

## Basic Computer Terminology

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**Access time** - The performance of a hard drive or other storage device - how long it takes to locate a file.

**Active program or window** - The application or window at the front (foreground) on the monitor.

**Application** - a program in which you do your work.

**ASCII** (pronounced ask-key ) - American Standard Code for Information Interchange. a commonly used data format for exchanging information between computers or programs.

**Background** - part of the multitasking capability. A program can run and perform tasks in the background while another program is being used in the foreground.

**Bit** - the smallest piece of information used by the computer. Derived from "binary digit". In computer language, either a one (1) or a zero (0).

**Backup** - a copy of a file or disk you make for archiving purposes.

**Boot** - to start up a computer.

**Bug** - a programming error that causes a program to behave in an unexpected way.

**Bus** - an electronic pathway through which data is transmitted between components in a computer.

**Byte** - a piece of computer information made up of eight bits.

**CD-ROM** - an acronym for Compact Disc Read-Only Memory.

**Client – Server** - A common form of distributed system in which software is split between server tasks and client tasks. A client sends requests to a server, according to some protocol, asking for information or action, and the server responds.

**Clipboard** - A portion of memory where the Mac temporarily stores information. Called a Copy Buffer in many PC applications because it is used to hold information which is to be moved, as in word processing where text is "cut" and then "pasted".

**Clock Rate** (MHz) - The instruction processing speed of a computer measured in millions of cycles per second (i.e., 200 MHz).

**Compiler** - a program that converts programming code into a form that can be used by a computer.

**Compression** - a technique that reduces the size of a saved file by elimination or encoding redundancies (like JPEG, MPEG, LZW, etc.)

**Control Panel** - a program that allows you to change settings in a program or change the way a Mac looks and/or behaves.

**CPU** - the Central Processing Unit. The processing chip that is the "brains" of a computer.

**Crash** - a system malfunction in which the computer stops working and has to be restarted.

**Cursor** - The pointer, usually arrow or cross shaped, which is controlled by the mouse.

**Daisy chaining** - the act of stringing devices together in a series (such as SCSI).

**Database** - an electronic list of information that can be sorted and/or searched.

**Data** - (the plural of datum) information processed by a computer.

**Defragment** - (also - optimise) to concatenate fragments of data into contiguous blocks in memory or on a hard drive.

**Dialog box** - an on-screen message box that appears when the computer requires additional information before completing a command.

**Digitise** - to convert linear, or analogue, data into digital data that can be used by the computer.

**Disk** - a spinning platter made of magnetic or optically etched material on which data can be stored.

**Disk drive** - the machinery that writes the data from a disk and/or writes data to a disk.

**Disk window** - the window that displays the contents or directory of a disk.

**Document** - a file you create, as opposed to the application which created it.

**DOS** - acronym for Disk Operating System - used in IBM PCs.

**DPI** - acronym for Dots Per Inch - a gauge of visual clarity on the printed page or on the computer screen.

**Download** - to transfer data from one computer to another. (If you are on the receiving end, you are downloading. If you are on the sending end, you are uploading).

**Drag** - to move the mouse while its button is being depressed.

**Driver** - a file on a computer that tells it how to communicate with an add-on piece of equipment (like a printer).

**Ethernet** - a protocol for fast communication and file transfer across a network.

**Expansion slot** - a connector inside the computer that allows one to plug in a printed circuit board that provides new or enhanced features.

**File** - the generic word for an application, document, control panel or other computer data.

**Floppy** - a 3.5-inch square rigid disk which holds data. (so named for the earlier 5.25 and 8 inch disks that were flexible).

**Folder** - an electronic subdirectory that contains files.

**Font** - a typeface that contains the characters of an alphabet or some other letterforms.

**Fragmentation** - The breaking up of a file into many separate locations in memory or on a disk.

**Freeze** - a system error, which causes the cursor to lock in place.

**Gig** - a gigabyte = 1024 megabytes.

**Hard drive** - a large capacity storage device made of multiple disks housed in a rigid case.

**Head crash** - a hard disk crash caused by the heads coming in contact with the spinning disk(s).

**High density disk** - a 1.4 MB floppy disk.

**Highlight** - to select by clicking once on an icon or by highlighting text in a document.

**Hit rate** - The fraction of all memory reads which are satisfied from the cache.

**Hz** - Abbreviation for hertz, the number of cycles per second, used to measure clock speed

**Icon** - a graphic symbol for an application, file or folder.

**Initialise** - to format a disk for use in the computer; creates a new directory and arranges the tracks for the recording of data.

**Insertion point** - in word processing, the short flashing marker that indicates where your next typing will begin.

**Installer** - software used to install a program on your hard drive.

**Interrupt button** - a tool used by programmers to enter the debugging mode. The button is usually next to the reset button.

**K** - short for kilobyte.

**Keyboard shortcut** - a combination of keystrokes that performs some function otherwise found in a pull down menu.

**Kilobyte** - 1024 bytes.

**Landscape** - in printing from a computer, to print sideways on the page.

**Launch** - start an application.

**Measurements** (summary) -

\*a bit = one binary digit (1 or 0) \*"bit" is derived from the contraction b'it (binary digit) -> 8 bits = one byte

\*1024 bytes = one kilobyte

\*K = kilobyte

\*Kb = kilobit

\*MB = megabyte

\*Mb = megabit

\*MB/s = megabytes per second

\*Mb/s = megabits per second

\*bps = bits per second

i.e., 155 Mb/s = 19.38 MB/s

**MB** - short for megabyte.

**Megabyte** - 1024 kilobytes.

**Memory** - the temporary holding area where data is stored while it is being used or changed; the amount of RAM a computer has installed.

**Menu** - a list of program commands listed by topic.

**Menu bar** - the horizontal bar across the top of the screen that lists the menus.

**MHz** - Abbreviation for megahertz, or millions of cycles per second.

**Multi tasking** - running more than one application in memory at the same time.

**Nanosecond** - one billionth of a second.

**Operating system** - the system software that controls the computer.

**Optical disk** - a high-capacity storage medium that is read by a laser light.

**Palette** - a small floating window that contains tools used in a given application.

**Partition** - a subdivision of a hard drives surface that is defined and used as a separate drive.

**Paste** - to insert text, or other material, from the clipboard or copy buffer.

**PC** - acronym for personal computer, commonly used to refer to an IBM or IBM clone computer that uses DOS.

**PCI** - acronym for Peripheral Component Interchange - the newer, faster bus architecture.

**Peripheral** - an add-on component to your computer.

**Point** - (1/72") 12 points = one pica in printing.

**Pop-up menu** - any menu that does not appear at the top of the screen in the menu bar. (May pop up or down)

**Port** - a connection socket, or jack.

**Power PC** - a processing chip designed by Apple, IBM and Motorola (RISC based).

**Power Mac** - a family of Macs built around the PowerPC chip.

**Print spooler** - a program that stores documents to be printed on the hard drive, thereby freeing the memory up and allowing other functions to be performed while printing goes on in the background.

**RAM** - acronym for Random-Access Memory.

**Resize box** - the small square at the lower right corner of a window which, when dragged, resizes the window.

**RISC** - acronym for Reduced Instruction Set Computing; the smaller set of commands used by the PowerPC and Power Mac.

**ROM** - acronym for Read Only Memory; memory that can only be read from and not written to.

**Root directory** - the main hard drive window.

**Save** - to write a file onto a disk.

**Save as** - (a File menu item) to save a previously saved file in a new location and/or with a new name.

**Scroll** - to shift the contents of a window to bring hidden items into view.

**Scroll bar** - a bar at the bottom or right side of a window that contains the scroll box and allows scrolling.

**Scroll box** - the box in a scroll bar that is used to navigate through a window.

**SCSI** - acronym for Small Computer System Interface.

**Serial port** - a port that allows data to be transmitted in a series (one after the other), such as the printer and modem ports on a Mac.

**Server** - a central computer dedicated to sending and receiving data from other computers (on a network).

**Shut down** - the command from the Special menu that shuts down the computer safely.

**Software** - files on disk that contain instructions for a computer.

**Spreadsheet** - a program designed to look like an electronic ledger.

**Start up disk** - the disk containing system software and is designated to be used to start the computer.

**Surge suppressor** - a power strip that has circuits designed to reduce the effects of surge in electrical power. (Not the same as a UPS)

**32 bit addressing** - a feature that allows the computer to recognize and use more than 8MB of memory.

**Thin client** - A simple client program or hardware device that relies on most of the function of the system being in the server

**Title bar** - the horizontal bar at the top of a window that has the name of the file or folder it represents.

**Upload** - to send a file from one computer to another through a network.

**Uninterruptible Power Source (UPS)**- a constantly charging battery pack that powers the computer. A UPS should have enough charge to power your computer for several minutes in the event of a total power failure, giving you time to save your work and safely shut down.

**UPS** - acronym for Uninterruptible Power Source.

**Vapourware** - "software" advertised, and sometimes sold, that does not yet exist in a releasable form.

**Virtual memory** - using part of your hard drive as though it were "RAM".

**WORM** - acronym for Write Once-Read Many; an optical disk that can only be written to once (like a CD-ROM).

**Zoom box** - a small square in the upper right corner of a window which, when clicked, will expand the window to fill the whole screen.

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