

Section 1 - This mysterious custom keyboard thing

Written by ai03, last updated Oct 13 2020

In this quick series, I will cover everything you need to know to get started smoothly on the adventure of custom keyboards.

Information that usually takes months upon months to scrounge together is now available in a quick read in one spot.



So what is a custom keyboard anyways?

In general, “custom keyboards” refers to high-end keyboards designed to maximize quality, aesthetics, comfort, acoustics, or a mix of these elements. They tend to be a fair bit more

expensive than a general keyboard, and are usually very exclusive due to their low-quantity high-quality nature.

Their price can range from below 200USD to well over 1000USD, and they can vary heavily in form and function. They also require the user to choose and assemble the parts, making it a far more involving topic than simply buying and using.



Are they really worth their price tag?

In general, custom keyboards tend to have its benefits, such as

- Significantly better quality and design compared to off-the-shelf units,
- Less fatigue on the fingers during extended use,
- Being able to fine-tune the board to your needs in all of its aspects.

Whether custom keyboards are worth their price depends on your use case. Decide based on how you value the aspects of keyboards we've discussed earlier, and how much time you spend using a keyboard each day.

Alright, I'm sold. So I just go buy a unit and plug it in?

Not quite. Usually, the custom keyboard kit itself only includes the case parts, meaning you must source the rest of the parts separately and assemble them to build a functional unit.

You may wonder why keyboards are such a hassle rather than being pre-built; this is due to the massive variety of switches and keysets available to fine-grain tune feel and aesthetic to one's

preferences. The age where one picks switches from a few color choices is well in the past, with over 800 recorded keyswitch types and hundreds of keysets in existence. But do not worry, for this guide will cover all you need to know when we get to that.



My wallet is ready... or is it?

This depends heavily on how far you want to go. I personally categorize keyboards into the following ranges; do note that this is excluding the switches and keycaps as explained above.

- Under 200: Entry level boards for those newly entering custom keyboards.
- 200~300: Affordable custom keyboards that go a tier above entry level.
- 300~400: The usual range for decent boards.
- 400~500: Premium, enthusiast level boards, usually with a known brand name attached.
- 500+: The wallet black hole for those too deep into the hobby.

So I just buy the most expensive thing out there and call it a day?

You can, but you will likely waste all of your money and end up unhappy.

Similar to audio, coffee, cuisine, cameras, and the like, going for the most expensive units without knowing what to appreciate or how to take advantage of it properly is generally a bad idea.

Start in the affordable ranges; modern low-cost boards have been consistently improving their quality to offer great experiences for accessible prices. Use them to determine and hone in on your true preferences of parts, then use that knowledge to upgrade to the next level. Less mistakes are made this way.

Why does everything seem to be out of stock?

Most custom keyboards are manufactured in small batches to keep quality high, and are oft limited by the capacities of the vendors. After all, these custom keyboards aren't mass produced and globally distributed by a multinational corporation.

One very common sales format in the community is the group buy, where orders are only collected for several weeks, then the units are produced after. The in-stock sale units tend to be several thousand units at absolute maximum, selling out fairly quickly. Thus it is difficult to get in on a keyboard purchase without knowing what you wish to purchase beforehand.

What's this mechmarket thing?

There are several aftermarket keyboard communities such as r/mechmarket on Reddit. It is possible to buy both used and unused keyboard units and parts from such places, but do proceed with caution. It is not uncommon for keyboards to be flipped at prices 3x higher than MSRP; this may not be a problem for those with an infinite budget, but for others it is a prime way to be taken advantage of and end up with less than paid for.

So what's next?

By this point, I'm assuming that you are interested in going ahead with custom keyboards. In the next sections I will cover each component of the keyboard to understand what choices must be made with them.

Continue on by clicking [here](#).

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