# Computer Dictionary

When you're working on the computer by yourself, it doesn't matter what you call something. You can call memory disk space or your desktop the screen or just about anything else you might come up with.  You know what you're talking about.  If you're talking to someone else about your computer, it's nice to have a common meaning and name for the terms you use.  It makes communicating easier when everyone knows what you're talking about.

Do you know what your **Desktop** is?  How about a **dialog box**?  These are just a couple of the terms that refer to things on your computer.  Knowing the names of these things and what they refer to can be helpful when talking to people about your computer.

The following is a list of common terms used with computers and an explanation in plain English. Hopefully this list will help you understand a little more about your computer and help you communicate with others when talking about your computer.

If you have suggestions for changes and/or additions, please let me know.

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| **Active window** | The window currently being used; the window that's open and "on top" on the desktop. |
| **Address** | The location of a file. You can use addresses to find files on the Internet and/or your computer. Internet addresses are also known as URLs. See *Address Bar*. |
| **Address Bar** | An Address Bar is a section in a window (Internet Explorer, Netscape, Windows Explorer, etc) where you can enter the *address* of the file you want to open. When you type an *address* in the Address Bar, you open the file at that *address*. An Address Bar is also used in E-Mail programs (i.e., Outlook and Outlook Express) to address an E-Mail message. See *AutoComplete*. |
| **ANSI** | American National Standards Institute. |
| **Application** | A program such as a spreadsheet, a database, a word processor; anything that reads code and follows the instructions to accomplish a given task. See *Application Program*. |
| **Application Program** | A sequence of programmed instructions that tell the computer how to perform a task (i.e. accounting, word processing or other work) for the computer system user. To use a program, it must first be loaded into *Memory* from a *Hard Disk*. |
| **Arrow keys** | The keys usually found at the right side of the keyboard that point left, right, up, and down, and are used to navigate around the desktop or within a document or application. |
| **ASCII** | American Standard for Coded Information Interchange. |
| **AutoComplete** | A feature in the *Address Bar*. When you begin typing a previously used address, this feature finishes it as you type. |
| **Background application** | A program that is running while another is being used. |
| **Backup File** | Copies made on a removable media device (*diskette*, *tape* or sometimes a remote *Hard Disk* system) and kept to ensure recovery of data lost due to equipment failure, human errors, updates, disasters and the like. |
| **Baud Rate** | A variable unit of data transmission speed equal to one bit per second. This is typically used in talking about the connection speed when using a *modem*. Some common baud rates include 26,400, 28,800, and 115,200 among others. |
| **Binary** | A number system like the decimal numbers, but using 2 as its base and having only the two digits 0 (zero) and 1 (one). It is used in computers because digital logic can only determine one of two states - "OFF" and "ON." |
| **BIOS (Basic Input Output System)** | A collection of information (firmware) that controls communication between the *CPU* and the rest of the computer. |

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| **Bitmap** | A computer image stored as collections of bits in memory locations corresponding to pixels on the screen that form pictures. File format is **.BMP**. |
| **Bit** | Binary digit, the smallest unit of storage for a computer that can take on a value of 0 or 1. |
| **Boot** | Short for bootstrap. To turn the computer on and have it go through the instructions it needs to start working. |
| **Browse** | To view the contents of files, folders, and/or pages. |
| **Browser** | An application used to view graphics, E-Mail, sound, and multimedia files on the Web (i.e., Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer). |
| **Byte** | A sequence of adjacent *Bit*s considered as a unit. One Byte is sufficient to define all the alphanumeric *character*s. There are 8 Bits in 1 Byte. The storage capacity of a *Diskette* is commonly measured in *Megabyte*s, which is the total number of bits storable, divided by eight million. |
| **Cache** | A place that temporarily stores files on your computer. |
| **CD-ROM** | Compact Disk Read-Only Memory: A data storage disk that holds about 640 megabytes of digital information. |
| **Character** | An information symbol used to denote a number, letter, symbol or punctuation mark stored by a computer. In a computer a character can be represented in one (1) Byte or eight (8) bits of data. |
| **Click** | To press the left mouse button to select an icon or command. |
| **Clipboard** | An area of computer memory used to store cut or copied text or graphics temporarily so that the data can be moved to other locations. The clipboard normally does not appear on the screen. |
| **Close button** | The small button on the right end of a Windows *title bar* marked with an "X." When clicked, this button will close the application window it was in. |
| **Control Panel** | A group of tools you use to change hardware and software settings in the computer. One of the ways in which you get to the Control Panel is by clicking on the **Start** button and moving your mouse to **Settings** and then selecting the **Control Panel**. |
| **CPU** | **C**entral **P**rocessing **U**nit: The computer brain, where all information is sent to be processed. |
| **Default printer** | The printer to which print jobs will be sent automatically. |
| **Defragmentation** | The process of bringing the parts of a file back together. Over time, parts of a file can become fragmented - that is, spread over different areas. Fragmentation causes slower disk speed. Windows 98 includes the Disk Defragmenter, which may help improve disk performance. |
| **Desktop** | The main screen that appears after the computer boots. |
| **Destination folder** | The folder into which files are being moved or copied. |
| **Dial-up** | A program that allows a computer user to connect to a remote |

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| **networking** | network using a modem. |
| **Dialog box** | A window that pops up to get or give information about a file or folder that the computer user is working on. |
| **Diskette** | A portable storage disk used to store and retrieve data files. Also called a floppy. |
| **Document** | A file that includes information you can type, edit, view, or save (i.e., reports, spreadsheets, or articles). |
| **Double-click** | To press the left mouse button twice in succession without moving the mouse to execute an action (i.e., opening an application). |
| **Download** | The process of copying files from one computer to your own by using a *modem* or a network connection. For example, you download files from the *Internet* to your *hard disk*. |
| **Drag** | An action used to move an item from one place to another by selecting it, holding down the left mouse button, and moving the object to the new location, and then releasing the mouse button when the file is in the destination folder. |
| **Driver** | A driver is a piece of software that the operating system uses to control a specific piece of hardware. For example, there is a driver that allows the computer to use the printer. |
| **DVD** | A high-capacity compact disc. This disc can store enough data for a full-length movie. You must have a DVD CD-ROM to use DVD discs. |
| **E-Mail** | Electronic messages sent from one person to another over the *Internet* or a network. E-mail can contain both text and files. |
| **Execute** | To execute means to run or to perform the operations described by an instruction or a program in the computer. This is typically done by double-clicking on a link (pointer) to the program. |
| **File** | Information that has been named and is being stored, usually in a *folder*. Usually interchangeable with *document*. |
| **Folder** | A location in which you can store files and other folders. |
| **GIF** | **G**raphics **I**nterchange **F**ormat: A file type that most Web browsers and graphics programs can read. Usually contains a picture or animation, but may also contain text. File format is **.GIF**. |
| **Gigabyte** | One trillion bytes (exactly 1,024,000,000 bytes). Often abbreviated as GB or GByte. |
| **Graphical user interface** | Also known as GUI and pronounced gooey. These were designed to make it easier for people to use computers. Instead of using a command line and typing in commands, a GUI uses icons (little pictures) and graphics to move files and accomplish tasks. The Windows desktop is a GUI. |
| **Hard Disk** | Commonly called a Fixed Disk or HD drive. A hard disk is a device inside your computer where you can store programs and data files. Though similar to *Diskette*, hard disks have a higher capacity. |
| **Hexadecimal** | A number system based on sixteen, using digits 0 through 9 and |

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| | letters A through F to represent each digit of the number. (A = 10, B = 11, C = 12, D = 13, E = 14, F = 15). The hexadecimal numbering system is a shorthand notation for the *binary* numbering system used by computers. |
| **HTML** | HyperText Markup Language: A programming language that tells browsers how to display Web pages. |
| **HTTP** | HyperText Transfer Protocol: A method of transporting information from one computer to another through a browser. |
| **Hypertext or hyperlink** | Text or graphics that allow a part of a document to be linked to any other document, including documents on other Web sites, that, when selected or clicked, transport you to the other document or Web site. |
| **Icon** | A picture that represents an application, a file, or a device such as a disk drive or printer. |
| **Input** | Input consists of data or commands entered into a computer. |
| **Internet** | A worldwide network of computers. If you have access to the Internet, you can retrieve information from millions of sources, including schools, governments, businesses, and individuals. |
| **ISP** | **I**nternet **S**ervice **P**rovider: This is a company that provides Internet access. You use your hardware, such as a modem and some type of phone line, to access an ISP's network that is connected to the Internet. Typically you pay this company for access to the *Internet* and to *E-Mail*. |
| **Kilobyte** | One thousand bytes (exactly 1,024 bytes). Often abbreviated as KB or Kbyte. |
| **Maximize** | To make a window as large as it can be. Normally you do this by clicking on the square between the Minimize and Close buttons in the top right corner of a windows title bar. |
| **Megabyte** | One million bytes (exactly 1,024,000 bytes). Often abbreviated as MB or MByte. |
| **Memory** | A computer's workspace where it processes information; the amount of memory you have determines how many programs can be run at a given time, as well as how much data can be processed. |
| **Minimize** | To make a window as small as possible, usually done by clicking on the Minimize button, which is the first of the three buttons in the upper right corner of a window. Minimizing a window shrinks it to the taskbar. The window can be brought back at any time by clicking on the title on the taskbar. |
| **Modem** | **Mo**dulator-**dem**odulator: converts digital signals from a computer to analog signals for the phone line, then reconverts it back to digital again for the computer to receive from the phone line. |
| **Mouse** | A pointing device used to perform functions on a computer. You typically use the mouse to *click* on something to select it, *double-* |

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| | *click* to activate it or *right-click* on it to see a context sensitive menu of functions you can perform. |
| **Multimedia** | Any combination of text, pictures, sound, and video. |
| **Multi-Tasking** | Running several applications at the same time. |
| **On Top** | This normally refers to windows on your *Desktop*. Windows can overlap on your *Desktop* with one window being in front (on top) of other windows. The window that is in front of the rest is considered the active window or the one in which you are working. |
| **Operating Systems** | Windows NT, 95, 98, Linux, Macintosh, etc.; manages a computer's internal functions and provides the means of communication between the user and the computer. |
| **PC** | Personal Computer |
| **Program** | A group of instructions your computer uses to perform specific tasks. For example, Microsoft Word is a word-processing program. Programs are also called *applications*. See *Application Program*. |
| **Reboot** | Restarting a computer while it is on; usually done to fix a problem, or register changes with the operating system. |
| **Recycle Bin** | A trashcan that holds files a user wants to delete. Files placed in the Recycle Bin are held there until the user empties the Recycle Bin. |
| **Right-Click** | To click an item by using the secondary mouse button, which is typically the right mouse button. You can display a context sensitive menu by right-clicking an item. |
| **Search engine** | A Web site that allows the user to search the World Wide Web for sites that relate to a specific subject or category that the user has specified. |
| **Spam** | The electronic equivalent of junk mail. |
| **Start button** | The Start button is found at the left end of the *Taskbar* and provides access to all the programs loaded on the system. |
| **Tape** | A device used for making backup copies of large numbers of files. Tapes are not in extensive use today as other media are easier to use. |
| **Taskbar** | The Taskbar is usually found across the bottom of the *desktop* and contains the *Start button* on the left end and the time on the right. It also contains an indication of everything running on the system. |
| **Task manager** | Computer program that allows the user to monitor and manage the applications that are currently running on the computer. |
| **Title bar** | The horizontal bar at the top of a window that contains the name of the window or dialog box, and the Minimize, Maximize and Close buttons. |
| **URL** | **U**niform **R**esource **L**ocator: code used to specify the address of a website (i.e., http://www.hugheshelpdesk.com/). |
| **Virus** | Computer code that can damage or destroy computer files; often distributed via E-Mail. |