# How to Choose your Braille Display

Presented by Jackie Brown on 20 April 2021

## Why buy a Braille display?

* For work
* For education
* For leisure

## What would a Braille display do for me?

* To learn or expand my use of Braille
* To pair with a Smartphone or tablet in order to read books, write text messages, and generally navigate my Smart device
* Assist me on my computer with any screen reader
* Proofread important documents
* Take minutes at work or in a voluntary capacity

## What is my budget?

* How many cells could I afford in a Braille display? How many do I need? In many cases (particularly fixed applications, where you are at a desk all day), the more cells the better. However, if you are looking for a display which is portable, a display with fewer cells would be better.
* Would I prefer more cells using modern technologies or fewer cells with more established technologies? Piezoelectric cells, found in traditional braille displays, are very quiet and refresh (change the dot combination shown) very quickly. More modern displays such as the Orbit Reader are cheaper, but use alternative technologies which are more noisy and take longer to refresh. The braille also has a different feel (though not necessarily a worse one).
* Do I want a note-taker with a web browser, email client, diary manager etc? If so, a BrailleNote or BrailleSennse may be ideal. Otherwise, a product such as the Esys from Eurobraille or the Focus Blue from Freedom Scientific may be sufficient.
* Some displays, such as the HumanWare Brailliant BI X and the Baum VarioUltra are considered "smart displays". They have some basic notetaker functionality but do not have all the bells and whistles of a BrailleNote Touch or BrailleSense.
* Do I want Braille input, for use either with the built-in apps on the braille display or in conjunction with a computer or smartphone? Not all braille displays have a braille keyboard. The Mantis Q40 in fact has a QWERTY keyboard! The QBraille XL from Hims has a hybrid of the two.
* To I need braille translation? Reading or creating text files etc?
* What connectivity do I need? USB? Bluetooth? Do I need to connect to multiple devices and switch between them quickly, e.g. a computer and a smartphone?
* What support and training might I need, is it readily available and how much does it cost? It is important to factor in these aspects
* If it requires repair, what is the return time likely to be? Sometimes, braille displays are imported from other countries and need to be returned to those countries for repair, which could take several weeks.
* If the repair is likely to take a long time, is a loan unit available?
* What is the cost of repair? This is likely to increase the more cells there are

## Advice

* Take your time in choosing a Braille device
* Ask as many questions as you need to
* Knowledge from other Braillists and word of mouth is very important
* Arrange as many demonstrations in the comfort of your own home as you can
* If you cannot arrange a demonstration in your home, visit exhibitions where the display is on show, e.g. Sight Village
* Consider asking for a discount; some companies are very obliging in that sense, and there are generally summer offers available
* If you cannot afford a new display, look on second hand websites and email lists

## Some displays on the market

* Elbraille: a docking station for the Focus Blue braille displays. Runs Windows and JAWS and can be driven entirely from the Focus Blue braille keyboard.
* HumanWare Brailliant BI 20X and 40X, Mantis Q40: smart braille displays with text editor, book reader, calculator, wifi connectivity for downloading books and software updates. The Mantis Q40 has a QWERTY keyboard and the Brailliants have a braille keyboard. You can write in braille on the Mantis with FDS and JKL if you want to.
* BrailleSense 6: Android-based braille notetaker from Hims. Has a text editor, book reader, email client, web browser etc. Can run Android apps. Braille input with 32 or 20 cells.
* Orbit Reader 20+: the cheapest display on the market. Has a basic text editor, calendar and clock. 20 modern cells. No cursor routing buttons. SD card for books from RNIB etc.
* Orbit Reader 40: as above but it does have cursor routers, and it has 40 cells.
* VarioUltra: Baum, now Visiobraille. 20 or 40 cells, editor, PDF viewer, Excel viewer and many more features. Available in the UK from Computer Room Services.
* Canute 360: 9 lines of 40 cells, manufactured by Bristol Braille Technology and distributed by Techno-Vision Systems

## Further information

Braille on Display, available from [www.mosen.org/brailleondisplay](http://www.mosen.org/brailleondisplay)

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