TECH TERMS MADE EASY

In Part Two of my Tech Made Easy Series, you'll learn a few important computer and laptop terms. #techmadeeasy

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Laptops and computers are strange, complicated devices. There's a reason why you'll spend good money on one rather than build it from scratch. Today you aren't going to learn about the Top 5 Gadgets Hitting the Market, but you will learn a few keys terms – terms you can use when you make your next big purchase.

Before we start, let's define the term "memory." For us humans, memory is a collection of previous events. For computers, memory is a piece of technology that stores information. While you think longingly about your cruise in the Bahamas, your computer won't feel nostalgic about a Solitaire game you won. Your computer's memory will say, "You didn't save your powerpoint earlier. Would you like to load the version I saved for you?"

Anyway, let's get down to business. It's time to learn about RAM, CPUs, Resolution, and GPUs. The acronyms seem daunting, but you can do it. Here we go!

RAM

The Random Access Memory (RAM) is your device's short-term memory. But what does it mean for a device to have a short-term memory? If your laptop loses its

keys, will the RAM say, "Didn't you put them on the dining table a few minutes ago?"

The answer is sort of. The RAM keeps track of applications you've used recently. It knows the tabs you've opened while searching for a chocolate cake recipe, the video you buffered on Youtube but haven't watched yet, and the set of pictures you looked at earlier. Your RAM remembers all these things, so you can quickly access everything you've already opened.

Because RAM functions like your short-term memory, it can only focus on the applications in use, and it's easy to overload your RAM. If your device ever becomes slow, it might be because you've run out of space on your RAM. If you restart your device, your RAM will drop all its current memory to make space for new applications.

If you want a laptop that runs videos and games more smoothly, look for a device with a larger RAM, and you won't be disappointed.
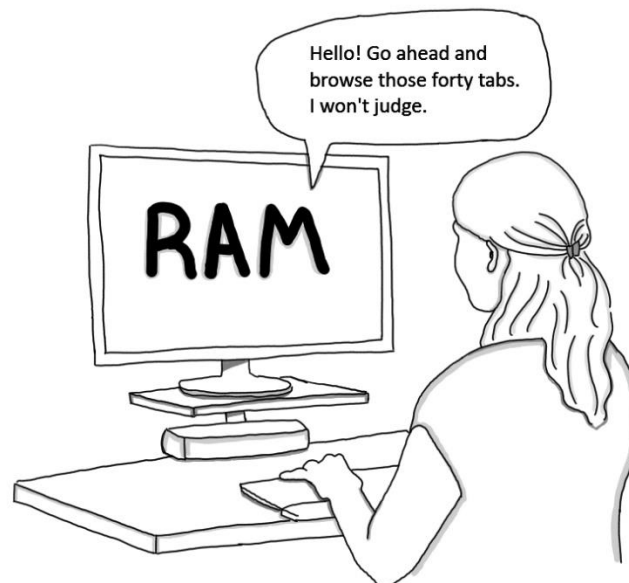
Your RAM saves everything you've opened recently, so you can get back to it as quickly as possible. However, the RAM can fill up and require a cleansing shutdown.

CPU

The [Central Processing Unit](#) (CPU) is like the brain of your computer, and like its name implies, it does a lot of processing. It deals with mouse functions and your keyboard input and trillions of calculations that keep your laptop acting like a laptop. When you dive into an application you've never used before (or haven't used recently), it's your processors job to say, "Hey, let's open this!" and bring it into existence for you. Modern CPUs have multiple processors to do what's called parallel processing. For the sake of this example, let's focus on the quadcore, which is a CPU with four processors. Each core works on a different set of functions. The same way you and 3 friends would (ideally) tackle a group project together, so, too, do these many processing units function.

Generally, a newer CPU is going to make your computer run more quickly.

Quadcore CPU
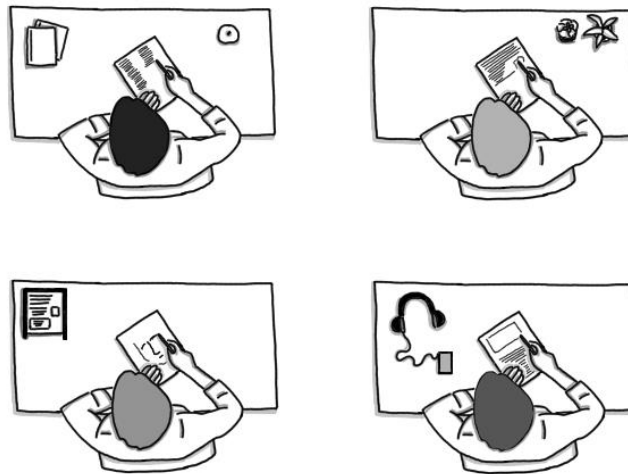
A CPU is the brain of your device. CPUs have multiple processors that function like friends in a group project. Everyone chooses a different job while working toward the same goal.
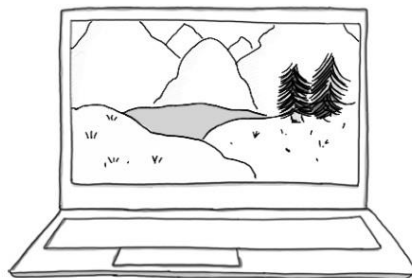
RESOLUTION

You've probably heard, "Wow, look at that resolution!" when you see a realistic photo. But what does it mean when you're looking for a laptop and learn it has a resolution of 1024x768?

Your screen is made from thousands of pixels. Each pixel is a small block with a designated color. When I type HELLO in all caps, there are pixels dedicated to the black squares of HELLO, and there are white pixels that provide the contrast around HELLO, so you can see my greeting clearly. If your device has a resolution of 1024x768, that means that your device is 1024 pixels wide and 768 pixels tall.

The confusing thing about pixels is they don't have a standard length. They aren't like inches or centimeters, which you can measure using a ruler. The same way "a lot of snow" can mean 1 inch or 1 foot based on where you live, so too can pixels change size. (Hopefully the picture below will clear up any confusion.)

If you're looking for a device with clearer images, choose a higher resolution.

Resolution:
2160x1440

Resolution:
2x2
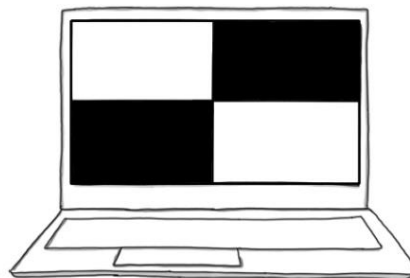
Your laptop screen is made of squares called pixels. The more squares you have, the smaller they will be, and the clearer your pictures will appear.

GPU

The [Graphics Processing Unit](#) (or GPU) is a small device that accelerates the buffering of images and videos. GPUs process large batches of information quickly, so they're the primary component used when you're trying to watch a movie or play a video game. Like the CPU, the GPU works in parallel, meaning different parts of the GPU take care of different tasks.

[Unlike CPUs](#), the GPU is only made to enact a select list of tasks. While the CPU may wander around selecting from a buffet of to-do lists, the GPU waits until it's called to action. Your CPU is the small group project, but your GPU is a giant conveyor belt with hundreds of workers. Each worker has a specific task they do over and over and over again, which is why GPU's are so speedy.

If you're looking to play video games or work with some video software, you'll want to find something with a newer GPU. You can tell this by looking at its number – a higher number signifies a newer model.

GPU

The GPU is full of hundreds of processors that are built for one task. This level of specialization makes them particularly fast.

WRAPPING UP

You have survived your crash course of computer terminology! There are hundreds of phrases you have yet to learn, but we'll get there. Trust me.

To recap:

- RAM keeps track of the current programs on your computer.
- Your CPU is like a brain that handles all the basic functions of your computer.
- The resolution of your computer determines how many squares can give you a clear image.
- The GPU is like a conveyor belt where each worker has a specialized task.

You're officially ready to impress your friends with your tech knowledge at your next dinner party. Who doesn't want to talk about CPUs over a bottle of red wine?

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