

Computer

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"Computer technology" and "Computer system" redirect here. For the company, see [Computer Technology Limited](#). For other uses, see [C \(disambiguation\)](#) and [Computer system \(disambiguation\)](#).

Computer

A **computer** is a general purpose device that can be [programmed](#) to carry out a set of arithmetic or logical operations. Since a sequence of operations can be readily changed, the computer can solve more than one kind of problem.

Conventionally, a computer consists of at least one processing element, typically a [central processing unit](#) (CPU), and some form of [memory](#). The processing element carries out arithmetic and logic operations, and a sequencing and control unit can change the order of operations in response to stored information. Peripheral devices allow information to be retrieved from an external source, and the result of operations saved and retrieved.

In [World War II](#), [mechanical analog computers](#) were used for specialized military applications. During this time the first electronic [digital](#) computers were developed. Originally they were the size of a large room, consuming as much power as several hundred modern [personal computers](#) (PCs).^[1]

Modern computers based on [integrated circuits](#) are millions to billions of times more capable than the early machines, and occupy a fraction of the space.^[2] Simple computers are small enough to fit into [mobile devices](#), and [mobile computers](#) can be powered by small [batteries](#). Personal computers in their various forms are [icons](#) of the [Information Age](#) and are what most people think of as “computers.” However, the [embedded computers](#) found in many devices from [MP3 players](#) to [fighter aircraft](#) and from toys to [industrial robots](#) are the most numerous.