Two types of software instruct a computer to perform its tasks—systems software and applications software. Systems software is a permanent component of the computer. Applications software requires the functions provided by the systems software.

A computer's operating system (OS) is the *systems software* that allows all the dissimilar hardware and software components to work together. It consists of a set of programs that manages all the computer's resources.

Drivers are OS programs that manage data from different I/O devices. The file system of an OS allows programs to give names to files, and it keeps track of each file's location.

An OS allows programs to run. An OS manages processes, each of which consists of a running program.

Modern operating systems provide a graphical user interface (GUI). A GUI allows a computer user to work directly with an application program by manipulating text and graphics on the monitor screen.

Applications software consists of programs that instruct the computer to accomplish specific tasks for the user, such as word processin, managing accounts in inventories, record keeping, or playing a video game. These programs, called applications, are run only when they are needed.