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STUDY GUIDE: COMPUTER BASICS, TERMS & ACRONYMS

A computer is defined as “a machine that takes in information, processes it, stores it, and gives it back on request.”

There are three main parts of a computer:

1. **PROCESSOR** (or CPU... Central Processing Unit)
This unit is the “brains of the computer.” It takes in information which it uses to perform calculations or to process information.
2. **MEMORY**
This is the storage unit for all information that is put into the computer. Information is held here until it is retrieved at a later time.
3. **INPUT AND OUTPUT DEVICES**
Input devices enable the user to put information into the computer. The two most commonly used input devices are the keyboard and the mouse. Joysticks and modems are also input devices.
Output devices display or print the information that has been stored by the computer. The monitor and the printer are the most common output devices.

For a computer to work, three things are necessary:

1. **HARDWARE:** The actual pieces of equipment that make up the computer system.
EXAMPLES: computer, monitor, modem, printer, disks, and disk drives.
2. **SOFTWARE:** Programs and instructions that direct the computer and tell it how to perform various tasks.
3. **A USER OR OPERATOR:** You or another person who can enter data into the computer.

PARTS OF A COMPUTER

1. **CPU:** Central Processing Unit: It's the computer chip that acts as the brain of the computer to process the information. Sometimes the casing that holds this unit is also called the CPU.
2. **Monitor:** The screen upon which the information is shown.
3. **Keyboard:** An input device that resembles a typewriter.
4. **Printer:** A mechanical output device that can print text or graphics onto paper. The three main types of printers that have been used throughout computer history are the dot matrix, ink jet, and laser.
5. **Mouse:** An input device that moves on a ball to move the cursor and select menu programs.
6. **Modem:** A device that allows information to travel over telephone lines. A modem is necessary for accessing the Internet and for e-mail correspondences.
7. **Disk-Drives:** The slots into which the disks are inserted. They read from and write to a floppy disk or hard disk. The **CD-ROM** drive allows you to insert special disks called CD-ROM's. The hard drive is composed of a metal disk that can not be removed. It holds more information than a floppy disk.

A computer doesn't comprehend English. Each piece of information is changed into a binary code, which uses the digits 0 and 1. For example, the letter "a" is 01000001. Every other letter in the alphabet is assigned a different combination of 0 and 1. Each 0 and 1 is called a **bit**. This is the smallest piece of computer information that computers can handle. Bits are joined together into longer strings called **bytes**. Eight bits make one byte.

1,024 Bytes = 1 Kilobyte

1,024 Kilobytes = 1 Megabyte

1,000 Megabytes = Gigabyte

GENERAL COMPUTER TERMS

Backspace/delete Key: The key on the computer keyboard that moves the cursor one space to the left and will delete any characters located to the left of the cursor.

Baud rate: A measurement of how fast a modem transfers data.

Boot: To start up a computer by loading a program into the memory from an outside source, such as a disk.

Bug: An error or glitch in a program.

Caps Lock Key: A key on the computer keyboard that creates all capital letters when the key is pressed.

Catalog: A list of all the files stored on a disk. It's a synonym for a "directory."

Character: Each individual letter, number, punctuation mark, or other symbol used in printing or displaying information that can be read by humans.

Chip: The small piece of material on which the integrated circuit is fabricated. Silicon is the material from which most computer chips are made.

Cursor: A line or small block that appears on the monitor screen to show where the next information will be placed.

Command: A communication from the user to the computer system. Usually the commands are typed on the keyboard.

Database: A large collection of information, such as a library, newspaper, or list of names that the computer can easily read and retrieve as output.

Default: The setting that is automatically used by a computer if the user has not specified a different setting or action.

Disk: A flat, circular, magnetic surface on which information can be stored.

DOS: Disk Operating System: A software system that allows the computer to communicate with the disk drives.

Edit: To change the text by adding, deleting, cutting, or pasting.

E-Mail: Electronic mail which has been sent from one computer system to another via telephone lines.

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Expansion Slot: A connector inside the computer into which a peripheral card can be placed.

File: A collection of information stored together on a disk, similar to the information that would be placed into one file folder of a file cabinet.

Font: The type of design used for letters or other characters.

Format: To prepare a blank disk so it's ready to receive information. It's a synonym for "initialize."

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Hardcopy: The printed copy of the computer information.

Input: The information that is fed into the computer.

Insert Key: A key on the computer keyboard that is used to add text without deleting the text that has already been written.

Interface: A type of equipment that is used to connect the computer to the other hardware.

I/O: Input/Output: The transfer of information into the computer and then out of it.

Internet: A network of thousands of computers that are connected together.

Joystick: A lever that's used to move the cursor, especially in some computer games.

Load: To enter information (such as a program) from a storage disk into the main memory.

Mainframe: A large computer used by the government and large businesses that stores vast amounts of information, and it can be used by many people at the same time.

Memory: A hardware component of the computer that stores information for later retrieval.

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Menu: A list of choices offered by a program.

Output: The information that a computer feeds out, which is usually shown on the monitor or in printed form.

Password: A secret code that protects computer information, and it allows only certain people to use a computer or program.

Piracy: The reproduction and distribution of software that has been copyright protected.

Public Domain Programs: Software that can be copied by anyone and used without charge.

Personal Computer: PC: A microcomputer small enough to be used in homes and small businesses.

Program: A set of instructions that tells the computer the actions necessary to accomplish a particular task. As a verb, this word means to write these computer instructions.

RAM: Random Access Memory: A type of memory within the computer that allows the user to change the programs and information in RAM. However, this information is lost when the computer's power is shut off.

Return or Enter Key: A key on the computer keyboard that is used to enter information and that also returns the cursor to the beginning of a new line.

ROM: Read Only Memory: The type of memory within the computer that can not be changed. It remains permanently, even when the computer is shut off.

Save: To place the contents of a file on a disk or the hard drive for future use.

Scanner: A device that can transfer a printed page and pictures into the computer without using the keyboard or mouse. They are also used in stores to scan prices.

Shift Key: The key on the computer keyboard that is used to capitalize letters and type the upper symbol on the number keys.

Space Bar: The longest key on the computer keyboard. It's used to produce a blank space between words and to advance the cursor.

Spreadsheet: A type of software that is used in the field of accounting to perform quick mathematical calculations.

Slot: An opening inside the computer into which the peripheral cards are inserted.

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User-friendly: A term signifying that a computer or computer program is easy to use.

Video Display Terminal: Another name for the monitor.

Virus: A program that causes damage to other computer programs.

Word Processor: A program used to create and modify text, thus creating professional documents.

COMPUTER ACRONYMS

IBM: International Business Machines

DOS: Disk Operating System

ProDOS: Professional Disk Operating System

RAM: Random Access Memory

ROM: Read Only Memory

CPU: Central Processing Unit

BASIC: Beginner's All Purpose Symbolic Instruction Code

MB: Megabytes

GB: Gigabytes

VR: Virtual Reality

VIOS: Basic Input/Output System

CRT: Cathode ray Tube

GDI: Graphic Device Interface

MCI: Media Control Interface

LCD: Liquid Crystal Display

INTERNET TERMS AND ACRONYMS

AOL: America on Line

BBS: Bulletin Board Service.

Bounced Message: An e-mail message that is returned to you because it did not reach its destination.

Browser: A client software program that's used to explore information on the Internet. Netscape Navigator is the top selling browser, followed by Mosaic and Microsoft Internet Explorer.

BTW: By the way.

Chat: A program that enables people to type messages to a server that displays the messages immediately so that others who are logged on can respond at once.

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Crash: An unexpected shut-down of a program or an entire system. This results in a loss of all work that was not saved.

Cyberspace: The imaginary space on the Internet where you go when you're on-line or where your e-mail goes.

Domain name: The name in an e-mail address that identifies the Internet host. In the address gray@erinet.net, erinet.net is the domain name.

Dot: The period used in a URL.

Downloading: The transferring of information from the server to your computer.

E-Mail (Electronic Mail): Messages sent from one computer to another over the Internet.

Emoticons: Often called smileys, these are special characters that represent human faces when turned sideways. They attempt to express the writer's emotions and gestures. For example: :-) represents the ☺.

FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions.

FTP: File Transport Protocol.

Flame: An angry or insulting message sent by one person to another by e-mail.

FWIW: For What It's Worth.

Gopher: An Internet service that locates and delivers electronic files.

Hacker: A computer enthusiast who taps into closed networks.

Home Page: The opening page of a document on the Web.

HTML: Hypertext Markup Language.

http: Hypertext transfer protocol.

IMO: In my Opinion.

IOW: In Other Words.

IP: Internet Protocol.

ISP: Internet Service Provider.

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Lurker: A person who goes to electronic meetings and doesn't say anything and also breaks into other computers.

Microsoft: The computer industry giant responsible for DOS and Windows.

Netiquette: The correct form of behavior to be used on the Internet.

Online: It's when you're connected to the Internet, and your computer is ready to accept data.

PPP: Point to point protocol.

Search Engine: A tool that matches key words with titles and descriptions on the Internet, Yahoo, Alta Vista, and Infoseek are examples of search engines.

Server: The company that provides the network operations for other computer users.

Surfing: Cruising the net, and aimlessly exploring various web pages and sites.

URL: Universal Resource Locator.

www: World Wide Web.

YAHOO: Yet Another Hierarchically Officious Oracle.

The last few letters in an e-mail address usually indicate the type of organization or country that is associated with the sender.

ORGANIZATIONS

com	commercial
gov	government
net	network
edu	education
mil	military
org	organization

COUNTRIES

au	Australia
ca	Canada
it	Italy
jp	Japan
us	United States