

Common technology terms with plain-language definitions

These common technology terms and their plain-language definitions help bridge the digital divide and unlock understanding for our patrons.

Internet – the global network of connected computers and devices

The internet is used to access websites. It is accessed through browsers such as Safari, Chrome, Edge, and others. The internet simply means the vast network of millions of computers and devices.

Browser – a software app that allows you to browse the internet

A browser lets you search and use the internet. Most computers and phones come with preinstalled browsers, but you can download different ones.

Website – a group of webpages that all share the same unique URL (Uniform Resource Locator) and are accessible on the internet using a browser

Google.com, Netflix.com, and eBay.com are examples of websites. Think of a website as a business that you can visit virtually.

Webpage – a single digital document on the internet; multiple webpages make up a single website

In the same way that pages make up a book, webpages make up a website. The website Netflix may have a URL of Netflix.com, while the page listing comedy movies may have a URL of Netflix.com/Comedy/.

URL or Uniform Resource Locator – the address where a webpage can be found on the internet

A URL acts as a website's address in the same way as the address for your house works.

Cookies – small text files that a website stores on your device to identify you

As you go from webpage to webpage on a site, or leave altogether and come back later, cookie files allow the website to “remember” you and track your activity and preferences.

Server – a computer that provides resources to other computers; most commonly used to store data

A server hosts data and resources so that other computers can access it. Servers provide many functions, including hosting websites and storing personal data.

The Cloud – a group of computers (servers) that store, manage, and process data so that it can be accessed over the internet

Nowadays, most computers and devices use the cloud to store data. This saves storage space on your phone or computer and also allows you to access the same data from different devices.

Multi-Factor Authentication, or MFA – a more secure way to sign into an account or device that requires two or more ways of confirming your identity

Because passwords alone are no longer reliably secure, most companies now use MFA, or Multi-Factor Authentication, which adds at least one additional verification, such as your fingerprint or sending a code to your phone or email, to try and stop bad actors from mimicking you.

Wi-Fi – wireless technology that connects computers and devices using radio waves

Wi-Fi allows you to use your device without a wired connection. Instead, it uses radio waves to connect people to the internet.

Bluetooth – short-range wireless technology that connects computers and devices using radio waves.

Bluetooth uses radio waves to connect devices. It is just like Wi-Fi, but is usually used only over short ranges.