

Computer Terminology

The following terms are common computer terms that you should be familiar with.

Adobe Acrobat: Acrobat Reader is a free software product from Adobe, designed to view .pdf (portable document format) documents downloaded from the Web. This type of file provides a standard form for storing and editing printed publishable documents.

Anti-virus Software: A program that detects and, in most cases, removes viruses from a PC, (e.g., McAfee, Norton). By protecting you from damaging viruses it protects you from loss of data. You must update your anti-virus program frequently as new viruses appear daily. This can usually be done via the Internet.

Bookmark: In Netscape Communicator, when you 'bookmark' a page, you tell your browser to remember that page's address (URL), so that you can go back to it easily, without having to type in the URL again. It keeps your place, much like a bookmark in a book does. Most browsers have an easy method of saving the URL to create a bookmark.

Broken Link: A hyperlink connection to another Web page which no longer works. Web pages are often moved or erased and links to these pages sometimes do not reflect this change. A broken link is a dead end which no longer opens the page to which it refers.

Browser: Software which lets you view material designed for the World Wide Web. Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape Communicator are the most commonly used Web browsers. A browser usually displays documents created in html code.

Cable Modem: A special modem that is used over cable television lines. It uses the coaxial-type cable which has a much greater bandwidth than the copper telephone lines standard dial-up modems use. The fastest, typical dial-up modem reaches ideal speeds of 56Kbps. The standard cable modem runs at 2Mbps.

Database: A grouping or collection of data (information) that enables a software application to find specific pieces easily. The data is usually separated into fields (one unique bit of information), records (a full grouping of similar types of fields) and files (a full grouping of similar types of records). You may think of it as a computerized version of a filing cabinet. MS Access is a popular Database program.

Dialog Box: A small window which appears on the computer screen that either requires that you perform an action, select an option, or provides you with information. For example, dialog boxes ask you questions like, "Do you want to save this document?" or "Are you sure you want to exit this program?"

Directories: Just as a drawer is a space where one keeps folders in a file cabinet, a directory is a place to store files or folders on a computer. For instance, you could have a directory called "teaching" that contains individual files filled with information about each class that you teach.

Discussion Board/Groups: These are available on certain web sites so that users of the site can communicate with others. These boards allow users to post messages to the site so that all other users of the site can view them and reply if desired. Discussion boards can be utilized to continue discussions outside the formal classroom.

Download: Transferring files or information from a remote computer (such as from the Internet) to your computer.

DRAM: (short for dynamic random access memory). DRAM is the most common type of memory but it is not as fast as other types, such as SyncRAM or static RAM. It is usually used for main or system memory, rather than another kind of memory called cache. Also known as dynamic RAM.

Drop Down Menu: A menu showing a list of choices on a Web page. When you click on the down arrow next to the first choice, the other choices on the list appear below (they 'drop down'). You can then select the choice that you want.

E-mail Attachments: Programs and documents can be sent 'attached' to e-mail messages. These attachments are not part of the message, and must be read or viewed separately. Any computer file (images, programs, spreadsheets, etc.) can be attached to e-mail.

Excel: A program in the Microsoft Office Suite that creates spreadsheets. Initially developed for accounting, spreadsheets like Excel are now used for a variety of other projects which require the data be organized in a table or grid. Excellent for recording and calculating grades.

Favorites: In Microsoft Internet Explorer you can tell the program to remember a list of your 'favorite' Web pages, so that you can go back to them easily, without having to type in the address (URL) again. When you add a page to your favorites, you can jump to it again by clicking 'favorites' on the tool bar and selecting from the list. 'Favorites' are similar to the 'bookmarks' used by Netscape Communicator.

File Extensions: These are the three letters which come after the dot . in the name of a file. These three letters tell your computer what kind of file it is. Examples are .jpg (image file), .doc (a Microsoft Word document), .htm (a web page), or .txt (a text file that can be opened in a word processor).

File Size: The size of the file is the amount of disk storage space taken up by that file (measured in bytes). Generally, smaller files will load (appear on the screen) faster on the Web, and it is to your advantage to make files as small as possible.

FTP (File Transfer Protocol): A method of transferring files from one computer to another. Usually, it is used to copy files from a personal computer to a server, so that they can be accessed by others. There are several common software programs that are used to transfer files. A common one is WS_FTP. FTP is often used to download files from Internet sites, many which allow users to log in anonymously and download public repositories of material (programs, images, text, etc.). These sites are called 'anonymous ftp sites'.

.GIF (Graphic Interchange Format): One of the most common file formats for images on the World Wide Web. Images saved as .gif files tend to take up more space than other image formats, but reproduce images more accurately.

Home Page: This is the first page that your browser will open when you access the Internet.

HTML: Hypertext Markup Language is the code used to write most documents on the World Wide Web. HTML codes (called 'tags') tell your browser how to arrange text and images onto the computer screen. You can write the code yourself using any text editor, or can use any one of several commercially available HTML editors to create a document.

HTML Editor: A program used to edit documents which are written in Hypertext Markup Language. Common programs are Netscape Composer, Macromedia Dreamweaver, and Microsoft FrontPage.

Hyperlinks: Text or images on a Web page that, when clicked with a mouse, cause your browser to load another page of HTML. Text links are usually (but not always) underlined in blue, while hyperlinks that are images are often in the form of 'buttons'.

ISP: Acronym for Internet Service Provider. A commercial company that charges a fee (usually monthly) to provide public access to the Internet. The user is assigned a distinct user name and password and software that enables their computer to dial-in. America Online (AOL), Earthlink, and MSN are some of the larger more common ISP in the United States.

Icon: A small graphic symbol that represents a program, file or folder on a computer. Clicking on an icon with a mouse generally causes the program to run, the folder to open, or the file to be displayed (if possible).

Internet Explorer: A popular Web browser, created by Microsoft, used to view pages on the World Wide Web.

.JPG: (Joint Photographic Experts Group) A commonly used file format for images on the Web. .jpg (also called .jpeg), files use compressed data, so they take up less disk space, but often sacrifice some image quality to do this.

LCD Projector: A device for taking the information that you would normally see on a computer monitor and projecting it onto a large projection screen. By projecting your work, you can show a PowerPoint slide show, a Web page, or other projects you've developed on the computer. All classrooms at Parker have LCD projectors mounted on the ceilings and connected to the computers.

Motherboard: The main circuit board within a computer that houses all of the other circuit boards which control the computer's functions. The motherboard usually houses the central processing unit (CPU), memory chips (DIMMS, DRAM), expansion slots, interfaces and controllers (for disk drives, the keyboard, the mouse, the monitor, etc.).

NIC: Acronym for Network Interface Card. A card that is slotted into a personal computer's motherboard. This card will allow the computer to connect to a network.

.PDF (portable document format): A file format created by Adobe, initially to provide a standard form for storing and editing printed publishable documents. Because documents in .pdf format can easily be seen and printed by users on a variety of computer and platform types, they are very common on the World Wide Web. To view files of this type, download the Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is available free from Adobe's Web site.

Plug-in: A program launched by your browser which allows you to use special kinds of files. These applications commonly let you see and hear video and audio files, as well as view specialized text files or virtual reality models. These programs are called plug-ins because they supplement the capabilities of your browser, and only run when they are needed to display files. Shockwave, Flash Player, RealAudio, and Adobe Acrobat Reader are examples of plug-ins.

PowerPoint: A program in the Microsoft Office suite which allows users to create presentations, and handouts. By creating PowerPoint 'slides', users can add color, images, sounds, and movies to their text presentations.

RealPlayer: A plug-in application from Real Networks that allows users to listen to audio and video files available from the Web.

Scanner: Hardware device that allows you to convert paper documents or images from notebooks, typed documents, and photographs into digital images. After images have been digitized, they can be placed on WWW pages or input into Word or PowerPoint.

Server: A computer which is designed to be accessed by many other computers. Servers can be attached to local area networks (cables connecting computers, such as in an office environment) and/or be hooked up to the Internet. With the proper software and connections, servers can control the distribution of e-mail, store WWW documents, and provide access to files or printers that are shared by many users.

Streaming Media: Any type of media (radio, television, etc.) which can be viewed using a plug-in (RealPlayer or Microsoft's NetCast for example). The streaming media is usually broadcast live, and can be from anywhere in the world. By using this feature, you will be able to view foreign broadcasts or listen to a radio stations from across the United States.

Unzip: A method for uncompressing files on a PC after downloading them from the Internet. Many files are stored on servers in a compressed format, allowing them to take up less disk space, and reducing the time it takes you to download them. You must decompress these files to make them usable by your computer. Winzip and PKunzip are popular free software programs that will unzip files. You can find Pkunzip on the X drive of your computer.

Upload: The process of transferring a file from a personal computer to a server. Uploading a file makes it available to others.

URL (Uniform Resource Locator): The "address" for documents on the Web. Addresses that begin with "http://" or "ftp://" usually indicate that they are URLs.

Word: A program in the Microsoft Office suite used for word processing and basic html creation and conversion.