Basic Computing Using Windows

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1 Computers and Peripherals

What is a computer? A **computer** is an automatic, electronic, data-processing machine that takes in facts and figures known as **data**, and then **processes** or organizes it in some useful way. Afterwards it **outputs**, or displays, the results for you to see as information. Keep in mind that data is not information but rather information is derived from accurate data that are entered into a computer. Only after processing, is data transformed into information which is then used for decision making.

When talking about computers, there are two terms which must be correctly distinguished, **hardware** and **software**. Hardware is all the parts of a computer that can be seen and touched. Hardware includes the internal components that we do not usually see unless we open up our machine. Software is all of the instructions that a computer uses to do what you ask it to do. Pieces of software are often called **programs** and an **operating system** is a suite of programs that help all the other **programs** run. Think of software as the power behind the hardware. Without software your computer is useless. Likewise, without hardware the software can't exist. Computers do not think for themselves so they need software, which is made to manipulate the computer's hardware in such a way that you, the user, can understand.

A calculator is a simple computer. It is not as complex or versatile as your net book, laptop or desktop computer though. It acquires information as series of key presses and computes the result which is displayed on a small screen. Since calculators are faster than humans this creates utility in the form of time saved. They can also repeat processes much more easily than humans can.

Many people mistakenly think that the part of the computer that normally displays pictures and text is the computer. This is usually not true. That part is called the **monitor**. The computer is usually a box . Also, you may call the whole assembly of all the hardware (the computer and the monitor, for example) the computer. Occasionally though, the computer and monitor are built together, for example, certain Apple computers.

There are different types of monitors. One of these is the one already shown. It is called a **CRT** monitor. It takes more power than the other popular kind, called **LCD**s . However, CRT monitors work faster, which makes them better for fast games because the movement will blur less. LCDs are thinner than CRTs, but they are generally more expensive.

Monitors are only one way the computer can output information for you to see. Another popular output device is called a **printer** . Printers are used to put data on paper. This is called **hard copy**, what monitors show is called **soft copy**. Computers can also output sounds through speakers; this is also soft copy.

There are also different kinds of input hardware. The two most important of which are the **mouse** and the **keyboard**. A mouse is used to move the **cursor** (or arrow) around the

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