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Bryan Pfaffenberg

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Dictionary of Computer Terms, 7th Edition

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**read-only memory (ROM)** The portion of a computer's primary storage that doesn't lose its contents when you switch off the power. ROM contains essential system programs that neither you nor the computer can erase. Because the computer's internal memory is blank at power-up, the computer can perform no functions unless given startup instructions. These instructions are stored in ROM. A growing trend is toward including substantial portions of the operating system on ROM chips instead of on disk. See *EPROM* and *programmable read-only memory (PROM)*.

**read/write** The capability of a primary or secondary storage device to record data (write) and to play back data previously recorded or saved (read).

**read/write file** In MS-DOS, Microsoft Windows 95/98, and OS/2, a file whose read-only file attribute is set so that the file can be deleted and modified. See *locked file*.

**read/write head** In a hard disk or floppy disk, the magnetic recording and playback device that travels back and forth across the surface of the disk, storing and retrieving data.

**read/write memory** See *random-access memory (RAM)*.

**Real Audio** A streaming audio technology developed by Real Audio, Inc., which enables Internet users to begin hearing an audio file moments after they start downloading the file. Quality is that of an AM radio broadcast, which is sufficient for voice broadcasts.

**real mode** In Intel microprocessors, an operating mode in which memory locations are directly mapped by a limited set of registers, producing a total maximum memory size of 1MB (and, in practice, 640K, due to the allocation of some of the memory for the use of peripheral devices). Processors prior to the 80286 could work only in the real mode; the 80286 and higher processors can be switched into the protected mode, which enables them to address much larger amounts of memory and to support the reliable execution of two or more programs simultaneously. See *multitasking*.

**real time** The immediate processing of input, such as a point-of-sale transaction or a measurement performed by an analog laboratory device. The computers used in your car are real-time systems.

