

MICROSOFT PRESS®

# COMPUTER DICTIONARY



THE COMPREHENSIVE  
STANDARD FOR  
BUSINESS, SCHOOL,  
LIBRARY, AND HOME

Microsoft  
P R E S S

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# INTRODUCTION

The *Microsoft Press Computer Dictionary* is designed to be a comprehensive and authoritative source of definitions for computer-related terms and acronyms. Written and reviewed by a distinguished team of experts from the computer industry and the business and academic communities, the dictionary includes terms drawn from a wide variety of disciplines:

Applications	History
Communications	Information Processing
Data and Data Storage	General Computing
Databases	Input/Output
Desktop Publishing	Memory and Memory Management
Electronics	Networks
Hardware	Output
Chips, Cards, and Boards	Print
Computers	Screen
Disks, Drives, and Other Media	Programming
Keyboards	Systems and Environments
Printers and Plotters	
Video	
Other Devices	

Although the book covers nearly every aspect of computing, it does not include entries on specific companies or on specific makes and models of computers, nor does it contain entries on most application software products, although some key products of universal importance are covered.

## Order of Presentation

Entries are alphabetized letter by letter. Spaces are ignored, as are characters such as hyphens and slashes; for example, *Baudot code* falls between *baud* and *baud rate*, and *machine-independent* falls between *machine identification* and *machine instruction*. Numbers and symbols are located at the beginning of the book and are listed in ascending ASCII order. If an entry begins with a letter or letters but contains a number, it is listed alphabetically, according to the initial letter(s), and then according to ASCII order. Thus, *V20* precedes *V.2x*, and both precede *VAB*.

## Format

Information in each entry is presented in a consistent format: entry name, abbreviation, pronunciation (if supplied), alternative name or names, definition, and cross-references (if any).

Phonetic pronunciations are given where appropriate or in cases where pronunciation might not be apparent. If an acronym is pronounced simply by saying the successive letters it contains, no pronunciation is given.

Cross-references are of three kinds: A *See* reference simply points to another entry that contains the information sought; a *See also* reference points to one or more entries that contain additional or supplemental information about the topic; and a *Compare* reference points to an entry or entries that offer contrast.

Illustrations are called out in the text. In most cases, illustrations appear on the same page as the entries to which they apply. In some instances, however, page-layout requirements have forced them to a subsequent page. In any event, the caption of each illustration identifies the entry to which it belongs.

## Future Printings and Editions

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of this book. If you find an error, think that an entry does not contain enough information, or seek an entry that does not appear in this edition, please let us know. Address your letter to: Microsoft Press, One Microsoft Way, Redmond, WA 98052, *Attention: Dictionary Editor*.



equipment, programs, activities, and procedures to determine how efficiently the entire system is performing, especially in terms of ensuring the integrity and security of data.

**audit trail** In relation to computers, a means of tracing all activities affecting a piece of information such as a data record from the time it enters the system to the time it leaves. An audit trail documents the path from input to output and should provide enough information to reconstruct or verify the entire sequence, either manually or through automated tracking procedures. For example, when several people are working on a document in a networked environment, an audit trail makes it possible to know who made a particular change and when, or even to see the document before and after that person's changes.

**authoring language** A computer language or application development system designed primarily for creating programs, databases, and materials for computer-aided instruction (CAI). The best-known example in the microcomputer world is PILOT, developed originally at the University of California, San Francisco, which is a language used to create lessons.

**authoring system** A combination of hardware and software designed to ease the tasks involved in producing interactive programs. *See also* authoring language, interactive program.

**authorization** In relation to computers, especially to remote computers on a network open to more than one person, the right granted to an individual to use the system and the data stored on it. Authorization is typically set up by a system administrator and checked and cleared by the computer, which requires that the user provide some type of identification, such as a code number or a password, that the machine can verify against its internal records. The terms *permission* and *privilege* are synonymous with *authorization*. *See also* network, system administrator.

**authorization code** *See* password.

**auto answer** The ability of a modem to answer incoming telephone calls automatically. *See also* answer mode.

**auto dial** The ability of a modem to open a tele-

phone line and initiate a call by transmitting a stored telephone number as a series of pulses or tones.

**AUTOEXEC.BAT** A special-purpose batch file (set of commands) that is automatically carried out by the MS-DOS operating system whenever the computer is started or restarted. AUTOEXEC.BAT is created by the user or, in later versions of MS-DOS, by the operating system when the system is installed. The file contains basic startup commands that help configure (tailor) the system to installed devices and to the preferences of the user.

**auto-key** *See* typematic.

**automata theory** The study of computing processes, their capabilities, and their limitations—the manner in which systems receive input, process it, and produce output; also, the study of the relationship between behavioral theories and the operation and use of automated devices. *See also* cellular automata.

**automated office** A rather vague term used to refer to an office in which work is performed with the aid of computers, telecommunications facilities, and other electronic devices.

**automatic answering** *See* auto answer.

**automatic data processing** *See* data processing.

**automatic dialing** *See* auto dial.

**automatic error correction** A process that, upon detection of an internal processing error or a data-transmission error, invokes and provides information to an appropriate routine designed to correct the error or retry the operation.

**Automatic Sequence Controlled Calculator** *See* Mark I.

**automonitor** A process or system feature capable of continually assessing the status of its own internal environment.

**autopolling** Also called polling. The process of periodically determining the status of each device in a set so that the active program can process events generated through each device. The process is used to determine the status of a range of events, such as whether a key or a mouse button was pressed or whether new data is available at a serial port. Autopolling can be compared with event-driven processing, in which a low-level routine in

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