

A-Z Guide of IT Jargon

Technology can feel like it has its own language. This guide explains common IT terms in plain English — no technical knowledge required.

Created by Cambridge Online to help everyone feel more confident with technology.

A

App (Application)

A program or piece of software designed to do a specific task, like checking the weather, reading emails, or playing games. You'll find apps on phones, tablets, and computers.

Attachment

A file (like a photo or document) that is sent along with an email. Be careful opening attachments from people you don't know.

Antivirus

Software that protects your device from harmful programs called viruses. It scans your computer and removes threats.

B

Bluetooth

A wireless technology that lets devices talk to each other over short distances — for example, connecting wireless headphones to your phone.

Browser

The app you use to visit websites on the internet. Common browsers include Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge, Safari, and Firefox.

Broadband

A high-speed internet connection for your home. It's what lets you go online, stream videos, and send emails.

Bookmark

A saved link to a website so you can find it again quickly, like putting a sticky note on a favourite page in a book.

C

Cloud

A way of storing files (photos, documents, etc.) on the internet instead of on your device. Services like Google Drive, iCloud, and Dropbox use the cloud.

Cookie

A small piece of data that a website saves on your device to remember things about you, like your login details or what's in your shopping basket.

Cursor

The small arrow (or blinking line) on your screen that shows where your mouse is pointing or where you'll type next.

CPU

The "brain" of your computer. It stands for Central Processing Unit and does all the thinking and calculating.

Cybersecurity

The practice of protecting your devices and personal information from online threats like hackers and scams.

D

Desktop

The main screen you see when you start your computer. It's where you'll find shortcuts to your files and programs. Also refers to a type of computer that sits on a desk.

Download

Saving a file from the internet onto your device — like saving a photo, a document, or an app.

Data

Any information stored or used by a computer. This includes your photos, documents, emails, and browsing history.

Driver

A small piece of software that helps your computer communicate with a piece of hardware, like a printer or keyboard.

E

Email

Electronic mail — a way to send and receive messages over the internet. It's free to use with services like Gmail, Outlook, or Yahoo Mail.

Encryption

A security method that scrambles your information so only the right person can read it. Used in online banking, messaging, and more.

Ethernet

A wired internet connection using a cable plugged directly into your device. It's often faster and more reliable than Wi-Fi.

F

Firewall

A security system that monitors and controls what comes in and out of your network, helping to block harmful traffic.

File

A single item stored on your computer, such as a document, photo, or video.

Folder

A place to organise your files, just like a folder in a filing cabinet. You can create folders to group related files together.

Fibre Broadband

A very fast type of internet connection that uses fibre-optic cables instead of traditional copper wires.

G

Gigabyte (GB)

A unit of digital storage. One gigabyte can hold roughly 250 songs or 300 photos. Your phone or computer's storage is measured in gigabytes.

GPS

Global Positioning System — the technology that lets your phone or sat-nav know exactly where you are.

Google

The world's most popular search engine. Type a question or topic into Google and it will find relevant websites for you.

H

Hardware

The physical parts of a computer or device that you can touch — the screen, keyboard, mouse, and the box itself.

Hotspot

A place where you can connect to the internet wirelessly, often in cafés, libraries, or public spaces. Your phone can also create a personal hotspot.

Hard Drive

The part of your computer where all your files and programs are permanently stored. Think of it as your computer's filing cabinet.

HDMI

A type of cable used to connect devices to a TV or monitor to show video and play sound. You might use it to watch Netflix from a laptop on your TV.

I

Internet

A worldwide network that connects computers and devices, allowing people to share information, send messages, and browse websites.

Icon

A small picture on your screen that represents an app, file, or folder. You click or tap on icons to open things.

Inbox

The section of your email where new messages arrive.

ISP (Internet Service Provider)

The company that provides your internet connection, such as BT, Sky, or Virgin Media.

J

Junk Mail (Spam)

Unwanted emails, often advertising or scams, that clutter up your inbox. Most email services have a junk or spam filter to catch these.

K

Keyboard Shortcut

A combination of keys you press at the same time to do something quickly — for example, Ctrl+C to copy and Ctrl+V to paste.

Kilobyte (KB)

A small unit of digital storage. A short text email might be a few kilobytes. There are 1,000 kilobytes in a megabyte.

L

Link (Hyperlink)

Clickable text or image on a website or email that takes you to another page or website. Links are often shown in blue and underlined.

Login

The process of entering your username and password to access an account or device.

Laptop

A portable computer that folds open and can be used on your lap, at a desk, or anywhere.

M

Malware

Short for “malicious software” — any program designed to harm your device or steal your information. Viruses and spyware are types of malware.

Megabyte (MB)

A unit of digital storage. A typical photo is 2–5 megabytes. There are 1,000 megabytes in a gigabyte.

Modem

A device that connects your home to the internet through your phone line or cable. It's often built into your router.

Mouse

A small device you move with your hand to control the cursor on screen. You click its buttons to select things.

N

Network

A group of connected devices that can share information. Your home Wi-Fi is a network connecting your phone, laptop, and other devices.

Notification

An alert or message that pops up on your device to let you know about something — like a new email, text, or app update.

O

Operating System (OS)

The main software that runs your device. Windows, macOS, Android, and iOS are all operating systems. It's what makes everything else work.

Online

Being connected to the internet. When you're browsing the web or checking email, you're online.

Offline

Not connected to the internet. Some apps and files can still be used offline.

P

Password

A secret word or phrase you use to access your accounts. Keep passwords strong and private — never share them.

Phishing

A type of scam where criminals send fake emails or messages pretending to be from a trusted organisation, trying to trick you into giving away personal information.

Pixel

A tiny dot on your screen. Thousands of pixels together make up the images you see. More pixels generally means a clearer picture.

Pop-up

A small window that suddenly appears on your screen, often an advert or alert. Some pop-ups can be harmful — close them carefully.

PDF

A file format that looks the same on any device. PDFs are commonly used for documents, forms, and guides (like this one!).

Q

QR Code

A square, patterned barcode that you scan with your phone's camera. It usually takes you to a website or shows information.

R

RAM

Your computer's short-term memory. It helps your device run programs smoothly. More RAM generally means better performance.

Router

A device that sends your internet connection wirelessly (via Wi-Fi) to your devices at home. It's usually a small box from your internet provider.

Refresh

Reloading a web page to see the latest version. You can usually do this by pressing F5 or clicking the circular arrow in your browser.

S

Software

Programs and apps that run on your device — everything from your web browser to your word processor. The opposite of hardware.

Spam

Unwanted messages, usually emails, often trying to sell you something or trick you. See also: Junk Mail.

Screenshot

A picture of what's currently showing on your screen. Useful for saving information or showing someone what you can see.

Search Engine

A website that helps you find information on the internet. Google, Bing, and Yahoo are popular search engines.

SSD

A Solid State Drive — a fast type of storage used in modern computers. It's quicker and quieter than an older hard drive.

Streaming

Watching or listening to content (like films or music) directly from the internet without downloading it first. Netflix, BBC iPlayer, and Spotify use streaming.

T

Tablet

A portable touchscreen device, bigger than a phone but smaller than a laptop. iPads and Samsung Galaxy Tabs are popular tablets.

Touchscreen

A screen you control by tapping and swiping with your fingers, rather than using a mouse.

Two-Factor Authentication (2FA)

An extra layer of security where you need two things to log in — usually your password plus a code sent to your phone.

Toolbar

A row of buttons or icons at the top of a program or app that give you quick access to common actions.

U

Upload

Sending a file from your device to the internet — the opposite of downloading. For example, uploading a photo to Facebook.

URL

The address of a website, shown in the bar at the top of your browser. For example: cambridgeonline.org.uk

USB

A type of connector used to plug things into your computer, like a memory stick, phone charger, or printer cable.

Update

A new version of software that fixes problems or adds features. It's important to keep your device updated for security.

V

Virus

A harmful program that can damage your device or steal your data. Antivirus software helps protect against viruses.

VPN

A Virtual Private Network — a tool that makes your internet connection more private and secure, especially on public Wi-Fi.

Video Call

A call where you can see and hear the other person using a camera. Zoom, WhatsApp, and FaceTime are popular for video calls.

W

Wi-Fi

A wireless connection that lets your device access the internet without plugging in a cable. Most homes, cafés, and libraries have Wi-Fi.

Website

A collection of pages on the internet about a particular topic or organisation. You visit websites using a browser.

Webcam

A small camera built into or connected to your computer, used for video calls and taking photos.

Widget

A small tool or shortcut on your phone's home screen that shows information at a glance, like the weather or your calendar.

Windows

The most common operating system for desktop computers and laptops, made by Microsoft.

Y

YouTube

A popular website and app for watching and sharing videos on almost any topic. It's free to use.

Z

Zip File

A compressed file that bundles one or more files together to make them smaller and easier to share. You "unzip" it to access the contents.

Zoom

A popular app for video calls and online meetings. It became widely used during the pandemic for keeping in touch.

Need More Help?

If you come across a word or phrase that isn't listed here, don't worry — just ask! Cambridge Online offers free, friendly digital skills support across Cambridge and Cambridgeshire.

Visit: cambridgeonline.org.uk

Call: **01223 800450**

Email: info@cambridgeonline.org.uk