

Computer Hardware: What Does Each Part Do?

Each part of a computer system is involved in one of the four basic computer operations: **input**, **processing**, **storage**, or **output**.

Input devices allow you to communicate with the computer or “feed information to the computer.” You have to tell the computer what you want it to do. The primary input devices are the **keyboard** and the **mouse**. Other input devices include the joystick, modem, scanner, camera, and microphone.

- ❑ The **keyboard** looks like a typewriter and is used to type information. It has keys with letters, numbers, and special symbols such as arrows.
- ❑ A **mouse** is a hand-held device that controls the movement of the **pointer** that you see on your screen. The mouse is used to manage objects on the screen.

The **processor** (central processing unit or CPU) is the part of the computer that manipulates the data. This is the “brain of the computer.” It communicates with the input, output, and storage devices to perform tasks. The processor is located inside the system unit, so you cannot see it.

The **storage** area is where the data or information is stored or saved. If you compose a letter, you want the computer to save it for you. The computer saves it on a **disk**. There are different kinds of disks.

- ❑ A **floppy disk** used to be the device most people used to save information but files from most modern programs became too large to fit on a floppy disk. Other storage devices that hold more information and cost less became available. Floppy disks are now hardly used.
- ❑ The **hard disk** is a stack of magnetic platters located **inside** the system unit. This is the major storage area of the computer.
- ❑ A **CD-ROM** or **DVD-ROM** is a portable disk used to store information. The data is burned on the disk using laser light. A CD or DVD is inserted into the drive, and the computer can read it. A DVD looks like a regular CD, but it holds more information.
 - You must have a DVD-ROM drive in order to access a DVD. A

DVD-ROM drive can also access a CD-ROM; but a CD-ROM drive cannot play a DVD.

- CDs and DVDs may be read-only (like music or movies that you buy) or read-write (so you can add your own information). Read-write CDs and DVDs may be made so that they can only be written to once, or so information can be written over multiple times. You need to be careful to buy the right CD or DVD for you purpose.

Output is the result of the computer's (and your) work. The major output devices are the **monitor** (screen) and the **printer**. (Speakers are also output devices. Of course, they generate sound.)

The **monitor** displays the results of the actions you perform with input devices (i.e., keyboard and mouse). The **printer** gives you a paper copy of your work.