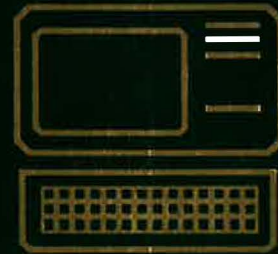




Dictionary of Computer Terms

Fourth Edition



Over 1300 defined terms explain computer applications, commands, functions, hardware, and operating systems.

In-depth discussions; numerous examples, tables, and diagrams; Sample programs in Ada, APL, BASIC, C, C++, COBOL, Fortran, Lisp, LOGO, Pascal, PL/I, and Prolog

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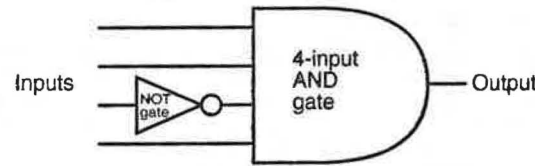


FIGURE 8. DECODER FOR THE BIT PATTERN 1101

multiplying power by 10 is equivalent to adding 10 decibels; and multiplying by 100 is equivalent to adding 20 decibels.

(2) to express the ratio of two voltage levels:

$$\text{dB} = 20 \log_{10} \frac{\text{first voltage level}}{\text{second voltage level}}$$

Because power is proportional to the square of voltage, this is equivalent to the previous formula if both voltages are driving the same load impedance.

(3) to describe the loudness of a sound, expressed in decibels relative to the threshold of human hearing. Clearly audible sounds range from about 20 to 100 dB; those much above 100 dB are painful to the ears.

DECIMAL NUMBERS numbers expressed in ordinary base-10 notation, using the digits 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, whether or not there are any digits to the right of the point. For example, 3.14 is a decimal number, and so is 314.

DECLARE to state the attributes of a variable. In some programming languages, such as Pascal and C, all variables must be declared. This protects the programmer from accidentally creating another variable by misspelling a variable name. In BASIC and FORTRAN, declaring variables is optional, and declarations are used mainly to create arrays or other variables of special types.

DECODER a circuit that recognizes a particular pattern of bits. Decoders are used in computers in order to recognize instructions and addresses. Figure 8 shows a decoder that recognizes the bit pattern 1101.

DECRYPTION decoding—that is, translating information from an unreadable or secret format into a form in which it can be used. *Contrast* ENCRYPTION.

DEDICATED assigned to only one function. For instance, a dedicated phone line is one that is always connected to the same equipment.

DE FACTO STANDARD a standard that is not official, but is established by widespread usage.

DEFAULT an assumption that a computer makes unless it is given specific instructions to the contrary. For example, a word processing program may start out assuming a particular default combination of margins, page length, and so on, which the user can change by issuing specific commands.

DEFAULT DIRECTORY (*current directory*) the directory on each disk in which the operating system looks for files if no directory is specified. In MS-DOS, OS/2, UNIX, and some other operating systems, the user chooses the directory with the command `cd` or `chdir`. *See* DIRECTORY.

DEFAULT DRIVE (*current drive, logged drive*) the disk drive that the computer uses when not told to use another one. Under MS-DOS and OS/2, typing a drive designator as a command (for example `c:`) changes the default drive.

DEFAULT LOGIC (*defeasible logic*) a formal system of reasoning in which some facts or rules have priority over others. For example, statements about ostriches might have priority over statements about birds, because an ostrich is a specific kind of bird. It is then possible to say without contradiction that birds fly, but ostriches don't fly. In classical logic, "birds fly" and "ostriches are birds" together with "ostriches don't fly" is a contradiction.

Default logic is often used in expert systems. *See* EXPERT SYSTEM; *contrast* FUZZY LOGIC; CONFIDENCE FACTOR. *See also* BOOLEAN ALGEBRA.

DEFEASIBLE LOGIC *see* DEFAULT LOGIC.

DEGAUSS to demagnetize. Color monitors need to be degaussed when they show areas of weak or incorrect color. Some monitors degauss themselves every time they are turned on. If you wish to repeat the degauss cycle on such a monitor, wait 5 seconds each time you turn it on or off before flipping the switch again; otherwise, the power supply may be damaged.

DEGREE MEASURE a way of measuring the size of angles in which a complete rotation has a measure of 360 degrees (written as 360°). A right angle is 90°. *Contrast* RADIAN MEASURE.

DEL the DELETE key.

DELETE to remove an unwanted item (character, word, art, file). *See* RECOVERING ERASED FILES for help on restoring deleted files.

DELIMITERS symbols that mark the beginning or end of a special part of a program. For instance, `{` and `}` are the delimiters for comments in Pascal (*see* PASCAL).