Searches should include Wikipedia, which is *surprisingly good* for a number of programming concepts/terms such as [Application Programming Interface](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Application_Program_Interface):

**What is an API?**

An application programming interface (API) is a particular set of **rules ('code') and specifications that software programs can follow to communicate with each other**. It serves as an interface between different software programs and facilitates their interaction, similar to the way the user interface facilitates interaction between humans and computers.

**How is it used?**

The same way any set of rules are used.

**When and where is it used?**

Depends upon realm and API, naturally. Consider these:

1. [The x86 (IA-32) Instruction Set](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IA-32) (very useful ;-)
2. A [BIOS interrupt call](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BIOS_interrupt_call)
3. [OpenGL](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OpenGL) which is often exposed as a C library
4. Core Windows system calls: [WinAPI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windows_API)
5. The Classes and Methods in [Ruby's core library](http://www.ruby-doc.org/core/)
6. The [Document Object Model](http://www.w3.org/DOM/) exposed by browsers to JavaScript
7. [Web services](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_service), such as those provided by [Facebook's Graph API](http://developers.facebook.com/docs/)
8. An implementation of a protocol such as [JNI in Java](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Java_Native_Interface)