

# DICTIONARY OF COMPUTER WORDS

*Revised Edition*



Houghton Mifflin Company  
*Boston • New York*

Words included in this Dictionary that are known to have current trademark registrations are shown with initial capital and are also identified as trademarks. No investigation has been made of common-law trademark rights in any word, because such investigation is impracticable. The inclusion of any word in this Dictionary is not, however, an expression of the Publisher's opinion as to whether or not it is subject to proprietary rights. Indeed, no definition in this Dictionary is to be regarded as affecting the validity of any trademark.

Copyright © 1995 by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without the prior written permission of Houghton Mifflin Company unless such copying is expressly permitted by federal copyright law. Address inquiries to Reference Permissions, 222 Berkeley Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02116.

For information about this and other Houghton Mifflin trade and reference books and multimedia products, visit The Bookstore at Houghton Mifflin on the World Wide Web at <http://www.hmco.com/trade/>.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dictionary of computer words.—Rev. ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-395-72834-7 (acid-free paper)

1. Computers—Dictionaries.

QA76.15.D5259 1995

004'.03—dc20 95-1175

CIP

Manufactured in the United States of America

DOH 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Book design by Anne Chalmers

**ART CREDITS:** *Apple Computer*: desktop, dialog box, keyboard (Apple Adjustable), menu, overlaid windows, toolbar; *Fountain Hills Systems Inc.*: keyboard (Ergonomic Keyboard); *Lexmark International, Inc.*: keyboard (Select-Ease); *Library of Congress*: pixel (photograph); *Lotus Development Corporation*: spreadsheet; *Maureen Wilken/Cheryl Snyder*: range; *Microsoft Corporation*: screen shots at the entries alert box, character-based, graphical user interface, and range reprinted with permission from Microsoft Corporation; illustration of the Natural Keyboard at the entry keyboard reproduced with permission from Microsoft Corporation; *Tech-Graphics*: antialiasing, Bézier curve, chip, computer, connector, DIP switch, Dvorak keyboard, floppy disk, hard disk, hierarchical, landscape, letter-quality, mouse, network, outline font, overlaid windows, pixel, printed circuit board, QWERTY keyboard, sector, sine wave, software, trackball, write-protect; *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*: Energy Star.

**back up** To copy files from one *storage* area, especially a *hard disk*, to another to prevent their loss in case of disk failure. For today's personal computers, where a typical hard disk can easily contain 500 *megabytes* to 1.2 *gigabytes* of data, regular *backups* are crucial. Many professionals recommend that you make at least two *backups* and keep the extra backup in another location in case of fire or theft. Files can be backed up by using operating system commands or a backup *utility* program. Backup utilities are faster and usually compress the data so that fewer disks or tapes are required.

**backward compatible** See **downward compatible**.

**bad break** In word processing and desktop publishing, a place where a word, line, or page is improperly divided. Examples include setting the second part of a hyphenated word at the beginning of a left-hand page, hyphenating "minute" at the end of a line as "min-ute" when the word in a document is actually "mi-nute," and leaving a section title stranded at the very bottom of a page.

**bad sector** A *sector* of a hard disk or floppy disk that cannot be used for reading and writing information because of a manufacturing defect or a flaw in the surface. It is normal for a new hard disk to have a small number of bad sectors; the operating system or a disk utility program can locate and mark these areas so they will not be used. As a hard disk gets older, more sectors may occasionally fail, but if this happens frequently it is a sign of a malfunctioning disk drive or impending disk failure. If bad sectors appear on a floppy disk, some data will usually be lost and the entire disk may become unusable; the safest policy generally is to copy the remaining files to a fresh disk, if possible, and discard the one that has failed. See also *disk, format, head crash, sector*.

**bandwidth** A measure of the amount of data that can be passed by a communications channel in a given amount of time. For *analog* devices, bandwidth is the range of frequen-

cies that can be transmitted and is expressed in *hertz* (cycles per second). A standard telephone line, for example, has a usable bandwidth of about 3,000 Hz. For *digital* devices, bandwidth is often measured in *bps* (bits per second). In general, the bandwidth of a channel directly affects the speed of data transfer — the wider the bandwidth, the faster data can be sent.

**base font** In word processing, the default *font* that is used in a document wherever a different font is not specifically selected.

**BASIC** [BAY-sik] Acronym for **B**eginners' **A**ll-purpose **S**ymbolic **I**nstruction **C**ode. A simple, widely used high-level *programming language*. It was first developed in the mid-1960s by John Kemeny and Thomas Kurtz of Dartmouth College, and many other versions with *proprietary* extensions have also been developed over the years. Despite being criticized by professional programmers for its unwieldiness, BASIC is still widely taught to students as a first programming language. *Visual Basic* is based on BASIC.

**basic input/output system** See **BIOS**.

**batch file** A *text file* that consists of a number of commands to be executed one after the other. Batch files offer a convenient way to carry out a frequently executed sequence of commands by simply typing the name of the batch file. They are easy to create and can include a small number of programming functions, such as IF . . . THEN, GOTO, and FOR . . . IN . . . DO constructs, which make the command line interface much faster and more powerful. It is also possible to call one batch file from within another, executing the second file and then returning control to the first. All batch files in DOS have the extension .BAT; hence they are often called *BAT files*.

As the last step in the boot-up sequence, most DOS-based computers automatically run the file AUTOEXEC.BAT, which can be used to set a number of system parameters and install device *drivers* and *terminate and stay resident* pro-