

## Talking About Home Technology: Intro and Vocabulary

Do you have a computer? Do you use it a lot? Maybe too much? (My wife thinks I spend too much time in front of the computer.) Do you think that your computer and other home technology has made your life easier, or more complicated?

We're going to talk this week about computers and other **gadgets** that are supposed to make your life easier. On this topic, we'll talk about the difference between the words 'want' and 'need,' and we'll talk about whether or not you think that they really improve our lives. And we'll talk about the difference between replacing and **upgrading** your computer.

So, let's start with this: what technologies do you have in your home? How many of them do you think you *need*? Is there something that you want to buy for your home? My favorite question is this: can you think of something that technology could do for you. . . but there's no **device** on the market?

Here's the vocabulary we'll be using this week:

### Vocabulary

**Technology / Technologies:** If you read the news, you'll see that science is finding a lot of new things every day. But, until someone finds a way to make these discoveries improve my life, it's not really important to me. When someone uses science to make your life better, that's technology. Or, it's 'a technology.' Often, when we talk about technology, we're talking about computers. But technology can also mean medicine, or chemistry. . . or any science you want, really.

**Upgrade:** A popular alternative to buying a new computer is to only buy a few new parts for your old computer. When you 'improve' your computer like this, you upgrade your computer. An upgrade can mean a new processor, more **RAM**, or a bigger **hard-drive**. When you upgrade your computer you can say, generally, "I've just upgraded my computer." Or, you can use the word as a noun: "I got a hard drive upgrade." And, you can be specific with the word: "I upgraded my RAM to four gigabytes."

**RAM / Memory:** Your memory is your ability to remember things that have happened in the past. When you remember the meaning of the verb 'to sing,' or what you ate on your sixteenth birthday, that's your memory at work. It's easy to think that computer memory would be where your computer puts things like photos, music, or programs when you're not using them. But it *isn't*. Computer memory is the space where the computer can hold the information that it's thinking about *right now*. That means, when you're looking at a picture on your computer, that

picture is in your computer's memory. There's a technical explanation for this, but I'm not the right person to give it to you. An important thing to know if you're thinking about **upgrading** your computer is this: the more memory your computer has, the more things it can do at one time.

**Hard-drive:** A hard drive is your computer's storage. When you put the pictures and music and programs that you use on your computer, you're *probably* putting them on your hard drive. A hard drive is a storage device that's permanently built into your computer. On many PCs, your hard drive will sometimes be called the 'C drive.' Having a bigger hard drive means having more room to keep photos, music, and programs on your computer.

**Hard-drive crash:** The **hard drive** is the 'storage' of your computer. It's where your photos are, your music, your programs. If you have videos on your computer, they're on your hard drive, too. So is your **operating system**, the software that makes your computer work. So, imagine what would happen if your hard drive broke. All of that information would be *gone*. A lot of it—the photos, your documents—you might not ever get back. That's what we call a hard drive crash. There are a lot of different things that can cause a hard drive crash. The important thing is this: everyone who has experienced a hard drive crash will tell you that it's important to make frequent **back ups**.

**Operating System:** By itself, your computer is just a pile of electronic parts. It needs someone to tell it how to 'work.' It needs an operating system, a set of instructions, that tells it how to work. The most common operating systems are Windows and OSX, from Apple. Some people also use an operating system called Linux.

**Compatibility / Compatible:** Can you use Apple software on a Windows computer? No, you can't. Not easily. The software isn't compatible with the **operating system**. 'Compatible' is just a fancy word describing two things that work together. A lot of software is available in two versions: one is Windows compatible, and the other is compatible with Apple computers. But the word compatible is important for more than just software. Hardware can have compatibility problems. I bought a **RAM upgrade** for a computer once, only to discover that it was *incompatible*, it didn't work with the computer I had.

**Motherboard:** Inside your computer are a lot of parts. There's the processor and the **RAM**, there's the hard-drive and the video-card. And the part that 'holds all of these together,' or 'connects' them all is the motherboard. When you buy a **RAM upgrade**, it's important to know if there's room on your motherboard, and if the RAM is **compatible**.

**Electronics:** 'Electronics' actually means anything that is powered by electricity: the lights in your apartment, my wife's hair-dryer, and the stove in our kitchen are all electronics, in that sense.

But, when we talk about 'Electronics,' we're mostly talking about expensive, technological things that are powered by electricity . . . and normally that have some kind of computer inside. Your MP3 Player is an example of electronics. So is your computer, of course, or your digital camera. Electronics are normally expensive, and they seem to be out-of-date pretty often!

**Backup:** Imagine you had a **hard drive crash** *today*. How many files would you lose? How long would it take you to replace—to get new copies of—the ones you *could* replace? How many files—like the photos and documents I lost in my hard drive crash—would be gone forever? That's why it's important to make a copy, or a backup of your files! A backup is simply a copy of the data you want to 'protect' that you keep separate from your computer. I used to backup my data with CDs, then with DVDs, but it's just too many discs! Now my plan is to make my backups with an external **hard drive**.

**Gigabyte:** A gigabyte is a unit we use to measure the size of data. Often **hard drives** and **RAM** are measured in gigabytes. The name means, literally, one billion 'bytes.' (a 'byte' is one letter in computer terms.) A better way to imagine a gigabyte is this: you can fit around 300 digital photos (depending on the size and quality) in a gigabyte. And you can fit around 200 songs (again, depending on the length and quality) in a gigabyte.

**Terabyte:** A gigabyte is a lot of information. But, if it's not enough, you can always get a terabyte of information. That's a thousand gigabytes. There is a website that says a terabyte of storage can hold as much information as fifty thousand trees made into paper and printed. A terabyte is a lot of information.

**Device:** Any machine—from a car, to a space ship, to an MP3 player—is a device. The words *mean* the same thing, but we don't always use them the same way. A device is often the 'small' or 'cute' form. If your best friend has a new vacuum cleaner that makes coffee and tells bedtime stories, and you think it's a little bit silly, you might say “that's an interesting device you have there.” Also, devices sound smaller in English than machines.

**Gadget:** If a device is small and sometimes a little bit. . . unusual, then a gadget is a very small, very technological device. And a gadget is normally unusual. When they first came out, cell phones were gadgets. Now, they're normal. iPods were gadgets, too, when they were new. Now, I think of BlackBerrys as gadgets. People who always buy the latest gadgets are often called “gadget people.”