

# Basic Computer Terminology

In many respects, learning to use a computer begins with learning a new (foreign) language. The following terms and explanations are provided to assist computer users in understanding words used to describe computers and their operations. The initial list was developed by Harold Openshaw who got his first computer when he moved to Willow Valley and who recognized the need for others to understand basic computer terminology. The listing is in a sequence to facilitate its presentation in a basic computer class. If you are looking for a specific term, hold down the control key (ctrl) on the keyboard and press the F key on the keyboard. In the pop-up search window on the computer screen, use the keyboard to type in the word(s) you are looking for and press the Enter key on the keyboard. The first occurrence of the word(s) you are seeking will then be displayed and highlighted.

**Account name** - this word (a set of letters and/or numbers) lets the Web site (or computer) know who you are so it knows where to look to see if you are using a valid password to access your information and allow you to do what you want to do. Account names are usually not case sensitive. In other words, it doesn't matter if you use capital or lower case letters. Some special characters are not permitted in account names, depending on the Web site or computer. Account names must be unique so that there is no ambiguity in the Web site or computer knowing who you are. Most "common" account names are already taken by the millions of Yahoo and Gmail email account users, so some improvising may be necessary in setting up an account name.

**Address book** - email addresses that you use on a regular basis can be kept in an electronic address book that can facilitate your sending emails. Email programs even help you address your mail by displaying email addresses that are in your address book and match the letters you type in the address box of your email.

**Boot-up** - the start-up process the computer goes through between the time you turn it on and when it is ready for you to do things. Boot-up can include self-diagnostics where the computer assures itself (and you) that it is okay, loading computer programs that allow you to do things, and sometimes checks on the Internet to assure it has the most up-to-date programs. Boot-up can take several minutes if the computer has a lot of things to do.

**Browser** - computer programs that allow you to navigate on the Internet as well as your own computer.

**CD drive** – if your computer has one, a small tray that comes out of the CPU (no, it is NOT a coffee cup holder) that allows you to insert a compact disc that will hold hundreds of times more information than a floppy disc.

**Central processing unit (CPU)(tower)** - the heart of your computer. This is the component that enables a computer to do its work.

**Change font size** - most programs allow you to change the size of the font (i.e., letters) and/or the level of zoom. If you aren't sure how to do something, you can usually left-click on Help or press the F1 key and enter a word that represents what you want to do and the computer will try to help you.

**Clock** - shows you what time your computer thinks it is. You can change the time if it is not correct. Most current computers automatically recognize daylight saving time changes.

**Close** - the X in the upper right corner allows you to close the current program that is running on your computer.

**Computer screen** (also called a monitor or display) - the component that looks like a television screen and shows what the computer is doing.

**Cookies** - electronic files on your computer that allow other computers on the Internet to know that you had visited their Web site.

**Copy & paste** - computers allow you to copy information from one location and to paste that information into one or more other locations. For example, you could compose a holiday letter or announcement on a word processor, copy that document into the computer's memory, and then paste that letter into any number of emails to friends, and include additional personalized remarks in each email.

**Cursor** - an arrow, a hand or a line on the computer screen that allows you to control what the computer is doing. Depending on what you are doing and what kind of display you see on the screen, the cursor will take different shapes. You control the cursor position with the mouse and keyboard.

**Delete/erase** - pressing the Delete key on the keyboard while an area is highlighted, will cause that highlighted area to be deleted. The same thing will happen if you hold down the Control (ctrl) key on the keyboard and press the letter X while an area is highlighted.

**Double-left-click** - you quickly press the left button on the mouse twice.

**Download** - this term generally refers to actions you might take in getting an electronic file or program from another computer or Internet site and putting it on your own computer.

**Drag and drop** - in some cases you can use the mouse to highlight an object and, holding down the left mouse button, to move the object to another place on the screen.

**DVD drive** - a small tray similar to a CD but which holds more information than a CD.

**Electronic clipboard** - the part of the computer's memory that is used for copying and pasting, or cutting and pasting, is often referred to as the electronic clipboard.

**Email** - electronic mail that is transmitted via the Internet.

**Email addresses** - an email address is like a postal address for mail on the Internet. It tells the Internet where to send the message. An email address has two parts. The part after the @ indicates what electronic post office should receive the message. The part before the @ indicates which electronic mailbox at that electronic post office should receive the message. For example, a Willow Valley Retirement Communities Computer Club email address of [wvcomputerclub@gmail.com](mailto:wvcomputerclub@gmail.com) tells the Internet world to send email with that address to the Gmail electronic mail post office and put it in the [wvcomputerclub](mailto:wvcomputerclub@gmail.com) electronic account mailbox.

**Floppy disc drive** – on older computers, a slot in the central processor case that allows you to insert a disc and either add information to the computer or collect information from the computer. External drives may be connected via a USB port.

**Gmail** - Gmail is a free email service that is accessible from anywhere in the world that has connection to the Internet.

**Google/searches** - Google and Yahoo and other Web sites provide capabilities to search for information on the Internet. These are called search engines.

**Highlight** - computers allow you to highlight information displayed on the screen and to do a number of things with that information. Highlighting can be done in different ways. One easy way is to put the cursor at the beginning of the area you want to highlight, hold down the left mouse button and “drag” (move) the cursor (using the mouse) to the end of the area you want to highlight. This will cause that area to be highlighted. If you don’t highlight the desired area the first time, you can left-click the mouse at the spot where you want to begin your highlighting and repeat the process until the desired area is highlighted.

**Icons** (images or small pictures of things) - these provide shortcuts to functions a computer can perform or programs a computer can run. For example, if you want to change the color of the print in a word processing document, you could left-click on the icon for Font Color and select red **from the color display by left-clicking on the red square.**

**Internet** - a worldwide collection of connected computers

**Internet Explorer** – an outdated program to get on the Internet and do email.

**Keyboard** - a component that has keys like a typewriter plus other keys that allow you to do many more things than a typewriter can do. Some of the other keys are:

- Alt**
- Backspace**
- CTRL (Control)**
- DEL (Delete)**
- end**
- FN (Function)**
- home**
- insert**
- num lock (number lock)**
- page down**
- page up**
- up, down, left and right arrows**
- Windows logo key**

**Left-click** - you press the left button on the mouse one time.

**Log-in** - the process of entering your account name and password

**Log-off** - if a computer is set up for multiple users, each user can log off or sign off from his or her account when done using the computer.

**Magnifier** - a computer program that allows the screen display to be split where a portion of the screen displays a magnification of the area where the cursor is positioned.

**Maximize** - causes the current window to fill the entire screen.

**Message** - the body of your email contains the information you want to send. It can include text, images, and even links to sites on the Internet.

**Minimize** - causes the currently displayed window to leave the screen and the program that caused that screen to display, to be displayed with an underline in the taskbar at the bottom of the screen.

**Modem** - a component that allow your computer to talk with other computers, including the Internet.

**Mouse** - a small component you manipulate with your fingers or hand to aid in controlling the actions of the computer.

**Mouse clicks** - the things you do with the buttons on a mouse

**Mouse pad** - a small pad of material that is sometimes used to help a mouse get better traction on a smooth surface such as a highly waxed desktop.

**Open programs** - the currently displayed program has a different color from other programs that may be running in the background. Today's computers are capable of running many programs simultaneously.

**Password** - this word (a set of letters and/or numbers and/or special characters) allows the Web site (or computer) to confirm that you are authorized access to that account. Passwords are almost always case sensitive; therefore, when you set up a password in an account and you make the first letter of the password a capital letter and the rest of the password lower case, you must type it exactly that same way each time you access your account. Most accounts allow you to change your password. Just remember that when you do, make a note of the change because the old password will no longer work.

**Pop-ups** - small windows of information that display on your screen, often without a corresponding action on your part to initiate the pop-up

**Printer** - a device that allows you to print paper copies of work you have done, pictures you have taken, or images you see displayed on your computer screen. All-in-one printers allow you to fax, print or copy.

**Programs running in the background** - You don't have to close one program to start another one. You can be on the Internet and working on an email when you decide that you want to compose your email message using your word processor. You can have both of those programs running at the same time.

**Restart** - sometimes when you get a new program or an update to a program, you may be asked to restart your computer. This can be done by left-clicking on the Start (Windows logo) button at the bottom-left corner of the screen, then left-clicking on the Power button, and then left-clicking on the Restart button.

**Restore down** - (resize window)(change window size) this is the small icon that looks like a screen in front of a second screen in the upper-right corner of a window. Left-clicking that icon may cause the current full-screen display to become smaller, and that smaller display can be re-sized so multiple displays can appear on your screen at the same time.

**Right-click** - you press the right button on the mouse one time to initiate an additional action display window.

**Screen controls** - in the upper right corner of a window or screen.

**Scroll** - this word refers to moving the image displayed on the screen, usually up and down, but sometimes horizontally.

**Scroll bar** - a bar display on the right side of the screen and/or the bottom of the screen that indicates you are not seeing the full display of information that is available. They allow you to move the display up and down or from side to side.

**Shutdown** - the usual process you should follow in turning off your computer. That process starts by left-clicking on the Start button (Windows icon) in the lower left corner of the computer screen.

**Software** - computer programs that you use to tell the computer what functions to carry out. Examples are word processors, games, spreadsheets, and browsers.

**Start button** (Windows icon) - this button provides access to the inner workings of your computer, including the first step in turning your computer off.

**Taskbar** (usually at bottom of screen) - this shows what programs are running and provides information and functions that are usually available no matter what you are doing on the computer.

**The Desktop** - the first display that enables you to do something with your computer.

**Toolbar “pulldown”** - almost all programs have toolbars at the top of the display. When you left-click on one of the words, “buttons” or icons in those toolbars, you will get a “pulldown” display that gives you a range of options from which you can choose in performing functions offered by that program.

**Turning on the computer** (buttons or switches are in different locations depending on the computer manufacturer and model)

**USB** – a port or connection point on a device that allows communication with other devices. A wire that connects to that port may be called a USB cable.

**Virus/spyware** - malicious software (malware) can come in many forms and with many different names and can adversely affect a computer in many ways. Adverse effects can range from annoying pop-up advertisements to complete loss of computer functionality. Security software exists for reducing the risks of malicious software, but vigilance is always appropriate. Remember, just as you wouldn't leave your house door open all the time if your house were in a bad neighborhood, you don't want to keep your “computer's door” open to the Internet because bad people are just a mouse-click away.

**Web site** - an address on the Internet that can display information or perform actions that can be helpful or harmful.

**Window** - a term that can indicate your entire screen or smaller segments or partition displays on your screen.

**Yahoo/email** - basic Yahoo email is a free email service that is accessible from anywhere in the world that has connection to the Internet. Yahoo also offers email accounts that are not free, but those accounts are not appropriate for most people.

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