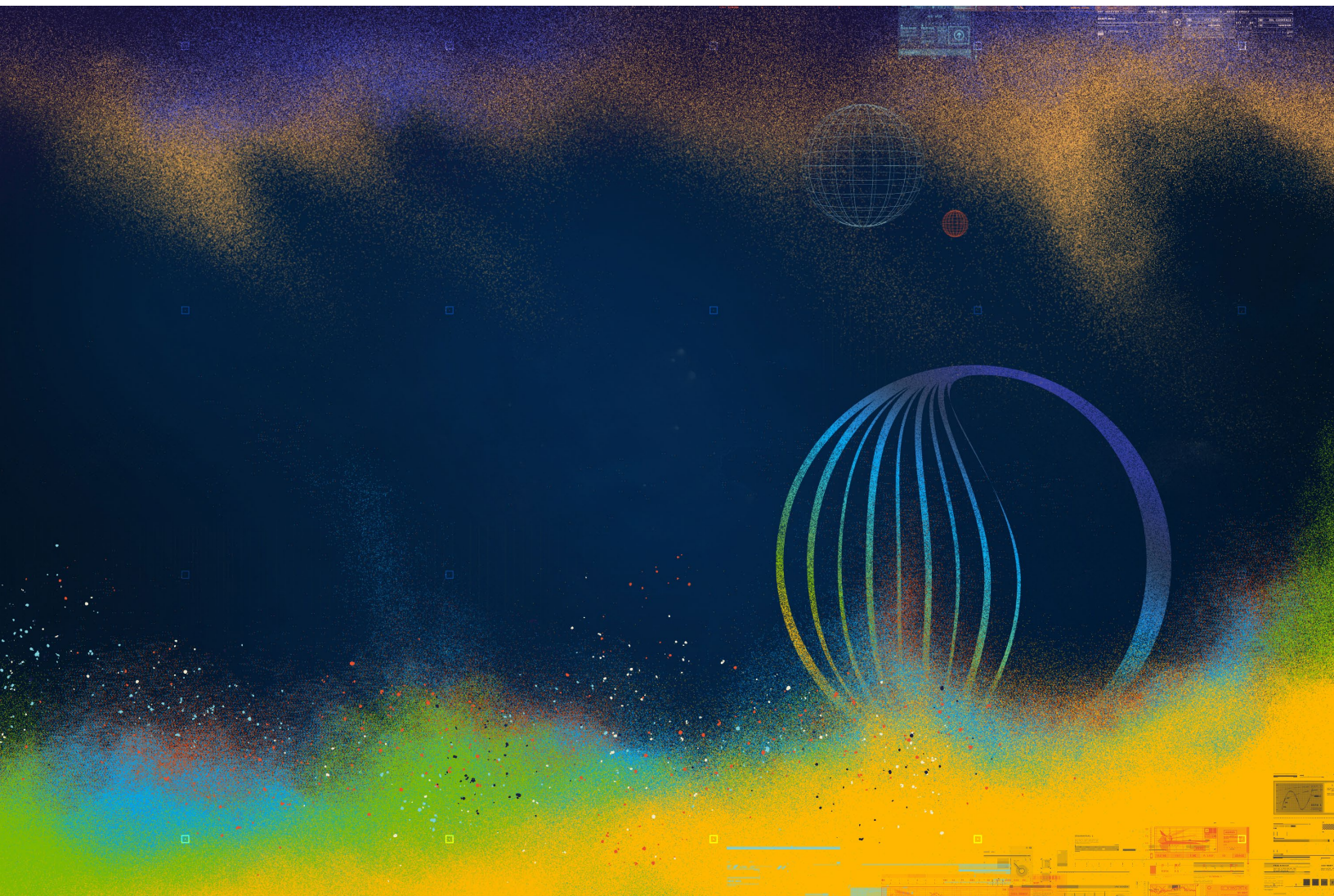




Windows and Mac: Measuring the Gap

How Today's Windows 11
PCs Compare to Mac on the
Categories That Matter

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JULY 2026

Bottom Line

An evidence-based view of how today's Windows 11 PCs compare to Mac across the categories buyers care about. Conducted by Signal65 under controlled lab conditions using publicly available, industry-standard benchmarks.

Today's Windows 11 PCs deliver powerful performance, system quality, and battery life that are comparable to Mac, while also offering broader flexibility, device choice, and compatibility. Signal65 provides a clear, data-backed view of how the two platforms compare across areas that matter to buyers. The goal of this analysis is not to generalize across all devices, but to provide an evidence-based view of how representative systems compare today.

Key Highlights



The featured Windows system leads decisively in multithreaded compute (+92%), on-device AI (+78%), and productivity (+50% Word), while holding parity in single-threaded and creative work.



Beyond benchmarks, Windows expands what a laptop can do: gaming, touch and pen, display and form-factor variety, connectivity, and customization.



The featured Windows system ran roughly even with the MacBook Air in the office battery rundown, and battery scales with configuration; entry-tier Windows systems delivered 12% to 56% longer battery life than the MacBook Neo.¹

Rethinking Windows vs. Mac Comparisons

An objective look at the strengths of Windows 11 and Mac for today's buyers.

The Context: Outdated Assumptions Still Shape Buying Decisions

The default mental model in the channel and the consumer press still gives Mac continued credit for performance, battery life, and “it just works” polish, even in areas where modern Windows silicon and platforms have closed or reversed the gap. Buyers, and many of the people advising them, are often operating from a perception of the two platforms that may not fully reflect recent advances across Windows silicon and platforms.

¹ Windows 11 PCs Compared to MacBook Neo <https://signal65.com/research/windows-11-pcs-compared-to-macbook-neo/>

Apple’s introduction of the MacBook Neo at lower price points puts the Mac brand in front of more mainstream buyers than at any point in the last decade, raising the stakes for the Windows competitive narrative across both the volume and premium tiers. The conversation is no longer confined to premium creative buyers; it now runs through the heart of the mainstream market.

Clear data helps ensure buyers are evaluating platforms based on current capabilities, not past perceptions. By [building on the Signal65 MacBook Neo report’s entry-tier findings](#), which were commissioned by Microsoft, this analysis brings the same evidence-based approach to the mainstream segment, offering a more complete and up-to-date comparison.

This report brings together two complementary perspectives to provide a clearer view of how today’s platforms compare. For many users, this comparison is not abstract, it shows up in the ability to go deeper into the things they care about, from creative projects to more technical or enthusiast use cases.

Where Windows matches Mac. Across single-threaded performance, system quality, creative apps and photo editing, and battery life, the featured Windows system and Mac show comparable results in many real-world scenarios, based on head-to-head evaluation using industry-standard benchmarks.

Where Windows expands the experience. The featured Windows system leads decisively in multi-threaded compute, on-device AI and productivity. Beyond these areas, the Windows ecosystem supports a wider range of device types and use cases, such as PC gaming, touch and pen input, and convertible designs, along with greater variation in hardware configurations, connectivity, and customization across OEMs. This diversity enables choice across different user needs and preferences.

Two Stories, One Narrative

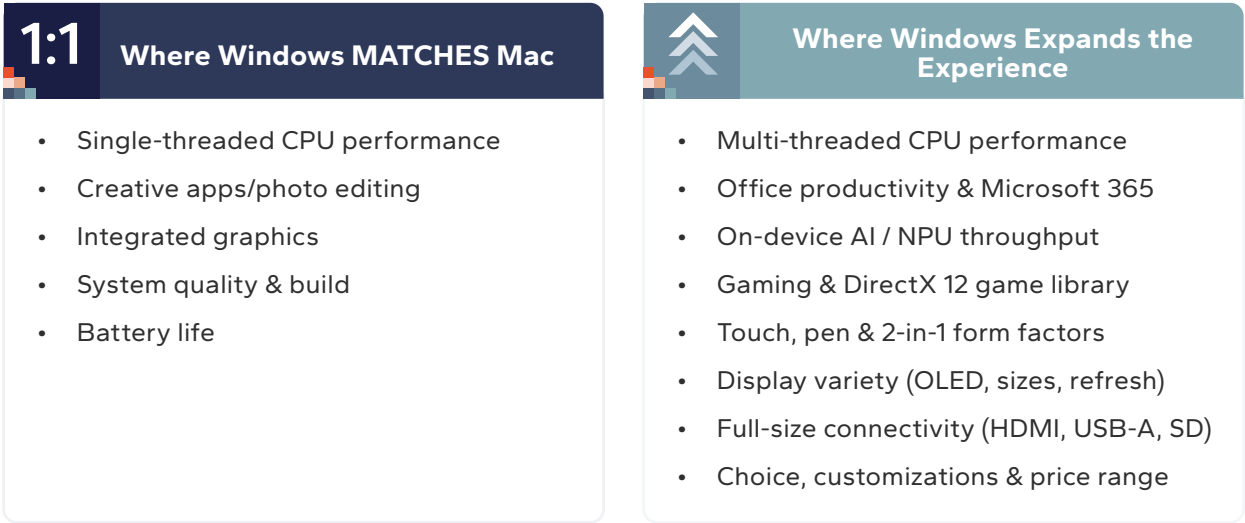


Figure 1: The report’s recurring scaffold. Readers always know which half of the story they are in.

Systems Under Test

This report focuses on the mainstream tier, the most important head-to-head for the broad consumer narrative, with entry-tier context carried over from the [Signal65 Neo compete report](#).

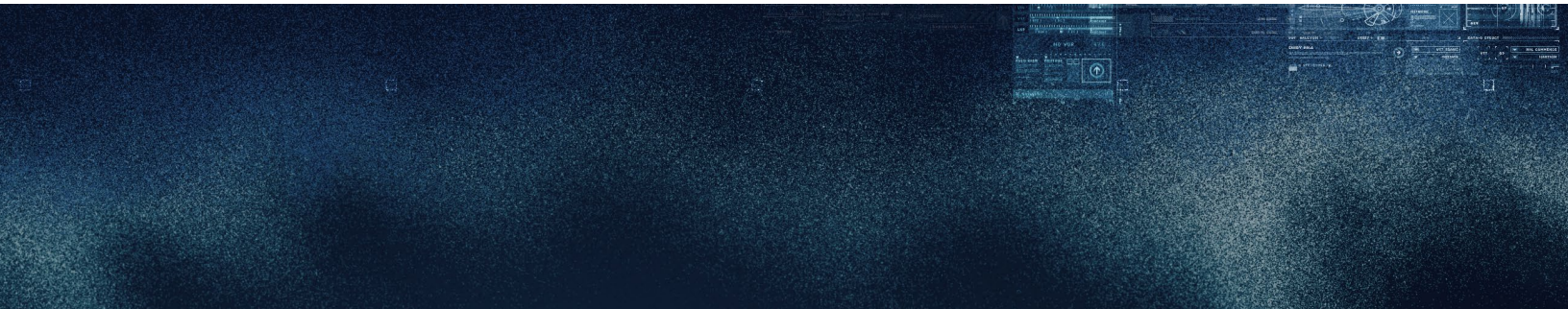
Windows comparison systems are selected to align to the same price band as Mac, reflecting how many buyers evaluate options in-market.

All performance testing was conducted under AC power in the default balanced power profile, with median results reported across a minimum of three runs. Performance claims are qualified with “in our testing,” per Signal65’s reporting standard.

Note that this report’s insights are based on testing conducted using one Mac device and one Windows 11 PC. Not all features are available on all devices; availability and performance varies by device, configuration, usage, and other factors.

System	Silicon	Tier	Form factor	Role in report
Apple MacBook Air 15"	Apple M5	Mainstream	Clamshell	Mac baseline
Asus Zenbook A16	Snapdragon X2 Elite Extreme	Mainstream	Thin-and-light	Featured Windows comparison
Windows entry-tier set	Snapdragon X1 / Intel / AMD	Entry	Clamshell + 2-in-1	Context from Neo report

Table 1: Systems under test. This draft features the Asus Zenbook A16 (Snapdragon X2 Elite Extreme) as the mainstream Windows comparison against the MacBook Air 15" (M5), with entry-tier context reused from the [Neo compete report](#).



Where Windows Matches Mac, and Differentiates

What stands out in the current data is how close the comparison has become in areas traditionally associated with Mac, such as performance, battery life, and overall system quality. To illustrate this in a concrete way, we focus on a representative head-to-head comparison: the ASUS Zenbook A16 powered by Snapdragon X2 Elite Extreme, and Apple’s MacBook Air 15" with the M5 chip. While this is a single example, it provides a helpful reference point and frames the broader findings in this report.

This example is intended to be illustrative, not definitive. It does not suggest that all Windows PCs outperform the MacBook Air but rather shows that a mainstream Windows device at a comparable price point can perform competitively in these areas, and in some cases show meaningful advantages.

Performance Insights

Across a cross-platform benchmark suite, the Snapdragon X2 system reaches parity with the M5 MacBook Air in the categories most associated with Apple silicon, and moves ahead in multi-threaded compute, NPU AI performance, productivity, and graphics. These gains matter beyond benchmarks, enabling users to take on more complex workloads and explore interests that benefit from higher performance, whether that is content creation, development, or more advanced computing tasks.

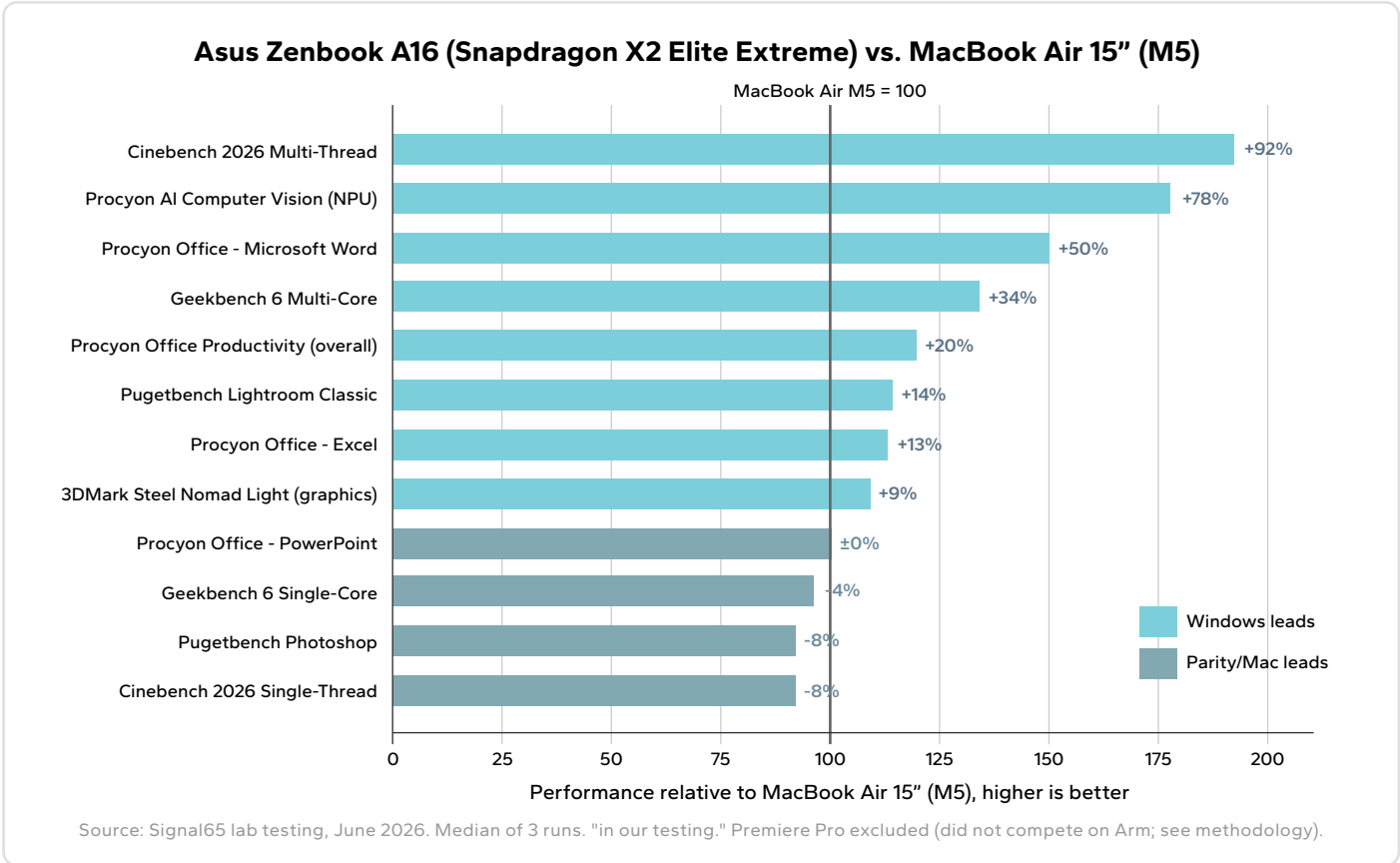


Figure 2: Asus Zenbook A16 (Snapdragon X2 Elite Extreme) performance relative to the MacBook Air 15" (M5), where the Mac equals 100. Higher is better. Median of three runs; in our testing.

Reading the Chart

- **Multi-threaded CPU.** The Snapdragon X2 system delivered 92% higher Cinebench 2026 multi-thread and 34% higher Geekbench 6 multi-core scores than the MacBook Air M5 in our testing, a decisive lead in sustained, many-core work.
- **On-device AI / NPU.** 78% higher in Procyon AI Computer Vision and roughly 53% higher on the 2.0 native and WinML runs, reflecting the platform's Copilot+ PC-class NPU.
- **Office productivity.** 20% faster overall in Procyon Office Productivity, with Microsoft Word 50% faster and Excel 13% faster. PowerPoint was effectively at parity.
- **Graphics.** 9% higher in 3DMark Steel Nomad Light, and the Windows system also runs the DirectX 12 path, which has no macOS equivalent (more on that in the ecosystem section).
- **Where the Mac holds parity or a slight edge.** Single-threaded CPU was within a few percentage points (Geekbench single-core -4%, Cinebench single-thread -8%), and the Mac led in two creative tests, PugetBench Photoshop (-8%) and Procyon Photo Editing (-11%). We present these honestly: the headline is parity with selective leads, not a clean sweep.

The Pattern Holds One Tier Down: The Entry-level Story

This is not the first time benchmark testing has put the two platforms side by side. In Signal65's Neo compete report, also commissioned by Microsoft, four mainstream Windows 11 laptops were measured head-to-head against Apple's MacBook Neo, and the results pointed in the same direction as the data above.

The strongest Windows systems in that study led the MacBook Neo by up to 92% in Cinebench 2026 multi-thread, up to 58% in Adobe Photoshop, up to 70% in Lightroom Classic, and up to 49% in 3DMark Steel Nomad Light, while also delivering up to 56% longer battery life in a real-world Office rundown and shipping with 16GB and 1TB configurations against the Neo's 8GB and 256GB. In other words, the mainstream-tier pattern of parity-and-advantages shown above is consistent with what the entry tier already demonstrated.

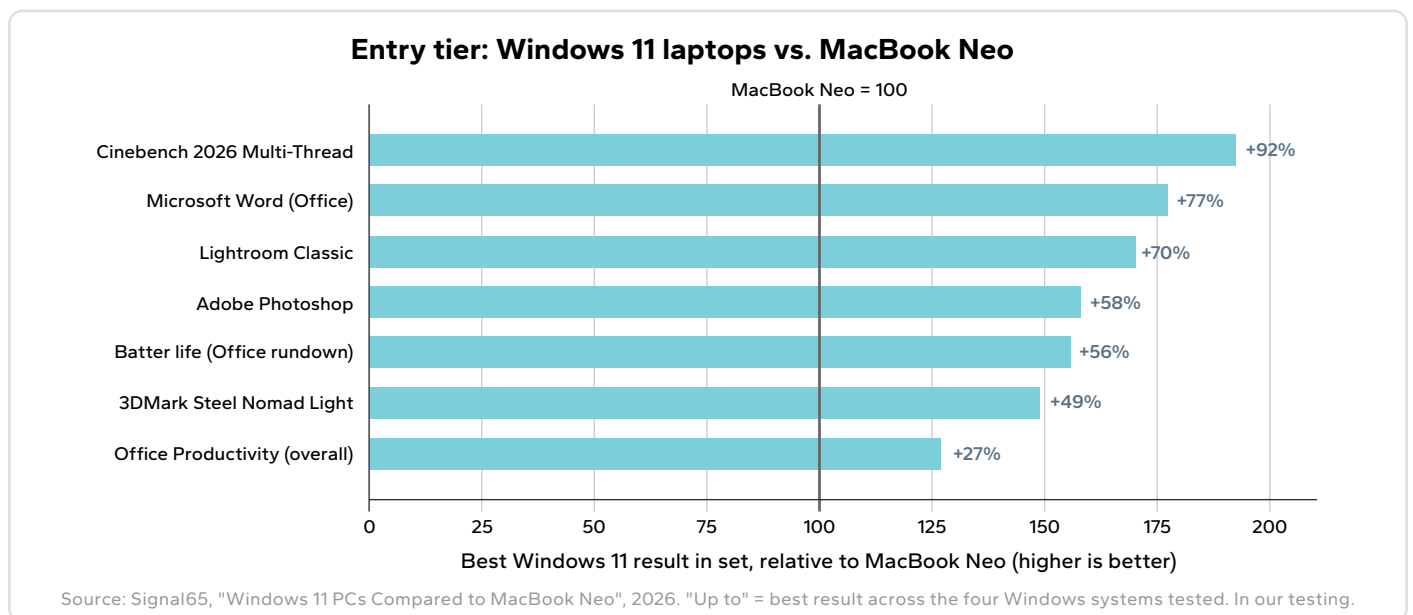


Figure 3: Entry tier, from the Signal65 Neo report: the best Windows 11 result in each test relative to the MacBook Neo (Neo = 100). In our testing.

System Quality Insights

System quality is no longer an Apple preserve. Across the full span of prices that Windows laptops occupy, from value mainstream models to flagship ultraportables, buyers can find the same hallmarks of a premium machine that Mac is known for, without committing to a single design or a single price.

Look for the things that signal quality on a Mac and you will find them across multiple Windows 11 devices: all-aluminum, CNC-machined unibody chassis; bright, high-contrast displays, including OLED options; wide color-gamut panels covering sRGB and DCI-P3 for photo and video work; large precision-glass trackpads; comfortable backlit keyboards; and quiet, well-tuned thermals. The difference is that on Windows these qualities appear across many designs and price points, not in a single product line.

The practical takeaway for buyers is straightforward: achieving a premium experience doesn't require a single form factor or price point. Windows devices offer flexibility in how that experience comes together, giving buyers the ability to choose the design, display, and size that best support how they work and what they enjoy doing on their PC.

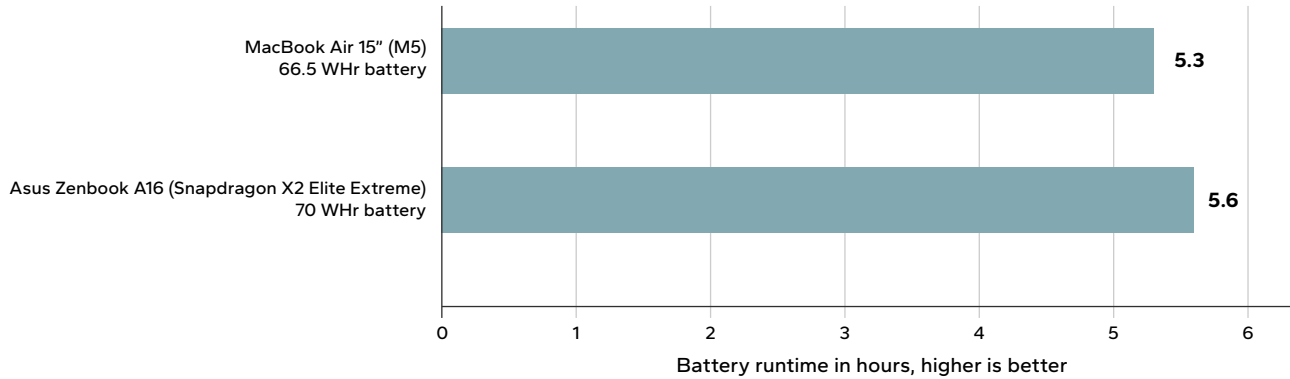


Dell XPS 14, HP EliteBook Ultra, Lenovo ThinkPad X1, ASUS Zenbook DUO, Samsung Galaxy Book6 Ultra

Battery Life Insights

Battery life is the single most assumed Mac advantage, so the most useful finding here is a quiet one: in our testing, the featured Windows system, the Asus Zenbook A16 on the Snapdragon X2, runs slightly longer than the MacBook Air M5 in the Procyon Office Productivity battery rundown, measured on battery power with screen brightness set to 150 nits. Reaching parity in the category Apple is most assumed to own is itself the headline. And this is only one configuration: battery life on Windows scales with battery capacity and display choice, so other designs, with larger batteries or lower-power panels, can stretch well beyond what a single thin-and-light shows. That battery life is a configuration choice rather than a platform ceiling is clear from Signal65's entry-tier testing in the [Neo compete report](#), commissioned by Microsoft, where Windows systems delivered from 12% to 56% longer battery life than the MacBook Neo in a real-world Office rundown, depending largely on the battery and configuration chosen. Battery life, in other words, is shaped by configuration choices rather than inherent platform constraints.

Battery Life: Procyon Office Productivity Rundown



Source: Signal65 lab testing, Run 18. Runtime derived from the Procyon Office Productivity battery test (battery % used per hour). In our testing.

Figure 4: Battery life in the Procyon Office Productivity rundown, relative to the MacBook Air 15" (M5). The Snapdragon X2 Zenbook runs on par with the Mac.

Where Windows Expands the Experience

Beyond the benchmarks, a whole set of categories exists where differences become more apparent. These reflect areas where Windows devices offer capabilities shaped by a broad, multi-OEM ecosystem, rather than any single benchmark outcome. They also matter to real buyers in concrete, everyday ways, across every price segment, shaping how people work, create, and engage with the things they care about on their PC.



Choice



Gaming



Touch & Pen



Displays



Connectivity



Microsoft 365

Microsoft 365



Compatibility



Security



Choice and versatility. Multiple OEMs, dozens of designs, and form factors spanning ultraportable, premium, gaming, convertible, creator, business, and ruggedized, so you can find the right PC for your needs. Mac focuses on a more streamlined set of clamshell configurations.

For a buyer, choice is not an abstraction; it is the ability to get exactly the machine the job calls for at a price they can pay. A student on a tight budget, a field technician who needs ruggedization, a designer who wants an OLED panel, and an executive who lives in airports are all served by different Windows designs, often from competing OEMs pushing each other on price and features. The Mac asks every one of those buyers to adapt to the same handful of clamshells.



Gaming and game-library scale. One of the clearest ecosystem differences. Windows provides access to the broadest range of PC games*, with support for DirectX 12, Game Pass, and widely used anti cheat systems. Most major titles are developed with Windows in mind, and availability on macOS varies by title.

This extends beyond enthusiasts. For many buyers, a laptop also serves as an entertainment device, and access to popular games can be a meaningful factor. Windows devices offer that flexibility across price points, while gaming options on macOS are more limited.

**Source "The Preferences Powering PC Gaming" report by Ampere Analysis, commissioned by Microsoft, September 2025*



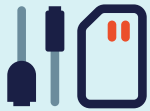
Touch and pen input. 2-in-1s, detachables, pen support, and tablet modes are categories Apple does not compete in on the MacBook product line at any price. **Neo compete data** on the Lenovo Yoga 7i and HP OmniBook X Flip already demonstrated this at the entry tier; the structural gap holds up-stack.

Touch and pen change what a laptop is for. A 2-in-1 becomes a tablet for reading and travel, a sketchpad for designers and students, a signature surface for sales, and a presentation tool that folds flat. These are not niche behaviors; they are how a large share of mainstream buyers actually use a device, and Apple reserves them for the iPad, a separate purchase on a separate operating system.



Display variety. Screen sizes from 11 to 17 inches, OLED options, and high-refresh and gaming-grade panels. Mac offers 13-, 14-, and 16-inch fixed configurations.

The display is the part of a laptop a buyer stares at all day, and Windows offers far more of it to choose from: sizes from compact 11-inch travel machines to 17-inch desktop replacements, OLED panels with deep contrast, high-refresh screens for smooth motion, and color-accurate options for creative work. The Mac menu is three fixed, though high-quality, sizes.



Connectivity. Full-size HDMI, USB-A, SD and microSD card readers, Thunderbolt, 5G modems, and broader external-display support. The MacBook Neo's two-USB-C-only layout is the visible end of a long-standing Apple connectivity gap.

Connectivity is where Apple minimalism may become a user's daily friction. Windows laptops routinely include full-size HDMI for projectors and TVs, USB-A for the mouse, drive, or dongle a person already owns, SD and microSD readers for photographers, and on many models optional 5G for working anywhere. The Mac's sparse, adapter-dependent port layout pushes those costs and hassles onto the user.

For mainstream and budget buyers especially, "it just plugs in" is real value: no hub to buy, no adapter to lose, no surprise at the conference-room table. The ports that come in the box are part of the price comparison, and Windows generally includes more of them.



Microsoft 365 on Windows. Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook with full feature parity, Copilot and the workflows millions of users already know. The first-party experience runs great on the first-party platform.

Most student and commercial work lives in Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook, and those applications are designed first for Windows. That may show up as smoother usability with enterprise documents, templates, and the keyboard-and-menu muscle memory millions of users already have.



Compatibility breadth. Decades of native Windows software, broader enterprise application support, and wide peripheral compatibility (printers, docks, gaming peripherals, monitors, accessories). For the large x86 Windows install base, that breadth can mean fewer file-type and hardware-support workarounds. On Windows on Arm, app compatibility is narrower today but continues to improve quickly through native ports and emulation.

This matters most to the buyers with the least slack: a small business that cannot rebuy its peripherals, a student who needs a specific course application, a family using an older printer. Compatibility helps protect the money already spent, at every price point.



Security and sign-in flexibility. Windows Hello provides multiple sign in options across devices, including facial recognition, fingerprint, and PIN. These options allow individuals and organizations to choose authentication methods that fit different usage scenarios, while maintaining a consistent Windows experience. On Mac, biometric sign in is available primarily through Touch ID fingerprint recognition on supported devices.

For families, schools, and businesses, having multiple sign-in options can help reduce friction while supporting secure access. A student might use a PIN, while a professional may prefer facial or fingerprint sign in, all within a consistent Windows sign in framework.

From Assumption to Evidence: The Myth List

Each common Mac assumption, paired with the evidence that challenges it and a clear takeaway. Written to be easy to quote, screenshot, and share.

The Myth	The Evidence (in our testing)	The Takeaway
"Macs are faster."	In our testing, a mainstream Snapdragon X2 Windows system showed close performance to M5 MacBook Air in single-threaded work and led by 92% in Cinebench multi-thread and 34% in Geekbench multi-core.	At the same price band, a modern Windows PC keeps pace on light tasks and pulls clearly ahead on the heavy, many-core work that takes time.
"Macs have better battery life."	In our testing, a Snapdragon X2 Windows system ran roughly even with the MacBook Air M5 in the Procyon Office Productivity rundown at 150 nits, while a larger-battery Windows configuration ran about 14% longer. At the entry tier, Windows systems led the MacBook Neo by 12% to 56%, depending on battery size and configuration.	Battery is no longer a clear Mac advantage. It is a configuration choice: parity here, and a Windows lead with the right battery and display.
"Macs are better for creators."	Mixed and workload-specific: the Mac led Photoshop (~8%) and Procyon Photo Editing (~11%), while Windows led Lightroom Classic by 14%. Windows also led the 3DMark Steel Nomad Light graphics test by 9%; GPU performance increasingly drives creative workloads.	Creative advantage is workload-by-workload, not platform-wide, and a discrete-GPU Windows configuration is the cleanest path to clear creator wins.
"Macs just work."	"Just works" is a marketing claim. Windows breadth is observable: the largest game library, options including touch and pen, broad peripheral support, and more connectivity.	Windows offers broader capabilities across a wider range of devices and use cases.
"Macs are better built and more reliable."	Modern premium Windows chassis match or exceed Mac on materials (aluminum unibody, Gorilla Glass, MIL-STD durability).	Premium build is no longer an Apple monopoly, and Windows offers it across far more designs and price points.

Table 2: Myth-versus-data summary.

Conclusion: The Case for Windows

The Mac remains a strong and well-regarded platform, and recent launches like the MacBook Neo and broader portfolio updates will continue to resonate with mainstream buyers. At the same time, some of the assumptions shaping purchase decisions have not fully caught up with the latest hardware.

In areas often associated with Mac, a mainstream Windows PC reaches parity and frequently leads. In our testing, the Asus Zenbook A16 on the Snapdragon X2 Elite Extreme platform showed close performance to the M5 MacBook Air in single-threaded and light workloads and led by up to 92% in multi-threaded CPU, 78% in on-device AI, 50% in Microsoft Word, and roughly 9% to 14% in graphics and Lightroom Classic, while running on par with it on battery life.

Beyond these areas, Windows continues to offer a broader range of experiences across device types, input methods, and software compatibility. This includes a wider selection of form factors, touch and pen support, gaming ecosystems, and expanded peripheral and application flexibility. These differences reflect platform design choices and contribute to a more diverse set of options for different user needs.

Taken together, the data suggests the comparison between Windows and Mac is more balanced than it is often perceived to be. The goal of this analysis is not to generalize across all devices, but to provide a clear, evidence-based view of how representative systems compare today.

What stands out is the degree to which current hardware narrows historical gaps while expanding choice across the ecosystem. With repeatable lab data, the conversation can shift from perception-driven assumptions to a more informed evaluation based on real-world performance and experience. Across performance, breadth of options, and overall value, Windows presents a compelling choice for many mainstream buyers, supporting both what users need to accomplish and what they want to explore.

Key Highlights



The featured Windows system leads decisively in multithreaded compute (+92%), on-device AI (+78%), and productivity (+50% Word), while holding parity in single-threaded and creative work.



Beyond benchmarks, Windows expands what a laptop can do: gaming, touch and pen, display and form-factor variety, connectivity, and customization.



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¹ Windows 11 PCs Compared to MacBook Neo <https://signal65.com/research/windows-11-pcs-compared-to-macbook-neo/>

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