

Techno-Terminology

Many teachers that I work with are often confused or overwhelmed by the alphabet soup of common technology. Like any modern field, technology has more and more abbreviations all the time. With the rapid acceleration of technology this lexicon may be difficult to keep up with. Here is a list of somewhat common terms with a brief explanation of what the letters represent as well as what these things actually mean to us as users of technology.

Common Terms

CMC – Computer Mediated Communication

Refers to any form of communication utilizing computers. Email, text and audio chat, discussion boards, and video conferencing are all forms of computer mediated communication.

CMS – Course Management System

Refers to a web-based program that allows teachers and students to participate in a virtual learning environment. Often used for distance education, these can also be used to enhance traditional classroom instruction. Some well known examples include Blackboard®, Desire2Learn and Moodle. (Also referred to LMS – Learning Management System, or VLE – Virtual Learning Environment).

FTP – File Transfer Protocol

Refers to the means by which files are typically uploaded and downloaded between a desktop computer and a web server.

HTML – Hypertext Markup Language

Refers to the language that web pages are written in. Based upon a series of tags that identify different items in a page, this language is among the most simple of computer programming languages.

HTTP – Hypertext Transfer Protocol

Refers to the protocol upon which world wide web delivery is based. Other protocols can be used for different types of data transfer.

IP – Internet Protocol

Refers to a standard rules used for sending and receiving information over the internet. Can also refer to the unique address (IP address) that each computer, server, printer or other device utilizes to connect to the internet.

ROM – Read Only Memory

Refers to data that is stored in a “read only” manner such as data on a CD-ROM or other disk that you are unable to alter.

URL - Uniform (or universal) resource locator

Refers to an address of a web page. <http://www.eslmag.com> is the URL for ESL Magazine.

USB - Universal Serial Bus

Refers to a very common protocol for connecting external devices to a computer. Digital cameras, keyboards and flash memory drives are common examples of devices using USB.

Domains

It is worth understanding the variety of domain categories since this can help us when searching for certain information. Here are the four prominent domain categories used on the world wide web today. Due to a lack of oversight these categories may not always reflect what they are intended to.

.com – Commercial sites. This designation indicates that this site should represent a commercial interest and therefore any information provided on such a site should be considered in that context.

.edu – used only for educational sites. Originally available to a variety of organizations with loose educational connections, this category is now only available to sites that grant educational degrees.

.org – Organizational sites. This designation is intended for non-profit or non-commercial organizations.

.net – Non-commercial site that may be organizational or educational.

File Extensions

Ever-present, the three digit file extensions seem to confuse many. While these may be hidden, or even unnecessary on some computers, they are critical to understand for sharing files between computers. It is also important to be able to identify them in order to predict which program(s) may be best for opening them.

.exe – Executable file. This extension identifies a computer application or program.

.doc – Document file. This extension identifies a word processing document common to Microsoft Word or an open-source word processor such as OpenOffice.

.pdf – Portable Document File. This extension identifies an adobe acrobat file. These files are generally un-editable and allow users to share files without altering formatting (this is not true for .doc files. They are likely to be altered when moved from one computer to another due to local user preferences).

.mov – Quicktime Movie file. This extension identifies a movie file created or used by Apple’s Quicktime format. This is a widely used standard even among Windows computers and servers.

.wmv – Windows Media Video. This extension identifies a movie file created or used by Windows Media Player format.

.ra (or .rm or .ram) – Real Media. These extensions identify audio and video files used by RealPlayer.

Technology Terminology Resources

This list is just the beginning of some of the more common terms that may be useful for a wide range of ESL teachers. In order to continue to expand your technical literacy, you may be interested in visiting the following sites:

Techterms.org

This dictionary claims to not only define terms, but to also explain them in simplified terms with examples provided to illustrate explanations. Containing hundreds of entries, ranging from simple to advanced, they are ranked on a “Tech Factor” scale from 1 to 10.

Whatis.com

This site has been around for a long time and has served as a frequent reference for many in the technology field. They claim to have thousands of entries and, unlike the others listed here, offer the option of being browsed through by category.

Techdictionary.com

Billing itself as “The Online Computer dictionary,” this site includes thousands of entries ranging from those included in this article to obscure programming tags that even experienced programmers need to reference on the rare occasion they are needed.