Many familiar features of 10 Mbps Ethernet such as CSMA/CD, a variety of cabling options, and deployment of shared hubs and switches are retained in Fast Ethernet variants. Fast Ethernet gained market acceptance around the same time that LAN switching became popular. Most Fast Ethernet cards are connected to a switch or cabled to another device.

The two key features of Fast Ethernet, as compared to 10-Mbps Ethernet, are higher bandwidth and autonegotiation. Autonegotiation allows an Ethernet card or switch to operate at 10 or 100 Mbps. It also negotiates half-duplex or full-duplex operation. If the other device is not able to autonegotiate, it settles for half-duplex operation at 10 Mbps.