

Basic Computer Terminology

This glossary below is a grouping of terms that are typically associated with computers. Chances are many students will recognize these terms from their computer science course. You can easily refer to this glossary for the basics if you are truly a “newbie” to online and computer research. However, for advanced terms you may wish to access both the Librarian Glossary and the Search Engine Savvy Glossary also located on the **Goodies CD> Glossaries>Chapter 4 Search Engines**.

“A” Drive: The computer has storage systems. The storage system that is contained inside the computer is typically referred to as the “C” drive or the hard drive. The “A” drive is an alternative storage system that you use by inserting a disk into the computer. The data will be stored, but on the disk, not on the internal computer storage system. Typically the “A” drive is where a designer will save their work.

Application Software: (see software programs)

Examples include: word processing and Graphic design

Arrow Keys: Keypad to the right of your main keyboard that move the cursor.

Auxiliary Storage: Also known as a secondary storage system, such as a floppy disk, thumb, flash or external hard drive.

Backup: This refers to making a copy of your files.

Backup System: A method for storing data in more than one location to prevent loss.

Bootng: Start-up, loading an operating system into memory

Cache: (pronounced: cash) this feature is the amount of fast memory that stores information that is frequently used, which translates into faster processing speeds.

CAD/ CAM: Computer aided deigning, computer aided manufacturing.

Sometimes the terms are interchangeable. For example in fashion designing you can use the computer to both aid you in the design of a garment or a line and set up detailed instructions for the computer to aid in the manufacturing of the garment or line.

Caps Lock: This key located often on the left of the keyboard permits you to TYPE IN ALL CAPITAL LETTER, without using the shift key.

Carriage Return: (Also known as an Enter or Return Key) Striking the “Enter” key issues a carriage return to take your text to the next line. It should be noted

most word processor programs have a built in “word wrap” feature, which will take your text to the next line automatically. It is recommended you do not use the “Enter” key except to add rows or to intentionally separate rows of text.

Case Sensitive: Some programs are very sensitive to the way commands are typed. For example the word “PASSWORD” and the word “password” are very different to a case sensitive program. If you are working with a case sensitive program, and you do not enter data exactly, this may account for some frustration you maybe experiencing in entering a program or in executing a command.

CD: A circular disk, which stores programs and data.

CD-ROM: Compact disk, read only memory. This is usually a drive on your computer and frequently is labeled the “D” drive.

Character: A letter, number or special character on the keyboard such as % (percentage) or \ (a back slash).

Click: the action of depressing the mouse to active or issue a command.

Clipboard: This is an area of storage used by the computer when using such commands as cut, copy and paste.

Clone: A generic/ no-name brand of computers that imitates another. The clone may or may not be comparable.

Close: To cancel, exit, remove or shut-down a program, window or application

Compatible: This can be computers and/or programs that work together regardless of the manufacturing source. For example in most vector-based programs the file format would be (.EPS), for raster-based image-editing programs the file format would be (.TIF), and for word processors, the file format would be (.RTF) or (.txt).

Computer Literacy: A degree of awareness, knowledge and competency of computers. You will be computer literate if you read this book and do ALL the exercises!!!

Computer: A machine that receives information. There are a variety of different ways for the computer to receive the information, and this is known as *input*. The computer will then process and display this information and this is known as *output*.

Connectivity: The new communication “buzz word.” This is instant electronic communication between computers, machinery, business operations and people.

Control Key: This abbreviation on this key is “Ctrl” There are usually 2 Control keys on the computer keyboard and they can be found on the right and left of the keyboard. This key is used with other keys to issue commands to the computer software programs.

Copy: This is a frequently used command in computers. The command will copy what you direct it to copy. For example if you use a phrase over and over, rather than type the phrase each time you use it, you can drag the mouse over the phrase, command the computer to “copy” the phrase, and then you can “paste” the phrase where you want in the document. This is a real time-saver!

CPU: This is the abbreviation for Central Processing Unit. Basically this is the brain of the computer that includes the electronic circuitry that executes stored program information. This is very similar to the human brain, whose function is to issue commands, and regulate functions inside and outside it.

Crash: Breakdown or malfunction of hardware and/or software.

Cursor: This is symbol on the monitor that indicates where the user must begin or where the work stopped. The cursor can take the icon format of an “I” beam, an “arrow, a “ pointer, “ a “hand,” an “hourglass,” a “question mark” or a “blinking underscore or I beam.”

Cut: A process that cuts out text/data. If the user doesn't want to eliminate the section of text but simply wants to move it, the function is often combined with the paste function. This means the user may cut out a section of text and then can paste that text to another area in the document. This is a great time saver and saves the user from re-typing data.

Data: Information, which is input into a computer and is typically unorganized.

Debug: Process of locating and repairing errors within the computer and/or its software.

Default: Action or assumptions the computer will automatically make, unless you issue other instructions. For example the default for most workspace is "portrait" or 8.5" x 11" you may go into the page set-up command and change it to "landscape" or 11" x 8.5".

Default Drive: Sometimes this is known as the area of the computer automatically assigned for storage. Typically it is an area, such as a disk, designated by the designer (user) for storage.

Default Settings: When you first start working on a document, the computer has already established where you will start on the page, how far you can type on a

line and even how many lines you can enter before moving to a new page. This is because the computer program has established pre-set guidelines for many tasks such as: page layout, background color or even the setting of a color mode. These are not permanent settings. They are known as default settings and can often easily be changed by the designer.

Desktop: This is can be a blank screen, background, or actual workspace. It should be noted that when you open a new file in most graphic programs the actual “blank page” not the “gray area” will be what is saved to a disk or printed on a hard copy. The gray area outside the page is great for “practicing” and then moving that work onto the actual page to be saved or printed.

Desktop Publishing: The use of computers and specific software, which enables the designer to produce professional looking and/or commercially documents.

Deselect: Often used as a mouse action or undo command this feature permits you to change your mind.

Dialog Box: (See menu)

Digitizer: A graphic input tool which converts image into digital information for the computer to utilize.

Directory: A group of files store on a disk or on a drive.

Disk Drive: Hardware that can read and write information (known as data) from a disk.

Diskette: A magnetic disk. 3½" disks are still used within in the business world for small amounts of storage.

Double-click: Firmly and rapidly depressing the mouse button twice. Used for activating a program icon or any other command that may require a yes or enter response.

DOS: Disk Operating System. This is a group of programs that control and manage the computer and disk storage area.

Download: Transferral of information from one computer to another.

Drag: Mouse motion of depressing the left or right buttons located on the mouse while simultaneously moving the mouse from location to another.

Drag and Drop: A click and continuous depression of the mouse on an item, icon or image, will enable you to “drag” that selection and “drop” the selection to another location by releasing the mouse.

Driver: Set of instructions between the computer, monitor, printer and other output devices which allows them to communicate with one another.

Editor Line: Located at the top or bottom of screen, this line permits you to edit a command or make a correction. For example: in a spread sheet or database program where you can type a “new math formula” on the editor line and hit the enter key, the corresponding line of the main screen document will make the math correction on every cell that is directly related to this change.

Email: Also known as Electronic mail. The process of sending, storing and retrieving information from computer to computer regardless of their geographical location.

Enter Key: This key generally on the right of the keyboard is also known as the carriage return key or return key. (See carriage key)

Error Message: This cryptic message is displayed on your screen to inform you “YOU” made a mistake. Don’t panic! This can be a good message for example it

might tell you that you forgot to put a disk in the “A” drive before attempting to save.

ESC: This is an abbreviation for Escape. This key on the top left of keyboard is used generally to “go back one screen” or to “cancel a command.”

WARNING! In **some** industry programs this key actually “SAVES” your work. Although this isn’t logical, be sure to check the manual for the software program that you are using.

HINT: Try using a post-it note to your screen to remind you of when to use or not to use this command.

Execute: Computer will respond by implementing a command it has received from the user or the operating system and/or software.

Exit: To quit or shutdown a program.

Export: This feature permits you to “send” your work to another program or computer for viewing, printing and/or editing.

Extension: Generally a 1 to 3-letter suffix added to a file name or to a DOS command. Typically it will indicate the program in which the file was generated. For example: WP for word processor or DB for data base, or it may indicate further specifics about what kind of graphic it is such TIFF.

Facsimile: Also known as Fax. The use of computers to transfer information from one FAX machine to another.

File: Information, graphics or images that are contained on disks, in folder or on specified drives. A file can be named, saved, opened, copied, retrieved, and modified.

File Management: **Systematic** organization to manage on the computer of files, and/or directories for easier access.

File Extension: This refers to the 3 characters following the name of a file. This identifies what Kind of file and the type of program used to generate the file. For example: if you are drawing in Adobe Photoshop, this programs automatically saves data as a “native” extension code of (.psd) Designers may not want to use the “native” extension code because they want/need to use the file in several programs. If that is the case, a designer may create a file and use the extension code TIFF (tagged image file format). This means the designer can later retrieve the file and view it in several other software applications. The same holds true in the business world.

File Format: This indicates how a file has been set up for retrieval, exporting or printing.

File Name: Just like each of us have names for identification, so must a file.

Generally you will assign a name to the data being saved and you will also assign the storage area. It is recommended that you name the file according to what is inside the file for easy identification and use later. For example if you have a file that says A: Motif. TIFF, this means

A = disk drive where the file is saved

Motif= the NAME of the file based on what is in the file

TIFF= the extension indicating what kind of file it was when it was saved.

Floppy: This refers to your 3 ½" disk. You can use this disk to save or back up your work. You will save the work by inserting this disk into the "A" drive of the computer and commanding the computer program to save the data on this disk by using the "A" drive storage system.

Fly Out Menu: (See menu)

Folder: Even on the screen the icon for folder looks just like the manila folder used for filing documents. The function is the same; you can create a document or a file with data or graphics and then store them in a "folder."

Font: Text character generated on the computer which can be categorized by 1) typeface or name such as: Ariel, or Signature, or style such as: **BOLD**, *italic*, weight, & point size such as 8, 14, 24.

Function Key: These keys, which are located on the top of your keyboard, are also called “hot keys.” These are “short-cuts” keys that issue commands such as “select-all” by merely touching just that one key. Check your computer and/or program for what each key represents.

General Purpose Program: These are commonly known as business application programs and may include: a word processing, database, spreadsheet and basic drawing program.

GIGO: Garbage In, Garbage Out. This is what happens if you put the wrong data into your computer. The computer is only a tool and often is only as “smart” as the information it receives.

Glitch: This is frequently just a minor problem and not necessarily a “terminal” problem the computer or its software is experiencing.

GroupWare: Software that permits several users/machines to swap information via a networking system, regardless of the geographic location of the computers.

Hacker: A person who gains entry into a computer illegally.

Hard Copy: Paper printout of your work.

Hard Drive: The computer filing cabinet that stores all the programs, files, everything on your computer. The hard drive is connected to the motherboard, all which is located in the computer case or tower.

Hardware: The computer and the related equipment it uses.

Help: This is a menu and/or icon that permits you activates an icon or menu option for obtaining on screen assistance in a program. Be sure to check to see if this “assistance” part of the program has been installed. Often the Help Menu can be cumbersome to wade through, and you may find it is quicker to “online” technical support.

Hierarchical Menu: These menus are sequential. This means you make one selection and another selection (menu) appears such as in the case of “Save As,” your next choice is where to save.

I-Beam: (See cursor)

Icon: A small picture or symbol on the screen. (See cursor)

Import: Bring data, from one program into another.

Inkjet Printer: A printer that uses a nozzle device to spray the ink onto the paper.

Input devices: A device for inputting data into the computer. For example: keyboard, light pen, mouse, digitizer or scanner just to name a few.

Insertion Point: (see cursor)

Integrated Packages: Programs that contain multiple capabilities, such as a word processing program, a data base program and a spreadsheet program.

Internal Storage: Area the computer allocates for storing data such as the “C” drive.

Internet: Also known as The Net.

Keyboard: A computer input device. The computer keyboard is similar to a typewriter’s keyboard, but it has several additional keys useful for computer operations.

Landscape: The orientation (direction) of a document or image. This is horizontal document typically 11” wide x 8.5” height.

Laser Printer: A printer utilizing a beam of light to transfer information and images from the computer onto paper.

Licensed software: Software that is protected and may not be duplicated or shared without permission of the manufacturer.

List Box: This is a dialog box offering additional selections such as a list of the names of all the files you have saved on your floppy disk or on the hard drive.

Lowercase: These are character keys that type small letters, not CAPITAL or UPPER CASE text.

Magnetic Tape: Secondary storage used for storing or for making a backup of computer and data files.

Main Memory: Also known as an internal storage, primary storage, and primary memory as well as simply memory. (See memory)

Maximize: This option permits you to “enlarge a screen/or window” to full size for viewing and editing purposes. It is typically indicated as a “clear block icon” on the top right of screen and/ or document. Clicking the mouse inside the “clear block icon” activates this option.

Memory: The portion of the CPU that temporarily holds program instructions.

Menu: List of choices or options. There are several versions as well as a variety of different names associated with the term menu. Examples include:

- Pull-down
- Pop-up
- Fly-out
- Icon
- ? (Help) F4
- Item
- Bar
- Sub-menu
- List Box
- Message Box
- Dialog Box

Menu Bar: On screen (visible) text or graphic list of options.

Message Box: This is a list of choices similar to a LIST BOX or DIALOG BOX

Minimize: This option permits you to “shrinks the size of a screen and/or window.” This is generally an icon made to look like an “underscore or underline” located in the top portion of your screen and/or document. (Insert figure 3-6)

Modem: Used to transfer and convert digital signals to analog signals (information) over communication lines from computer to computer.

Monitor: TV screen-like device for viewing the data.

Motherboard: A large circuit board containing the CPU, RAM, expansion slots and microchips.

Mouse: A handheld input device, which rolls across a flat surface, and is activated by a series of moves, drag and clicking operations to input and manipulate data, which corresponds to the data, viewed simultaneously upon the screen. (Other terms associated with mouse are, Mouse Button, Mouse Pad and Mouse Action)

MS-DOS: Type of Disk Operating System. Computers run on a system of commands issued by the user and/or software in a language the computer will understand.

For example: A:filename.wps

Instructs the computer to:

- Save my file
- On a floppy disk, which is inserted into the “A” drive
- As a word processing file.

Multimedia: A multiple sensory experience that may involve, sight sounds available on many of today's computers.

Multitasking: An operating system feature that enables the designer/user to operate several programs concurrently.

Name: The name you are using to name your file or folder.

Network: A system of communication between two or more computers.

Off-the-shelf software: Software commercially produced for the general public use.

Open: The terms means to “open” a file on the computer. The file may be a new file or it may be an existing file saved on either the hard drive (disk) or a floppy disk.

Orientation: Used to indicate the direction of the workspace/page layout. Landscape orientation means the page is a horizontal layout; Portrait orientation means the page is used vertically

.

Output Device: Equipment such as printers and plotters used to produce a tangible representation of work generated on the computer.

Packaged Software: Software packaged for resale.

Password: Often personalized and unique phrase created by the owner of the computer to designate specific users or the computer and/or software and/or storage areas.

Peripheral equipment: External hardware attached to the computer.

Portrait: The orientation (direction) of a document or image, using a vertical page layout or workspace, typically 8.5" width x 11" height.

Presentation Graphics Program: This is a professional looking graphic program used in business that enhances text and images for presentations.

Printers: Hardware used in "printing" a hardcopy of what was viewed on the screen or saved on the computer.

Procedure: Steps necessary to complete a task.

Program: Step-by-step instructions telling the computer to perform specific steps or tasks.

Prompt: A message or signal, such as proceed, perform a task, or make a choice, all given to the user by the computers operating system.

Pull-down menu: Similar to a window shade, this menu, when “pulled-down,” offers a variety of functions or other options for the user to perform. In many graphics programs these can leave open on the screen for frequent. In addition, they often offer additional “fly-out” menu offering additional selections.

QWERTY: Standard keyboard layout (similar to a typewriter) used on most computers keyboards. This style is popular in the US while the DVORAK style is popular in Europe.

RAM: Random access memory. The computer’s primary “working” memory. This information is stored and accessible but is lost when the computer is shut off.

This is similar to our short-term memory.

Reboot: To re-start your computer and/or program when it was already turned on. Sometimes when you are working on the computer, a program may lock up, or even worse, the electric may go off. If that happens you may need to start the program over. The reason it is called a reboot is because the computer was

already turned on and considered warm. When you turn the computer on for the first time each day it is called a cold start.

Refresh: A computer option/icon that redraws the image and “cleans-up” the screen.

ROM: Read only memory. Unlike RAM (random access memory) ROM represents information that is permanently written on a computer chip and will always remember the commands or functions it is needs to perform.

Ruler: These guides located at top and or sides of the screen enable the designer to render an image that is perfectly aligned and scaled. These can be activated by a simple toggle on and off command and then accessed or “grabbed” to a specific location on screen.

Save: The ability to permanently keep information. (See storage) List below are some suggestions for when, where and how to save.

- **When-**As frequently as possible. We suggest you save every 15 minutes.
A rule of thumb is how much data can YOU afford to lose?
- **Where-**Always backup your work. For example, if you typically save to the hard drive frequently this is the “C” drive of the computer, backup your files on a 3 1/2” disk, a CD, a flash drive, hard drive or other internal or external storage device.

- **How:** This answer is not as obvious as it appears. We suggest that you save complex files in increments, stages or versions.

For example:

- A designer might save a croquis to the hard drive as a template to use frequently. The designer will open that file and begin to build the image by garment rendering and save it as “version#1.”
- Next by adding color, this becomes Version #2.
- And other final edits maybe name as
 - Version #3.
 - Or as .Final

This method is simply working smarter versus harder. A little planning can go a long way and the computer really can be your best friend. When the designer is completely satisfied this becomes “final version.”

Scanner: Equipment that reads text, photos, or other images directly into the computer to be enhanced, manipulated or modified by the designer/user. Files can be opened in a word processing program, graphics program, loaded on the web or sent electronically via Email or Fax.

Screen: Similar to a television in appearance that outputs information from the computer.

Scroll: This action or option permits the designer to move through, the screen, and text, and image, graphic, document or page layout by using the cursor or keypad. Other terms or icons associated with the term scroll are:

- Page Up
- Page Down
- Home
- End
- The directional “Arrow keys”
- “Arrows”
- Icon
- Scroll Bar
- Scroll Box
- Select Browse Object
- Next Page

Secondary Storage: Additional storage such as a data disk.

Selection Tool: This tool is often in the form of an “arrow”, “pointer”, and activates an area by “highlighted area” which can be seen in the form of “shading, dotted outline or a motion or flickering outline.” Typically the mouse is used to activate this tool. Keystrokes can also be used but can be considered cumbersome to use.

Service Bureau: Commercial printing service used to print a variety of files, but typically known for doing camera-ready work.

Shareware: Software available for nominal fee or for FREE.

Shortcut: In computer this can be in the form of using the “Function Key”, which takes several steps or functions with one keystroke.

Shrink: Indicating to make a screen smaller. (See minimize) Minimizing does not close the program or window. This feature merely reduces the size so a designer may work on another program.

Softcopy: A visual non-tangible display on the screen of the work generated.

Software Programs: Application or instructions that tells the computer what to do

Status Bar: This can be often located on the top portion of your screen and can indicate everything from the font style selected to the drawing tool used.

Status Line: Generally located on the bottom of your screen indicating everything from the location of your mouse, last typed line / character of text or even the tool you are currently using.

Storage: This indicates areas or devices that are designated for retaining information they can be temporary or permanent

Examples include:

- Hard drive
- Floppy disk
- Magnetic tape
- CD

Style: A typeface alternative such as **bold**, underline/underscore or *italic*, used to enhance font. (See font)

Submenu: Additional options available that relate or are relevant to the previous menu.

Terminal: Equipment that will enable the designer to input output and communicates information.

Thumb Drive: A portable storage device that is about the size of a thumb to hold large quantities of data.

Title Bar: The Name of the program and file at the top of the screen.

Tool Bar: In most programs this is where the “tools” used by the designer are located.

Tutorial: A sample of how the program works. This is usually a mini-exercise using step-by-step instructions that walk you through the steps to operate a program. Like the Help Menu this feature comes with the program, but often is not installed because of the amount of space required on the hard drive to run such an application.

UNDO: A great feature of most software that permits the user to go back and “undo” the last step or series of steps. Check the program and version you are using or the number of times the program will permit you to “undo.”

Unzip: Term used to indicate the “decompressing of a file.” This means to open a file that was made smaller for reasons of size and then reopened or “un-zipped” to the original size to show complete details of the work. This term is used for very large text files or for large raster-images files.

Update: To keep files and information current.

Upload: Transfer a file from your computer to another computer.

User: That's You!

Vector Image: This is a term related to most drawing programs and is associated with line drawings or images the computer “understands” as a series of lines done mathematically.

Virus: A series of illicit and illegal instructions that passes from one computer to another via a variety of contact sources.

Warm Boot: Restarting the system by hitting Ctrl+Alt+Del keys all at the same time to clear memory or reload program. (See reboot)

WingDings: A type of font character that can be accessed and transforms an ordinary key stroke into a symbol or a vector image.

Windows: This is an application software program that works “on top” of the computer's disk operating system and is used to manipulate and manage your programs, software and computer functions.

Word Processor: The process generating, arranging, editing, proofreading and printing text.

Word-wrap: When words automatically move to the next line without manually hitting the “enter” key or space bar.

Workspace: This can mean the actual size of the printable document, or it can also mean the space outside the document that will not print.

Workstation: This includes the area and the equipment the designer will use.

WWW: World Wide Web, hypermedia system using the Internet to transport data using a simple phone line.

WYSIWYG: “What you see is what you get.” What is on the screen/monitor is what will print.

ZIP DISK: A dated version of used for data storage. A “zip disk” was designed to hold large amounts of data, this method is currently replaced with a CD, or a Flash Drive also known as a Thumb Drive.