly, the Apple Store app. This, I expect, will change, as developers update their apps for X compatibility. But, as it stands, the X doesn't *feel* like the "future of the smartphone" when I open some of my most-used apps. It feels like I'm looking at the same slab of glass I've seen for the last decade.



Another thing that doesn't feel futuristic: Face ID — and that's a good thing.

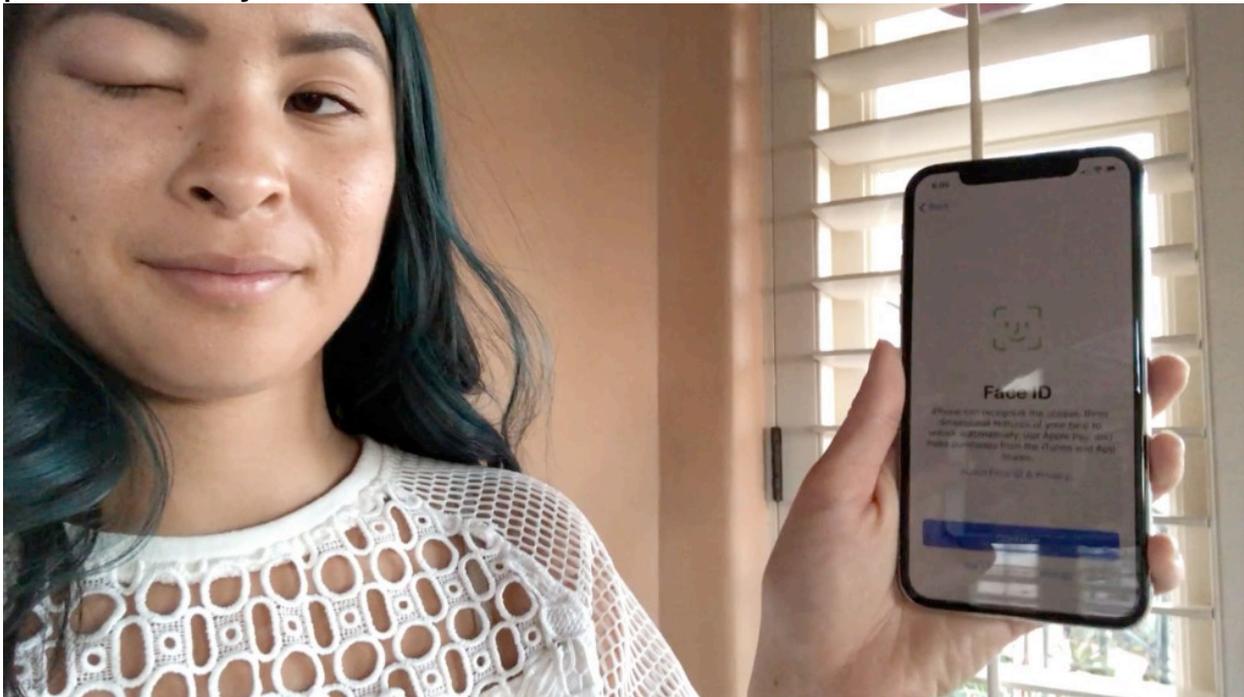
Simply put: Face ID is really f**king impressive. But that's because it's *invisible*.

You pick up your phone, swipe up, and you're in. You open your password manager, a little orb swirls, and you're in.

Android has had a face unlock feature since 2011 and Samsung introduced its own earlier this year, but neither of those implementations work quite as seamlessly as Apple's.

For a normal human who isn't aware of the 30,000 invisible dots being projected on their face or the 3D map of their head encrypted somewhere deep inside their phone, there's nothing "futuristic" about these interactions. Using Face ID is what life without a passcode — life before we all became paranoid technofreaks — felt like.

We live in a post-passcode world and, in this world, your passcode is your face.



My Face ID journey started with a mosquito.

Last week, during a heat wave in San Francisco, a mosquito targeted me while I was sleeping. On my eye. My face was the

only part of my body not covered by my comforter, and I paid for it. (But, honestly, what kind of mosquito is dumb enough to try to suck blood out of an EYELID??)

It happened the night before I was supposed to drive down to Apple's headquarters, meet with execs, grab my loaner unit, and start reviewing. That night, I popped a Benadryl and hoped that the swelling would subside by morning. It didn't.

And so me and my ogre eye dragged ourselves to Cupertino. I set up Face ID immediately, because there was no time to waste. I was worried that my swole-eye would muck up Face ID somehow. But remarkably, over the next few days, as my face retreated back to normalcy, Face ID kept up with my changing eye and I didn't need to rescan once.



Face ID felt fast, easy, and secure enough (as long as you don't have a twin or a lookalike sibling).

The feature worked as promised: with sunglasses, without sunglasses, with my hair up, with it down, at night in the dark, or during the day.

With the default setting, if you don't have sunglasses on, your eyeballs need to be facing the screen for Face ID to work. (You can also turn off this requirement in Accessibility settings if you can't physically look at the screen, but requiring attention provides another layer of security, according to Apple.) If you're looking off

to the side or both of your eyes are shut, the screen won't unlock (possibly good to note if you ever get mugged or arrested and someone's trying to force-unlock the phone). It also doesn't work while you're yawning (me every morning).

The phone uses this "Attention" feature in other ways as well. If your alarm goes off or someone calls and it senses you looking at the screen, the volume will turn down. If it can tell you're looking at the phone but there's no touch activity (maybe you're reading an article intently), the display won't go to sleep.

If you swipe up immediately on the screen when using Face ID, it's as fast as Touch ID.

Raising to wake up the phone and looking at the device will unhide your notifications on screen (the equivalent of tapping the home button on older iPhones). Immediately swiping up on the lockscreen will take you to the home screen (the equivalent of clicking the home button).

The iPhone needs to be in close range (about my arm's length, ~1.5 feet) for Face ID to register — but it'll work with multiple angles: whether you're holding your phone below your face (as most people do), or holding it up, as though you're about to take a picture.

Using Apple Pay with Face ID is a little more awkward than using it with Touch ID. Instead of just laying your phone directly on a card reader while holding your thumb down for Touch ID, you need to double click the side button, authenticate with your face, and then hold the phone to the terminal.

But overall, Face ID worked great, which is surprising because so many others have tried and failed to implement facial recognition.

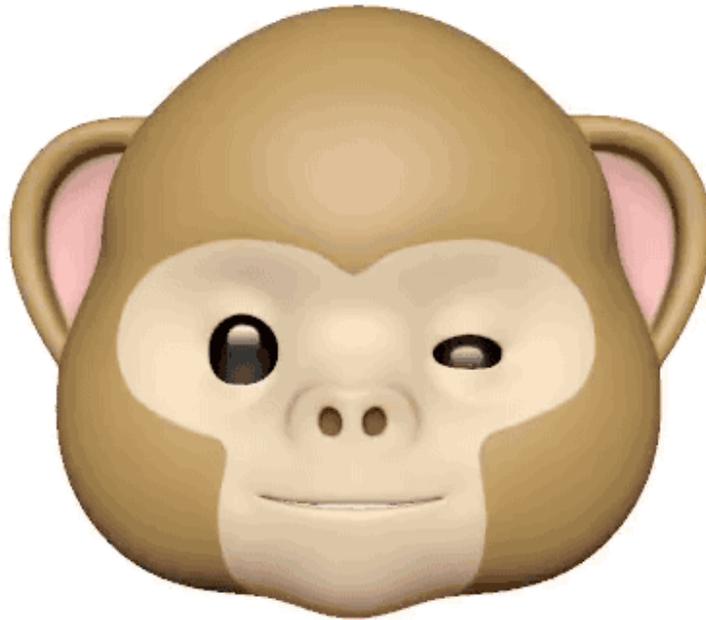
People were able to unlock the Galaxy Note 8 [with a photo](#), and Android 4.1's "liveliness check," which required the user to blink, was [similarly fooled](#). I tried tricking the iPhone with selfies, and Face ID didn't budge.

But that's not to say it's foolproof. Apple says the probability that a [random person could unlock your phone](#) with Face ID is 1 in 1,000,000 (Touch ID's is 1 in 50,000) — but that probability goes way down if you're 13 years old or younger (Apple says it's because children's "[distinct facial features may not have fully developed](#)"), or you have a twin or even have a sibling who looks like you. In fact, my editor John Paczkowski has identical twins, and they were able to bypass Face ID's security.

The technology that powers Face ID is called TrueDepth, which not only recognizes your face, it understands depth as well.

It's all tucked away in that little "notch" at the top: the flood illuminator that blasts infrared light on your face, the dot projector that helps create a 3D map of it, and an infrared camera that captures those dots and infrared light.

This ability to 3D-map your face is also how Animojis — animated emojis that match your facial expressions and have your voice — work on the phone. The TrueDepth camera is pretty accurate. It even captured my swollen eye via Animoji.



Apple's opening up the TrueDepth camera information to developers too, and Snapchat just used Apple's augmented reality platform, ARKit, to build a handful of new filters that more closely track your face and head movements. They're cool, but it's really too bad that they're [terrifying](#).

Because of the TrueDepth camera, you can also take [Portrait Mode](#) selfies now.





The rear camera is really good (but you already knew that).

The iPhone X's rear camera is mostly the same as the iPhone 8 Plus's (which you can read more about in my [iPhone 8 review](#)). There's a new image signal processor in this year's phones (including the 8) that helps optimize features like exposure, autofocus, and HDR, plus a new "color filter" that produces more vivid colors. Like the 8 Plus, the X also has two lenses: one wide-angle (for landscape shots) and one telephoto (for closeups).

The difference in the X is that its telephoto lens has a better f/2.4 aperture (vs. f/2.8 in the 8 Plus) to let in more light. It also has optical image stabilization, which reduces blur from hand shakiness, on its telephoto lens. (The 8 Plus only has stabilization on the wide-angle, and the X has it on both.)

All of this means that stills — especially nighttime photos — look bright and clear using no zoom *and* 2x zoom.





The [Pixel 2](#) actually produced a better nighttime shot here, but the phone does not have a telephoto lens for 2x optical zoom.

On the Pixel 2, you can pinch to use digital zoom, but the image's resolution will be reduced.



In these daytime shots, the colors on the iPhone X's camera look warmer and more vivid, while the [Galaxy Note 8](#)'s photos look brighter but a bit more washed out.



The Galaxy Note 8 is an apt comparison, because it similarly has a dual-lens camera with optical image stabilization on both lenses.



The same was true of the phone's video capabilities, compared with Pixel 2 and Galaxy Note 8.



Battery life on the iPhone X is decent, but not stellar.

In my tests, the iPhone X lasts a day with some juice left over — but not enough to go for two days, so you'll need to charge it overnight. Like the iPhone 8, the X supports wireless charging, and you can read my full thoughts on that [here](#).

It was difficult to precisely measure the phone's battery life, since I only had a week to review and I was using it heavily every day, including shooting in 4k video at 60 frames per second and reading in direct sunlight with the brightness turned all the way up. But here are my receipts (and an [iOS app usage breakdown](#), for those interested):

Day 1	79% at 9:04 a.m. 62% at 11:00 a.m. 15% at 2:48 p.m. 10% at 3:20 p.m. 9% at 3:40 p.m.	Installing/setting up apps (also big battery suck) Twitter, Facebook Reviewing videos Giving video notes on Slack Using Waze to drive home (1.25 hours, huge battery suck) Email
Day 2	98% at 7:55 a.m. 66% at 1:40pm 29% at 8:51pm 18% at 9:46pm 17% at 10:12pm	Listened to 30-minute podcast through iPhone speakers Twitter, Facebook WhatsApp An hour-long phone call Snapchat Lens test 4K shooting and viewing
Day 3	100% at 7:22 a.m. 67% at 11:26 a.m.	Before/after 4k video shoot Email (Plugged in phone to transfer videos, which messed up battery test)
Day 4	98% at 6:58 a.m.	(Plugged in phone to transfer photos and videos, which messed up battery test)
Day 5	100% at 8:37 a.m. 40% at 7:43 p.m. 27% at 12:12 a.m.	Google Docs Twitter, Slack, WhatsApp Took a few pics at a concert
Day 6	100% at 9:30 a.m. 87% at 2:19 p.m. 58% at 9:42 p.m.	Lyft, Google Docs, Twitter, Facebook Uploaded media to Google Drive Was mostly on Wifi
Day 7	100% at 7:10 a.m. 69% at 2:59 p.m. 22% at 12:34 a.m.	Minimal usage -- Mostly on Wifi WhatsApp, Facebook

The iPhone X has a [True Tone](#) display, like the iPhone 8, and [water resistance](#), like the iPhones 7 and 8.

I won't go into depth about those, either — you can read more about True Tone and the iPhone's IP67 rating at the above links.

There were...more software bugs than usual in a review unit. Apple needed to redesign iOS 11 to fit the new parameters of the iPhone X. Everything, even the spacing between apps on the homescreen, needed adjustments. While I was using the iPhone X this past week, things on screen didn't always look quite right.

I wasn't able to screen capture them all, but I've included the ones I got here. I sent them to Apple, and a representative said, "We believe most of what you shared are related to known issues that we are looking to address or have addressed in a future software update."

Most of the bugs were fairly minor, so I'm not too concerned. But something to keep an eye out for.



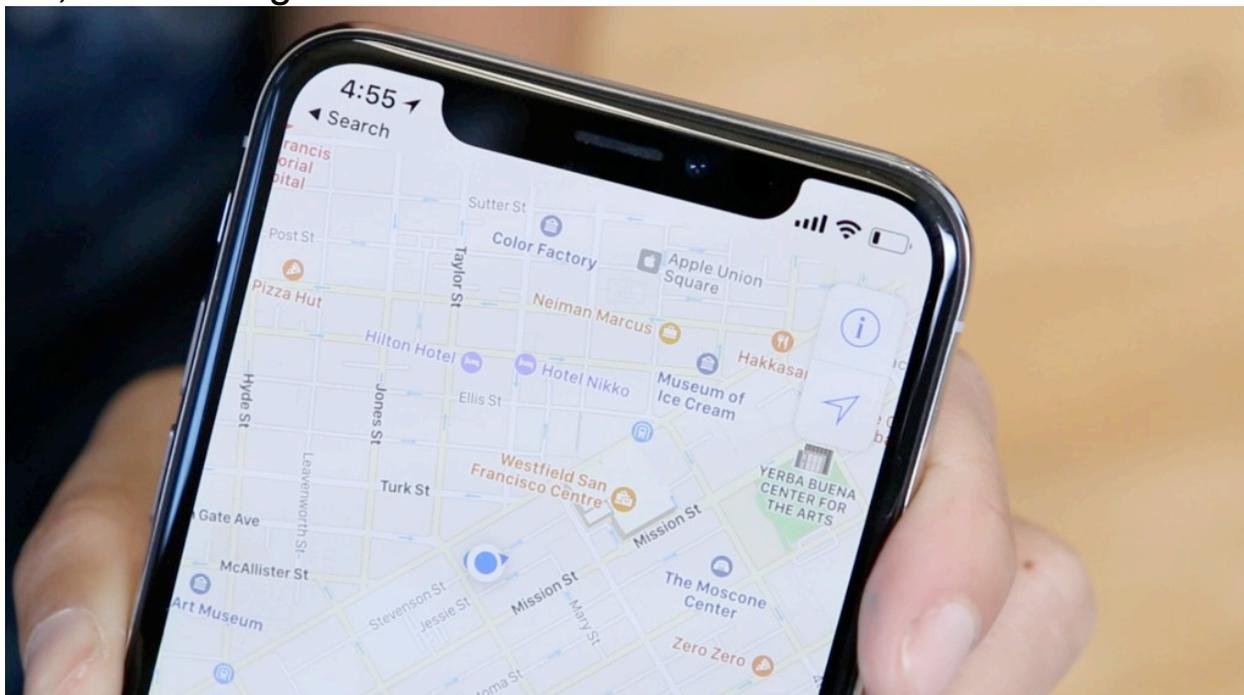
Ultimately, the most striking thing to me about this phone isn't the Face ID, 3D-face scanning tech, or the new OLED display. It's that it's got the 8 Plus's screen size — and two-lens camera — in a form factor that's much better for smaller hands and pockets.

The biggest phone is no longer the best. Apple has typically reserved its best features for its big, bulky "Plus" phones. The X changes that.

For the [small-handed](#) (like me) or those who wear women's pants, which have the dumbest, shallowest pockets, the X's size is the *real* killer feature.

Unlike the wider, heavier Plus, I can twirl the X around in one hand, and stick it in tiny jean pockets with ease. When one of my hands is preoccupied with an overhead subway strap or carrying bags of groceries, I can confidently use the X in the other, without feeling like I'm precariously holding a fragile, giant gadget.

So, is this thing worth a thousand bucks?



If you're a normal smartphone user...the iPhone 7 or 8 start at \$549 and \$699 respectively, and are great for people who just want a good phone that works right out of the box.

The person who should consider getting the iPhone X is someone who:

A) takes photography and video pretty seriously — and knows how to get exactly what they want out of an iPhone camera (there's no doubt that the X has the best iPhone camera);

B) is an early adopter, gadget-geek type who is used to learning how to use new software and loves having the latest and greatest thing;

C) and, most importantly, can actually afford to spend between \$999 and \$1,150 (or be on a \$50 per month payment plan) AS WELL AS afford the \$279 screen repair fee and the \$549 general repair fee if anything breaks.

And, for those who are going to get the X, here's one more thing. Before I leave you, I want to talk about storage. If you do decide the iPhone X is for you, you'll need to choose between getting 64GB (\$999) or 256GB (\$1,150).

I have 615 photos and videos in the iPhone X's camera roll, about 100 of which are one- to two-minute videos, and 81 apps (ridiculous, I know). After a week, I have used 37GB of storage. With 615 photos! That's a lot of media for not a lot of space.

With iOS 11's new photo compression system, you can absolutely get away with 64GB, especially if you automatically back up all of your media to Google Photos, iCloud, or something similar. But if you get the bigger model — 256GB — your phone will run much faster, for longer, and you probably won't ever worry about running out of space. ■



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