

EXAM ✓ **CRAM**

CompTIA® **A+**

220-701
220-702

Fourth Edition

CD FEATURES 200 PRACTICE QUESTIONS



PEARSON



DAVID L. PROWSE

CompTIA A+ Exam Cram, Fourth Edition

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Introduction

Welcome to the *CompTIA A+ Exam Cram*, Fourth Edition. This book prepares you for the CompTIA A+ Essentials Exam (number 220-701), and the CompTIA A+ Practical Application Exam (number 220-702) Imagine if you will, that you are at a testing center and have just been handed the passing scores for these exams. The goal of this book is to make that scenario a reality. I am very happy to have the opportunity to serve you in this endeavor. Together, we can accomplish your goal of attaining the CompTIA A+ certification.

Target Audience

The CompTIA A+ exams measure the necessary competencies for an entry-level IT professional with the equivalent knowledge of at least 500 hours of hands-on experience in the lab or field.

This book is for persons who have experience working with desktop PCs and laptops and want to cram for the A+ certification exam—*cram* being the key word. This book does not cover everything in the PC world; how could you in such a concise package? However, this guide is fairly thorough and should offer you a lot of insight...and a whole lot of test preparation.

If you do not feel that you have the required experience, have never attempted to troubleshoot a computer, or are new to the field, then I recommend the A+ Exam Certification Guide, which goes into much more depth than this text. On a side note, another great reference book that should be on every PC technician's shelf is the latest edition of *Upgrading and Repairing PCs* by Scott Mueller, published by Que.

There are essentially two types of people that will be reading this book: those who want a job in the IT field, and those who want to keep their job. For those of you in the first group, the new CompTIA A+ certification can have a powerful career impact, increasing the chances of securing a position in the IT world. For those in the second group, preparing for the exams serves to keep your skills sharp, and your knowledge up to date, making you a well-versed and well-sought after technician.

Of course I know that some of you are picking this book up solely for the practice exams, which are by the way located directly after Chapter 17, "Taking the Real Exams," and more are on the CD. But I recommend against

solely studying the practice questions. This book was designed from the ground up to build your knowledge in such a way that when you get to the practice exams, they will act as the final key to passing the real exams. The knowledge in the chapters is the cornerstone, whereas the practice exam questions are the battleships. Complete the entire book and you will have built yourself an impenetrable castle of knowledge.

About the Latest CompTIA A+ Exams

The newest versions of the exams (released in 2009) are known as the CompTIA A+ Essentials Exam (number 220-701), and the CompTIA A+ Practical Application Exam (number 220-702). There are quite a few changes and additions to these latest versions of the A+ exams including

- ▶ Windows Vista has been incorporated into the new objectives.
- ▶ Older operating systems such as Windows 95, 98, Me, and NT have been removed.
- ▶ Newer multicore processor technologies such as Core 2 Duo have been added.
- ▶ Newer hard drive and memory technologies have been added.
- ▶ The A+ troubleshooting process has been updated.
- ▶ Increased amount of networking and security topics, with increased difficulty.

This book covers all these changes and more within its covers.

For more information about how the A+ certification can help your career, or to download the latest official objectives, access CompTIA's A+ webpage at <http://www.comptia.org/certifications/listed/a.aspx>.

Note

Note: Those who have been certified in the most recent version of CompTIA A+ (2006 objectives) by taking 220-601 and one of the following: 220-602, 220-603 and 220-604 exams are eligible to update their currency through taking the CompTIA A+ bridge exam (one exam, BR0-003), which covers the new 2009 objectives.

About This Book

There is a lot of new information (and changing information) on the new A+ exams, so the people at Exam Cram and I decided to start this book from scratch. Every single bit of content is all new. The book is broken down into 17 chapters, each pertaining to particular objectives on the exam. Because the official CompTIA objectives can have very long names that sometimes deal with multiple subjects, I have divided the chapters into more manageable (and memorable) topics. All the questions in this book refer to these topics. Chapter topics and the corresponding CompTIA objectives are listed in the beginning of each chapter.

For the most part, I've structured the exam topics in this book to build on one another. Because of this I suggest that you read this entire book in order to best prepare for the CompTIA A+ exams. In the case that you want to review a particular topic, if your CD practice exam identifies a topic deficiency, for example, the topics are listed at the end of this introduction. In addition, you can use the index or the table of contents to quickly find the concept you are after.

Chapter Format and Conventions

Every Exam Cram chapter follows a standard structure and contains graphical clues about important information. The structure of each chapter includes the following:

- ▶ **Opening topics list:** This defines the topics to be covered in the chapter; it also lists the corresponding CompTIA A+ objective numbers.
- ▶ **Topical coverage:** The heart of the chapter. Explains the topics from a hands-on and a theory-based standpoint. This includes in-depth descriptions, tables, and figures geared to build your knowledge so that you can pass the exam. The chapters are broken down into between two and four topics each.
- ▶ **Cram Quiz questions:** At the end of each topic is a quiz. The quizzes, and ensuing explanations, are meant to gauge your knowledge of the subjects. If the answers to the questions don't come readily to you, consider reviewing individual topics or the entire chapter. In addition to being in the chapters, you can find a PDF of all the Cram Quiz questions compiled in one place on the CD.

- ▶ **Additional Reading and Resources:** At the end of each chapter, I list other sources of information, including books and websites, if you want to learn more about a particular topic.
- ▶ **Exam Alerts, Sidebars, and Notes:** These are interspersed throughout the book. Watch out for them!

ExamAlert

This is what an Exam Alert looks like. Normally, an alert stresses concepts, terms, hardware, software, or activities that are likely to relate to one or more certification test questions.

Additional Elements

Beyond the chapters, there are a few more elements that I've thrown in for you. They include:

- ▶ **Practice Exams:** There are four practice exams in total, consisting of 100 questions each. Two of them are directly after Chapter 17 within the book. There is one for each CompTIA A+ exam. The other two are located on the CD that accompanies this book, again, one for each exam.
- ▶ **Cram Sheet:** The tear-out Cram Sheet is located right in the beginning of the book. This is designed to jam some of the most important facts you need to know for the exam into one small sheet, allowing for easy memorization.

The Hands-On Approach

For this book, I built a new desktop computer using components that I believe are a good example of what you will see in the field today, and for a while to come; and are representative of the types of technologies that will be covered in the exams. I refer to the components in this system from Chapter 2, "Motherboards" onward. I like to put things into context whenever possible. By referencing the parts in the computer during each chapter, I hope to infuse some real-world knowledge and to solidify the concepts you need to learn for the exam. I believe that this more hands-on approach can help you to visualize concepts better and recommend that every PC technician build their own PC at some point (if you haven't already). This can really help to reinforce the ideas and concepts expressed in the book. I also recommend that you work

with two computers while going through this book: one with Windows Vista, and one with Windows XP. Another option is to run one computer with one of the operating systems mentioned and a virtual machine running the other operating system.

Within these pages I refer to various ancillary websites, most notably;

- ▶ *Microsoft's TechNet*—<http://technet.microsoft.com>
- ▶ *Microsoft Help and Support*—<http://support.microsoft.com> (previously known as the Microsoft Knowledge Base or MSKB).

As an IT technician, you will be visiting these sites often; they serve to further illustrate and explain concepts covered in this text.

Goals for This Book

I have three main goals in mind while preparing you for the CompTIA A+ exams.

My first goal is to help you understand A+ topics and concepts quickly and efficiently. To do this, I try to get right to the facts that are necessary for the exam. To drive these facts home, the book incorporates figures, tables, real-world scenarios, and simple to-the-point explanations. Also, in Chapter 17, you can find test-taking tips and a preparation checklist that gives you an orderly step-by-step approach to taking the exam. Be sure to complete every item on the checklist! For students of mine that truly complete every item, there is an extremely high pass rate for the exams.

My second goal for this book is to provide you with more than 600 *unique* questions to prepare you for the exam. Between the Cram Quizzes and the practice exams, that goal has been met, and I think it will benefit you greatly. Because CompTIA reserves the right to change test questions at any time, it is difficult to foresee exactly what you will be asked on the exam; however I think you will find that a good amount of the questions in this book are similar to the real questions. Regardless, to become a good technician, it is important to know the *concept*, not just memorize questions. To this effect each question has an explanation and maps back to the topic (and chapter) that was covered in the text. I've been using this method for more than a decade with my students (over two thousand of them) with great results.

My final goal is to provide support for this and all my titles, completing the life cycle of learning. I do this through my personal website: www.DavidLProwse.com. It has additional resources for you and is set up to

take questions from you about my titles. The site requires free registration to gain access to the additional A+ resources or to post questions; however, all you need is a valid email address, so join my little community! I'll try my best to get to your questions ASAP. All personal information is kept strictly confidential.

Good luck to you in your certification endeavors. I hope you benefit from this book. Enjoy!

Sincerely,

David L. Prowse

Exam Topics

Table I.1 lists the exam topics covered in each chapter of the book.

TABLE I.1 **Exam Cram CompTIA A+ Exam Topics**

Exam Topic	Chapter
Troubleshooting Theory Troubleshooting Examples and Concepts	1
Motherboard Components and Form Factors The BIOS Installing and Troubleshooting Motherboards	2
CPU 101 Installing and Troubleshooting CPUs	3
RAM Basics and Types of RAM Installing and Troubleshooting DRAM	4
Understanding and Testing Power Power Devices Power Supplies	5
Magnetic Storage Media Optical Storage Media Solid State Storage Media	6
Installing and Upgrading to Windows Vista Installing and Upgrading to Windows XP	7
Windows User Interfaces System Tools and Utilities Files, File Systems, and Disks	8
Updating Windows Maintaining Hard Disks	9
Repair Environments and Boot Errors Windows Tools and Errors Command-Line Tools	10

TABLE I.1 **Continued**

Exam Topic	Chapter
Installing, Configuring, and Troubleshooting Visible Laptop Components	11
Installing, Configuring, and Troubleshooting Internal Laptop Components	
The Video Subsystem	12
The Audio Subsystem	
Input/Output, Input Devices, and Peripherals	
Printer Types and Technologies	13
Installing, Configuring, and Troubleshooting Printers	
Networking Fundamentals	14
Network Cabling and Connectors	
Troubleshooting Network Connectivity	
Installing and Configuring a SOHO Network	
Basics of Data Security	15
Authentication	
Malicious Software	
File Security	
Safety and Environmental Procedures	16
Professionalism and Communication Skills	
Getting Ready and the Exam Preparation Checklist	17
Tips for Taking the Real Exam	
Beyond the CompTIA A+ Certification	

CHAPTER 5

Power

This chapter covers the following A+ exam topics:

- ▶ Understanding and Testing Power
- ▶ Power Devices
- ▶ Power Supplies

You can find a master list of A+ exam topics in the “Introduction.”

This chapter covers CompTIA A+ 220-701 objectives 1.3 and 2.5 and CompTIA A+ 220-702 objectives 1.1, 1.2, and 1.4.

Everything relies on power. Clean, well-planned power is imperative in a computer system. It’s so important, that I almost made this the first chapter of the book. I can’t tell you how many power-related issues I have troubleshot in the past. Many of the issues that you see concerning power are due to lack of protection and improper planning, and as such you will see several questions (if not more) on the A+ exams regarding this subject.

Imagine a scenario in which you work for a technical services division of a company. You are required to install a new, more powerful power supply in a computer that contains many devices and requires a lot of electricity. You need to install the computer in a new area of the company’s building. This requires you to plug the computer into an AC receptacle that has never been used or tested.

What kind of power supply should you select? How can you verify that the AC outlet is properly wired? And how can you protect the computer? This chapter answers all those questions and furnishes you with the knowledge you need to install, test, and troubleshoot power supplies and test power that comes from the wall outlet.

Understanding and Testing Power

The power for your computer is derived from electricity, which is basically the flow of electric charge. Electricity is defined and measured in several ways, most commonly

- ▶ *Voltage*, a representation of potential energy; sometimes it's more simply referred to as pressure; its unit of measurement is volts (V).
- ▶ *Wattage* or electric power, the rate of electric energy in a circuit, measured in watts (W).
- ▶ *Amperage* or electric current, the movement of electric charge, measured in amperes or amps (A).
- ▶ *Impedance*, the amount of resistance to electricity, measured in ohms (Ω).

Each of these is covered in this chapter, but by far the most common of these that you will be testing is voltage. Here are two examples of voltages you are probably familiar with:

- ▶ 120 Volts AC (the voltage associated with many U.S. homes)
- ▶ 5 Volts DC (the voltage associated with some of the internal power connections in your PC)

The difference in these two examples (aside from the amount of volts) is that a house's outlets use alternating current (AC), in which the flow of electrons alternate, and your computer, again internally, uses direct current (DC), in which the flow of electrons is one way.

ExamAlert

In AC, electron flow alternates.

In DC, electrons flow one way.

Back to our scenario; because you can't control who wired the AC outlet that you will be connecting the computer to, or how clean the power is that comes from your municipality, you should test the outlet prior to plugging the computer in. Two good tools to use when testing are a receptacle tester and a multimeter.

ExamAlert

Warning: Read through these sections carefully before attempting to test a live AC outlet. If you still feel unsure, contact a qualified electrician to test and make repairs to an AC outlet.

Testing an AC Outlet with a Receptacle Tester

Type B AC outlets are the most common, and might also be referred to as wall sockets, electric receptacles, or power points. It is type B that you need to be concerned with for the A+ exam. If any of the hot, neutral, or ground wires are connected improperly, the computer connected to the outlet is a sitting duck, just waiting for irreparable damage. To ensure that the AC outlet is wired properly, you can use a receptacle tester, like the one shown in Figure 5.1. These are inexpensive and are available at most home improvement stores and electrical supply shops. When you plug in the receptacle tester, it tells you if the receptacle is wired properly or indicates which wires are incorrect.



FIGURE 5.1 A common receptacle tester and labeled receptacle

In Figure 5.1 the test has passed. With this particular tester, two yellow lights tell you that the outlet is wired correctly. Any other combination of lights tells you that there is a wiring error. The different combinations are usually labeled on the tester itself; for example, an open ground error is displayed by one single, yellow light on this tester. Important: If you receive any erroneous readings or if there are no lights at all, *do not use the outlet* and contact your supervisor and/or building management so that they can bring in a licensed electrician to fix the problem.

ExamAlert

If you find an AC outlet is improperly wired, contact your supervisor and/or building management to resolve the problem.

Testing an AC Outlet with a Multimeter

Every PC technician should own a multimeter, and we use one throughout this chapter. A multimeter is a hand-held device that, among other things, can be used to measure amps and impedance, and to test voltage inside a computer and from AC outlets. It has two leads, a black and a red. Whenever using the multimeter, try to hold both of the multimeter leads with one hand, and hold them by the plastic handles; don't touch the metal ends. It will be like holding chopsticks but is a safer method, reducing the severity of electric shock in the uncommon chance that one occurs. To test an AC outlet with a multimeter, run through the following steps:

1. Place the multimeter's black lead in the outlet's ground. (The parts of the outlet are labeled in Figure 5.1.)
2. Place the red lead in the hot opening
3. Turn on the multimeter to test for volts AC (sometimes labeled as VAC). Hold the leads steady and check for readings. Optimally, the reading will hover around 115 volts or 120 volts depending on where you are in the United States. Watch the readings for a minute or so. Remember the reading or range of readings that display. A common reading is shown in Figure 5.2.
4. Turn off the multimeter.
5. Remove the red lead.
6. Remove the black lead.

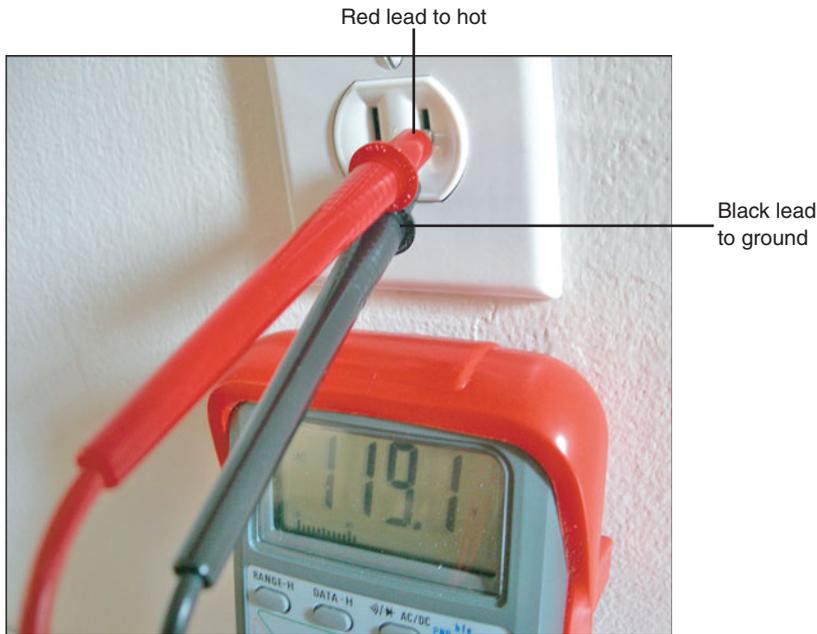


FIGURE 5.2 A receptacle tested with a multimeter

What was your reading? A steady reading closest to 120 volts is desirable. It might be less in some areas, but the key is that it's steady at one voltage; this is also known as *clean power*. If the reading fluctuates a lot, say between 113 volts and 121 volts, for example, you have one of the varieties of *dirty power*. This could be because too many devices use the same circuit or because power coming from electrical panel or from the municipal grid fluctuates, maybe because the panel or the entire grid is under/overloaded. A quick call to your company's electrician can result in an answer and possibly a long-term fix. However, we are concerned with an immediate solution, which in this case will be to install an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) or other line-conditioning device between the computer and the AC outlet. This can regulate the output of AC to the computer.

ExamAlert

To keep an AC outlet's voltage steady, use a UPS or line conditioner.

You can also test the neutral and ground wires in this manner. You should be especially concerned with whether the ground wire is connected properly.

Previously we showed how to test this with the receptacle tester, but to test this with the multimeter, connect the black lead to ground and the red lead to neutral. This should result in a reading of 0 volts. Any other reading means that the outlet is not grounded properly, which can result in damage to a computer that connects to it. You can also use a voltage detector, which is a pen-shaped device that beeps when it comes into contact with voltage. On a properly grounded outlet, the only part that should give audible beeps is the hot. Everything else including the screw and outlet plate should not register any sounds. If sounds do register by simply touching the outlet plate with the voltage detector, the outlet is not grounded properly. If this is the case, or if you got any other reading besides 0 volts on the multimeter, contact an electrician right away.

Cram Quiz

Cram Quiz Answer these questions. The answers follow the last question. If you cannot answer these questions correctly, consider reading this section again until you can.

1. What tool would you use to test the amount of voltage that is coming from an AC outlet?
 - A. Multimeter
 - B. Voltage detector
 - C. Receptacle tester
 - D. Impedance tester
2. Which of the following is a representation of potential energy?
 - A. Wattage
 - B. Voltage
 - C. Impedance
 - D. Amperage
3. Which wire when tested should display zero volts on a multimeter?
 - A. Neutral
 - B. Hot
 - C. Ground
 - D. Red

Cram Quiz Answers

1. **A.** The multimeter is the only testing tool that can display voltage numerically.
 2. **B.** Voltage is a representation of potential energy; an analogy for voltage would be water pressure in a pipe.
 3. **C.** When testing the ground wire with a multimeter, it should display a reading of zero volts.
-

Power Devices

Utilizing proper power devices is part of a good preventative maintenance plan and helps to protect a computer. You need to protect against several things:

- ▶ Surges
- ▶ Spikes
- ▶ Sags
- ▶ Brownouts
- ▶ Blackouts

A *surge* in electrical power means that there is an unexpected increase in the amount of voltage provided. This can be a small increase or a larger increase known as a spike. A *spike* is a short transient in voltage that can be due to a short circuit, tripped circuit breaker, power outage, or lightning strike.

A *sag* is an unexpected decrease in the amount of voltage provided. Typically, sags are limited in time and in the decrease in voltage. However, when voltage reduces further, a brownout could ensue. During a *brownout* the voltage drops to such an extent that it typically causes the lights to dim and causes computers to shut off.

A *blackout* is when a total loss of power for a prolonged period occurs. Another problem associated with blackouts is the spike that can occur when power is restored. In the New York area, it is common to have an increased amount of tech support calls during July; this is attributed to lightning storms! Quite often this is due to improper protection.

Some devices have specific purposes, and others can protect against more than one of these electrical issues. Let's describe a few of these devices.

Power Strips

A *power strip* is a group of sockets, usually in-line, with a flexible cable that plugs into an AC outlet. It enables for multiple devices to share a single receptacle in that outlet. Due to this, a maximum wattage rating can be applied to the device, for example, 3,000 watts is a decent amount. Interesting, a computer might have a 300-watt power supply, but on the average, it might use only 100 watts of that power while running. A monitor might use between 35 watts and 100 watts depending on the type of monitor. You can check the wattage rating on the back or side of most devices. Add the total for all

devices connected to the power strip, and remember not to exceed the maximum rating. This concept applies to other devices in this section including surge protectors and UPSs.

Power strips might not have surge protection functionality. If they don't have surge protection capabilities, they cannot protect from any of the electrical issues (surges and spikes) listed in the previous section.

A power strip has a master on/off switch and usually has a 15-amp circuit breaker to prevent overloading. If an overload occurs, the circuit breaker trips, cutting power, and the device can usually be reset by pressing a black button normally located somewhere near the power button. Overloads occur because the power strip tries to pull too much current (amps) from the wall outlet, or when too much current is supplied *to* the power strip. As a rule of thumb, no more than four or five computers (and monitors) should use the same power strip and, therefore, the same circuit. This calls into question whether any other AC outlets connect to the same circuit. To find this out, a qualified electrician can use a circuit testing tool and locate all the outlets on the circuit in question, or this information might be included in your building's electrical diagram. By the way, you can also calculate the amount of computers and monitors that can connect to a circuit by their amperage rating. For example, at AC (wall-outlet level) a typical computer would draw 2 to 3 amps and perhaps another 2 amps for the monitor maximum. (Keep in mind that these are estimates.) So on a standard 15-amp circuit, it would be wise to have no more than three computers and three monitors running simultaneously.

Surge Protectors

A *surge protector* or surge suppressor is a power strip that also incorporates a metal-oxide varistor (MOV) to protect against surges and spikes. Most power strips that you find in an office supply store or home improvement store have surge protection capability. The word *varistor* is a blend of the two terms *variable resistor*.

ExamAlert

To protect against surges and spikes, use a surge protector!

Surge protectors are usually rated in joules, which are a way to measure energy, and in essence, the more joules the better. For computer systems, 1,000 joules or more is recommended. This joule rating gives you a sense of how

long the device can protect against surges and spikes. Surges happen more often than you might think, and every time a surge happens, part of the varistor is burned out. The higher the joule rating, the longer the varistor (and therefore the device) should last. Most of today's surge protectors have an indicator light that informs you if the varistor has failed.

Because surges can occur over telephone lines, RG-6 cable lines, and network lines, it is common to see input and output ports for any or all these on a decent surge protector. Higher-quality surge protectors have multiple MOVs not only for the different connections such as AC and phone, but also have multiple MOVs for the individual wires in an AC connection.

Uninterruptible Power Supplies

An *uninterruptible power supply* (UPS) takes the functionality of a surge suppressor and combines that with a battery backup. So now, our computer is protected not only from surges and spikes, but also from sags, brownouts, and blackouts.

ExamAlert

Use a UPS to protect your computer from power outages!

But the battery backup can't last indefinitely! It is considered emergency power and typically keeps your computer system running for 5 to 30 minutes depending on the model you purchase. Figure 5.3 shows an example of a typical inexpensive UPS. Notice that some of the outlets on the device are marked for battery backup *and* surge protection, whereas others are for surge protection only.

Most UPS devices also act as line conditioners, protecting from over and under-voltage; they condition (or regulate) the voltage sent to the computer. The device shown, and most UPS devices today, has a USB connection so that your computer can communicate with the UPS. When there is a power outage, the UPS sends a signal to the computer telling it to shut down, suspend, or stand-by before the battery discharges completely. Most UPSs come with software that you can install that enables you to configure the computer with these options.



FIGURE 5.3 A common UPS

UPS devices' output power capacity is rated in volt-amps (VA) and watts. Although you might have heard that volt-amps and watts are essentially the same, this is one of those times that they are somewhat different. The volt-amp rating is slightly higher due to the difference between apparent power (when in battery backup mode) and real power (when pulling regular power from the AC outlet). For example, the device in Figure 5.3 has a volt-amp rating of 350 VA but a wattage rating of 200 watts. Generally, this is enough for a computer, monitor, and a few other devices, but a second computer might be pushing it given the wattage rating. The more devices that connect to the UPS, the less time the battery can last if a power outage occurs; if too many devices are connected, there may be inconsistencies when the battery needs to take over. Thus many UPS manufacturers limit the amount of battery backup-protected receptacles. Connecting a laser printer to the UPS is *not* recommended due to the high current draw of the laser printer; and *never* connect a surge protector or power strip to one of the receptacles in the UPS, to protect the UPS from being overloaded.

ExamAlert

Do *not* connect laser printers to UPS devices.

The UPS normally has a lead-acid battery that, once discharged, requires 10 hours to 20 hours to recharge. This battery is usually shipped in a disconnected state. Before charging the device for use, you must first make sure that the battery leads connect to the UPS. If the battery ever needs to be replaced, a red light will usually appear accompanied by a beeping sound. Beeping can also occur if power is no longer supplied to the UPS by the AC outlet.

There are varying levels of UPS devices, which incorporate different technologies. For example, the cheaper standby UPS (known as an SPS) might have a slight delay when switching from AC to battery power, possibly causing errors in the computer operating system. Although it isn't important to know these different technologies for the exam, you should realize that some care should be taken when planning the type of UPS to be used. When data is crucial, you had better plan for a quality UPS!

Cram Quiz

Answer these questions. The answers follow the last question. If you cannot answer these questions correctly, consider reading this section again until you can.

1. Which device should you use to protect against power outages?
 - A. Multimeter
 - B. UPS
 - C. Fedex
 - D. Surge protector
2. You want a *cost-effective* solution to the common surges that can affect your computer. Which device would be the best solution?
 - A. UPS
 - B. Surge protector
 - C. Power strip
 - D. Line conditioner
3. Which of these is an unexpected increase in voltage?
 - A. Sag
 - B. Blackout
 - C. Spike
 - D. Whiteout

Cram Quiz Answers

1. **B.** The UPS is the only item listed that protects the computer from power outages like blackouts and brownouts.
 2. **B.** A surge protector is the right solution at the right price. A UPS is a possible solution but costs more than a surge protector. A line conditioner also would be a viable solution but, again, is overkill. And a power strip doesn't necessarily have surge protection functionality.
 3. **C.** A spike (or a surge) is an unexpected increase in voltage. A sag is a decrease in voltage, a blackout is a power outage, and a whiteout is a blizzard, which could result in a blackout!
-

Power Supplies

Okay, now that we've tested our AC outlet and put some protective power devices into play, let's go ahead and talk power supplies. The power supply is in charge of converting the alternating current (AC) drawn from the wall outlet into direct current (DC) to be used internally by the computer. It feeds the motherboard, hard drives, optical drives, and any other devices inside of the computer. Talk about a single point of failure! That is why many higher-end workstations and servers have redundant power supplies.

Planning Which Power Supply to Use

It is important to use a reliable brand of power supply that is UL listed (certified). There are a few other things to take into account when planning which power supply to use in your computer:

- ▶ Type of power supply and compatibility
- ▶ Wattage and capacity requirements
- ▶ Amount and type of connectors

Now, in our scenario we said that we need a power supply that can support many devices in our workstation; one that will output a lot of power. In this scenario the computer has two IDE hard drives, a CD-Burner, a DVD-ROM, one SATA drive, and a PCIe video card. And let's just say that we use an ATX 12V 2.0 motherboard. So we need to look for a high-capacity, compatible ATX power supply with a decent amount of connectors for our devices. Let's discuss planning now.

Types of Power Supplies and Compatibility

The most common form factor today is Advanced Technology Extended (ATX). Depending on the type of ATX, the main power connector to the motherboard will have 20 pins or 24 pins. Table 5.1 shows a few different form factors and their characteristics. The key is compatibility. In our scenario we have a previously built computer, which means that the case and motherboard are already compatible. If this computer was *proprietary*, we could go to the computer manufacturer's website to find out the exact form factor, and possibly a replacement power supply for that model computer. Some third-party power supply manufacturers also offer replacement power supplies for proprietary systems. However, if this computer was custom built, we would need to find out the form factor used by the motherboard and/or case, and

should open the computer and take a look at all the necessary power connections. Then we need to find a compatible power supply according to those specifications from a third-party power supply manufacturer. Table 5.1 displays the form factors you need to know for the exam.

TABLE 5.1 **Common Power Supply Form Factors**

Form Factor	Main Power Connector	Other Characteristic
ATX	P1 20-pin connector	An older standard but you will still support it!
ATX 12V 1.0 - 1.3	P1 20-pin connector & P4 4 pin 12V connector	Supplemental 6-pin AUX connector provides additional 3.3V and 5V supplies to the motherboard.
ATX 12V 2.0	P1 24-pin connector (backward compatible)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 6-pin AUX was removed. ▶ SATA power cable is required.

Figure 5.4 gives examples of a P1 20-pin (the white connector) and P1 24-pin connector (the black connector). Toward the left of the black connector you notice it has an additional four pins that can be separated from the main group of 20 pins. Both have locking tabs to keep the P1 connector fastened to the motherboard. (In the figure this is shown only on the 20-pin connector.)

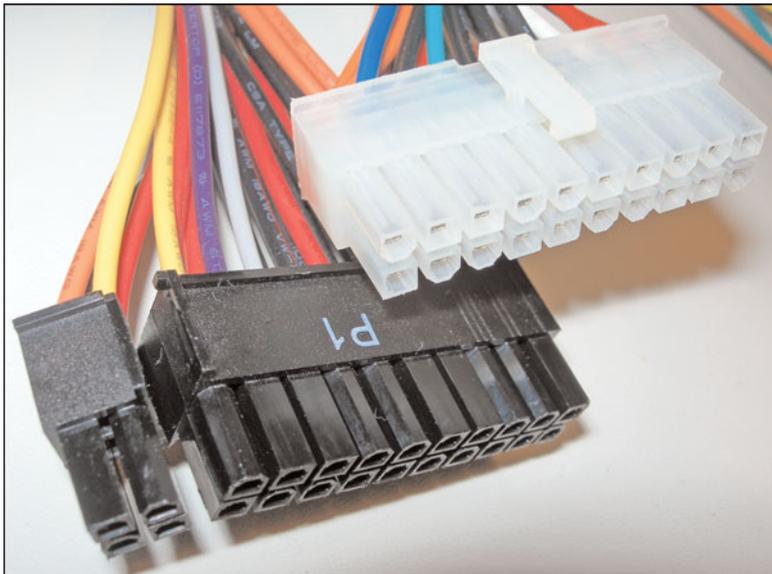


FIGURE 5.4 24-pin and 20-pin power connectors

ExamAlert

Original ATX power supplies connect to the motherboard with a 20-pin connector. Newer ATX 12V 2.0 power supplies connect with a 24-pin connector.

There are many other types of form factors such as microATX, BTX, and NLX (covered in Chapter 2, “Motherboards”) and older form factors such as AT; however, the form factors listed in Table 5.1 are the important ones to know regarding power supplies for the A+ exam. For any other form factors, just remember that the power supply, case, and motherboard all need to be compatible.

Another important piece to consider is the type of case that is used. Larger cases require longer power cables to reach the devices. You can find the measurements for the cables on the power supply manufacturer’s website. There are several different types of cases that you need to be familiar with:

- ▶ **Desktop:** Lies horizontally, usually has one 5¼-inch drive bay.
- ▶ **Mini-tower:** Stands vertically, usually has two or three drive bays.
- ▶ **Mid-tower:** Usually has three or four bays.
- ▶ **Full tower:** Usually has six bays.
- ▶ **Slim line:** Compaq and the Playstation III and other third-party case manufacturers use this case design.

Many power supply manufacturers also make computer cases and often sell them as a package or to be purchased separately.

Wattage and Capacity Requirements

Power supplies are usually rated in watts. They are rated at a maximum amount that they can draw from the wall outlet and pass on to the computer’s devices. Remember that the computer will not always use all that power the way in which a light bulb does. And the amount depends on how many devices work and how much number crunching your processor does! In addition, when computers sleep or suspend, they use less electricity. What you need to be concerned with is the maximum amount of power all the devices

need collectively. Most power-supply manufacturers today offer models that range from 300 watts all the way up to 1,000 watts. Although 300 watts is a decent amount of power for many computers, it might not suffice in our scenario. Devices use a certain amount of power defined in amps and/or watts. By adding all of the devices power consumption together, we can get a clearer picture of how powerful a power supply we need. Consult the manufacturer's web page of the device for exact requirements. We said that in our scenario the computer has two IDE hard drives, a CD-Burner, a DVD-ROM, a floppy drive, and one SATA drive and a PCIe video card. It also has a quad core processor and 2GB of RAM (in two sticks).

After doing the math, it appears that the computer in our scenario needs about 400 watts or so to run smoothly. The power supply we purchase should be rated slightly higher just in case, so in this scenario we would obtain a 450-watt or 500-watt power supply. Most power supplies are rated for 15 amps, so it is important to connect the computer to a 15-amp circuit or higher.

Amount and Type of Power Connectors

It is important to know how many of each type of power connector you need when planning which power supply to use. In our scenario we need four IDE power connectors (for the two hard drives, CD-Burner, and DVD-ROM), one floppy power connector, and one SATA power connector. You need to be familiar with each of these types of power connectors for the A+ exams. Be prepared to identify them by name and by sight. Table 5.2 defines the usage and voltages for the most common power connectors: Molex, mini, SATA, and PCIe, which are displayed in Figures 5.5 through 5.8.

TABLE 5.2 **Power Connectors**

Power Connector	Usage	Pins and Voltages
Molex	IDE hard drives, optical drives, and other devices	Red (5V), black (G), black (G), yellow (12V)
Mini	Floppy drives	Red (5V), black (G), black (G), yellow (12V)
SATA	Serial ATA hard drives	15-pin, 3.3V, 5V, and 12V
PCIe	PCI Express cards	6-pin

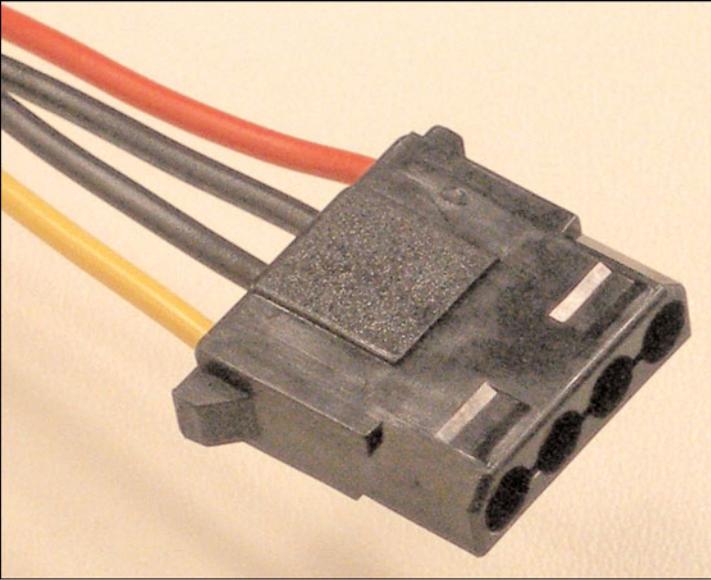


FIGURE 5.5 Molex power connector

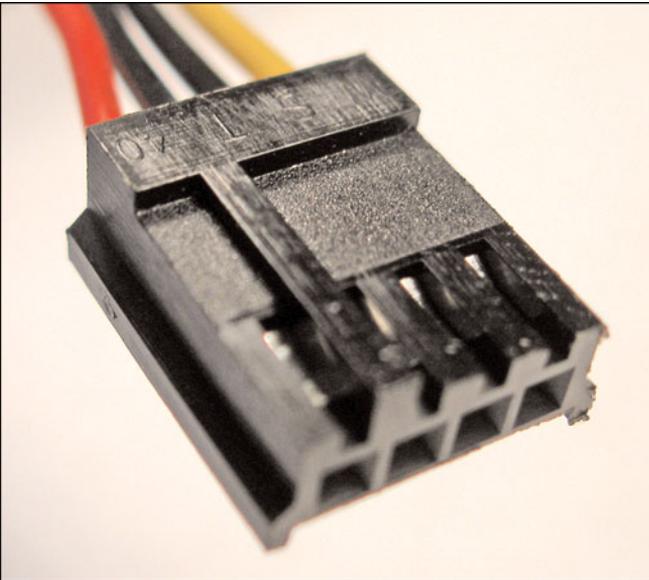


FIGURE 5.6 Mini power connector

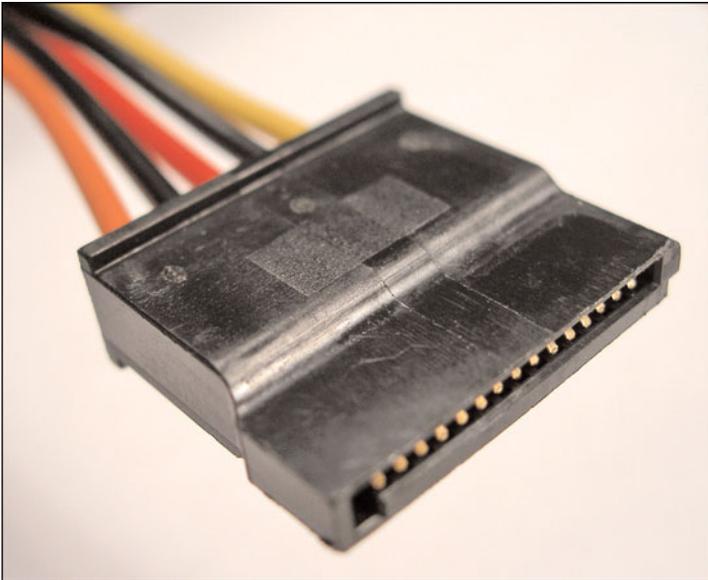


FIGURE 5.7 SATA 15-pin power connector

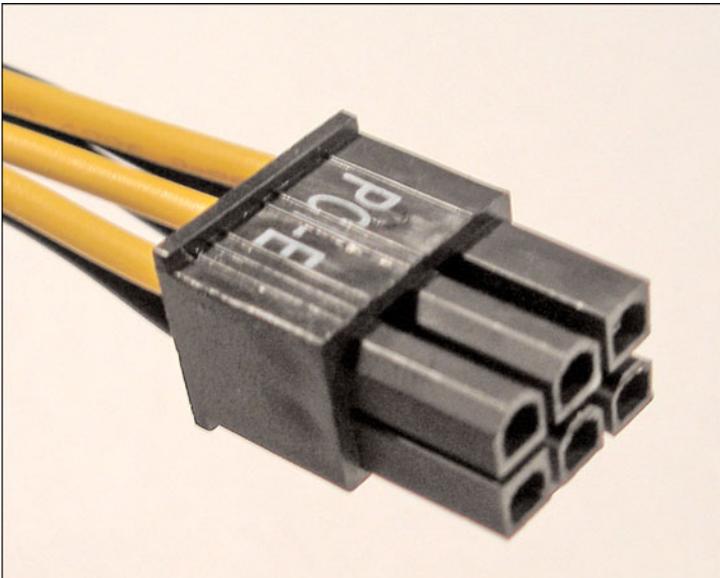


FIGURE 5.8 PCIe 6-pin power connector

Installing the Power Supply

When the power supply arrives, we can install it. But first, let's take a look at the back of the power supply to identify the components we see, as shown in Figure 5.9.

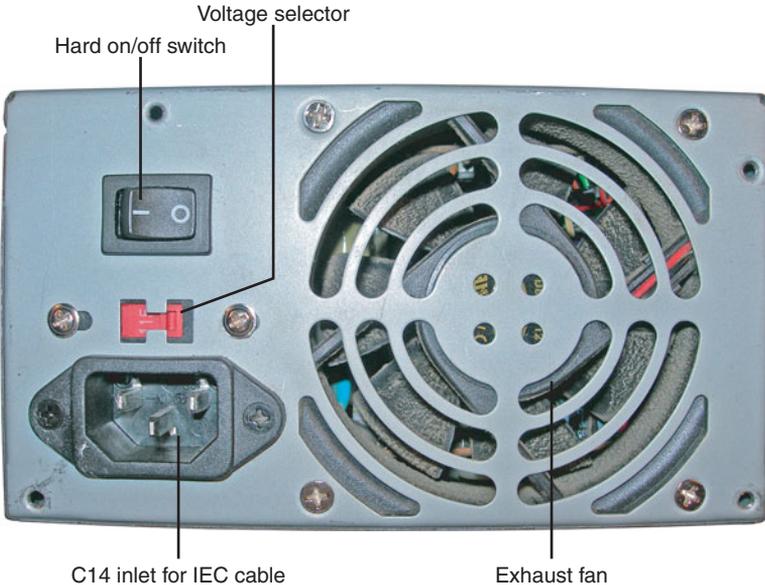


FIGURE 5.9 Rear view of power supply

On the top-left portion of Figure 5.9, we see a hard on/off switch sometimes referred to as a kill switch. This is a nice feature when troubleshooting PCs. Instead of disconnecting the power cable, we can shut off this switch. It works nicely in emergencies as well. Below that we see a red voltage selector switch. This should be set to 115V in the United States. It also has a 230V option to be used in other countries. (An additional adapter might be necessary for the different wall outlets you might encounter.) Never change the voltage selector switch while the computer is running. Be sure to check this setting before using the power supply. Some newer power supplies are now equipped with a universal input enabling you to connect the power supply to any AC outlet between 100V to 240V, without having to set a voltage switch. Below that we see the power cable inlet; this is known as a C14 inlet and is where we attach our power cord to the power supply. These inlets and cables that connect to them are defined by the IEC 60320 specification (previously the IEC 320 spec), and because of this many techs refer to the power cord as an IEC cable (which by the way stands for International Electrotechnical Commission).

This cord actually has a standard three-prong connector suitable for an AC outlet on one end and a C13 line socket on the other to connect to the power supply. To the right we see the power supply fan that is of great importance when troubleshooting power supplies.

If there is a power supply connected to the computer, turn off the computer and unplug the power supply. ATX motherboards are always receiving 5 volts even, when they are off, if the computer is plugged in. Be sure that you are employing antistatic methods. Remove the old power supply and prepare to install the new one.

You might want to test the power supply before installing it. This can be done by connecting a power supply tester (described in the next section), plugging in the power supply to the AC outlet, and turning on the hard on/off switch. Or you can test the power supply after it is installed by simply turning the computer on.

The power supply is placed inside the case and mounted with four standard screws that are screwed in from the back of the case. In some instances, a plastic housing inside the case might need to be removed. In addition, the power supply might not fit without the removal of other devices, such as the processor, and such, but in most cases (pun intended) you should install the power supply without too much trouble. Next, connect the P1 connector to the motherboard and attach the Molex, mini, SATA, and PCIe as necessary to their corresponding devices. Note that the P1 connector (20-pin or 24-pin main connector) can be plugged in only in one way and that there is a locking tab. Also, most other connectors are molded in such a way as to make it difficult to connect them backward. If you need a lot of strength to plug in the connector, check and make sure that it is oriented correctly. Don't force the connection. Afterward, remove any antistatic protection, and finally, plug the power supply into the AC outlet, turn on the hard on/off switch (if the power supply has one), and turn on the computer. Check to see if the fan in the power supply is working and if the computer boots correctly.

Troubleshooting Power Supply Issues

Installation of the power supply was easy, and there aren't usually many issues when doing so, but power supplies don't last forever. Moreover, many issues that occur with power supplies are intermittent making the troubleshooting process a little tougher. Your best friends when troubleshooting power supplies are going to be a multimeter, power supply tester, and your eyes and ears. Of course, always make sure that the power supply connects to the AC

outlet properly before troubleshooting further. Here are a couple of the issues you may encounter with power supplies:

- ▶ Fan failure
- ▶ Fuse failure
- ▶ Quick death
- ▶ Slow death

Fan failure can be due to the fact that the power supply is old, extremely clogged with dirt, or that the fan was of cheaper design (without ball bearings). However, for the A+ exam it doesn't make a difference. As far as A+ is concerned, if the fan fails, the power supply needs to be replaced, and it makes sense. Chances are, if the fan has failed, other components of the power supply are on their way out also. It is more cost-effective to a company to simply replace the power supply than to have a technician spend the time opening it and trying to repair it. More important, although it is possible to remove and replace the fan by opening the power supply, this can be a dangerous venture because the power supply holds an electric charge, so the A+ rule is to never open the power supply.

ExamAlert

Do not open a power supply! If it has failed, replace it with a working unit.

Fuse failure can occur due to an overload or due to the power supply malfunctioning. Either way, the proper course of action is to replace the power supply. Do not attempt to replace the fuse. Chances are that the power supply is faulty if the fuse is blown. If it so happens that you need to test an individual fuse that was lying around, then use your multimeter. Make sure that your red lead is connected to the ohms (Ω) input and set the meter to Ohm (Ω). Touch the probes to both ends of the fuse. A good fuse should show zero ohm or display continuity. A bad or "blown" fuse will not show any reading. This is an example of testing impedance.

If the power supply dies a quick death, it might be because of several reasons from an electrical spike to hardware malfunction. First make sure that the IEC cable is connected properly to the power supply and to the AC outlet. Sometimes, it can be difficult to tell whether the power supply has failed or if it's something else inside or outside the computer system. You should check the AC outlet with your trusty receptacle tester and make sure that a circuit

hasn't tripped, and verify that any surge protectors and/or UPS devices work properly. Depending on what you sense about the problem, you might decide to just swap out the power supply with a known good one. Otherwise, move on to the following numbered steps.

If the power supply is dying a slow death and is causing intermittent errors, it could be tough to troubleshoot. If you suspect intermittent issues, first make sure that the power cord is connected securely and then try swapping out the power supply with a known good one. Boot the computer and watch it for awhile to see if the same errors occur.

Whether the power supply has apparently failed completely or is possibly causing intermittent errors, and you can't figure out the cause to this point, continue through the following steps:

1. Remove the computer case.
2. Connect a power supply tester, as shown in Figure 5.10, to the P1 connector and look at the results. (Make sure you have the correct power supply tester; this depends on whether you have a 20-pin or 24-pin power connector.) These power supply testers normally test for +12V, -12V, +5V, -5V, and 3.3V, but they might not test every individual pin. If there are error lights, no lights, or missing lights for specific voltages on the tester, replace the power supply. If all the lights are green, move on to the next step.



FIGURE 5.10 Testing a 24-pin P1 connector with a power supply tester

Note

The $-5V$ light in the figure is not lit. This is because the $-5V$ wire (white) is optional. See Chapter 2 for more information on the individual pins in an ATX connection.

Note

Though it's uncommon, some proprietary computer's power supplies do not light specific voltages, for example the $3.3V$ light, even though the power supply is working properly. Check the documentation that came with the computer to see if this is an actual problem or a normal result.

3. Use a multimeter to test the power supply. Use the same methodology for testing with a multimeter as in the beginning of this chapter.
 - a. Turn off the hard on/off switch. (If there is one; if not, unplug the IEC cord.)
 - b. With the main motherboard connector (P1) inserted into the motherboard, connect the black lead to a ground wire (or other source of ground) and insert the red lead to a colored voltage wire in the main power connector, as shown in Figure 5.11. You need to dig a little bit to get the lead in there but don't press too hard. When the leads are stationary, move on to the next step.



FIGURE 5.11 Testing the 3.3 volt wire with a multimeter set to volts DC

- c. Turn on the hard on/off switch (or plug the IEC cord back in) and turn on the computer.

- d. Turn on the multimeter to volts DC and view the results. In the figure you notice that we test an orange wire (which is rated for +3.3 volts). Generally, supply voltages should be within ± 5 percent of the nominal value. Our result was +3.43 volts, which is within tolerance.

Note

If you have an analog multimeter, you would usually set this to 20 or higher. Just remember to move the decimal point in the reading for every increment higher than 20!

- e. Shut off the multimeter and computer every time before moving to another wire. Check each of the wires for proper voltages. A chart of all the voltages for 20-pin and 24-pin connectors is available in Chapter 2.
 - f. If one of the wires fails or gives intermittent results, first verify you have a decent connection with the multimeter leads; then see if the wire just needs to be inserted into the main motherboard connector better, and if it continues, replace the power supply. If all the wires are fine (which is doubtful), move to the next step.
4. Swap the power supply with a known good power supply. Boot the computer and watch it for several minutes or longer to see if there are any strange and intermittent occurrences.

Remember that sometimes connections can be jarred loose inside and outside the computer. Check the IEC cord on both ends and all power connections inside the computer. This includes the main motherboard connector, Molex, mini, SATA, and PCIe connectors. Any one loose connector can have interesting results on your computer!

Heating and Cooling

Another thing to watch for is system overheating. This can happen for several reasons:

- ▶ Power supply fan failure
- ▶ Auxiliary case fan failure
- ▶ Inadequate amount of fans

- ▶ Missing or open slot covers
- ▶ Case isn't tightly closed and screwed in

Air flow is important on today's computers because processors can typically operate at 3 gflops. That creates a lot of heat. Add to that the fact that the video card and other cards have their own on-board processors, it can get hot inside the computer case. Circulation is the key word here. Air should flow in the case from the front and be exhausted out the back. Any openings in the case or missing slot covers can cause circulation to diminish. If you have a computer that has a lot of devices, or does a lot of processing, or runs hot for any other reason, your best bet is to install a case fan in the front of the case, which pulls air into the case, and a second case fan in the back of the case, which with the power supply fan helps to exhaust hot air out the back. Also, try to keep the computer in a relatively cool area and leave space for the computer to expel its hot air! Of course there are other special considerations and options, such as liquid cooling, and special processor cooling methods, such as the Intel Chassis Air Guide, but they are not covered in the A+ exam.

Cram Quiz

Answer these questions. The answers follow the last question. If you cannot answer these questions correctly, consider reading this section again until you can.

1. Which device tests multiple wires of a power supply at the same time?
 - A. Multimeter
 - B. Power supply tester
 - C. Line conditioner
 - D. Surge protector
2. Which power connector would be used to power an IDE hard drive?
 - A. Molex
 - B. mini
 - C. P1
 - D. P8/P9
3. Which of the following uses a 24-pin main motherboard power connector?
 - A. ATX
 - B. ATX 12V 1.3
 - C. ATX 12V 2.0
 - D. ATX 5V 2.0

4. The red wire in a Molex connection is rated for what voltage?
- A. 12 volts
 - B. 5 volts
 - C. 3.3 volts
 - D. 24 volts

Cram Quiz Answers

1. **B.** The power supply tester tests 3.3V, 5V, -5V, 12V, and -12V simultaneously. A multimeter tests only one wire at a time. Line conditioners and surge protectors are preventative devices, not testing devices.
 2. **A.** Molex connectors power IDE devices. Mini connectors are for floppy drives, P1 is a name used for the main motherboard connector, and P8/P9 are legacy main power connectors for AT systems.
 3. **C.** ATX 12V 2.0 combined the 20-pin and 4-pin connectors used in ATX 12V 1.3 into one 24-pin connector.
 4. **B.** The red wire is rated for 5 volts. The yellow wire is rated for 12 volts and 3.3 volts is associated with the main motherboard connector (to feed the processor); 24 volts is not involved in the devices we discussed in this chapter.
-

Additional Reading and Resources

Additional A+ resources: <http://www.davidlprorowse.com/aplus>.

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Power Supply Calculator from Journey Systems:
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Index

NUMBERS

#1-TuffTEST, 168

3G, 432

4G, 432

**32-bit CPU (central processing units),
58**

**64-bit CPU (central processing units),
58**

220-701 CompTIA A+ practice exam

answers, 524-535

questions, 503-523

220-702 CompTIA A+ practice exam

answers, 558-570

questions, 537-557

802.11 wireless, 433

802.3ab standard, 408

802.3u standard, 408

802.3z standard, 408

A

AC (alternating current) outlets, 104

electrical safety, 482

regulating output, 107

testing, 105-108

Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP), 338**Acronis True Image, 290****actions, documenting (six-step troubleshooting process), 13**

display issue example, 17

power issue example, 18

Add/Remove Snap-ins window, 208**addresses**

IP addresses, 401

private addresses, 405

public addresses, 405

administrative privileges, 208**administrative shares, 470****administrative tools, 207-208****ADSL (Asymmetrical Digital Subscriber Line), 431****Advanced Boot Options menu, 266-267****adware, 460****AGP (Accelerated Graphics Port) buses, 31-33, 338****AMD, CPU (central processing units), 63-64****amperage (A), 104****AMR (audio/modem riser) buses, 32****answers (practice exams)**

practice exam 1, 524-535

practice exam 2, 558-570

antimalware, 445

HDD (hard disk drives) maintenance, 141, 263

updates, 263

antistatic devices

ESD (electrostatic discharges), 485

wrist straps, 19, 484

antivirus software, 461-464**APIPA (automatic private IP addressing), 402****applications, 200**

network connectivity, troubleshooting, 426-427

Windows applications

Command Prompt, 206

Computer, 203-204

Control Panel, 205

Network, 206

Windows Explorer, 204-205

Archive file attribute, 468**aspect ratio, 353****asymmetric key encryption, 476****Asymmetrical Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL), 431****attrib command, 469****ATX (Advanced Technology Extended)**

motherboards, 24, 35-37

power supplies, 116-117

audio

clusters, 34

laptop audio subsystems, 315-316

overview, 361

quality of, 364-365

sound cards, 361-364

speakers, installing, 363

authentication

biometrics, 456

BIOS security, 454-455

definition of, 444

logon process, 451-453

passwords

changing, 450

password policy, 450-451

strong passwords, 449

smart cards, 455

UAC (User Account Control), 453-454

usernames, 449

automatic private IP addressing (APIPA), 402
Automatic Updates, 461
AV (antivirus) software, 461-464

B

backups, 445. See also restore points
 Backup Status and Configuration (Windows Vista), 260
 HDD (hard disk drives)
 Windows Vista, 260
 Windows XP, 261

bar code readers, 373

Basic Rate ISDN (BRI), 432

batteries
 CMOS batteries, 39, 42
 disposal of, 487
 laptops, 319
 lithium batteries, 39, 42

Belarc Advisor, 168, 186

biometrics, 373, 456

BIOS (Basic Input Output System), 39, 45
 accessing, 40
 configuring, 40-41
 downloading, 43
 flashing, 43-44
 identifying version of, 43
 passwords, resetting, 42
 POST (power-on self-tests), 40
 security, 454-455
 Setup utility, 40-41
 troubleshooting
 memory errors, 99
 motherboard-related issues, 50
 updating, 43, 263

blackouts, 110

blank paper (printers), troubleshooting, 393

Blu-Ray data storage, 154

Blue Screen of Death (BSOD), 284-286

Bluetooth, 323, 433-434

Boot Device Priority (BIOS boot order), BIOS configuration, 41

boot disks, 145

boot errors, 271-273

boot files, 236

boot sector viruses, 459

"BOOTMGR is missing" error message, 271

bootrec command, 297

bootstrapping
 BIOS (Basic Input Output System), 39-40
 POST (power-on self-tests), 40

botnets, 460

BRI (Basic Rate ISDN), 432

brownouts, 110

BSOD (Blue Screen of Death), 99, 284-286

BTX (Balanced Technology Extended)
 motherboards, 36-37
 power supplies, 118

buses. See also PC cards
 AGP (Accelerated Graphics Port) buses, 31-33
 AMR (audio/modem riser) buses, 32
 CNR (Communications and Networking Riser) buses, 32
 FSB (Front Side Buses), 28, 57
 IDE (Integrated Drive Electronics) buses, 28-29, 42
 memory buses, 28
 PCI (Peripheral Component Interconnect) buses, 29, 32

- PCI Express x16 Interface, 28
- PCIe (Peripheral Component Interconnect Express) buses, 31-33
- SATA (Serial ATA) buses, 29
- speed ratings, 28

C

cable

- cable Internet, 431
- interference
 - EMI (electromagnetic interference), 488
 - RFI radio frequency interference), 488
- physical safety, 486

cable select drive configurations (PATA), 135

caches

- CPU, 60-61
- HDD (hard disk drives), 138

cameras

- digital cameras, 373
- web cameras, 373

CAS (Column Address Strobe) latency, RAM, 90

case fans, 65-66

cathode ray tube (CRT), 348

causes (problem identification process)

- establishing theory of probable cause, 11
 - display issue example, 15-16
 - power issue example, 17
- testing theory of probable cause, 12
 - display issue example, 16
 - power issue example, 17

CD-ROMs

- data storage, 149-150
- installing
 - Windows Vista, 169
 - Windows XP, 186

CD-Rs, 150

CD-RWs, 150

CDs (Compact Discs), data storage, 149-150, 153

cellular connectivity, 432

Cellular WAN, 323

CF (CompactFlash) cards, 161

changes to computers, identifying (problem identification process), 11

cheat sheets (exam preparation), 497-498

chipsets, 29

- ICH (I/O Controller Hubs), 26
 - bus connections, 28
 - IDE buses, 28-29
 - SATA buses, 29
- IOH (Input/Output Hubs), 26
- MCH (Memory Controller Hubs), 26, 80
- video card chipsets, 342

chkdsk command, 293-294

Class A networks, 404

Class B networks, 404

Class C networks, 404

Class D networks, 404

Class E networks, 404

Classic mode, reverting to, 225

clean power, 107

cleanup programs, HDD (hard disk drives) maintenance, 140, 258-259

clear speaking, 490

clearing data, 445

clock rates, 56-57

CMOS (complimentary metal-oxide semiconductors), 39, 42

CNR (Communications and Networking Riser) buses, 32

coaxial cable, 419

color depth, 350-351

Command Prompt, 206, 221, 238-239, 270, 293

command-line interface, opening, 421

communication skills, developing, 490-492

compatibility

DRAM (dynamic random-access memory), 98

power supplies, 116-117

printer installation, 385

Component Video, 340

compression, 468

CompTIA A+

220-701 practice exam

answers, 524-535

questions, 503-523

220-702 practice exam

answers, 558-570

questions, 537-557

post certification development, 501

Computer Management, starting/stopping services, 220

Computer window, 203-204

comsetup.log, 193

configuring

BIOS, 40-41, 455

IPv4, 400-403

network adapters, 406-408

password policy, 450-451

printers, 386

managing print jobs, 387

managing printer permissions, 391

pooling printers, 390

print spooling options, 388-389

separator pages, 392

setting printer priority, 387-388

sharing printers, 391

XPS (XML Paper Specification) feature (Windows Vista), 390

video settings

color depth, 350-351

drivers, 349-350

Multiple Monitor (DualView), 356-357

OSD (on-screen display), 355-356

refresh rate, 354-355

resolution, 351-354

Windows

administrative tools, 207-208

boot files, 236

directory structure, 235

file systems, 244

formatting disks, 240-243

Indexing service, 237-238

MMC (Microsoft Management Console), 208

mounting disks, 244-245

overview, 197

partitioning disks, 240-243

power management, 222-223

RAID disks, 245-247

starting/stopping services, 220-221

user customizations, 225-226

user migration, 223-225

consumables, 380

continuity testers, 417

Control Panel, 205

convert command, 294

cooling

- power supplies, 127

cooling systems

- fans, 65-66

- heat sinks, 64

- liquid cooling systems, 66

- power supplies, 127

- TIM (thermal interface material), 65

copy command, 297**copying folders, 475****CPU (central processing units), 55, 67-68**

- 32-bit CPU, 58

- 64-bit CPU, 58

- AMD CPU, 63-64

- caches, 60-61

- clock rates, 56-57

- cooling systems

- fans, 65-66

- heat sinks, 64

- liquid cooling systems, 66

- thermal compound (TIM), 65

- function of, 56

- HT (Hyper-Threading), 61

- installing

- ESD prevention, 69

- LGA sockets, 70

- motherboard preparation, 69

- PGA sockets, 72

- testing installations, 72-73

- Intel CPU, 63-64

- memory controller integration, 80

- multi-core CPU, 61

- power consumption, 62

- RAM access, 80

- sockets, 58-59

- compatibility, 60

- LGA sockets, 70

- PGA sockets, 72

- TDP (thermal design points), 62

- troubleshooting, 74-76

CPU-Z, testing CPU installations, 73**CRT (cathode ray tube), 348****Ctrl+Alt+Del login functionality, 452****customers, listening to (professionalism), 490****customizing user environment, 225-226****D****data backups, 445****data removal, 445****data security**

- data security technologies, 444-446

- data sensitivity, 446-447

- security compliance, 447

- threats, 444-445

data sensitivity, 446-447**data storage**

- Blu-Ray, 154

- CD-ROMs, 149-150

- CD-Rs, 150

- CD-RWs, 150

- CDs (Compact Discs), 149-150, 153

- CF (CompactFlash) cards, 161

- DVD (Digital Versatile Discs), 151-153

- floppy disk drives, 143-145

- HDD (hard disk drives)

- antimalware, 141

- backups, 260-261

- caches, 138

- cleanup programs, 140, 258-259

- components of, 132

- data transfer rates, 137

- defragging, 141, 259

- determining drive specifications, 137-138
- installing, 139
- latency, 138
- manually deleting Internet files, 258
- manually deleting temporary files, 258
- NAS (Network Attached Storage), 143
- PATA (Parallel ATA), 133-135
- preventive maintenance, 140-141, 258-259, 262-264
- restore points, 261
- rotational speeds, 138
- SATA (Serial ATA), 135-136, 140
- SCSI (Small Computer System Interface), 138-139
- troubleshooting, 141-143
- Ultra ATA hard drives, 139
- magnetic storage media, 132-147
- optical storage media, 149-155
- SD (Secure Digital) cards, 159
- SDIO (Secure Digital Input Output) cards, 160
- solid-state storage media, 156-162
- tape drives, 145
- USB flash drives, 156-158
- data transfer rates, HDD (hard disk drives), 137**
- date/time, BIOS configuration, 41**
- DC (direct current), 104**
- DDR (Double Data Rate), 84-85**
- DDR2 (Double Data Rate 2), 86**
- DDR3 (Double Data Rate 3), 87**
- DDR4 (Double Data Rate 4), 88**
- Debugging Mode option (Advanced Boot Options menu), 267**
- defragging HDD (hard disk drives), 141, 259, 295**
- degaussing, 356**
- deleting**
 - Internet files from HDD (hard disk drives), 258
 - temporary files from HDD (hard disk drives), 258
- desktop, 198**
- destroying data, 446**
- Device Manager, 212-213, 276-279**
- dial-up connectivity, 430**
- digital cameras, 373**
- digital optical ports, 362**
- digital signatures, 214**
- digital subscriber line (DSL), 431**
- Digital Visual Interface (DVI), 340**
- direct-sequence spread spectrum (DSSS), 433**
- Directory Services Restore Mode option (Advanced Boot Options menu), 267**
- directory structure for Windows Vista, 235**
- dirty power, 107**
- Disable automatic system on system failure option (Advanced Boot Options menu), 267**
- Disable driver signature enforcement option (Advanced Boot Options menu), 267**
- disabling**
 - fast user switching, 451
 - visual effects, 225
 - Welcome screen, 451
- Disk Cleanup program, HDD (hard disk drives), 140, 258-259**
- Disk Defragmenter, 259**
- disk images, installing**
 - Windows Vista from, 170
 - Windows XP from, 187
- Disk Management, 240-243**

diskpart command

diskpart command, 295

disks

- formatting, 240-243
- mounting, 244-245
- partitioning, 240-243
- RAID, 245-247

displays

- controls, 310-311
- CRT, 348
- LCD, 347-348
- projectors, 348-349
- troubleshooting, 15-16, 19

disposal of hardware/equipment, safety, 487-488

distractions, avoiding (professionalism), 491

docking stations, 321

documentation

- findings/solutions (six-step troubleshooting process), 13
 - display issue example, 17
 - power issue example, 18
- motherboards
 - installing, 25-26
 - Technical Product Specification PDF, 27
- MSDS (material safety data sheets), 487
- reviewing (problem identification process), 11

double-sided memory modules, 90

Downlevel phase (Vista installation), 178

downloading

- BIOS (Basic Input Output System), 43
- updates, 461

Dr. Watson, 282

DRAM (dynamic random-access memory), 82

- compatibility, 98
- installing, 94-96
- RDRAM (Rambus DRAM), 88
- SDRAM (synchronous DRAM), 82-83
- troubleshooting, 98-101

Driver Signing, 214

drwtsn32 command, 282

DSL (digital subscriber line), 431

DSSS (direct-sequence spread spectrum), 433

dual channel RAM (random access memory), 89

DualView, 312-313, 356-357

duplex settings, 407

DVD-ROMs, installing Windows Vista from, 169

DVDs (Digital Versatile Discs), data storage, 151-153

DVI (Digital Visual Interface), 340

DxDiag, 214-215

dynamic IP addresses, 401

E

Easy Transfer, 224

ECC (Error Correction Code), RAM, 91

edit command, 296-297

EEPROM (Electrically Erasable Programmable ROM) chips, 39

EFS (Encrypting File System), 244, 476-478

electrical safety

- AC outlets, 482
- ESD (electrostatic discharge), 484-486

- monitors
 - CRT monitors, 482-483
 - LCD monitors, 483
- power supplies, 482
- printers, 483
- surge protectors, 484
- UPS (uninterruptible power supplies), 484
- EMI (electromagnetic interference), 488**
- Enable Boot Logging option (Advanced Boot Options menu), 267**
- Enable low-resolution video (640x480) option (Advanced Boot Options menu), 267**
- Encrypting File System (EFS), 244, 476-478**
- encryption, 445**
 - asymmetric key encryption, 476
 - definition of, 475
 - in Windows, 476-478
 - symmetric key encryption, 476
 - wireless encryption, 437
- ergonomics, 487**
- errors**
 - boot errors, 271-273
 - error messages
 - “BOOTMGR is missing,” 271
 - “Invalid boot.ini,” 273
 - “NTDETECT failed,” 273
 - “NTLDR is missing,” 273
 - “The Windows Boot Configuration Data file is missing required information,” 272
 - reporting, 286-287
 - stop errors, 284-286
- ESD (electrostatic discharges), 18-19, 484-486**
 - CPU installation, 69
 - DRAM installations, 95
 - troubleshooting, 50

Ethernet, 322, 408

Event Viewer, 280-282

exams

- 220-701 CompTIA A+ practice exam
 - answers, 524-535
 - questions, 503-523
- 220-702 CompTIA A+ practice exam
 - answers, 558-570
 - questions, 537-557
- post certification development, 501-502
- preparing for
 - cheat sheets, 497-498
 - exam day tips/tricks, 498-500
 - exam preparation checklist, 495-497
 - scheduling exams, 495, 498

expand command, 297

expansion buses, 338-339. See also PC cards

- AGP (Accelerated Graphics Port), 31-33
- AMR (audio/modem riser), 32
- CNR (Communications and Networking Riser), 32
- PCI (Peripheral Component Interconnect), 29, 32
- PCIe (Peripheral Component Interconnect Express), 31-33

expectations, setting/meeting (professionalism), 490

external clock speeds, 57

F

fans (cooling systems), 65-66, 124

FAST (Files and Settings Transfer Wizard), 224

fast user switching, disabling, 451

FAT16, 244

FAT32, 244**FDISK/MBR command, 463****File Transfer Protocol (FTP), 413****files**

- boot files, 236
- comsetup.log, 193
- file systems, 244
- hidden files, 469
- indexing, 237-238
- miglog.xml, 179
- NetSetup.log, 193
- PostGatherPnPList.log, 179
- PreGatherPnPList.log, 179
- security
 - definition of, 468
 - file attributes, 468
 - folder sharing, 469-475
 - hidden files, 469
- setup.log, 192
- setupact.log, 179, 192
- setupapi.app.log, 179
- setupapi.dev.log, 179
- setupapi.log, 192
- setuperr.log, 179, 192
- setuplog.txt, 192
- Windows Vista installation log files, 179
- Windows XP installation log files, 192
- Winsat.log, 179

Files and Settings Transfer (FAST) Wizard, 224**findings, documenting (six-step troubleshooting process), 13**

- display issue example, 17
- power issue example, 18

firewalls

- updates, HDD (hard disk drive) maintenance, 263
- Windows Firewall, 427, 462

FireWire, 371**FireWire (IEEE 1394a) ports, 33****FIXBOOT command, 298****/fixboot option (bootrec command), 297****FIXMBR command, 298, 463****/fixmbr option (bootrec command), 298****flash drives, 156-158****flashing BIOS (Basic Input Output System), 43-44, 455****Flickr, 354****floppy disk drives, 143-145****folders**

- copying, 475
- moving, 475
- sharing, 469-475

format command, 295**formatting**

- disks, 240-243
- USB flash drives, 158

front panel ports, 34**FRU (field replaceable units), power supplies as, 482****FSB (Front Side Buses), 28, 57****FTP (File Transfer Protocol), 413****full-duplex, 407****function keys, 304-305****functionality, verifying (six-step troubleshooting process), 12-13**

- display issue example, 16
- power issue example, 18

fuses (power supplies), troubleshooting, 124

G - H

garbage printouts, troubleshooting, 394

gateway addresses, 402

Ghost, 290

ghosted images (printers), troubleshooting, 394

GPF (general protection faults), troubleshooting, 100

GPU (graphics processor units), 310, 342

half-duplex, 407

hard drives. See HDD (hard disk drives)

hard faults (page faults), troubleshooting, 100

hardware

compatibility

Windows Vista, 168

Windows XP, 186

disposal of, 487-488

recycling, 487-488

requirements

Windows Vista, 167-168

Windows XP, 185

hash algorithms, 476

HD (high definition), 310

HDD (hard disk drives), 132

antimalware, 141

backups

Windows Vista, 260

Windows XP, 261

caches, 138

cleanup programs, 140, 258-259

components of, 132

data transfer rates, 137

defragging, 141, 259

installing, 139-140

Internet files, deleting manually, 258

laptop hard drives, 328-329

latency, 138

NAS (Network Attached Storage), 143

PATA (Parallel ATA), 133-135

preventive maintenance, 140-141, 258-259, 262-264

restore points, 261

rotational speeds, 138

SATA (Serial ATA), 135-136, 140

SCSI (Small Computer System Interface), 138-139

specifications, determining, 137-138

temporary files, deleting manually, 258

troubleshooting, 141-143

Ultra ATA hard drives, installing, 139

HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface), 340

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), 447

heat

heat sinks, 64

hot components, physical safety, 486

heavy items, physical safety, 486

hibernation, 222

hidden files, 468-469

high definition (HD), 310

High-Definition Multimedia Interface (HDMI), 340

HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), 447

hives (Registry), 227

HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT Registry hive, 227

HKEY_CURRENT_CONFIG Registry hive

HKEY_CURRENT_CONFIG Registry hive, 227

HKEY_CURRENT_USER Registry hive, 227

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE Registry hive, 227

HKEY_USERS Registry hive, 227

hot components, physical safety, 486

hot docking, 322

hot swappable devices, removing, 216

HT (Hyper-Threading), 61

HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol), 413

hubs, 408

I

i.Link (IEEE 1394a) ports, 33

I/O (input/output) ports, 33

ICH (I/O Controller Hubs), 26-29

icons, 199

IDE (Integrated Drive Electronics) buses, 28-29, 42

identifying

changes to computers (problem identification process), 11

problems (six-step troubleshooting process), 10-11

display issue example, 15

power issue example, 17

IEEE 1394 ports, 371

IEEE 1394a (FireWire/i.Link) ports, 33

impact printers, 382

impedance, 104

Indexing service, 237-238

Infrared, 323

inheritance, permissions, 474

ink/toner cartridges

disposal of, 488

laser printers, 380

inkjet printers, 381

input devices (laptops), 372-373

function keys, 304-305

keyboards, 304-308

pointing devices, 309

stylus, 309

installing

CPU (central processing units)

ESD prevention, 69

LGA sockets, 70

motherboard preparation, 69

PGA sockets, 72

testing installations, 72-73

DRAM (dynamic random-access memory), 94-96

floppy disk drives, 144

HDD (hard disk drives), 139-140

laptop memory, 330-331

motherboards, 25-26, 46-47

power supplies, 122-123

printers, 385-386

snap-ins, 208

sockets

LGA sockets, 70

PGA sockets, 72

sound cards, 363-364

speakers, 363

video cards, 343-346

Windows Vista

installation methods, 169-170

partitions, creating, 174-175

step-by-step installation process, 171-173

Windows XP

installation methods, 186-188

step-by-step installation process, 188-191

Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), 432**Intel, CPU (central processing units), 63-64****interference**

EMI (electromagnetic interference), 488

RFI (radio frequency interference), 488

internal clock speeds, 57**Internet files, manually deleting from HDD (hard disk drives), 258****“Invalid boot.ini” error message, 273****inverter boards, 314-315****IOH (Input/Output Hubs), 26****IP addresses, configuring, 401****ipconfig command, 421-422****IPv4**

Classes, 403-405

configuring, 400-403

IrDA wireless ports, 323**ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network), 432****J - K - L****jams (paper), troubleshooting, 392-393****jump drives, 156-158****keyboards, 373**

function keys, 304-305

laptop keyboards, 304-308

KVM Switches, 373**LANs (local area networks), 410****laptops**

audio subsystem, 315-316

communications, 322-323

components, 304

CPUs, 331-333

expansion devices, 320-322

function keys, 304-305

hard drives, 328-329

keyboards, 304-308

memory, 329-331

optical discs, 316

overview, 301-302

pointing devices, 309

ports, 303

power, 316-319

stylus, 309

system board, 331-333

video subsystem

display controls, 310-311

DualView, 312-313

GPU, 310

LCD, 310

resolutions, 310

troubleshooting, 314-315

laser printers, 378

advantages of, 380

electrical safety, 483

printing process, 379-380

toner cartridges, 380

Last Known Good Configuration option (Advanced Boot Options menu), 267**latency, 90, 138, 407****LCD (liquid crystal displays), 310, 314, 347-348, 483****LGA (Land Grid Array) sockets, 59, 70****lines/smearing (printers), troubleshooting, 393****liquid cooling systems, 66****listening to customers (professionalism), 490**

lithium batteries

lithium batteries, 318-319

BIOS password resets, 42

CMOS, 39

local area networks (LANs), 410

Local Group Policy Editor, 451

local printers, 383

log files

Windows Vista installation log files, 179

Windows XP installation log files, 192

logic, using while troubleshooting, 19

logon process, security, 451-453

loose connections, troubleshooting, 306

Love Bug virus, 458

low on virtual memory errors, troubleshooting, 100

lumens, 348

M

macro viruses, 459

magnetic storage media, 146-147

floppy disk drives, 143-145

HDD (hard disk drives), 132

antimalware, 141

backups, 260-261

caches, 138

cleanup programs, 140, 258-259

components of, 132

data transfer rates, 137

defragging, 141, 259

determining drive specifications, 137-138

installing, 139

latency, 138

manually deleting Internet files, 258

manually deleting temporary files, 258

NAS (Network Attached Storage), 143

PATA (Parallel ATA), 133-135

preventive maintenance, 140-141, 258-259, 262-264

restore points, 261

rotational speeds, 138

SATA (Serial ATA), 135-136, 140

SCSI (Small Computer System Interface), 138-139

troubleshooting, 141-143

Ultra ATA hard drives, 139

tape drives, 145

maintenance, HDD (hard disk drives), 140-141, 258-259, 262-264

malware, 444

definition of, 458

spyware, 460, 464-466

trojan horses, 460

viruses, 458-464

worms, 459

managing

devices with

Device Manager, 212-213

Driver Signing, 214

DxDiag, 214-215

System Information Tool, 214

power, 222-223

printers

print jobs, 387

printer permissions, 391

master drive configurations (PATA), 134

mATX (microATX) motherboards, 36-37

MCH (Memory Controller Hubs), 26

memory

- laptop memory, 329-331
- low on virtual memory errors, troubleshooting, 100
- memory buses, 28
- memory controllers, 80
- out of memory errors, troubleshooting, 100, 393
- RAM (random-access memory), 79, 92-93
 - CPU access to, 80
 - DDR, 84-85
 - DDR2, 86
 - DDR3, 87
 - DDR4, 88
 - double-sided memory modules, 90
 - DRAM (dynamic random-access memory), 82, 94-101
 - dual channel RAM, 89
 - ECC (Error Correction Code), 91
 - memory latency, 90
 - nonparity, 90-91
 - parity, 90
 - RDRAM, 88
 - SDRAM, 82-83
 - single channel RAM, 88-89
 - single-sided memory modules, 90
 - SRAM (static random-access memory), 81-82
 - volatile RAM, 81
- ROM (read-only memory), 82
- USB flash drives, 158
- video card memory, 342
- virtual memory, 100, 219-220
- microATX (Advanced Technology Extended)**
 - motherboards, 36-37
 - power supplies, 118

microphones, 373**microprocessors. See CPU (central processing units)****Microsoft Challenge-Handshake Authentication Protocol (MS-CHAP), 478****Microsoft Management Console (MMC), 208****Microsoft System Configuration Utility. See Msconfig****MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), 373****miglog.xml, 179****migrating user data, 223-225****MMC (Microsoft Management Console), 208****modems, 323****monitors**

- CRT monitors, 482-483
- electrical safety, 482-483
- LCD monitors, 310, 314, 347-348, 483
- troubleshooting, 15-16, 19

motherboards, 23, 38

- ATX (Advanced Technology Extended) motherboards, 24, 35-37
- BTX (Balanced Technology Extended) motherboards, 36-37
- buses. *See also* PC cards
 - AGP (Accelerated Graphics Port), 31-33
 - AMR (audio/modem riser), 32
 - CNR (Communications and Networking Riser), 32
 - DSB (Front Side Buses), 28
 - expansion buses, 29-33
 - IDE (Integrated Drive Electronics), 28-29, 42
 - memory buses, 28
 - parallel buses, 28-29

PCI (Peripheral Component Interconnect), 29, 32
 PCI Express x16 Interface, 28
 PCIe (Peripheral Component Interconnect Express), 31-33
 SATA (Serial ATA), 29
 speed ratings, 28

chipsets, 29

ICH (I/O Controller Hubs), 26-28

IOH (Input/Output Hubs), 26

MCH (Memory Controller Hubs), 26, 80

clock speeds, 57

CPU

installation, 69

socket compatibility, 59-60

documentation

installations, 25-26

Technical Product Specification PDF, 27

DRAM installations, 95

front panel ports, 34

I/O (input/output) ports, 33

installing, 25-26, 46-47

main components of, 24

microATX (mATX) motherboards, 36-37

NLX (New Low Profile Extended) motherboards, 36-37

troubleshooting, 47-52

mounting drives, 244-245

mouse devices, 373

moving folders, 475

MS-CHAP (Microsoft Challenge-Handshake Authentication Protocol), 478

Msconfig, 218-219, 284

MSDS (material safety data sheets), 487

multi-core CPU (central processing units), 61

multimeters

AC outlet tests, 106-108

testing power supplies, 126

multipartite viruses, 459

Multiple Monitor technology, 313, 356-357

Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI), 373

My Computer, 203-204

N

NAS (Network Attached Storage), 143

native resolution, 347

net command, 425-426

NetSetup.log, 193

netstat command, 424-425

network adapters, 406-408, 434-439

network installations

Windows Vista, 169

Windows XP, 187

network interface cards (NIC), 400

Network window, 206

networking

cables, 416-419

EMI (electromagnetic interference), 488

hubs, 408

IPv4

Classes, 403-405

configuring, 400-403

LANs (local area networks), 410

latency, 407

network adapters, 406-408

NIC (network interface cards), 400

overview, 399-400

- ports, 411-414
 - printers, 383
 - proxy servers, 409
 - repeaters, 408
 - routers, 409
 - SOHO (small office home office)
 - networks
 - 802.11 wireless, 433
 - Bluetooth, 433-434
 - cable Internet, 431
 - cellular, 432
 - dial-up, 430
 - DSL (digital subscriber line), 431
 - ISDN, 432
 - overview, 430
 - port forwarding, 438
 - port triggering, 438
 - routers, 434-439
 - satellite connectivity, 431
 - wireless network adapters, 434-439
 - switches, 409
 - troubleshooting network connectivity with
 - applications, 426-427
 - ipconfig, 421-422
 - net, 425-426
 - netstat, 424-425
 - nslookup, 425
 - ping, 422-423
 - tracert, 423-424
 - VPNs (virtual private networks), 410
 - WANs (wide area networks), 410
 - WAPs (wireless access points), 409
 - NIC (network interface card), 400**
 - NLX (New Low Profile Extended)**
 - motherboards, 36-37
 - power supplies, 118
 - nodes, 405**
 - nonparity, RAM, 90-91**
 - northbridge. See MCH (Memory Controller Hubs)**
 - nslookup command, 425**
 - NTBackup (Windows XP), 261**
 - “NTDETECT failed” error message, 273**
 - NTFS, 244, 471**
 - “NTLDR is missing” error message, 273**
-
- O**
- OFDM (orthogonal frequency-division multiplexing), 433**
 - ohms, 104**
 - on-screen display (OSD), 355-356**
 - Online configuration phase (Vista installation), 179**
 - optical discs, 316**
 - optical storage media, 155**
 - Blu-Ray, 154
 - CD-ROMs, 149-150
 - CD-Rs, 150
 - CD-RWs, 150
 - CDs, 149-150, 153
 - DVD (Digital Versatile Discs), 151-153
 - OS (operating systems), optimizing with**
 - Msconfig, 218-219
 - power management, 222-223
 - Task Manager, 216-218
 - virtual memory, 219-220
 - OSD (on-screen display), 355-356**
 - out of memory errors, troubleshooting, 100, 393**

outcomes, documenting (six-step troubleshooting process)

outcomes, documenting (six-step troubleshooting process), 13

display issue example, 17

power issue example, 18

outlets (power). See also power, power strips

AC outlets, 105-108

electrical safety, 482

Outlook (MS), 426

overheating power supplies, 127

P

page faults (hard faults), troubleshooting, 100

page printers, 378

paper, troubleshooting

blank paper printing errors, 393

jams, 392-393

parallel buses

IDE (Integrated Drive Electronics), 28-29, 42

SATA (Serial ATA), 29

parallel ports, 372

parity, RAM, 90

partitioning disks, 240-247

partitions, creating during Windows Vista installation, 174-175

passwords

BIOS, 42

changing, 450

password policy, 450-451

strong passwords, 449

PATA (Parallel ATA) hard drives, 133-135

patch testers, 417

PC Cards, 32. See also expansion buses

PC Check, 168

PC Diagnostic tools, 168

PCI (Peripheral Component Interconnect) buses, 29, 32, 338

PCI Express x16 Interface, 28

PCIe (PCI Express), 338

PCIe (Peripheral Component Interconnect Express) buses, 31-33

PCMCIA (Personal Computer Memory Card International Association), PC Cards, 32

percentage signs (%), 205

Performance tool, 282-284

Peripheral Component Interconnect (PCI), 338

peripherals, 372-373

monitors

CRT monitors, 482-483

electrical safety, 482-483

LCD monitors, 310, 314, 347-348, 483

troubleshooting, 15-16, 19

printers, 377, 384

configuring, 386-392

consumables, 380

electrical safety, 483

impact printers, 382

ink/toner cartridges, 380, 488

inkjet printers, 381

installing, 385-386

laser printers, 378-380, 483

local printers, 383

network printers, 383

page printers, 378

thermal printers, 382

troubleshooting, 392-397

permissions

inheritance and propagation, 474

NTFS permissions, 471

PGA (Pin Grid Array) sockets, 59, 72

physical safety

- cable, 486
- ergonomics, 487
- heavy items, 486
- hot components, 486

piezoelectric inkjet printers, 381

ping command, 422-423

pixel dimensions, 351

plans of action, establishing (six-step troubleshooting process), 12

- display issue example, 16
- power issue example, 18

pointing devices, 309

polymorphic viruses, 459

pooling printers, 390

POP3 (Post Office Protocol Version 3), 413

ports, 411-414

- audio clusters, 34
- definition of, 368
- digital optical ports, 362
- forwarding, 438
- front panel ports, 34
- I/O (input/output) ports, 33
- IEEE 1394, 371
- IEEE 1394a (FireWire/i.Link) ports, 33
- laptop ports, 303
- port replicators, 322
- PS/2, 372
- RJ45 LAN ports, 34
- serial versus parallel, 372
- Sony/Phillips Digital Interconnect Format (S/PDIF), 362
- triggering, 438
- USB (Universal Serial Bus) ports, 33, 368-371

positive outlook, maintaining (professionalism), 490

POST (power-on self-tests), 40

Post Office Protocol Version 3 (POP3), 413

PostGatherPnPList.log, 179

power, 103, 115

- AC (alternating current) outlets, 104
 - electrical safety, 482
 - regulating output, 107
 - testing, 105-108

amperage (A), 104

blackouts, 110

brownouts, 110

clean power, 107

consumption, CPU (central processing units), 62

DC (direct current), 104

dirty power, 107

impedence, 104

managing, 42, 222-223

ohms, 104

power connectors, 119-120

power strips, 110-111

power supplies, 128-129

ATX form factor, 116-117

BTX form factor, 118

capacity requirements, 118-119

compatibility, 116-117

cooling, 127

electrical safety, 482

FRU (field replaceable units), 482

installing, 122-123

laptops, 316-319

microATX form factor, 118

NLX form factor, 118

overheating, 127

power connectors, 119-120

power

- testing, 126
- troubleshooting, 123-127
- wattage (W), 118-119

- sags, 110

- spikes, 110

- surge protectors, 110-112

- troubleshooting, 17-19

- UPS (uninterruptible power supplies), 112-113

- voltage (V), 104, 110

- wattage (W), 104, 118-119

practice exams

- 220-701 CompTIA A+ practice exam

- answers, 524-535

- questions, 503-523

- 220-702 CompTIA A+ practice exam

- answers, 558-570

- questions, 537-557

PreGatherPnPList.log, 179**preparing for exams**

- cheat sheets, 497-498

- exam day tips/tricks, 498-500

- exam preparation checklist, 495-497

- scheduling exams, 495, 498

preventive maintenance

- HDD (hard disk drives), 140-141, 258-259, 262-264

- spyware, 464-466

- viruses, 461-464

printers, 377, 383-384

- calibrating, 386

- compatibility, 385

- configuring, 386

- managing print jobs, 387

- managing printer permissions, 391

- pooling printers, 390

- print spooling options, 388-389

- separator pages, 392

- setting printer priority, 387-388

- sharing printers, 391

- XPS (XML Paper Specification) feature (Windows Vista), 390

- consumables, 380

- driver installation, 385

- impact printers, 382

- ink/toner cartridges, 380, 488

- inkjet printers, 381

- installing, 385-386

- laser printers, 378-380, 483

- local printers, 383

- network printers, 383

- page printers, 378

- prioritizing, 387-388

- testing installations, 386

- thermal printers, 382

- troubleshooting, 392-397

private addresses, 405**probable cause (six-step troubleshooting process)**

- establishing theory of, 11

- display issue example, 15-16

- power issue example, 17

- testing theory of, 12

- display issue example, 16

- power issue example, 17

Problem Reports and Solutions, 282**problems, identifying (six-step troubleshooting process), 10-11**

- display issue example, 15

- power issue example, 17

professionalism, 490-492**Program Compatibility Wizard, 231****program viruses, 459****projectors, 348-349**

PROM (Programmable ROM) chips, 39
protocols

APIPA (automatic private IP addressing), 402

FTP (File Transfer Protocol), 413

HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol), 413

IPv4

Classes, 403-405

configuring, 400-403

POP3 (Post Office Protocol Version 3), 413

ports, 411-414

SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol), 413

TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol), 400

TELNET, 413

proxy servers, 409

PS/2 ports, 372

public addresses, 405

punctuality (professionalism), 490

purging data, 445

Q - R

quality of audio, 364-365

questioning users (problem identification process), 10

Quick Launch, 200

RAID (Redundant Array of Inexpensive Disks), 245-247

RAM (random-access memory), 79, 91-93

CPU access to, 80

DDR (Double Data Rate), 84-85

DDR2 (Double Data Rate 2), 86

DDR3 (Double Data Rate 3), 87

DDR4 (Double Data Rate 4), 88

double-sided memory modules, 90

DRAM (dynamic random-access memory)

compatibility, 98

installing, 94-96

RDRAM, 88

SDRAM, 82-83

troubleshooting, 98-101

dual channel RAM, 89

ECC (Error Correction Code), 91

memory latency, 90

nonparity, 90-91

parity, 90

single channel RAM, 88-89

single-sided memory modules, 90

SRAM (static random-access memory), 81-82

volatile RAM, 81

RDRAM (Rambus DRAM), 88

Read-only file attribute, 468

/rebuildbcd option (bootrec command), 298

receptacle testers, AC outlet tests, 105

Recovery Command Prompts

copy, 297

edit, 296-297

expand, 297

recovery environment commands, 297-298

Recovery Console, 270-271

recovery discs, installing

Windows Vista from, 170

Windows XP from, 188

recovery environment commands, 297-298

recycling hardware/equipment, safety

recycling hardware/equipment, safety, 487-488

Redundant Array of Inexpensive Disks (RAID), 245-247

refresh rate, 354-355

regedit command, 226

regedt32 command, 226

Regional and Language Options, 226

Registry, 226, 228

Reliability and Performance Monitor, 282-284

Remote Assistance, 229

Remote Desktop, 229-230

removing

hot swappable devices, 216

snap-ins, 208

repair tools, 265

Advanced Boot Options menu, 266-267

Recovery Console, 270-271

WinRE (Windows Recovery Environment), 268-270

repeaters, 408

replacing

inverter boards, 314-315

laptop keyboards, 306-308

reporting errors, 286-287

resolution, 351, 354

changing, 353

laptops, 310

native resolution, 347

table of, 352

resolving problems (six-step troubleshooting process), establishing plans of action, 12

display issue example, 16

power issue example, 18

restoring Windows, 287. See also backups

restore points, 261

System Restore, 289-290

to an earlier condition, 289

Windows Vista complete PC backups, 288

Windows XP's ASR backups, 288

results, documenting (six-step troubleshooting process), 13

display issue example, 17

power issue example, 18

reviewing documentation (problem identification process), 11

RFI (radio frequency interference), 488

RJ45 LAN ports, 34

ROM (read-only memory), 39, 82

rotational speeds, HDD (hard disk drives), 138

routers, 409, 434-439

S

S-Video (Separate Video), 340

S/PDIF (Sony/Phillips Digital Interconnect Format) port, 362

Safe Mode option, 266, 465

Safe Mode with Command Prompt option (Advanced Boot Options menu), 266

Safe Mode with Networking option (Advanced Boot Options menu), 266

Safely Remove option, 216

safety, 489

disposal of hardware/equipment, 487-488

electrical safety

AC outlets, 482

CRT monitors, 482-483

- ESD (electrostatic discharge), 484-486
- LCD monitors, 483
- power supplies, 482
- printers, 483
- surge protectors, 484
- UPS (uninterruptible power supplies), 484
- MSDS (material safety data sheets), 487
- physical safety
 - cable, 486
 - ergonomics, 487
 - heavy items, 486
 - hot components, 486
- recycling hardware/equipment, 487-488
- sags (power), 110**
- sanitizing data, 445**
- Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX), 447**
- SATA (Serial ATA) buses, 29**
- SATA (Serial ATA) hard drives, 135-136, 140**
- satellite connectivity, 431**
- Scan Line Interleave (SLI), 346**
- /ScanOS option (bootrec command), 298**
- scheduling exams, 495, 498**
- screen switching, 311**
- SCSI (Small Computer System Interface) hard drives, 138-139**
- SD (Secure Digital) cards, 159**
- SDIO (Secure Digital Input Output) cards, 160**
- SDRAM (synchronous DRAM), 82-83**
- SDSL (Symmetrical Digital Subscriber Line), 431**
- Secure Shell (SSH), 413**

security

- administrative privileges, 208
- authentication
 - biometrics, 456
 - BIOS security, 454-455
 - logon process, 451-453
 - passwords, 449-451
 - smart cards, 455
 - UAC (User Account Control), 453-454
 - usernames, 449
- compliance, 447
- data security
 - data security technologies, 444-446
 - data sensitivity, 446-447
 - security compliance, 447
 - threats, 444-445
- encryption
 - asymmetric key encryption, 476
 - definition of, 475
 - in Windows, 476-478
 - symmetric key encryption, 476
 - wireless encryption, 437
- file security
 - definition of, 468
 - file attributes, 468
 - folder sharing, 469-475
 - hidden files, 469
- malware
 - definition of, 458
 - preventing and troubleshooting, 461-466
 - spyware, 460, 464-466
 - trojan horses, 460
 - viruses, 458-464
 - worms, 459

- overview, 443

- smart cards, 456

Separate Video (S-Video), 340

separator pages (printers), 392

serial ports, 372

service packs (SP), Windows updates, 252-253

services

- Indexing services, 237-238

- starting/stopping in

- Command Prompt, 221

- Computer Management, 220

setup.log, 192

setupact.log, 179, 192

setupapi.app.log, 179

setupapi.dev.log, 179

setupapi.log, 192

setuperr.log, 179, 192

setuplog.txt, 192

SFC (System File Checker), 294

sharing

- folders

- overview, 469-470

- permission inheritance and propagation, 474

- Windows Vista, 473-474

- Windows XP, 471-472

- printers, 391

shielded twisted pair (STP), 418

Sidebar, 200

SIM (Subscriber Identity Module) cards, 160

SIM (System Image Manager), 170

Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP), 413

single channel RAM (random access memory), 88-89

single drive configurations (PATA), 134

single-sided memory modules, 90

six-step troubleshooting process, 14, 290-291

- display issue example, 15-16

- documenting solutions, 13

- display issue example, 17

- power issue example, 18

- establishing plans of action, 12

- display issue example, 16

- power issue example, 18

- establishing theory of probable cause, 11

- display issue example, 15-16

- power issue example, 17

- identifying the problem, 10-11

- display issue example, 15

- power issue example, 17

- power issue example, 17-18

- testing theory of probable cause, 12

- display issue example, 16

- power issue example, 17

- verifying system functionality, 12-13

- display issue example, 16

- power issue example, 18

slave drive configurations (PATA), 135

Sleep mode, 223

SLI (Scan Line Interleave), 346

small office home office (SOHO) networks

- 802.11 wireless, 433

- Bluetooth, 433-434

- cable Internet, 431

- cellular, 432

- dial-up, 430

- DSL (digital subscriber line), 431

- ISDN, 432

- overview, 430

- port forwarding, 438

- port triggering, 438

- routers, 434-439
- satellite connectivity, 431
- wireless network adapters, 434-439
- smart cards, 455-456**
- smearing/lines (printers), troubleshooting, 393**
- SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol), 413**
- snap-ins, adding/removing, 208**
- SO-DIMMs, laptop installations, 330-331**
- social engineering, 444**
- sockets**
 - CPU sockets, 58-60
 - LGA (Land Grid Array) sockets, 59, 70
 - PGA (Pin Grid Array) sockets, 59, 72
- SOHO (small office home office) networks**
 - 802.11 wireless, 433
 - Bluetooth, 433-434
 - cable Internet, 431
 - cellular, 432
 - dial-up, 430
 - DSL (digital subscriber line), 431
 - ISDN, 432
 - overview, 430
 - port forwarding, 438
 - port triggering, 438
 - routers, 434-439
 - satellite connectivity, 431
 - wireless network adapters, 434-439
- solid-state storage media, 162**
 - CF (CompactFlash) cards, 161
 - SD (Secure Digital) cards, 159
 - SDIO (Secure Digital Input Output) cards, 160
 - USB flash drives, 156-158
- solutions (six-step troubleshooting process)**
 - documenting, 13
 - display issue example, 17
 - power issue example, 18
 - implementing, 12
 - display issue example, 16
 - power issue example, 18
- Sony/Phillips Digital Interconnect Format (S/PDIF) ports, 362**
- sound cards, 361-364**
- SOX (Sarbanes-Oxley), 447**
- SP (service packs), Windows updates, 252-253**
- speakers, installing, 363**
- speaking clearing, 490**
- spikes (power), 110**
- spooling (printers), 388-389**
- spyware, 460, 464-466**
- SRAM (static random-access memory), 81-82**
- SSH (Secure Shell), 413**
- standby, 222**
- Start menu, 200-203**
- Start Windows Normally option (Advanced Boot Options menu), 267**
- starting services in**
 - Command Prompt, 221
 - Computer Management, 220
- startup issues, troubleshooting, 17-19**
- Startup Repair option (Recovery Options), 270**
- Startup Restore option (Recovery Options), 270**
- static IP addresses, 401**
- status indicators, 406**
- stealth viruses, 459**
- stop errors, 99, 284-286**

stopping services in

stopping services in

Command Prompt, 221

Computer Management, 220

storing data

Blu-Ray, 154

CD-ROMs, 149-150

CD-Rs, 150

CD-RWs, 150

CDs, 149-150, 153

CF (CompactFlash) cards, 161

DVD (Digital Versatile Discs),
151-153

floppy disk drives, 143-145

HDD (hard disk drives)

antimalware, 141

backups, 260-261

caches, 138

cleanup programs, 140, 258-259

components of, 132

data transfer rates, 137

defragging, 141, 259

determining drive specifications,
137-138

installing, 139

latency, 138

manually deleting Internet files,
258

manually deleting temporary files,
258

NAS (Network Attached Storage),
143

PATA (Parallel ATA), 133-135

preventive maintenance, 140-141,
258-259, 262-264

restore points, 261

rotational speeds, 138

SATA (Serial ATA), 135-136, 140

SCSI (Small Computer System
Interface), 138-139

troubleshooting, 141-143

Ultra ATA hard drives, 139

magnetic storage media, 132-147

optical storage media, 149-155

SD (Secure Digital) cards, 159

SDIO (Secure Digital Input Output)
cards, 160

solid-state storage media, 156-162

tape drives, 145

USB flash drives, 156-158

STP (shielded twisted pair), 418

strong passwords, 449

stuck keys, troubleshooting, 306

stylus, 309

surge protectors, 110-112

electrical safety, 484

HDD (hard disk drive) maintenance,
262

switches, 409

symmetric key encryption, 476

**Symmetrical Digital Subscriber Line
(SDSL), 431**

SYS command, 463

system boards, laptops, 331-333

system failure, 444

System file attribute, 468

System File Checker (SFC), 294

**system functionality, verifying (six-
step troubleshooting process), 12-13**

display issue example, 16

power issue example, 18

System Image Manager (SIM), 170

System Information Tool, 214

**System Recovery Options window,
269-270**

System Restore, 261, 289-290

system tools

Device Manager, 212-213

Driver Signing, 214

DxDiag, 214-215
 Msconfig, 218-219
 Program Compatibility Wizard, 231
 Registry, 226, 228
 Remote Assistance, 229
 Remote Desktop, 229-230
 Safely Remove option, 216
 System Information Tool, 214
 Task Manager, 216-218
 virtual memory, 219-220
systray (System Tray), 200

T

tape drives, 145
Task Manager, 97, 216-218
Task Scheduler, 226
taskbar, 200-203
TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol), 400
TDP (thermal design points), 62
TDR (time-domain reflectometers), 418
Technical Product Specification PDF, 27
TELNET, 413
temporary files, manually deleting from HDD (hard disk drives), 258
testing
 AC outlets, 105-108
 CPU installations, 72-73
 DRAM installations, 96
 HDD (hard disk drive) installations, 140
 power supplies, 126
 printer installations, 386
 theory of probable cause (six-step troubleshooting process), 12
 display issue example, 16
 power issue example, 17
 twisted pair cable, 417-418
tests. See exams
“The Windows Boot Configuration Data file is missing required information” error message, 272
theory of probable cause (six-step troubleshooting process)
 establishing, 11
 display issue example, 15-16
 power issue example, 17
 testing, 12
 display issue example, 16
 power issue example, 17
thermal printers, 381-382
thinking logically while troubleshooting, 19
threats, 444-445
throughput (data). See data transfer rates
TIM (thermal interface material), 65
time-domain reflectometers (TDR), 418
time/date, BIOS configuration, 41
toner/ink cartridges
 disposal of, 488
 laser printers, 380
touch pads, 309
touch screens, 373
tracert command, 423-424
TrackPoint, 309
Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP), 400
trojan horses, 460
troubleshooting, 20-21
 BIOS (Basic Input Output Systems)
 memory errors, 99
 motherboard-related issues, 50
 boot errors
 Windows 2000 Boot Errors, 273
 Windows Vista Boot Errors, 271-273
 Windows XP Boot Errors, 273

- BSOD (Blue Screen of Death), 99
- command-line tools
 - chkdsk, 293-294
 - Command Prompt, 293
 - convert, 294
 - defrag, 295
 - diskpart, 295
 - format, 295
 - SFC (System File Checker), 294
 - xcopy, 295
- CPU (central processing units), 74-76
- DRAM (dynamic random-access memory), 98-101
- error reporting, 286-287
- ESD (electrostatic discharges), 18-19, 484-486
- fans, 124
- floppy disk drives, 144
- fuses (power supplies), 124
- GPF (general protection faults), 100
- hard faults (page faults), 100
- HDD (hard disk drives), 141-143
- laptops
 - audio subsystem, 315-316
 - communications, 322-323
 - CPUs, 331-333
 - expansion devices, 320-322
 - hard drives, 328-329
 - keyboards, 306-308
 - memory, 329-331
 - optical discs, 316
 - power, 316-319
 - system board, 331-333
 - video issues, 314-315
- low on virtual memory errors, 100
- monitors, 15-16, 19
- motherboards, 47-52
- network connectivity
 - applications, 426-427
 - ipconfig, 421-422
 - net, 425-426
 - netstat, 424-425
 - nslookup, 425
 - ping, 422-423
 - tracert, 423-424
- out of memory errors, 100
- page faults (hard faults), 100
- paper jams, 392-393
- power issues, 17-19
- power supplies, 123-127
- printers, 392-397
- recovery Command Prompts
 - copy, 297
 - edit, 296-297
 - expand, 297
 - recovery environment commands, 297-298
- repair tools, 265
 - Advanced Boot Options menu, 266-267
 - Recovery Console, 270-271
 - WinRE (Windows Recovery Environment), 268-270
- restoring Windows, 287
 - System Restore, 289-290
 - to an earlier condition, 289
 - Windows Vista complete PC backup, 288
 - Windows XP's ASR backup, 288
- six-step troubleshooting process, 14, 290-291
 - display issue example, 15-16
 - documenting solutions, 13, 17-18
 - establishing plans of action, 12, 16-18

- establishing theory of probable cause, 11, 15-17
- identifying the problem, 10-11, 15-17
- power issue example, 17-18
- testing theory of probable cause, 12, 16-17
- verifying system functionality, 12-13, 16-18
- spyware, 464-466
- startup issues, 17-19
- stop errors, 99, 284-286
- thinking logically, 19
- USB flash drives, 158
- user error, 19
- video cards, 343-346
- viruses, 461-464
- Windows tools
 - Device Manager, 276-279
 - Dr. Watson, 282
 - Event Viewer, 280-282
 - Msconfig, 284
 - Problem Reports and Solutions, 282
 - Reliability and Performance Monitor, 282-284
- Windows Vista installation, 178-181
- Windows XP installation, 192-193
- TV tuner cards, 346**
- twisted pair cables, 416**

U

- UAC (User Account Control), 453-454**
- Ultra ATA hard drives, installing, 139**
- unauthorized access, 444**
- Universal Serial Bus (USB), 368-371**
- unshielded twisted pair (UTP) cables, 416**

updates

- antimalware, HDD (hard disk drive) maintenance, 263
- BIOS, 43, 263
- downloading, 461
- firewalls, HDD (hard disk drive) maintenance, 263
- Windows, 256-257
 - HDD (hard disk drive) maintenance, 263
 - SP (service packs), 252-253
 - Windows Update, 254-255

upgrading to

- Windows Vista, 176-178
- Windows XP, 191

UPS (uninterruptible power supplies), 112-113

- electrical safety, 484
- HDD (hard disk drive) maintenance, 262

USB (Universal Serial Buses), 368-371

USB ports, 33

USB flash drives, 156-158

users

- customizing user environment, 225-226
- ergonomics, 487
- errors, troubleshooting, 19
- logon process, security, 451-453
- migrating user data, 223-225
- passwords
 - changing, 450
 - password policy, 450-451
 - strong passwords, 449
- questioning (problem identification process), 10
- state, 224
- UAC (User Account Control), 453-454

- user awareness, 446

- usernames, 449

USMT (User State Migration Tool), 224

UTP (unshielded twisted pair) cables, 416

V

verifying

- system functionality (six-step troubleshooting process), 12-13

- display issue example, 16

- power issue example, 18

- Windows Vista installation, 178-181

- Windows XP installation, 192-193

versions of

- Windows Vista, 166-167

- Windows XP, 184-185

vertical refresh rate, 354-355

VGA (Video Graphics Array), 340

video subsystems

- laptop video subsystems

- display controls, 310-311

- DualView, 312-313

- GPU, 310

- LCD, 310

- resolutions, 310

- troubleshooting, 314-315

- overview, 337

- video cards

- chipsets, 342

- connector types, 340-341

- expansion busses, 338-339

- GPU, 342

- installing, 343-346

- memory, 342

- SLI and TV tuner/capture cards, 346-347

- troubleshooting, 343-346

- video displays

- CRT, 348

- LCD, 347-348

- projectors, 348-349

- video settings

- color depth, 350-351

- drivers, 349-350

- Multiple Monitor (DualView), 356-357

- OSD (on-screen display), 355-356

- refresh rate, 354-355

- resolution, 351-354

virtual memory, 100, 219-220

virtual private networks (VPNs), 410

viruses

- definition of, 458

- preventing and troubleshooting, 461-464

- types of viruses, 458-459

Vista

- Backup Status and Configuration, 260

- boot errors, 271-273

- boot files, 236

- Compatibility Center, 168, 176

- directory structure, 235

- folder sharing, 473-474

- hardware compatibility, 168

- Indexing service, 237-238

- installing

- installation methods, 169-170

- partitions, 174-175

- step-by-step installation process, 171-173

- troubleshooting, 178-181

- verifying, 178-181
- Windows Preinstallation Environment phase, 179
- Windows Welcome phase, 179
- Logo'd Products List, 168, 176
- minimum requirements, 167-168
- restoring
 - restore points, 261
 - to an earlier condition, 289
 - Windows Vista complete PC backup, 288
- upgrading to, 176-178
- versions, 166-167
- Windows Welcome phase (Vista installation), 179
- XPS (XML Paper Specification) feature, 390
- visual effects, disabling, 225**
- volatile RAM (random access memory), 81**
- voltage (V), 104, 110**
- VPNs (virtual private networks), 410**

W

- WANs (wide area networks), 410**
- WAPs (wireless access points), 409**
- wattage (W), 104, 118-119**
- web cameras, 373**
- Welcome Center, configuring, 203**
- Welcome screen, disabling, 451**
- Widescreen Extended Graphics Array (WXGA), 310**
- Widescreen Super Extended Graphics Array Plus (WSXGA+), 310**
- Windows**
 - applications
 - Control Panel, 205
 - Network, 206
 - Windows Explorer, 204-205
 - components
 - application windows, 200
 - desktop, 198
 - icons, 199
 - Quick Launch, 200
 - Sidebar, 200
 - Start menu, 200-203
 - System Tray, 200
 - taskbar, 200-203
 - Welcome Center, 203
 - Windows Aero, 203
 - configuration
 - administrative tools, 207-208
 - boot files, 236
 - directory structure, 235
 - file systems, 244
 - formatting disks, 240-243
 - Indexing service, 237-238
 - MMC (Microsoft Management Console), 208
 - mounting disks, 244-245
 - overview, 197
 - partitioning disks, 240-243
 - power management, 222-223
 - RAID disks, 245-247
 - starting/stopping services, 220-221
 - user customizations, 225-226
 - user migration, 223-225
 - CPU, testing installations, 72
 - encryption, 476-478

Windows

firewalls, 427, 462

HDD (hard disk drive) maintenance, 263

updates, 263

system tools

Device Manager, 212-213, 276-279

Dr. Watson, 282

Driver Signing, 214

DxDiag, 214-215

Event Viewer, 280-282

Msconfig, 218-219, 284

Problem Reports and Solutions, 282

Program Compatibility Wizard, 231

Registry, 226-228

Reliability and Performance Monitor, 282-284

Remote Assistance, 229

Remote Desktop, 229-230

Safely Remove option, 216

System Information Tool, 214

Task Manager, 216-218

virtual memory, 219-220

updates, 256-257

HDD (hard disk drive) maintenance, 263

SP (service packs), 252-253

Windows Update, 254-255

Windows Aero, configuring, 203

Windows Boot Configuration Data file is missing required information" error message, "The, 272

Windows Complete PC Restore option (Recovery Options), 270

Windows Easy Transfer, 224

Windows Explorer, 204-205

Windows Memory Diagnostic Tool (Recovery Options), 270

Windows Preinstallation Environment phase (Vista installation), 179

Windows Recovery Environment (WinRE), 268-270

Windows Security dialog box, 451

Windows System Image Manager (SIM), 170

Windows System Information tool, 168, 186

Windows Update, 254-255

Windows Vista

Backup Status and Configuration, 260

boot errors, 271-273

boot files, 236

Compatibility Center, 168, 176

directory structure, 235

folder sharing, 473-474

hardware compatibility, 168

Indexing service, 237-238

installing

installation methods, 169-170

partitions, 174-175

step-by-step installation process, 171-173

troubleshooting, 178-181

verifying, 178-181

Windows Preinstallation Environment phase, 179

Windows Welcome phase, 179

Logo'd Products List, 168, 176

minimum requirements, 167-168

restoring

restore points, 261

to an earlier condition, 289

Windows Vista complete PC backup, 288

upgrading to, 176-178
versions, 166-167
Windows Welcome phase (Vista installation), 179
XPS (XML Paper Specification) feature, 390

Windows XP

boot errors, 273
boot files, 236
folder sharing, 471-472
hardware compatibility, 186
Indexing service, 237-238
installing
 installation methods, 186-188
 step-by-step installation process, 188-191
 troubleshooting, 192-193
 verifying, 192-193
Logo'd Products List, 186, 191
minimum requirements, 185
NTBackup, 261
restoring
 ASR backups, 288
 restore points, 261
 System Restore, 289-290
 to an earlier condition, 289
upgrading to, 191
versions, 184-185

WinRE (Windows Recovery Environment), 268-270

Winsat.log, 179

wireless access points (WAPs), 409
wireless network adapters, 434-439

wizards

FAST (Files and Settings Transfer) Wizard, 224
Program Compatibility Wizard, 231

worms, 459

WSXGA+ (Widescreen Super Extended Graphics Array Plus), 310

WXGA (Widescreen Extended Graphics Array), 310

X

xcopy command, 295

XP

boot errors, 273
boot files, 236
folder sharing, 471-472
hardware compatibility, 186
Indexing service, 237-238
installing
 installation methods, 186-188
 step-by-step installation process, 188-191
 troubleshooting, 192-193
 verifying, 192-193
Logo'd Products List, 186, 191
minimum requirements, 185
NTBackup, 261
restoring
 ASR backups, 288
 restore points, 261
 System Restore, 289-290
 to an earlier condition, 289
upgrading to, 191
versions, 184-185

XPS (XML Paper Specification) feature (Windows Vista), 390

Y - Z

zombies, 460