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COMPUTER DICTIONARY

SECOND EDITION

COMPLETELY REVISED AND UPDATED, WITH NEW DEFINITIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

THE COMPREHENSIVE STANDARD FOR BUSINESS, SCHOOL, LIBRARY, AND HOME

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soft In computing, an adjective meaning temporary or changeable. For example, a soft error is a problem from which the system can recover; a soft-sectored disk is one on which storage units (sectors) are defined by the operating system; a soft return is a character inserted by a word processor to end a line but not the paragraph (also called a newline character, ASCII 10); and a soft patch is a temporary program fix that remains only while the program is running. *Soft* is the opposite of *hard,* meaning permanent, fixed, or defined by physical boundaries.

In electronics, an adjective referring to magnetic materials that do not retain their magnetism when a magnetic field is removed or eliminated.

soft copy The temporary images presented on a computer display screen; the opposite of *hard* (printed) *copy.*

soft error An error from which a program or an operating system is able to recover, as opposed to a hard error, which causes program or operating system failure, requiring the user to reboot the system.

soft font *See* downloadable font.

soft hyphen *See* hyphen.

soft patch A patch (fix or modification) that is performed only while the code being patched is loaded into memory; thus, the executable file or object file is not modified in any way. *See also* patch.

soft return A line break inserted in a document by a word processor whenever the next word in the current line of text would cause the line to overflow into the page margin. A soft return creates a movable line break—that is, the program will break the line at a new location if text is inserted or deleted or if page margins are changed. In contrast, a hard return, which is inserted when the user presses the Enter key or the Return key, produces a line break that always appears in the same place, regardless of inserted or deleted text or changes in margin width. The term can also refer to a newline character, which in many word-processing programs can be entered to force a line break without ending the paragraph. *Compare* hard return.

soft-sectored disk A disk whose data sectors have been marked with recorded data marks rather than punched holes. *Soft-sectored* can refer to either a floppy disk or a hard disk but is generally used in reference to the former. A soft-sectored floppy disk has one punched hole, called an index hole, that marks the first sector. Most floppy disks in use are soft-sectored. *Compare* hard-sectored disk; *see also* index hole.

software Computer programs; instructions that cause the hardware—the machines—to do work. Software as a whole can be divided into a number of categories based on the types of work done by programs. The two primary software categories are operating systems (system software), which control the workings of the computer, and application software, which addresses the multitude of tasks for which people use computers. System software thus handles such essential, but often invisible, chores as maintaining disk files and managing the screen, whereas application software performs word processing, database management, and the like. Two additional categories that are neither system nor application software, although they contain elements of both, are network software, which enables groups of computers to communicate, and language software, which provides programmers with the tools they need to write programs.

In addition to these task-based categories, several types of software are described based on their method of distribution. These include the so-called canned programs or packaged software developed and sold primarily through retail outlets; freeware and public-domain software, which are made available without cost by their developers; shareware, which is similar to freeware but usually carries a small fee for those who like the program; and the infamous vaporware, which is software that either does not reach the market or appears much later than promised. *See also* firmware, hardware.

software-dependent An adjective describing a computer or an allied device that is tied to a particular program or set of programs developed for it.

software engineering The design and develop-

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The Comprehensive Standard for Business, School, Library, and Home

Here is a rich and comprehensive dictionary that meets the information needs of today's microcomputer user. Newly updated to reflect the changes and innovations in the microcomputer world, the second edition has many new definitions, illustrations, and photographs. This dictionary is ideal for the hundreds of thousands of people who work with microcomputers but are not computer professionals. Wide-ranging in scope, it covers:

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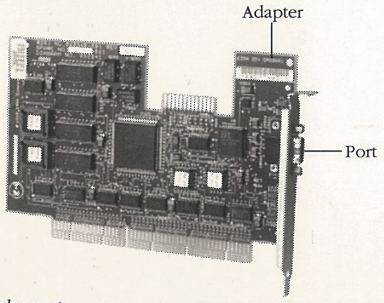
adapter With personal computers, especially those from IBM® or those that are IBM compatible, usually a printed circuit board (also called an interface card) that enables the computer to use a peripheral device for which it does not already have the necessary connections or circuit boards. See the illustration. Adapters are often used to permit upgrading to new or different hardware. Most often, the term is encountered in video, as in Color/Graphics Adapter (CGA), Enhanced Graphics Adapter (EGA), and Video Graphics Array (VGA). Other common adapters include game-controller hardware for joysticks, adapters for serial communications with devices such as modems, adapters for parallel interfaces for devices such as printers, and adapters for other types of peripheral devices such as CD-ROM drives. Commonly, a single adapter card can have more than one adapter on it. For example, a single adapter card can have both a serial port and a parallel port.



See also port.

Pronunciation Guides. Where appropriate, definitions include phonetic pronunciations that reflect industry usage—for example: GUI, pronounced "gooey."

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Cross-References. Entries are fully cross-referenced to provide supplementary information and invite further exploration.

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