

1.3: Hardware

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the role hardware plays in computing

Computer hardware (usually simply called hardware when a computing context is concerned) is the collection of physical elements that constitutes a computer system. Computer hardware is the physical parts or components of a computer, such as the monitor, mouse, keyboard, computer data storage, hard disk drive (HDD), graphic cards, sound cards, memory, motherboard, and so on, all of which are physical objects that are tangible.

Mainboard

The motherboard is the main component of a computer. It is a large rectangular board with integrated circuitry that connects the other parts of the computer including the CPU, the RAM, the disk drives (CD, DVD, hard disk, or any others) as well as any peripherals connected via the ports or the expansion slots.

Components directly attached to or part of the motherboard include:

- The **CPU** (Central Processing Unit) performs most of the calculations which enable a computer to function, and is sometimes referred to as the “brain” of the computer. It is usually cooled by a heat sink and fan. Most newer CPUs include an on-die Graphics Processing Unit (GPU).
- The **Chipset**, which includes the north bridge, mediates communication between the CPU and the other components of the system, including main memory.
- The **Random-Access Memory** (RAM) stores the code and data that are being actively accessed by the CPU.
- The **Read-Only Memory** (ROM) stores the BIOS that runs when the computer is powered on or otherwise begins execution, a process known as Bootstrapping, or “booting” or “booting up.”
- The **BIOS** (Basic Input Output System) includes boot firmware and power management firmware. Newer motherboards use Unified Extensible Firmware Interface (UEFI) instead of BIOS.
- **Buses** connect the CPU to various internal components and to expand cards for graphics and sound.
- The CMOS battery is also attached to the motherboard. This battery is the same as a watch battery or a battery for a remote to a car’s central locking system. Most batteries are CR2032, which powers the memory for date and time in the BIOS chip.

Storage

Computer data storage, often called storage, refers to computer components and recording media that retain digital data. Data storage is a core function and fundamental component of computers. The price of solid-state drives (SSD), which store data on flash memory, has dropped a lot in recent years, making them a better choice than ever to add to a computer to make booting up and accessing files faster.

Fixed media

Data is stored by a computer using a variety of media. Hard disk drives are found in virtually all older computers, due to their high capacity and low cost, but solid-state drives are faster and more power efficient, although currently more expensive than hard drives, so are often found in more expensive computers. Some systems may use a disk array controller for greater performance or reliability.

Removable media

To transfer data between computers, a USB flash drive or Optical disc may be used. Their usefulness depends on being readable by other systems; the majority of machines have an optical disk drive, and virtually all have a USB port.

Practice Question

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Input and Output



Input and output devices are typically housed externally to the main computer chassis. The following are either standard or very common to many computer systems.

Input

Input devices allow the user to enter information into the system, or control its operation. Most personal computers have a mouse and keyboard, but laptop systems typically use a touchpad instead of a mouse. Other input devices include webcams, microphones, joysticks, and image scanners.

Output device

Output devices display information in a human readable form. Such devices could include printers, speakers, monitors or a Braille embosser.

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