

What Is a Computer?

Read the text and answer the following questions:

- What is a Computer?
- What are two basic parts of a computer?
- What are the Different Types of Computers?

A computer is an electronic device that manipulates information, or "data." It has the ability to store, retrieve, and process data. You can use a computer to type documents, send email, and browse the internet. You can also use it to handle spreadsheets, accounting, database management, presentations, games, and more.

For beginning computer users, the computer aisles at an electronics store can be quite a mystery, not to mention overwhelming. However, computers really aren't that mysterious. All types of computers consist of two basic parts:

Hardware is any part of your computer that has a physical structure, such as the computer monitor or keyboard.

Software is any set of instructions that tells the hardware what to do. It is what guides the hardware and tells it how to accomplish each task. Some examples of software are web browsers, games, and word processors such as Microsoft Word.

Anything you buy for your computer can be classified as either hardware or software. Once you learn more about these items, computers are actually very straightforward.

When most people hear the word "computer" they think of a personal computer such as a desktop or laptop computer. However, computers come in many shapes and sizes, and they perform many different functions in our daily lives. When you withdraw cash from an ATM, scan groceries at the store, or use a calculator, you're using a type of computer.

Desktop Computers

Many people use desktop computers at work, home, school, or the library. They can be small, medium, or large in style, and usually sit on a desk. Once you add a monitor, mouse, and a keyboard, you have what is typically known as a desktop computer. Most desktop computers are easy to upgrade and expand, or add new parts. Another benefit of desktop computers is the cost. If you compare a desktop and a laptop with the same features, you will most likely find

that the desktop computer is priced lower. Some desktop computers have a built-in monitor to save space. These are often called all-in-one desktop computers.

Laptop Computers

The second type of computer that you may be familiar with is a laptop computer, or laptops as they are often referred to. Laptops are battery or AC-powered personal computers that are more portable than desktop computers, allowing you to use them almost anywhere. Since a laptop is smaller than a desktop, it's more difficult to access the internal components. That means you may not be able to upgrade them as much as a desktop. However, it's usually possible to add more RAM or a bigger hard drive. A laptop computer is sometimes called a notebook computer because of its size.

Servers

A server is a computer that "serves up" information to other computers on a network. Many businesses have file servers that employees can use to store and share files. A server can look like a regular desktop computer, or it can be much larger. Servers also play an important role in making the internet work: they are where web pages are stored. When you use your browser to click a link, a web server delivers the page you requested.

Other Types of Computers

Today, there are lots of everyday devices that are basically specialized computers, even though we don't always think of them as computers. Here are a few common examples:

Tablet Computers: These use a touch-sensitive screen for typing and navigation. Since they don't require a keyboard or mouse, tablet computers are even more portable than laptops. The iPad is an example of a tablet computer.

Mobile Phones: Many mobile phones can do a lot of things a computer can do, such as browsing the internet or playing games. These phones are often called smartphones.

Game Consoles: A game console is a specialized kind of computer that is used for playing video games. Although they are not as fully-featured as a desktop computer, many newer consoles, such as the Nintendo Wii, allow you to do non-gaming tasks like browsing the internet.

TVs: Many TVs now include applications (or apps) that let you access various types of online content. For example, you can view your Facebook news feed or watch streaming movies on Netflix.

(Adapted from <http://www.gcfllearnfree.org/computerbasics>)