**What Is a Patch Cable?**

Connect two or more network devices with patch cables

A patch cable is a general term for cabling that connects two electronic devices to each other, typically in a network. These devices might include computers and other [hardware](https://www.lifewire.com/computer-hardware-2625895). Patch cables are also used to carry telephone, audio, and video signals between devices in non-networked applications; these might include equipment such as headphones and microphones.

Patch cables are also called patch leads. The term patch cord is sometimes used as well, but it's often associated more with non-network types of cables such as those for wiring stereo components.

Patch cables are different from other types in that they're made to be more flexible than standard stiff, bulky copper cables. Patch cables always have connectors at both ends.

There are many different kinds of patch cables. The most common are [CAT5/CAT5e](https://www.lifewire.com/cat5-ethernet-cable-standard-817552) [ethernet](https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-ethernet-3426740) cables linking a computer to a nearby network [hub](https://www.lifewire.com/ethernet-and-network-hubs-816358), [switch](https://www.lifewire.com/definition-of-network-switch-817588), or [router](https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-a-router-2618162), a switch to a router, etc.

[Ethernet patch cables](https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-an-ethernet-cable-817548) are useful to those building [home computer networks](https://www.lifewire.com/home-computer-networks-basics-816351). Travelers staying in older hotels without Wi-Fi sometimes need patch cables to create hard-wired internet connections.

A [crossover cable](https://www.lifewire.com/crossover-cable-ethernet-817870) is a specific type of Ethernet patch cable used to connect two computers to each other.

Non-networking patch cables might include headphone extension cables, microphone cables, RCA connectors, XLR connectors, TRS phone connector cables, Tiny Telephone connectors, patch panel cables, etc. They also can be thick "snake cables" that transmit video and amplified signals.

What Does a Patch Cable Look Like?

Patch cables can be any color and are usually shorter than other kinds of networking cables because they're meant for "patching" devices together. Typically, that's accomplished over a short distance, so most are no longer than two meters. In fact, they can even be as short as just a few inches. Longer cables are usually thicker than their short counterparts and often are shielded to prevent electromagnetic interference.

A patch cable is normally made of [coaxial cabling](https://www.lifewire.com/coaxial-vs-optical-digital-cable-3134605), but it also could consist of fiber optic, shielded or unshielded CAT5/5e/6/6A, or single-conductor wires.

A patch cable always has connectors on both ends, which means it's not as permanent of a solution as some cables like pigtails or blunt patch cords. These are similar to patch cables but have exposed bare wires on one end that are meant to be connected directly and permanently to a terminal or other device.