# Types of Devices

The personal computer is a very powerful tool. Not only can it perform calculations much more quickly than a person can, it can also do many complex tasks simultaneously. This type of computer is also called a microcomputer. Although it does not seem that small, less than 20 years ago a computer with the same processing power would have filled an entire room. Today, as computers keep getting smaller, power and speed are the main characteristics by which we can differentiate among various types of computers. With increased power and speed, you can have more people accessing the same or varied information without sacrificing performance.

* Mainframe Computers
* Minicomputers
* Microcomputers
* Notebook/Laptop
* Palm-Sized Computers

The following section describes the relationship of the PC (personal computer) or microcomputer with other types or sizes of computers, such as mainframe computers, minicomputers, and notebooks or laptops.

## Mainframe Computers

Mainframe computers are large enough to fill an entire room and require a large capital investment. They can simultaneously handle hundreds of different programs and users without sacrificing performance. They can also process large volumes of data at incredible speed. These computers would need ten or more technicians to maintain them. Mainframes are commonly found in government agencies or large organizations. Often, users include members of the public. For instance, you access a mainframe computer whenever you use your bankcard at an automated teller machine (ATM).

## Minicomputers

Minicomputers can fill part of a room, and often cost tens of thousands of dollars. Typically, they process data at a slower rate and in smaller volumes than the mainframe computers. Several people can use a minicomputer simultaneously; but as the number of users increases, each user would notice a reduction in speed. Minicomputers are commonly found in medium-sized manufacturing companies and legal or accounting firms. The point-of-sale terminals (cash registers) in a department store or the scanners in a grocery store would link to a minicomputer.

## Microcomputers

Microcomputers sit on, beside or under a desk. They process data quickly and are designed for one user. The cost is relatively small, depending on the type, model and features. These computers are found in small businesses, schools and homes.

## Notebook/Laptop

Notebook/Laptop computers are portable microcomputers, and are similar to the desktop models in speed, performance and usage. They tend to cost the same or slightly higher, but provide a great advantage to the users who want portability. Notebooks are popular with sales people, real estate agents and others whose work requires them to be on the move constantly.

## Palm-Sized Computers

There are also small palm-sized or hand-held computers that are used as personal organizers. These computers have features for making appointments, writing notes, phones lists, etc.