An Input device. The keyboard allows you to type information into the computer. It has evolved over the years and many people now use a Microsoft style keyboard, which has additional keys designed to make Windows easier to use.

C:\Program Files\Microsoft Office\MEDIA\CAGCAT10\j0195384.wmf

An Input device. When using an operating system, such as Microsoft Windows, you use the mouse to select drop down menus, to point and click on items, to select items and to drag and drop items from one place to another.

Most computers are now supplied with a CD-ROM (Compact Disc - Read Only Memory) drive. CD-ROM discs look exactly like music CDs but contain computer data instead of music. The advantage of a CD-ROM is that it can hold a vast amount of data (equivalent to the storage capacity of over 450 floppy disks). The other big advantage of CD-ROMs is that they are interchangeable. This means that you can own a range of different CD-ROMs and choose which one to insert into your CD-ROM drive.

Short for "Digital Versatile Disk”. Similar to CD-ROM drives but allows you to use DVD disks, which contain vastly more information than a traditional CD-ROM disk. These also transfer the data from the disk to the computer far faster, allowing you to watch movies on your computer screen. A CD-ROM can store 650 MB of data, while a single-layer, single-sided DVD can store GB of data. The two-layer DVD standard allows a capacity of GB. A double-sided DVD increases the storage capacity to 17 GB (or over 25 times the data storage capacity of a CD-ROM).

Floppy disks are also known as diskettes. They are very slow compared to hard disks or CD-ROMs, and hold relatively small amounts of data (1.44 Mbytes). Sometimes people will backup (i.e. copy) important data from their hard disk to floppy disks. However, as diskettes are notoriously unreliable this is not the best way of backing up valuable data (but is better than nothing).

C:\Program Files\Microsoft Office\MEDIA\CAGCAT10\j0205582.wmf

Hard disks are the main, large data storage area within your computer. Hard disks are used to store your operating system, your application programs (i.e. your word processor, games etc) and your data. They are much faster than CD-ROMs and floppy disks and can also hold much more data. The picture shows the inside of a hard disk (which you would not normally see). Hard disks are installed within the system unit of your computer.

An output device. The monitor is the TV type screen on which you view your programs. They are supplied in different sizes, common sizes range from 15" to 21" screens. You should be aware that poor quality or badly maintained monitors could harm your eyesight.

Many 'extra' components can easily be fitted to your computer, which has the advantage of making the computer 'upgradeable' as newer and better hardware comes along.

Many computers are now supplied with sound cards and speakers which means that when you run 'multi-media' programs, you can listen to sounds which are played back via your computer. If you have a microphone and suitable software, you can also record sounds. You can even purchase special software which will allow you to talk to your computer and get the computer to type the words you have spoken on your screen. In time, this type of software may replace the keyboard.

A modem is a device which is used to attach your computer to the telephone system. The modem converts data into sound which is sent over the telephone line, the receiving modem turns the sounds back into data. If you wish to connect to the Internet, you will need a modem (or equivalent device). Modems used to be large boxes that you had to plug into the computer, but now modems boxes have become very small and in many cases the modem is actually inside the computer. If you are using ISDN or broadband then you will use another device similar to a modem.

Most data is printed once you have created it and there are a vast number of different printers available to accomplish this. Most common are ink jet and laser printers both of which can now produce coloured output (at a cost).

Scanners allow you to scan printed materials into your computer, which can then be stored within the computer. These pictures can then be altered, resized and printed as required.

CD-ROMs are read-only devices, but increasingly people are purchasing a special type of CD drive unit which allows you to record data, music or video to your own CDs. These devices require the purchase of special CDs to which you can write, called CD-R (Compact Disc – Recordable).

A tape backup unit allows for regular backing up of your data. These tapes can store a vast amount of data at a low cost. DAT (Digital Audio Tape) devices are commonly used for backups. The DAT tapes which are used can backup enormous amounts of data (i.e. over 4 GBytes per tape). The devices are also fast and reliable.

Portables by their very nature are very compact and require smaller than standard parts such as hard disks and CD-ROM drives. Many portables are supplied with special adaptor sockets which enable what are called PCMCIA compatible hardware to be connected to them. PCMCIA components tend to be more expensive than standard computer parts which are designed for more bulky desktop computers.