When You Don’t Own Your Own 3D Printer

While 3D printers have become increasingly affordable for home use, there are several reasons why you may be hesitant to invest several hundred dollars in one to start out. I get it, you want to know if you will actually enjoy and use a 3D printer, or you may want to investigate if the technical skills will be too prohibitive for you to use regularly. Below are some suggestions for sourcing access to a 3D printer.

1. Local libraries – Public libraries will often have one central, larger library that houses their 3D printer. You will need to take their technical use class, but after some requirements are fulfilled, you are able to reserve time to use their 3D printer for free. This is an excellent option if you live in a larger city with resources for 3D printing. My local library has an entire Maker Space with laser cutters, cricut die cut machines, large poster printers, and top of the line 3D printers!



Troy-Miami Public Library Maker Space. https://www.tmcpl.org/about/locations/makerlab

2. Maker Spaces – Google your city + MakerSpace and you will see options in your area for local clubs and organizations that offer a shared space for use with subscription fees or other requirements. The benefit to these types of places are that you can have access to member expertise as well, as they often have community events with multiple people coming together to help each other out. Maker Spaces are truly an open source dream where users are sharing and helping one another be better at their craft.
3. University libraries and labs – If you have a local college or university, technical college associated with the school district in your area, or local learning center, you may be able to "rent" time on their 3D printers. If you are associated with the university, you probably have access to their 3D printer similar to public libraries where you may need to take additional technical training; however, if you do not have an association with the university you may still have some options to access their 3D printers. Call or email the university's librarians or check out their website for any upcoming events.
4. Asking friends! I know several friends whose spouse 3D prints for work or for fun. There may be 3D printing enthusiasts in your child's school through the PTO, through your hobbies and interests (e.g., cosplayers and conventions are quickly using 3D printing for costuming and molding, the miniature community is also very active in 3D printing whether you're printing doll miniatures or paintable, professional game pieces), or through an engineer friend or spouse. You may ask if they'd be willing to show you their 3D printer and possibly play around with some basic prints to get an idea if it's something you want to purchase yourself.
5. Science Centers – My city (Orlando) has a fantastic maker space in the Orlando Science Center! They also have classes and training for every level – check out what is available in your city.



“The Hive” Makerspace at Orlando Science Center - https://www.osc.org/visit/science-live/makerspace/



Image from Instagram user @goldenjosh. Cosplay is a great way to get into making, and 3D printing can make some great molds for casting armor.