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Specifically, the BinHex file consists of one hex digit (0-9, A-F) for each four bits of data in the original file. Thus the BinHex file is about twice as long as the original. *See* STUFFIT; UUENCODE; UUDECODE; BINARY FILE; TEXT FILE.

BIOS (**B**asic **I**nput **O**utput **S**ystem) a set of procedures stored on a ROM chip inside IBM PC compatible computers. These routines handle all input-output functions, including screen graphics, so that programs do not have to manipulate the hardware directly. This is important because if the hardware is changed (for example, by installing a newer kind of video adapter) the BIOS can be changed to match it, and there is no need to change the application programs.

The BIOS is not re-entrant and is therefore not easily usable by multitasking programs. Windows and OS/2 programs do not call the BIOS; instead, they use procedures provided by the operating system.

BIOS ENUMERATOR the BIOS routine that tellss a PLUG AND PLAY system what hardware is installed.

BIPOLAR TRANSISTOR a semiconductor device formed by sandwiching a thin layer of P- or N-type semiconductor between two layers of the opposite type of semiconductor. (*See* TRANSISTOR.) The other general type of transistor is the field effect transistor (FET).

BIS Latin for "a second time," used to denote revised CCITT standards. *See* CCITT.

BISYNC *see* BINARY SYNCHRONOUS.

BIT a shorthand term for "binary digit." There are only two possible binary digits: 0 and 1. (*See* BINARY NUMBERS.) Bits are represented in computers by two-state devices, such as flip-flops. A computer memory is a collection of devices that can store bits.

A *byte* is the number of bits (usually 8) that stand for one character. Memory is usually measured in units of *kilobytes* or *megabytes*. *See* MEMORY.

One important measure of the capability of a microprocessor is the number of bits that each internal register can contain. For example, the classic Z80 microprocessor had 8-bit registers. The Intel 8088, used in the original IBM PC, had 16-bit registers but only an 8-bit bus, leading to some confusion as to whether it should really have been called a 16-bit processor. Newer microprocessors have 32 or 64 bits per register. In general, a processor with a greater number of bits per instruction can process data more quickly (although there are other factors to consider that also determine a computer's speed). *See also* MICROPROCESSOR.

BIT BUCKET *(slang)* a place where data is lost. For example, under UNIX, the file name `/dev/null` can be used as a bit bucket; anything written to it will be ignored, but the program will think it is successfully writing to a file.

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