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mechanism can perform the read and write operations, the computer is input/output-bound. A computer may be just input-bound or just output-bound if only input or only output limits the speed at which the processor accepts and processes data. *Also called:* I/O-bound.

input/output buffer *n.* A portion of computer memory reserved for temporary storage of incoming and outgoing data. Because input/output devices can often write to a buffer without intervention from the CPU, a program can continue execution while the buffer fills, thus speeding program execution. *See also* buffer¹.

input/output bus *n.* A hardware path used inside a computer for transferring information to and from the processor and various input and output devices. *See also* bus.

input/output channel *n.* A hardware path from the CPU to the input/output bus. *See also* bus.

input/output controller *n.* Circuitry that monitors operations and performs tasks related to receiving input and transferring output at an input or output device or port, thus providing the processor with a consistent means of communication (input/output interface) with the device and also freeing the processor's time for other work. For example, when a read or write operation is performed on a disk, the drive's controller carries out the high-speed, electronically sophisticated tasks involved in positioning the read-write heads, locating specific storage areas on the spinning disk, reading from and writing to the disk surface, and even checking for errors. Most controllers require software that enables the computer to receive and process the data the controller makes available. *Also called:* device controller, I/O controller.

input/output device *n.* A piece of hardware that can be used both for providing data to a computer and for receiving data from it, depending on the current situation. A disk drive is an example of an input/output device. Some devices, such as a keyboard or a mouse, can be used only for input and are thus called input (input-only) devices. Other devices, such as printers, can be used only for output and are thus called output (output-only) devices. Most devices require installation of software routines called device drivers to enable the computer to transmit and receive data to and from them.

input/output interface *n.* *See* input/output controller.

input/output port *n.* *See* port.

input/output processor *n.* Hardware designed to handle input and output operations to relieve the burden on the main processing unit. For example, a digital signal processor can perform time-intensive, complicated analysis and synthesis of sound patterns without CPU overhead. *See also* digital signal processor, front-end processor (definition 1).

input/output statement *n.* A program instruction that causes data to be transferred between memory and an input or output device.

input port *n.* *See* port.

input stream *n.* A flow of information used in a program as a sequence of bytes that are associated with a particular task or destination. Input streams include series of characters read from the keyboard to memory and blocks of data read from disk files. *Compare* output stream.

inquiry *n.* A request for information. *See also* query.

INS *n.* *See* WINS.

insertion point *n.* A blinking vertical bar on the screen, such as in graphical user interfaces, that marks the location at which inserted text will appear. *See also* cursor (definition 1).

insertion sort *n.* A list-sorting algorithm that starts with a list that contains one item and builds an ever-larger sorted list by inserting the items to be sorted one at a time into their correct positions on that list. Insertion sorts are inefficient when used with arrays, because of constant shuffling of items, but are ideally suited for sorting linked lists. *See also* linked list, sort algorithm. *Compare* bubble sort, quicksort.

Insert key *n.* A key on the keyboard, labeled "Insert" or "Ins," whose usual function is to toggle a program's editing setting between an insert mode and an overwrite mode, although it may perform different functions in different applications. *Also called:* Ins key.

insert mode *n.* A mode of operation in which a character typed into a document or at a command line pushes subsequent existing characters farther to the right on the screen rather than overwriting them. Insert mode is the opposite of overwrite mode, in which new characters replace subsequent existing characters. The key or key combination used to change from one mode to the other varies among programs, but the Insert key is most often used. *Compare* overwrite mode.

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