

# What is a PC?



[Print](#)

The letters 'PC' stand for 'personal computer' – that is, a computer that can fit on a single desk for use by ordinary people, as opposed to a huge mainframe or supercomputer.

Although the acronym technically refers to any such computer, it has come to mean the multi-purpose machines that usually run the [Microsoft Windows](#) operating system, as opposed to the Macintosh machines made by Apple.

## Key benefits and features of the PC

- PCs used to be known as 'IBM-compatibles' as they were based on systems built by the IBM Corporation. However, the machines went on to be made by so many other companies that the term fell out of use – in fact, IBM has completely stopped making PCs.
- PCs are mainly identified by their use of the Windows operating system. An operating system is the background software that runs everything else on top of it. Windows is the best-selling 'OS' in the world.
- Windows is not the only OS that PCs can use. Linux is a free 'open source' system that has been created by volunteers around the globe. It's very popular among the technically minded, but is unlikely to suit a beginner.
- PCs are capable of many functions, including word processing, playing music, videos and games, accessing the internet, and much more.
- PCs have a number of advantages over Apple Macs: They're generally cheaper, they have far more software available (especially games) and, as they're more popular, they tend to have fewer compatibility problems on the internet. They're also much more open to tinkering, if you're so inclined.
- The PC's Achilles heel is its vulnerability to all sorts of viruses and malware. So far Apple Macintoshes have proved to be much more resilient against viruses and other threats. With a PC, you can't afford not to invest in [antivirus](#) programs and keep them up to date.

*Alex Duin is a freelance writer, specialising in technology.*

Next steps

[What is a Mac?](#)

---

[What is a tablet computer?](#)

---

[What is an iPad?](#)

---

[What is a computer?](#)

---

[Computer terms and internet jargon](#)

---

*Search guides*

Search

## Free how-to guides for your website

Why not add our award-winning and extensive range of digital skills guides to your website?

Find out more

## Remote Digital Championing!

Guides covering some tips and techniques for providing remote support to learners, an increasingly important service in times of social isolation.

Find out more

# Start a Digital Champion movement!

Could your workplace do with developing its digital skills? With funded membership opportunities currently available, now is the perfect time for organisations to join our Digital Champions Network.

[Find out more](#)

## Subscribe to our newsletter

Join our mailing list to receive the latest news, offers and expert insights from our team.

*First name*

*Last name*

*Email address*

[Submit](#)