

SOFTWARE AND HARDWARE

Hardware is the term given to the physical components of a computer: e.g. keyboard, monitor, system box or floppy disk drive. Software, on the other hand, is electronic information: files, operating system, graphics, computer programs are all examples of software. The difference between hardware and software reflects the duality between the physical and mental worlds: for example, your brain is hardware, whereas your mind is software.

Software is the stuff that makes your computer do things for you. The computer without software would be like a home entertainment system with no tapes, CD's, or movies - you have the machine, but there is nothing to play on it. Software is continually developed. Each time the software maker (Microsoft, Adobe, Corel, etc) develops a new version of their software they assign it a version number.

Hardware are those components or physical pieces (things you can touch) that make up the computer. The different pieces of the computer's hardware are monitor, speakers, mouse, CDROM, floppy drive, hard drive, keyboard, CPU, RAM, Processor, etc. Each piece plays a role in the operation of a computer.

Operating System

An operating system is a program that acts as an intermediary between the application programs and the computer hardware. You cannot directly use computer applications (or programs) with computer hardware without a translation system between the hardware and the applications. This translation system is called the operating system (OS). The Windows or Mac OS works "behind-the-scenes" to run your computer (i.e. the software and the hardware). It tells the computer what to do when it starts up and keeps track of your documents, files, and other software. It also provides the standard user interface component (like menus and the desktop) that you see when you look at your computer screen.