

Review: Galaxy Z Flip: After 3 months, I can't stop using it

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Samsung Galaxy Z Flip. Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license by Grace R. Samson

Last year, if you told me about all the things that would happen in 2020, I'd shake my head with disbelief. This includes the fact that I'd like the

Galaxy Z Flip foldable phone. When it launched in February I was skeptical because just a year before, Galaxy Fold reviewer units had a number of issues. Then there was the Motorola Razr. It launched before the Flip and even though it was more expensive and had less impressive specs, I found its approach to foldable design more appealing.

Fast forward to now though, and the Galaxy Z Flip has won me over. I use it just like a regular phone, which seems silly to say but one of my biggest knocks against foldable phones so far is how they don't quite hold up to real-world use. Initially, I was protective about the phone; now I'm less cautious and it's still holding up.

Most of all, the Galaxy Z Flip is fun and that's something I don't say about many phones. Folding and unfolding it is as enjoyable as it was the first time I did it. Closing the phone shut to end a call brings me a level of satisfaction that I don't get from an iPhone 11 Pro or Pixel 4. And opening it with a whip-like flip of my wrist makes me feel like a badass.

I know the Galaxy Z Flip isn't the perfect phone or the most powerful. It doesn't have the best cameras or battery life. It is laughably expensive. And yet I can't stop using it. After three months, is the Galaxy Z Flip worth \$1,380? Yes. The high price reflects that it is a phone that can physically fold in half. Should you pay \$1,380 for this phone? No. But for those of you who want to flirt with the Wild West of mobile phone design, the Z Flip offers much to enjoy.

The Z Flip's Beautiful But Cursed Display

I love and hate this display. When it's clean, the tall narrow screen is amazing and vibrant. Videos look outstanding. The 21.9:9 aspect ratio is also really wide, so there are black bars on the sides of most videos. I watched widescreen films like *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*,

though, and they fit the display incredibly well.

But once in a while, the plastic polymer coating got in the way of the screen's beauty, especially when there were fingerprints on the screen which the coating seems to attract endlessly. When I wipe smudges clean with my shirt sleeve, they don't come off as easy as a phone without plastic polymer on it.

Then there's the crease. Ah, the crease. One thing I noticed after three months of using it is that I physically feel the crease constantly with my fingers. The Z Flip's crease cuts across the middle of the screen and if I scroll through apps like Instagram or Twitter, my finger goes over it like a car rolling over a seam in a concrete driveway. But this doesn't particularly bug me and because it's a horizontal crease instead of the vertical one on the Galaxy Fold, I actually see it less. To me, the crease is like background music at a restaurant. I notice it but forget about it after a while. Just like how I got used to notches on phones, I am now used to the crease.

The Z Flip's Flex Mode

It brings me an endless amount of delight how small the phone is closed. I never hesitate to take it with me because it's very pocketable (though the mileage inside women's pants pockets may vary). The Z Flip opens up into a phone as tall as the Galaxy S20 Ultra, albeit a skinner version of that.

I like having to open the phone in order to use it because I'm more selective about what I'm doing. The only time this feels tedious is messaging, I have to open the phone to read a text and reply and then I close it. If I get another reply, I have to start the process over. I'd be so happy if I could reply to messages from the outside display even just with my voice,

Over time, I stopped closing the phone shut as much and instead left it open at a 90-degree angle. This made it look like a mini laptop and it meant I could keep a message thread open or mindlessly scroll Instagram or Twitter. Samsung calls this half-fold position Flex Mode, and it is excellent for filming vertical video too. I honestly didn't expect to use the Z Flip this much as a [video camera](#) but in Flex Mode the phone becomes its own tripod, meaning I had more options where I could set it to get the perfect shot than a regular phone.

In the next version of the Z Flip, I hope Samsung embraces the video capture aspect more. There are rumors that the Galaxy Z Flip 2 will have a third exterior camera. If that turns out to be true, there is an opportunity here to turn the Z Flip into the ultimate phone for capturing video. Samsung would need to make the third camera identical to the main one, but rotate it 90 degrees (think Motorola One Action). That way when the phone is in Flex Mode it can capture vertical video with the existing two cameras and horizontal video with the third camera.

Flex Mode also has a software component where apps adapt to the L-shaped position. But only a few apps take advantage of it, and even then it feels limited. The Gallery app, for instance, puts photos on the top half and navigation controls on the bottom. But when I go to edit a photo, the picture moves from the top half of the screen to the center. Why not keep it at the top part of the screen and use the bottom half to make adjustments?

With Android 10, I can have two apps display in a split screen, which I've done for Zoom meetings (on the top) and email (on the bottom). It is a nice way to use the device without holding it. But again, functionality is limited.

One of the things I enjoy most about positioning the Z Flip at different angles is that I can fit the phone around my face when I'm talking on a

call instead of having it be flat. It's so early 2000s and I enjoy it almost as much as ending calls by closing the phone shut.

The Itsy-Bitsy Teenie Weenie Exterior Display

The tiny, pill-shaped display on the phone's exterior is incredibly cool and minimalist, but it's also kind of useless. I enjoy seeing the time and battery status, and using it to skip tracks in Spotify. But the display turns off too quickly to read notifications and I can't find a setting to adjust that.

Taking selfies with it is an odd experience too. The display becomes a viewfinder and allows you to use the exterior cameras for higher-resolution images, but the preview on the screen is misleading because it doesn't reflect the actual framing of the photo.

The usefulness of exterior displays on foldable phones varies. The one on the Galaxy Fold tries to do too much and feels cramped. On the other hand, the Galaxy Z Flip's screen is horribly simplistic. The Motorola Razr hits the sweet spot in-between the two.

While I understand that phone makers have to strike a balance between the size and utility of exterior displays, the one on the Z Flip can still be improved. Samsung could go the Motorola route and make the screen a touch larger, or enable notifications to be displayed longer. It also needs to have some capability to let users take basic actions with notifications.

Dust, Debris and Durability

When the Z Flip launched, there were concerns about its flexible display and long-term durability. After three months of regular use, I don't see a single scratch or nick on the display (though again, there are lots of smudges). The body has a tiny scuff from when the phone slid off my

desk and onto the floor. While we're on that subject, I haven't dropped the phone but it has dropped by itself several times. The exterior coating is ridiculously slippery and there were many times when I'd leave it on a counter or table and come back to find it on the ground because it slid off.

When closed, there is an air gap between the two halves of the screen. The only downside I've noticed is that it lets dust and lint collect on the display. Unlike with review units of the Galaxy Fold, I haven't had problems with dirt or dust getting under the display or into the hinge mechanism.

My biggest takeaway when it comes to durability is that I can use it just like a regular old smartphone. I don't baby this phone, or worry that I might break it. Daily use over months and years will be the true test for its durability.

Last Year's Performance Is Fine in Use

In terms of performance, using the Z Flip is like using a Samsung Galaxy S10E . Both aren't at the top of the Samsung spec heap; that title goes to the equally priced Galaxy S20 Ultra. But I never felt limited by the phone's performance. Animations look smooth and apps launch quickly. I do wonder what the lifespan of this phone will be in terms of software support, however.

The battery, which is middling, is perhaps the biggest compromise when compared to a regular [phone](#). I barely get through a day and a late-afternoon charge is typical. It's not awful, but it needs a charge by dinner time.

Galaxy S10 Cameras on the Galaxy Z Flip

In terms of cameras, I won't go in-depth on this (just check the original review for that info). In short, the cameras are good, but not great. It's essentially the S10 camera system, which includes an ultrawide-angle camera (with less resolution than the S10) and a main wide angle camera that lacks a dual-aperture. Photo and video image quality earns a solid B compared to the A+ of the Google Pixel 4 or iPhone 11 Pro.

In use, the camera always had chops for capturing a photo or video in any situation. Heck, there's even night mode on this puppy. Check out the video below made entirely of footage filmed on the Galaxy Z Flip.

At the end of the day, I think there is a lot to admire about the Galaxy Z Flip, but for most people it is still far more of an experiment than a dependable daily driver. That said, if you want the cutting edge, warts and all, it's definitely worth checking it out in a store (when we can do that again) or waiting for it to go on sale.

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