

# Apple iPad (9.7-inch, 2018) review:

[Scott Stein](#) Reviewed: March 29, 2018 - clnet  
[MSRP: \\$329.00](#)

**The Good** The 2018 entry-level iPad supports the Apple Pencil for art work and annotation, and adds a faster A10 processor. iOS continues to offer the best overall selection of free and paid apps on affordable tablets.

**The Bad** Lacks the bigger, better screen and Smart Connector found on pricier iPad Pros. The Pencil, case and keyboard add-ons will bring the price up to laptop level.

**The Bottom Line** The 2018 entry-level iPad doesn't add much, but it makes an already excellent tablet a better buy than ever.

Apple's newest 2018 iPad is basically the 2017 model with a faster processor and support for the Apple Pencil, a pricey stylus that lets you draw on the screen with remarkable accuracy. It's the same price as last year's model, too, starting at \$329, £319 or AU\$469 for the 32GB model. 128GB and LTE cellular options cost more, as you can see in the chart below.

Apple unveiled the new iPad at an [event in Chicago touting its commitment to education](#). And insofar as the new iPad's pricing goes, it still feels like a miss compared to its [primary Chromebook competitors](#). Students and educators in the

US get a modest \$30 break, and another \$10 off the price of the \$99 Pencil. I'm guessing school boards and taxpayers will grade that pricing plan with a C+ -- maybe a B- at best.

But for average consumers, this updated iPad feels like a solid A, with the [iPad Pro](#) remaining the A+. Yes, you're still paying a premium for the iPad versus, say, ultrabudget [Amazon Fire tablets](#). But the addition of Pencil support -- here if you want it, but not required -- is the icing on the cake of what was already a top-notch consumer tablet. The world of [iOS](#) apps is chock-full of everything you need, and even without the fancy screen upgrades of the iPad Pro, the Retina screen remains gorgeous and responsive.



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Yes, buying the Pencil and a good keyboard or case gets you back up into the pricing territory of a midrange Windows laptop. But the baseline iPad is delivering the bulk of the features of its step-up Pro siblings at almost half the price. And it runs circles around that old 16GB iPad you own, which you probably paid \$500 for -- before adding those same accessories to your shopping cart.

So, yeah, this iPad isn't terribly exciting. But, it's also pretty great.

**Editors' note:** We're continuing to test the new iPad, especially its battery life. Ratings are tentative until that testing is complete.

## What's different from the 2017 iPad? Speed and Pencil

Last year's \$329 model was pretty great at being a basic tablet with solid performance. Yes, it was essentially newer processors stuck into the body of an older [iPad Air \(\\$257.85 at Amazon.com\)](#), but it did its job well, and iPads haven't changed much in design over the years, so it's hard to even tell the difference.

The 2018 9.7-inch model has the same build, but improves all its internals significantly. A newer A10 processor is significantly faster, beating out every [iPhone \(\\$1,188.00 at Amazon.com\)](#) and iPad in benchmarks, except last year's iPad Pros and the iPhone 8, 8 Plus and X. (See the

performance comparison chart at the end of this article.) For a \$329 Apple device, that's pretty great.



Sarah Tew/CNET

As I said above, this iPad now works with the Pencil stylus, too, which is great news for anyone thinking of doing creative work. Much like [Microsoft's](#) Surface Pen, the Pencil stylus is pressure-sensitive and is helpful in art apps. Apple has also knitted Pencil support into its iWork suite of apps, including Pages, as well as the built-in Notes app. Instant annotations of PDFs and photos are easy, and its responsiveness is great. But you don't need the Pencil: Your finger will work just fine for basic mark-up. Most everyday iPad owners can skip the expense, or opt to add it later.

LTE speeds on the iPad are also improved, to 300Mbps. I don't use LTE on iPads (I tether with my phone), but you might.



We're not finished with battery tests, but Apple claims the same 10 hours of life for all current iPads when streaming and browsing the web. That's also the same as last year's model.

"But wait," you're saying. "That's it? Just a better processor and the option to use the Pencil? Those are the only changes from last year's model?" That's correct, and that's why I wouldn't recommend anybody with the otherwise excellent [2017 iPad](#) run out and upgrade to this model unless you're really in love the idea of a stylus. But here's the thing: Most of you don't have that [nearly identical 2017 iPad](#). You have a comparatively ancient [iPad 2 \(\\$189.99 at Best Buy\)](#) or iPad Air that's just chugging along.



Sarah Tew/CNET

So think of it this way: If you have any non-Pro iPad besides the 2017 model, the Air 2 or a Mini, the 2018 model will be slimmer and lighter. And it's faster than all previous iPads except the 2017 iPad Pros, which cost about twice as much to start.

# Pencil: The good and bad

Apple's Pencil is probably the iPad's most exciting feature of the last few years. Its ability to draw on angles and also be pressure-sensitive results in excellent digital sketching. Apple is slowly working in support in its core apps, too. The Pencil's also fast to recharge via Lightning. It's expensive, though: At \$99, £89 or AU\$145, it's nearly a third of the cost of the iPad. (Students and educators get a mere \$10 discount in the US.)

And nothing has changed about the Pencil's design, which is hardly kid-friendly: the rear cap covering the Lightning plug is way too easy to lose. The stylus tip can detach and get lost, too. And the Pencil still rolls across tables and has no way to clip onto the iPad. Unless you have a special case with a Pencil holder, you'll have to stick it in your ear.

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