

Apple iPhone SE (2020) review: An affordable, capable business phone fit for uncertain times



By [Matthew Miller](#) for [Smartphones and Cell Phones](#) | April 29, 2020 -- 12:47 GMT (05:47 PDT) | Topic: [Smartphones](#) - ZDNet

PROS

- ✓ High end processor
- ✓ Low price
- ✓ Small size for the masses
- ✓ Solid battery life
- ✓ Wireless charging
- ✓ Capable rear and front cameras
- ✓ Touch ID front sensor
- ✓ \$50 charge for reasonable internal storage

CONS

- ✗ Large top bezel

A couple of years ago the [Apple iPhone X](#) restored my joy in smartphones and a lot of that had to do with the small size and extremely responsive performance of the phone. I went through the [iPhone XS Max](#) and [iPhone XR](#) before choosing to stick with the [iPhone XS](#) and then moved onto the iPhone 11 Pro.

Two months ago, I traded in my iPhone 11 Pro -- as part of the T-Mobile Jump On Demand program -- to pick up the new Galaxy S20. When I saw the announcement for the new [2020 iPhone SE](#) with a low starting price of \$399, I immediately ordered one to satisfy my iOS desires. After almost a week with this new iPhone, I'm convinced it is perfect for people like me who want an iOS experience without paying \$750 to more than \$1,000.

At \$399, you would think there would be unforgivable compromises made to launch at this low price. There were not and Apple's shot across the bow with the iPhone SE should make all Android manufacturers a bit nervous. Google launched the [Pixel 3a](#) last year with a similar strategy and may soon release the Pixel 4a, but Apple's iPhone SE currently sets the bar for sub-\$400 smartphones.

SPECIFICATIONS

- **Processor:** Apple A13 Bionic chip, third-generation neural engine
- **Display:** 4.7 inch 1334 x 750 pixels resolution LCD (326PPI)
- **Operating system:** Apple iOS 13.4
- **RAM:** 3GB (unofficial)
- **Storage:** 64GB, 128GB, and 256GB internal options
- **Cameras:** 12MP f/1.8 aperture rear camera; 7MP front-facing camera with f/2.2 aperture.

- **Wireless technology:** 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac/ax Wi-Fi-6, Bluetooth 5.0, NFC, GPS/GLONASS
- **Dust and water resistance:** IP67
- **Battery:** 1,821mAh battery (unofficial) rated at up to 40 hours of audio playback and 13 hours of video. Wireless charging and fast charging with an 18W adapter (sold separately).
- **Dimensions:** 138.4 x 67.3 x 7.3mm and 148g
- **Colors:** Black, White, Product Red

One thing I love about these lower-priced iPhones, the iPhone SE and iPhone 11, is that Apple offers a reasonably priced option for additional internal storage. I think 64GB is fine for this affordable iPhone and \$50 to double the storage to 128GB is perfectly acceptable.

HARDWARE

My brother is one of those people who still carry an iPhone 8 because he likes using the Touch ID front fingerprint sensor. Now with facemasks a common wearable accessory, Face ID is not a practical solution for unlocking your iPhone. The iPhone SE launches at a perfect time at a price that is tough to beat.

Current iPhone 11 or 11 Pro users may even want to purchase one to use through the current coronavirus pandemic as a phone that can be secured with your finger and easily carried in an accessible pocket while you are wearing protective gear. It is a perfect starter iPhone and

also a great option for people looking to upgrade their iPhone 8 to something with modern internal specifications. The new Apple iPhone SE is essentially an iPhone 8 with improved internal specifications. It has a 4.7-inch LCD with large top and bottom bezels. The Touch ID fingerprint sensor is located at the center of the bottom bezel and works as perfectly as ever, especially during these times with your face hidden from view.

Apple added another camera this year to the Pro models so we now have three 12 megapixel cameras for wide, ultra-wide, and telephoto scenes. The top camera is the wide camera with f/1.8, 6-element lens, OIS, and 26mm focal length. The one below it is the 2x optical zoom camera with 52mm focal length and f/2.0 aperture with OIS. The camera in the middle, towards the center of the phone, is the ultra-wide camera with a 120-degree field of view, five-element lens, and f/2.4 aperture. This camera does not have OIS.

All of the same iPhone elements are present on the sides with the ringer switch and volume buttons on the left and the power button on the right. The Lightning port is on the bottom with nothing on the top edge.

A single-camera and flash are found tucked away in the upper left corner of the back. The Apple logo is centered with the Product Red logo in the bottom center of the phone I bought.

The red phone looks great with a glossy glass back and matte finish aluminum edges. The front is black so screen content pops when you turn on the display.

I've been very impressed with Apple's stereo speakers on its phones for the last couple of years and find the iPhone plays the loudest on connected Bluetooth headphones too. The stereo speakers sound good on this little phone. I cannot even listen to content at maximum volume.

After using the phone for about a week, I'm getting through a full day of use. Since we spend most of our time indoors with Wi-Fi service, it will take more testing out and about to pass final judgment on the battery. With the small LCD and Apple's excellent battery management, I am not concerned at all about battery life.

SOFTWARE

The iPhone SE runs the iOS 13.4.1, and in typical fashion, you can expect to get regular updates from Apple for years. There is no carrier bloatware, extra apps, or any other software installed that cannot be removed by the user.

Apple Arcade games play perfectly on the iPhone SE, and with the small size, some of the controls and functionality are even easier for many people. Apple TV Plus is supported as well so you can enjoy lots of content on the small 4.7-inch display.

All the great features of the latest version of iOS are present. This includes dark mode, Siri shortcuts, new Photos app, Apple Maps, Siri updates, and much more.

There is only a single camera on the back so the camera software is limited to capturing portrait mode shots of people. However, with people in the shot, you do have support for depth control before or after the shot. There are also six portrait lighting modes for people. If you want to capture portraits of pets, flowers, or other subjects then you will have to shoot in Photo mode and let the camera hardware apply native bokeh effects.

The 4K video capture is supported so the iPhone remains a solid video capture device. You can also now start capturing video while taking photos by holding down the shutter button. A handy feature to help you capture spontaneous moments.

PRICE AND AVAILABILITY

The Apple iPhone SE is available now in three colors, White, Black, and Product Red, starting at \$399 for 64GB capacity. The 128GB model is \$449 and the 256GB model is \$549.

DAILY USAGE AND CONCLUSIONS

One thing that I'm discovering with the Apple iPhone SE is that an affordable iPhone may be perfect for someone like me who prefers to spend most of his time with an Android

phone while enjoying the iOS experience from time-to-time. Honestly, when I retire from the smartphone business, I will probably pick up the latest iPhone and cool my addiction.

As someone who now runs regularly with a phone, primarily for safety reasons, small phones are desirable. The Apple iPhone SE offers a wonderful combination of compact size, in relation to massive Android phones, and superb performance.

It's not the best phone for watching media content, capturing photos with advanced options, or working on spreadsheets on the go. However, it is arguably the best phone available at \$399. The Pixel 3a is the closest competitor, but it compromises on the processor, internal storage, no dust/water resistant rating, and a lack of wireless charging. Other Android phones in this price also lack NFC and have almost non-existent software upgrades.

The new Apple iPhone SE is going to stick around until at least the new iPhone flagship models are announced later this year. Even then, it's hard to beat such a near-perfect phone at a price of \$399.