This introductory chapter will only try to explain what areas the subject of Computer Systems covers, the relevance of networking, and why you should study it. This text focuses on the interaction of hardware and software as it affects computer performance. Because it may not be a familiar or easy topic, some reasons will be presented why you should pursue this subject in some depth.

A computer is a device that accepts information (in the form of digitalized data) and manipulates it for some result based on a program or sequence of instructions on how the data is to be processed. Complex computers also include the means for storing data (including the program, which is also a form of data) for some necessary duration. A program may be invariable and built into the computer (and called logic circuitry as it is on microprocessors) or different programs may be provided to the computer (loaded into its storage and then started by an administrator or user). Today's computers have both kinds of programming.

A network is a group of computer systems and other computing hardware devices that are linked together through communication channels to facilitate communication and resource-sharing among a wide range of users. Networks are commonly categorized based on their characteristics.