

MICROSOFT PRESS®

COMPUTER DICTIONARY



THE COMPREHENSIVE
STANDARD FOR
BUSINESS, SCHOOL,
LIBRARY, AND HOME

Microsoft
P R E S S

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quantity, and n is 10 for voltage and current measurements and 20 for power measurements. A negative decibel value means that the measured quantity is less than the reference quantity. The dynamic range of an audio compact disc is about 90 dB, meaning that the maximum level of the music is 90 dB higher than the background noise level. The dynamic range of an audio cassette is typically 60 dB.

decimal The base-10 numbering system. *See also* base.

decision The selection of one among two or more possible courses of action. Decisions are sometimes mapped out in the form of decision tables or decision trees. The former are row-and-column layouts that outline specific conditions and the possible actions or outcomes related to each. The latter are tree-structured outlines in which nodes representing decision points branch into more and more specific alternative outcomes until they reach an end point (a leaf) that is the result of all the prior decisions made.

decision box A diamond-shaped flowchart symbol used to indicate a choice (decision) that results in branching in the process being illustrated.

decision support system Abbreviated DSS. A set of related programs and the data required to help with analysis and decision making within an organization. A DSS is similar to a management information system (MIS) or an executive information system (EIS) but provides the user with more help in formulating alternative decisions and choosing the most appropriate course. A DSS includes a database of information, a body of knowledge about the area in which decisions are to be made, a "language" that can be used to state problems and formulate questions, and a modeling program that can be used to test alternative decisions.

deck A term for a storage device, such as a tape deck, or for a group of such devices.

declaration A binding of an identifier to the information that relates to it. For example, to declare a constant means to bind the name of the constant with its value. To declare a variable means to bind the variable's name with a location in memory and with the information about the variable's data type.

Declaration usually occurs within the source code of a program; the actual binding can take place at compile time or at run time. Declaration can be performed explicitly (by specifying in a declare statement the identifier and the relevant information) or implicitly (by using the undeclared identifier in a statement), depending on the language being used. *See also* bind, constant, data declaration, data type, identifier, instruction, routine, type declaration, variable.

decoder A device or a program routine that converts coded data back to its original form. Decoding can mean changing unreadable codes (such as encrypted information) into readable text. It is sometimes also used to mean changing one code into another—for example, changing ASCII to EBCDIC, or binary to decimal—although this type of "decoding" is more usually referred to as *conversion*. In relation to electronics and hardware, a decoder is a type of circuit that produces one or more selected output signals based on the combination of input signals it receives.

decollate To separate the copies of a multiple-part continuous-paper form. Decollating can be performed manually, or it can be done mechanically by a device called a decollator.

decompiler A program that takes assembly language code or machine code and attempts to generate high-level source code from it—a difficult task because it is possible to write assembly code for which there is no corresponding high-level source code. *Compare* compiler; *see also* disassembler.

decrement To decrease a number by a given amount; also, the amount by which such a number is decreased. For example, if 10 is decremented by 2, the successive results are 8, 6, 4, and so on. *Compare* increment.

decryption The process of restoring encrypted data to its original form. *Compare* encryption.

dedicated An adjective used to describe a device, a program, or a procedure devoted to a single and exclusive task or purpose. A dedicated file server, for example, is used only for making files available to network users; a dedicated channel is a communications line used for one exclusive purpose.