

Computerspeak Made Easy

Those who do computer literacy training recommend providing easy glossaries of difficult new terminology. Here are some standard computer buzzwords defined and redefined.

Definitions

ASCII: A common computer code used for data communications; an abbreviation for American Standard Code for Information Interchange.

BASIC: A high-level symbolic programming language; an acronym for Beginner's All-Purpose Symbolic Instruction Code; similar to FORTRAN;

best suited for programming with the use of terminals, mini-computers and microcomputers.

Bit: A contraction for binary digit. The term refers to the representation of data in binary form, as a series of on-off or 1-0 digits.

Byte: A fixed number of bits that represent a character. The most common byte size is eight bits.

Chip: A memory device made from thin wafers of silicon and used for forming the main memory of a computer.

CPU (Central Processing Unit): The computer device that controls the actual operations of

the computer system; these include input, data transfer, arithmetic/logic and output operations, which are part of each user program.

CRT (Cathode Ray Tube): A terminal device that prints messages on a television-like tube; output is said to be "soft copy" since it is not retained as a permanent record.

Disk Drive: Direct-access device designed to minimize the access time required to locate specific records; ideally suited for on-line processing.

Firmware: Prewired hardware that has been preprogrammed to perform specific functions. A user frequently can purchase with a computer system some software or program support that is built into the hardware.

Floppy Disk: A floppy disk is a miniaturized version of the larger fixed-head magnetic disks. It is used on minicomputers and microcomputers to store data and programs. A floppy disk uses the random-access method of processing.

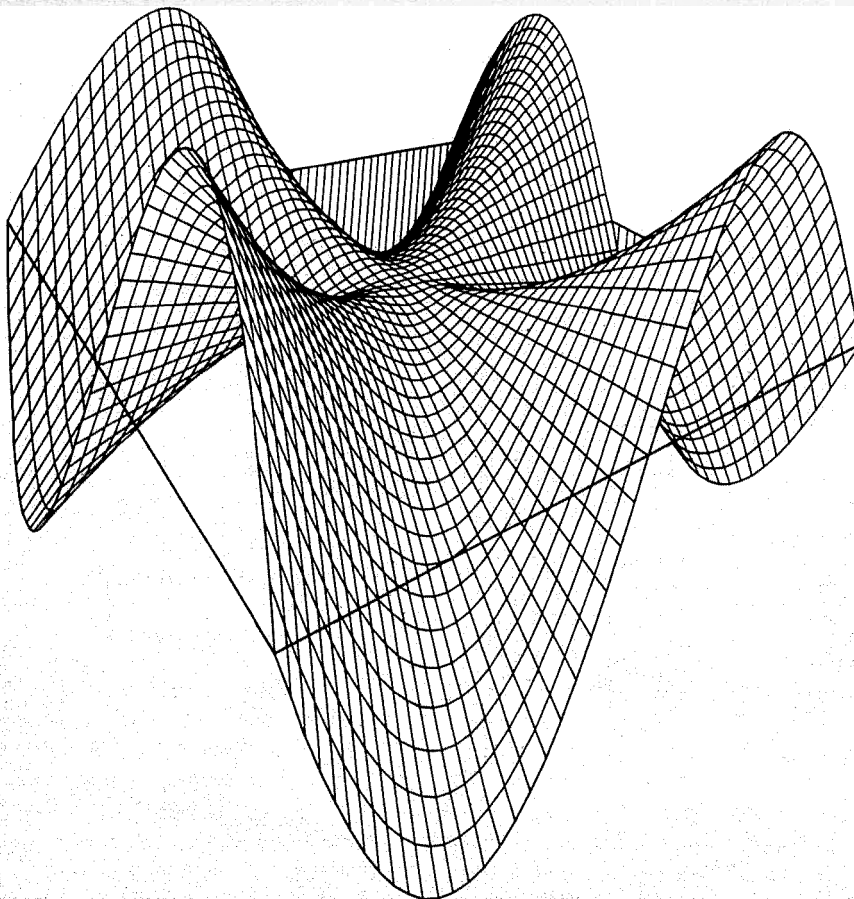
Hardware: Physical equipment used in conjunction with CPU that constitutes a computer system. Contrast with software.

I/P (Input): Incoming data read into a computer system for processing.

K: Always uppercase, K stands for 1,024 bytes. It is used to describe how much memory a computer has.

MB (Megabyte): One million bytes of storage.

Microcomputer: A small computer, usually with a keyboard CRT and 16 to 32K storage in its basic form; prices start at several hundred dollars. The term "personal computer" is synonymous with microcomputer.



Menu: A "table of contents" that appears on the monitor when a computer program is in use.

Modem: A device that modulates and demodulates signals transmitted over communication lines.

Monitor (or screen): Either a television set or a specially designed video screen on which the computer displays instructions, actions and results.

Peripheral: An accessory for a computer, such as a printer.

RAM (Random-Access Memory): Memory that is used for storing programs and data.

ROM (Read-Only Memory): The part of computer memory that contains prewired functions; cannot be altered by programmed instructions.

Software: Programming support that enables the computer

system to operate effectively. These include the supervisor, user programs, utility programs and so on.

Word Processing System: A system that automates secretarial tasks performed in most offices; instead of typing documents, reports and letters using a standard typewriter, a secretary uses a terminal that can print the document, make necessary changes when appropriate and store the information for future printing.

From An Introduction to Computers and Information Processing, 2nd edition, by Robert A. Stern and Nancy Stern. New York: Copyright © John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1982.

Redefinitions

ASCII: A method of encoding elements for computers. Computers which do not recognize lower case are called half-ASCII.

Byte: A group of bits. Bits are numbers in the binary system, i.e., to the base 2. Proposals to group numbers to the base 3 are considered trite.

CPU: The central processor of a computer. The abbreviation stands for Coronary/Pulmonary Unit.

Control Characters: Terminal keys which produce effects other than printed characters, e.g., CONTROL-G produces a beep. Remember Lauren Bacall's famous line: "If you need me, just beep. You know how to beep, don't you? Hold down the control key and press G."

Coupler: A small amount, e.g., be with you in a coupler minutes.

Cursor: A pirate; one who uses bad language.

Disk: A square thing you put in a computer. Etymology doubtful.

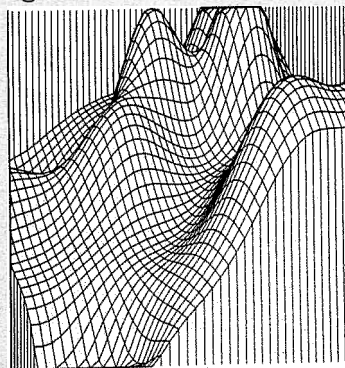
Firmware: Foundation garments. Floppy controllers are often implemented with firmware.

Megabyte: Severe occlusion of the upper and lower incisors.

Microchip: English delicacy, eaten with microfiche.

RAM: Area of computer memory reserved for users born between March 21st and April 19th.

Recursive Programming: Repeated use of bad language in program text. Cf., cursor.



By Terence Monks, director of computer services, United States Railway Association, Washington, D.C.



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