

Computers 101

Welcome to the Digital Age



Joining the digital age is easy!

Already, millions of people have discovered the wonders and benefits of using computers. Here at Women Work!, we believe you can too. Computers can enrich your life in many ways; they can help you to job-hunt, find resources and organize personal and financial affairs. This easy-to-follow guide has tips on how to purchase and set up a computer, and also some ways to become comfortable using one. (Note: bolded terms are defined in the glossary of this tip sheet.)



The Hardware:

Basic parts of a computer.

A personal computer includes all of the following **hardware** components: a **monitor**, **mouse**, **keyboard** and **CPU** (a unit that houses the **hard drive**, **RAM**, **processor**). The way these parts are organized in a computer can change depending on model and type.

- **Desktop computers** have limited movement; rarely do they leave the home or office. Desktop units usually have multiple pieces of hardware. The monitor, CPU, mouse and keyboard are generally separate components that are joined together by connecting cables. However, with evolving technology, newer models may combine the monitor and CPU into one unit, and allow for wireless keyboard and mouse.

- **Laptop computers** are easily moveable. These systems are lighter and smaller than their desktop

counterparts. Laptop computers usually house all of their components into one central unit without cables. The monitor, hard drives and processing hardware are all built into one unit. Other than size, they are equivalent to most desktop models.

Although these are the basic parts of a computer, other devices can be used in a personal computer system. A **printer**, **digital camera**, **ethernet card** and **modem** can be connected to the CPU using **USB** or **Firewire** technology; however older models might use other methods to connect.



The Software:

Making it all work.

Computer **software** is a set of instructions that can be stored on the hard drive of a computer. When accessed, software runs **programs** that tell the computer what to do. For example, a popular computer software program, **Internet Explorer**, tells the computer to **browse** or “**surf**” the Internet.

The most important piece of software that all computers require is the **operating system**. The type of operating system that a computer uses determines its classification as either an **Apple Macintosh** (often referred to as Apple) or **IBM Compatible** (often referred to as “PC”) computer. Apple computers use the **OS** operating system while IBM Compatible computers use the **Windows/ XP** or **Linux** operating systems.

Software programs can do many things. Some are created for **word processing** while others help you browse the **Internet**. Because there are so many programs available today, it is easy to find software that can help you with almost any task. Most computers already have useful software **installed** on their systems when you buy it.



Where to Start:

Getting a Personal Computer.

Computers are no longer difficult to get for the general public – prices have fallen to the point where most people are able to buy or obtain a computer. This section will show you how.

For those looking to purchase a new computer:

There are many issues to think about before buying a computer. First, decide what you will be using it for. If you are looking for a simple setup, then you most likely wouldn't look at certain models. Next, it is always wise to set a strict price limit. Knowing how much you want to spend will help determine where you should look. Lastly, decide what type of computer is right for you: Apple or IBM/PC. More people use IBM computers than Apple Macintosh, partly because Apples are more expensive. However, many graphic designers and educators believe that Apple systems are more user-friendly and powerful. In any case, you should carefully consider these points when buying a new computer.

Where to Look:

When buying a computer, people rely on companies with an online presence or large electronics stores. Popular Internet stores, such as Dell, HP and Gateway, all offer desktop and laptop computers at reasonable prices. However, they are harder to get a hold of and only offer “over-the-phone” customer service. Large electronic distribution stores such as Best Buy and CompUSA tend to offer less expensive models and have in-store, face-to-face customer assistance.

Although it is wise to shop around for the lowest price, do not base your decision on price alone; less expensive computers do not always have the best performance or life-span.

As a general rule when purchasing a computer, be sure to ask a lot of questions. If at any time you are unsure or confused, let your sales representative know. Buying a computer is an investment and you want to be sure you know exactly what you are getting. Be assertive!

For those looking to get a computer on a tighter budget:

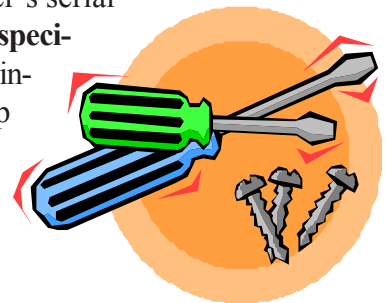
Local schools and organizations sometimes offer **refurbished** computer units at a much lower price; you may be eligible for a donated computer system at little or no cost, especially if there are young children in your home. **To find a local distributor, go to a nearby library or school.** There, you should be able to find someone to assist you in your search.



Maintenance:

Taking care of your computer.

Like most household appliances, computers can break. If you encounter problems with your computer, call your local distributor or the computer manufacturer for customer service, especially if it is still under warranty. More often than not, they will be able to repair computer hardware or software problems. When speaking to a customer/technical support representative, it is always best to have your computer's serial number and **technical specifications** on hand. This information will help speed up the time it takes to fix your computer.





Using your computer:

Where to find computer learning centers.

Learning to use a computers is not difficult; all it takes is a little time and patience. Many people go to continuing education programs and community colleges to take computer classes. These places have classes for various experience levels, especially for those with little understanding of computer systems. Because of the growing presence of computers in the workplace, many classes are offered for free or at a low cost. Be sure to check with the school/college for financial aid. To find the nearest continuing education program or community college, try your local yellow pages or library.



What a computer can do:

Putting your computer to work.

In this day and age, nearly all businesses use computers in some way or another. Most commonly, computers are used for word processing, record-keeping (**database**), and **inter/intra** office communicating (**e-mail**, Internet, and project presentations).

Most employers will ask you to give them an electronic copy of your résumé over the Internet, and will require that you show you can use a computer. For many office jobs, you must feel comfortable enough to use programs such as **Microsoft Word** and **Excel**.

Computers can also be useful in your personal life. For instance, people use computers for organization, recreation, and book-keeping. Using a computer may seem scary at first, but computer skills are becoming more beneficial every day. Computers are changing society and so can you!



Computer Glossary

Apple Macintosh: The name of a product line and computer operating system manufactured by Apple Computer, Inc.

Browse: To access resources on the Internet.

Cursor: A bright, usually blinking, movable indicator on a computer screen, marking the position at which a word can be entered, corrected, or deleted.

CPU: Refers to the central computer unit that houses the processor, RAM, hard drive and motherboard.

Database: A collection of information arranged for ease and speed of search and retrieval.

Desktop computer: A personal computer small enough to fit in an individual workspace.

Digital camera: A camera that captures an image digitally and stores it for later reproduction.

E-mail: A system for sending and receiving messages electronically over a computer network between personal computers.

Ethernet: A type of networking technology that connects computers to the Internet at a fast rate.

Firewire: A type of technology that allows data to be exchanged between two sources very quickly.

Hard drive: A disk drive that reads data stored on disks, such as CDs and DVDs.

Hardware: A computer and the associated physical equipment directly involved in performing data-processing or communications functions.

IBM Compatible: A computer that can use hardware and software designed for the IBM PC. (Basically, any computer not made by Apple is considered an IBM/PC)

Input: To enter data or a program into a computer.

Install: To store and enable a software program on a computer hard drive.

Inter: Between; among groups/organizations.

Internet: A worldwide electronic network providing access to millions of resources and services, such as e-mail. Composed of a network of computers.

Intra: Within a group/organization.

Keyboard: A set of keys, as on a computer terminal, word processor and typewriter.

Laptop computer: A portable computer small enough to use in your lap.

Linux: A trademark for an open-source version of the UNIX operating system.

Microsoft Word: A popular word processor, part of the Microsoft Office suite.

Microsoft Excel: A spreadsheet program from Microsoft, part of their Microsoft Office Suite.

Modem: A device used to connect a computer to the Internet.

Monitor: Screen that displays information from a computer.

Mouse: A hand-sized, button-activated input device that when rolled along a flat surface directs an indicator to move about a computer screen. It allows the user to select operations or manipulate text or graphics.

Operating system: Software that is standard to all computers; other programs use the operating system for a set of defined instructions.

OS: Apple Computer, Inc.'s operating system for their Macintosh family of personal computers.

Output: To retrieve data or a program from a computer.

Printer: A device that prints text or graphics on paper.

Processor: The part of a computer (a microprocessor chip) that is needed to process and decode data from a computer program. The higher your processor speed the faster your computer will run.

Program: A set of coded instructions that enables a machine, especially a computer, to perform a desired sequence of operations.

RAM: A device that stores information in the computer's memory so data can be accessed in any order – if you have more RAM or memory, your computer will run faster.

Refurbished: To renovate. When related to computers, it can refer to a system that is used but has had certain parts replaced

Software: Programs that tell the computer what to do for specific functions. Examples: Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Windows, Adobe Photoshop, Quickbooks.

Technical specifications: Information about a computer and its components. For example, a computer's model number, type of processor or amount of memory.

USB: or Universal Serial Bus, is a technology that allows devices to be connected to computers in order to exchange data back and forth: example, a digital camera can connect to a computer through a USB.

Windows: An operating system that comes on most IBM/PC systems.

Word Processing: Creating, editing and producing documents and texts by using computer systems. Documents are created by typing information into a word processor, such as Microsoft Word.

