Chapter 2

The Computer

The Computer

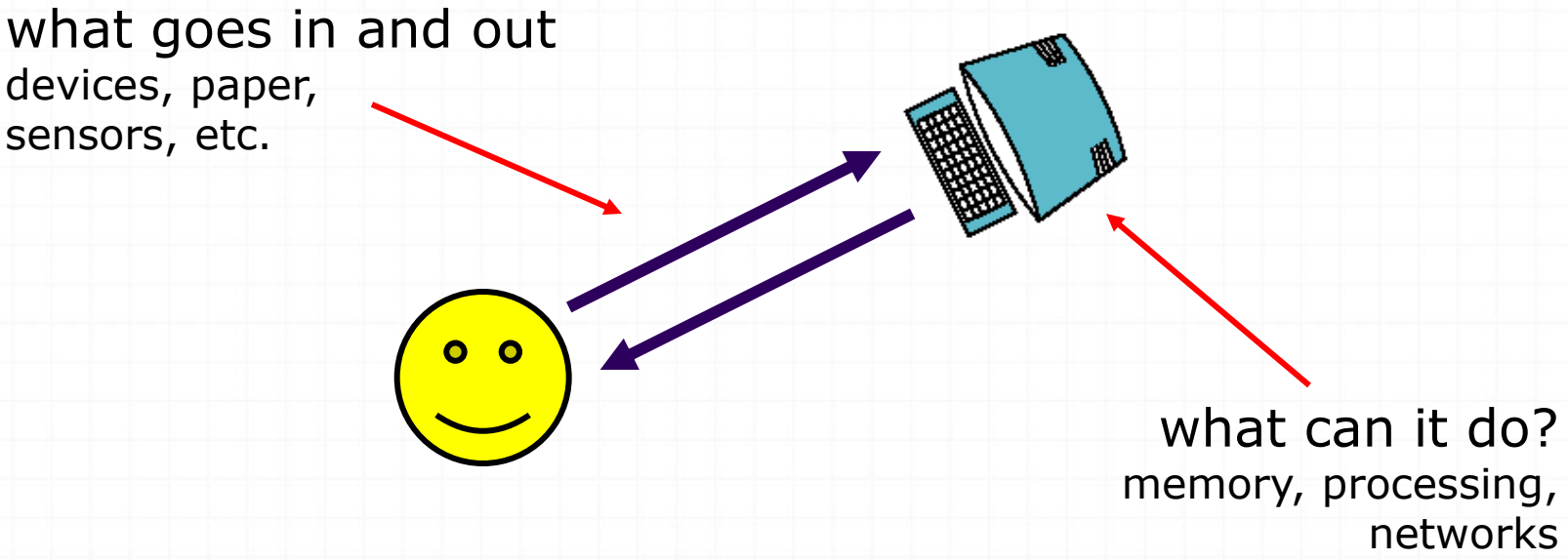
a computer system is made up of various elements

each of these elements affects the interaction

- input devices – text entry and pointing
- output devices – screen (small&large), digital paper
- virtual reality – special interaction and display devices
- physical interaction – e.g. sound, touch screen
- paper – as output (print) and input (scan)
- memory – RAM & permanent media, capacity & access
- processing – speed of processing, networks

Interacting with computers

to understand human–*computer* interaction
… need to understand computers!

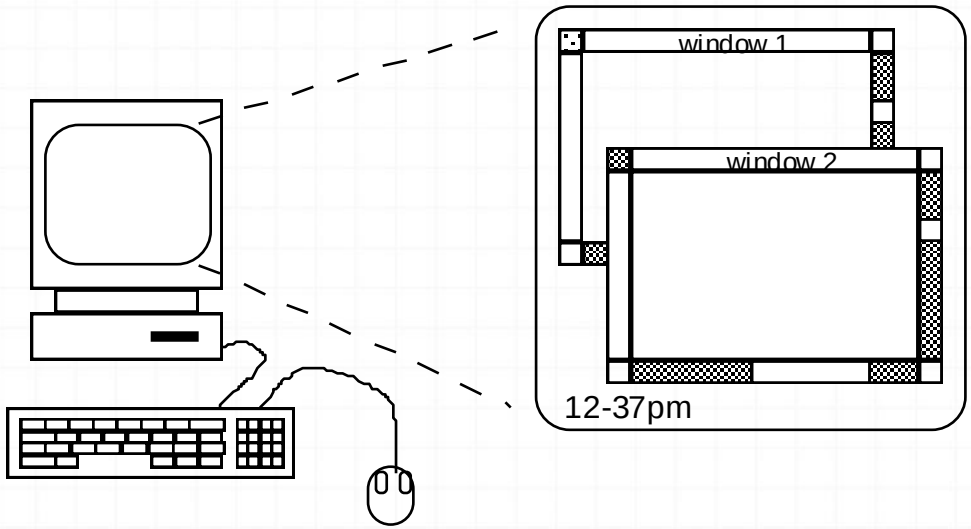


A ‘typical’ computer system

?

- screen, or monitor, on which there are windows
- keyboard
- mouse/trackpad

- variations
  - desktop
  - laptop
  - PDA



the devices dictate the styles of interaction that the system supports

If we use different devices, then the interface will support a different style of interaction

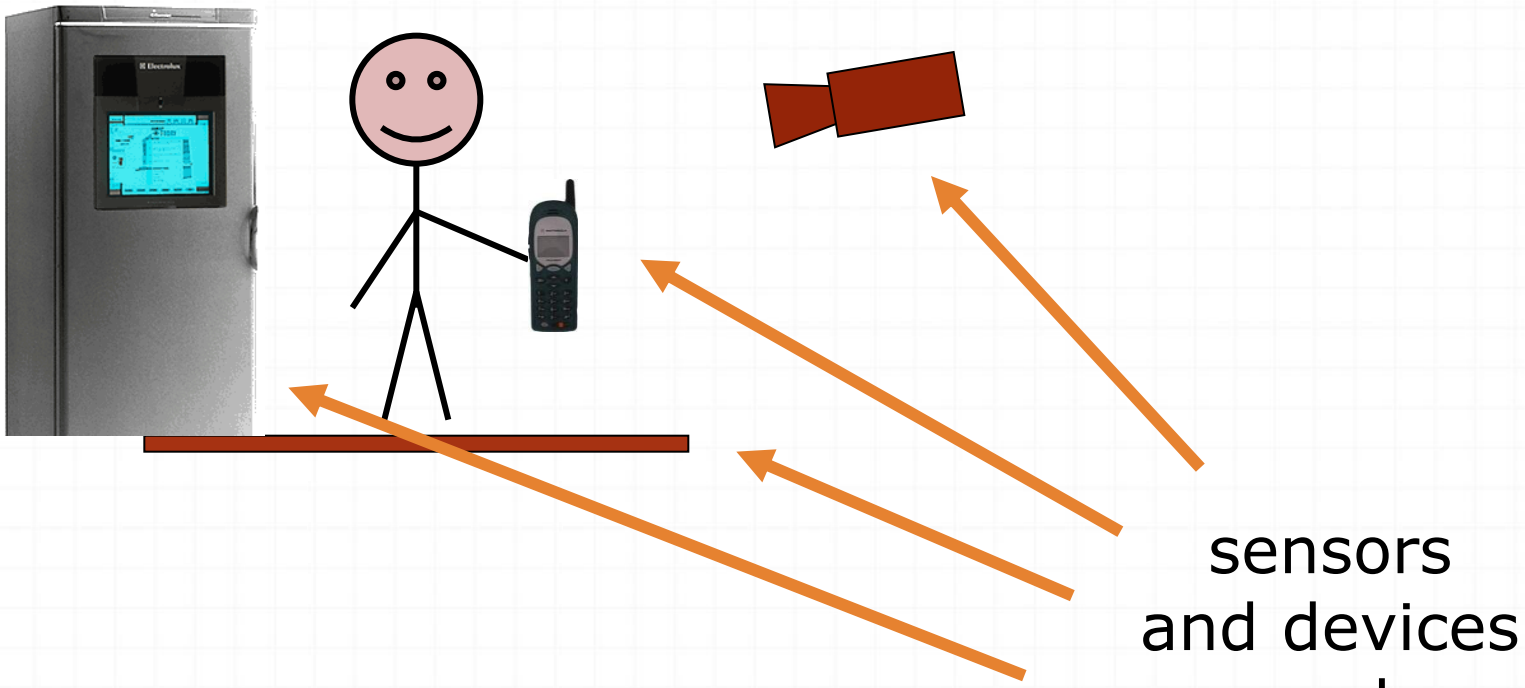
Interactivity?

Now most computing is interactive

- quick feedback
- the user in control (most of the time)
- doing rather than thinking …

Is faster always better?

Richer interaction



How many ...

- computers in your house?
  - hands up, ...
    ... none, 1, 2 , 3, more!!
- computers in your pockets?

are you thinking ...
... PC, laptop, PDA ??

How many computers …

in your house?

- PC
- TV, VCR, DVD, cable/satellite TV
- microwave, cooker, washing machine
- central heating
- security system

can you think of more?

in your pockets?

- PDA
- phone, camera
- smart card, card with magnetic strip?
- electronic car key
- USB memory

try your pockets and bags

text entry devices

keyboards (QWERTY et al.)
chord keyboards, phone pads
Handwriting recognition, speech recognition

Keyboards

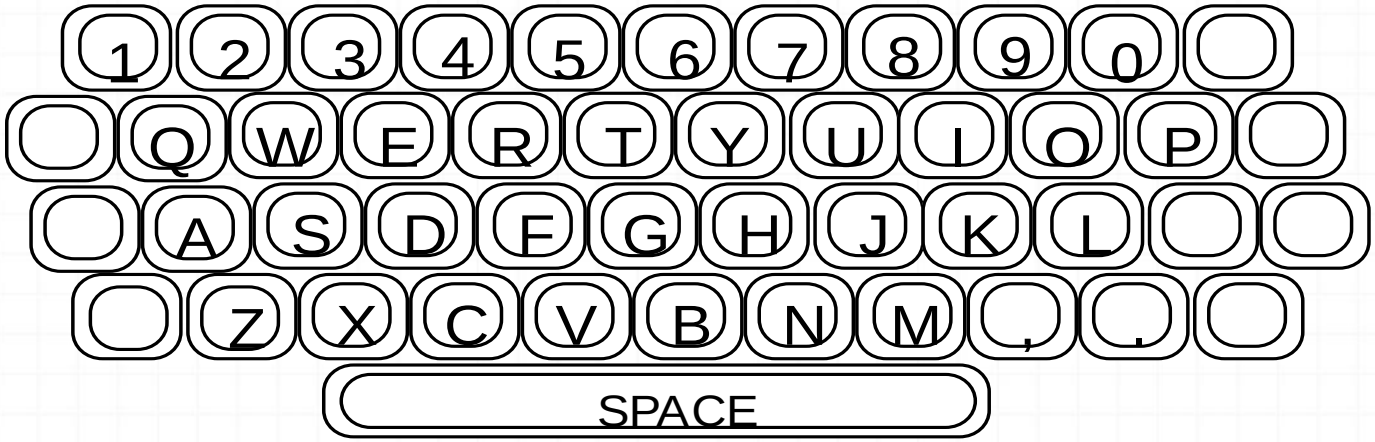
- Most common text input device
- Allows rapid entry of text by experienced users
- Key press closes connection, causing a character code to be sent
- Usually connected by cable, but can be wireless

layout – QWERTY

- Standardised layout

  but …
  - non-alphanumeric keys are placed differently
  - highlighted symbols needed for different scripts
  - minor differences between UK and USA keyboards

- QWERTY arrangement not optimal for typing
  – layout to prevent typewriters jamming!
- Alternative designs allow faster typing but large social base of QWERTY typists produces reluctance to change.



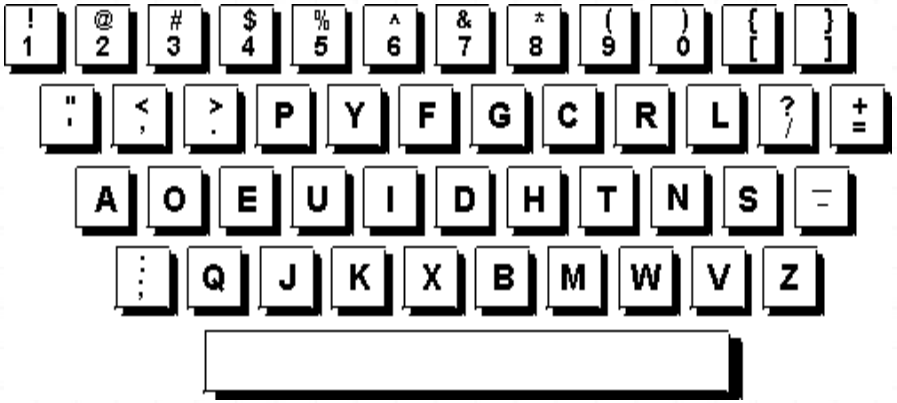
alternative keyboard layouts

Alphabetic

- keys arranged in alphabetic order
- not faster for trained typists
- not faster for beginners either!

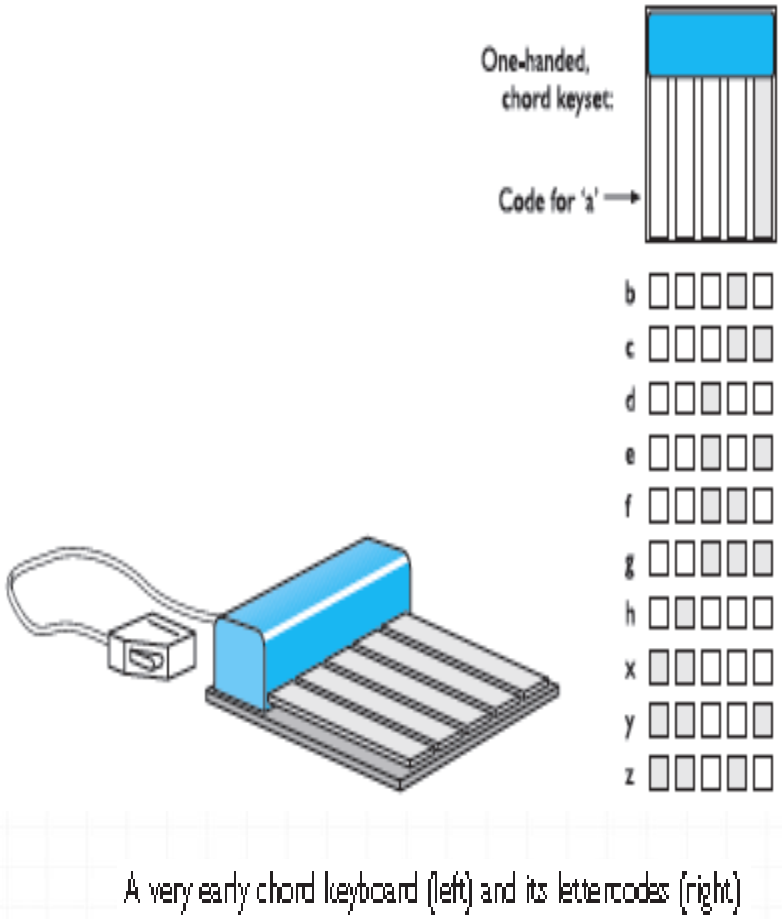
Dvorak

- common letters under dominant fingers
- biased towards right hand
- common combinations of letters alternate between hands
- 10-15% improvement in speed and reduction in fatigue
- But - large social base of QWERTY typists produce market pressures not to change



Chord keyboards

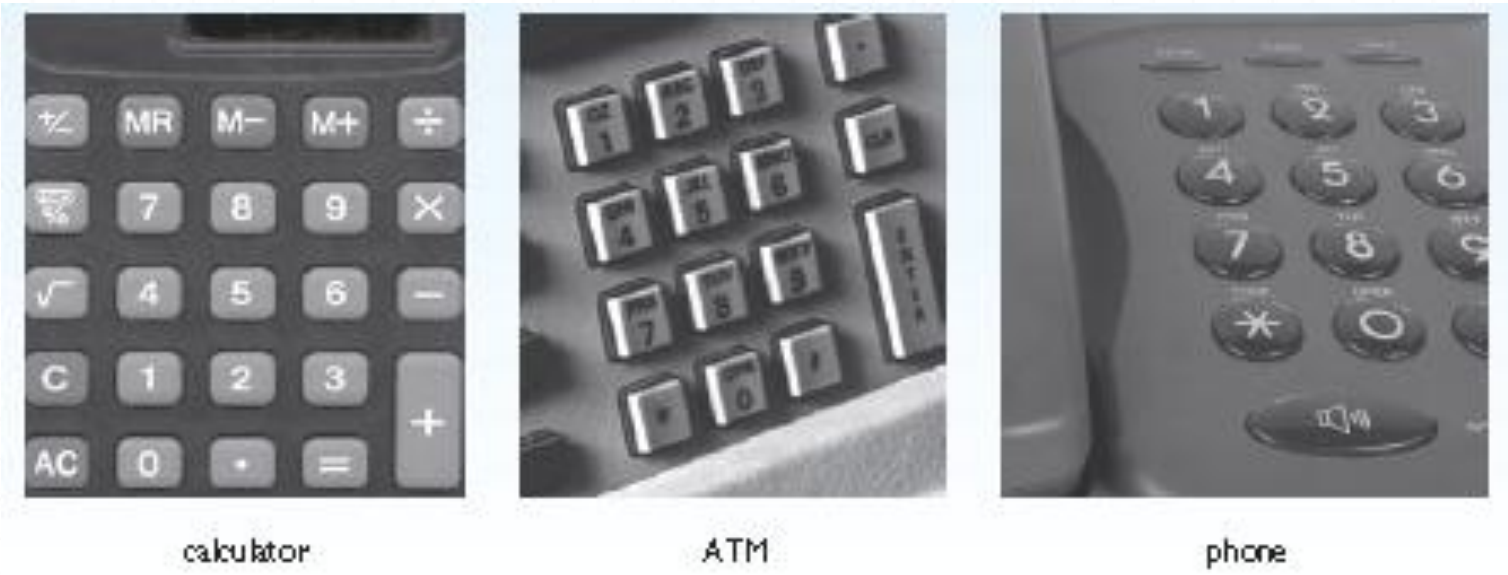
- only a few keys - four or 5 letters typed as combination of keypresses
- compact size
  - ideal for portable applications
- short learning time
  - keypresses reflect letter shape
- fast
  - once you have trained
- BUT - social resistance is still high
- Used where one-handed operation is possible



A very early chord keyboard (left) and its lettercodes (right)

Numeric keypads

- for entering numbers quickly:
  - calculator, PC keyboard
- for telephones
- not the same!! ATM like phone



Phone Pad and T9 Entry

- use numeric keys with multiple presses

  2 – a b c 6 - m n o
  3 - d e f 7 - p q r s
  4 - g h i 8 - t u v
  5 - j k l 9 - w x y z

  hello = 4433555[pause]555666

  surprisingly fast!

- T9 predictive entry
  - type as if single key for each letter
  - use dictionary to ‘guess’ the right word
  - hello = 43556 …
  - but 26 -> menu ‘am’ or ‘an’

Handwriting Recognition

- Text can be input into the computer, using a pen and a digesting tablet
  - natural interaction
- Technical problems:
  - capturing all useful information - stroke path, pressure, etc. in a natural manner
  - segmenting joined up writing into individual letters
  - interpreting individual letters
  - coping with different styles of handwriting
- Used in PDAs, and tablet computers …
  … leave the keyboard on the desk!

Speech recognition

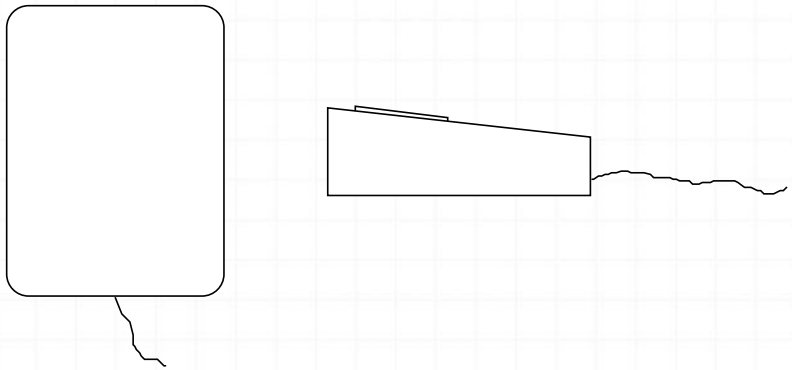
- Improving rapidly
- Most successful when:
  - single user – initial training and learns peculiarities
  - limited vocabulary systems
- Problems with
  - external noise interfering
  - imprecision of pronunciation
  - large vocabularies
  - different speakers

positioning, pointing and drawing

mouse, touchpad
trackballs, joysticks etc.
touch screens, tablets
eyegaze, cursors

the Mouse

- Handheld pointing device
  - very common
  - easy to use



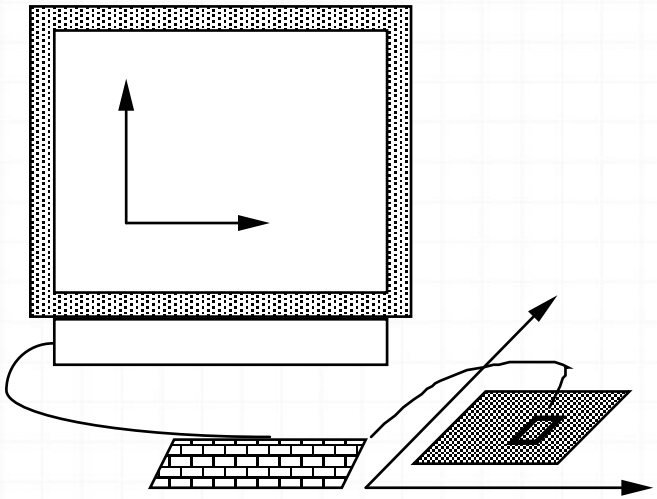
- Two characteristics
  - planar movement
  - buttons

    (usually from 1 to 3 buttons on top, used for making a selection, indicating an option, or to initiate drawing etc.)

the mouse (ctd)

Mouse located on desktop

- requires physical space
- no arm fatigue



Relative movement only is detectable.

Movement of mouse moves screen cursor

Screen cursor oriented in (x, y) plane,
mouse movement in (x, z) plane …

… an *indirect* manipulation device.

- device itself doesn't obscure screen, is accurate and fast.
- hand-eye coordination problems for novice users

How does it work?

Two methods for detecting motion

- Mechanical
  - Ball on underside of mouse turns as mouse is moved
  - Rotates orthogonal potentiometers
  - Can be used on almost any flat surface
- Optical
  - light emitting diode on underside of mouse
  - may use special grid-like pad or just on desk
  - less susceptible to dust and dirt
  - detects fluctuating alterations in reflected light intensity to calculate relative motion in (x, z) plane

Even by foot …

- some experiments with the *footmouse*
  - controlling mouse movement with feet …
  - not very common :-)
- but foot controls are common elsewhere:
  - car pedals
  - sewing machine speed control
  - organ and piano pedals

Touchpad

- small touch sensitive tablets
- ‘stroke’ to move mouse pointer
- used mainly in laptop computers

- good ‘acceleration’ settings important
  - fast stroke
    - lots of pixels per inch moved
    - initial movement to the target
  - slow stroke
    - less pixels per inch
    - for accurate positioning

Trackball and thumbwheels

Trackball

- ball is rotated inside static housing
  - like an upsdie down mouse!
- relative motion moves cursor
- indirect device, fairly accurate
- separate buttons for picking
- very fast for gaming
- used in some portable and notebook computers.

Thumbwheels …

- for accurate CAD – two dials for X-Y cursor position
- for fast scrolling – single dial on mouse

Joystick and keyboard nipple

Joystick

- indirect
  pressure of stick = velocity of movement
- buttons for selection
  on top or on front like a trigger
- often used for computer games
  aircraft controls and 3D navigation

Keyboard nipple

- for laptop computers
- miniature joystick in the middle of the keyboard

Touch-sensitive screen

- Detect the presence of finger or stylus on the screen.
  - works by interrupting matrix of light beams, capacitance changes or ultrasonic reflections
  - *direct* pointing device
- Advantages:
  - fast, and requires no specialised pointer
  - good for menu selection
  - suitable for use in hostile environment: clean and safe from damage.
- Disadvantages:
  - finger can mark screen
  - imprecise (finger is a fairly blunt instrument!)
    - difficult to select small regions or perform accurate drawing
  - lifting arm can be tiring

Stylus and light pen

Stylus

- small pen-like pointer to draw directly on screen
- may use touch sensitive surface or magnetic detection
- used in PDA, tablets PCs and drawing tables

Light Pen

- now rarely used
- uses light from screen to detect location

BOTH …

- very direct and obvious to use
- but can obscure screen

Digitizing tablet

- Mouse like-device with cross hairs

- used on special surface
  - rather like stylus

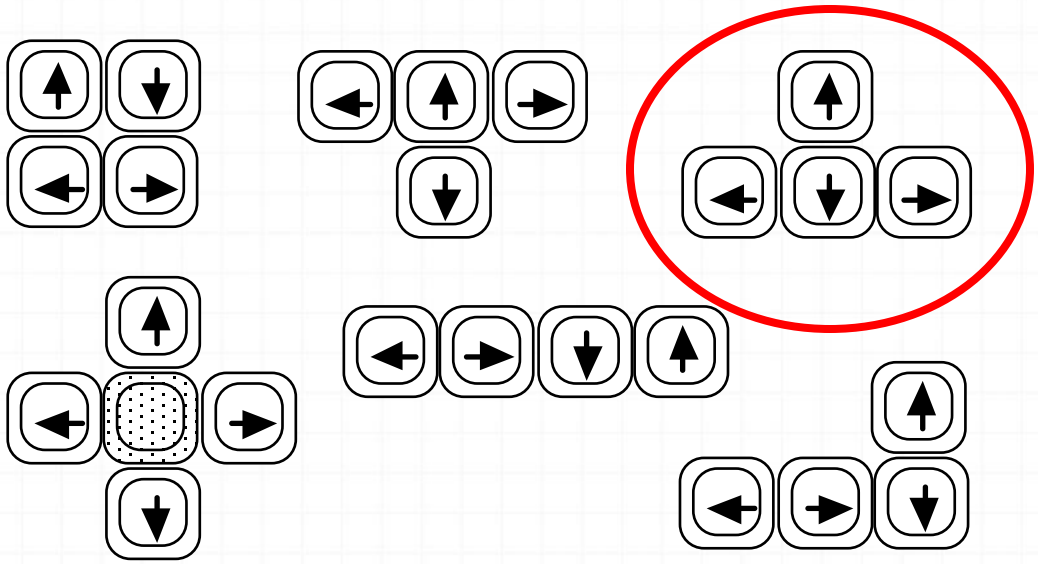
- very accurate
  - used for digitizing maps

Eyegaze

- control interface by eye gaze direction
  - e.g. look at a menu item to select it
- uses laser beam reflected off retina
  - … a very low power laser!
- mainly used for evaluation (ch x)
- potential for hands-free control
- high accuracy requires headset
- cheaper and lower accuracy devices available
  sit under the screen like a small webcam

Cursor keys

- Four keys (up, down, left, right) on keyboard.
- Very, very cheap, but slow.
- Useful for not much more than basic motion for text-editing tasks.
- No standardised layout, but inverted “T”, most common



Discrete positioning controls

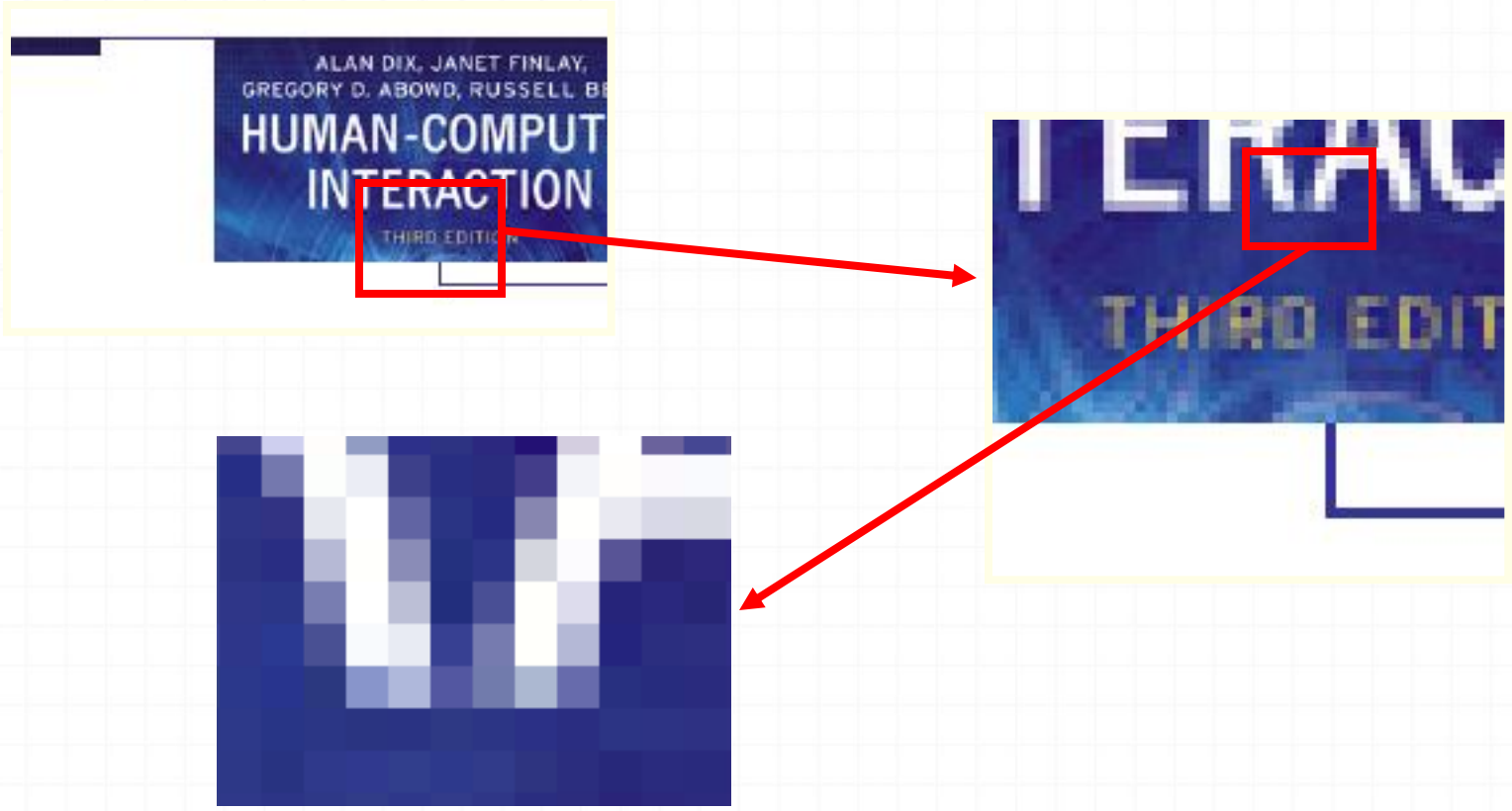
- in phones, TV controls etc.
  - cursor pads or mini-joysticks
  - discrete left-right, up-down
  - mainly for menu selection

display devices

bitmap screens (CRT & LCD)
large & situated displays
digital paper

bitmap displays

- screen is vast number of coloured dots



resolution and colour depth

- Resolution … used (inconsistently) for
  - number of pixels on screen (width x height)
    - e.g. SVGA 1024 x 768, PDA perhaps 240x400
  - density of pixels (in pixels or dots per inch - dpi)
    - typically between 72 and 96 dpi
- Aspect ratio
  - ration between width and height
  - 4:3 for most screens, 16:9 for wide-screen TV
- Colour depth:
  - how many different colours for each pixel?
  - black/white or greys only
  - 256 from a pallete
  - 8 bits each for red/green/blue = millions of colours

Health hints ...

- do not sit too close to the screen
- do not use very small fonts
- do not look at the screen for long periods without a break
- do not place the screen directly in front of a bright window
- work in well-lit surroundings

★ Take extra care if pregnant.
but also posture, ergonomics, stress

Liquid crystal displays

- Smaller, lighter, and … no radiation problems.
- Found on PDAs, portables and notebooks,
  … and increasingly on desktop and even for home TV
- also used in dedicted displays:
  digital watches, and mobile phones

large displays

- used for meetings, lectures, etc.
- technology

  plasma – usually wide screen

  video walls – lots of small screens together

  projected – RGB lights or LCD projector

  - hand/body obscures screen
  - may be solved by 2 projectors + clever software

  back-projected

  - frosted glass + projector behind

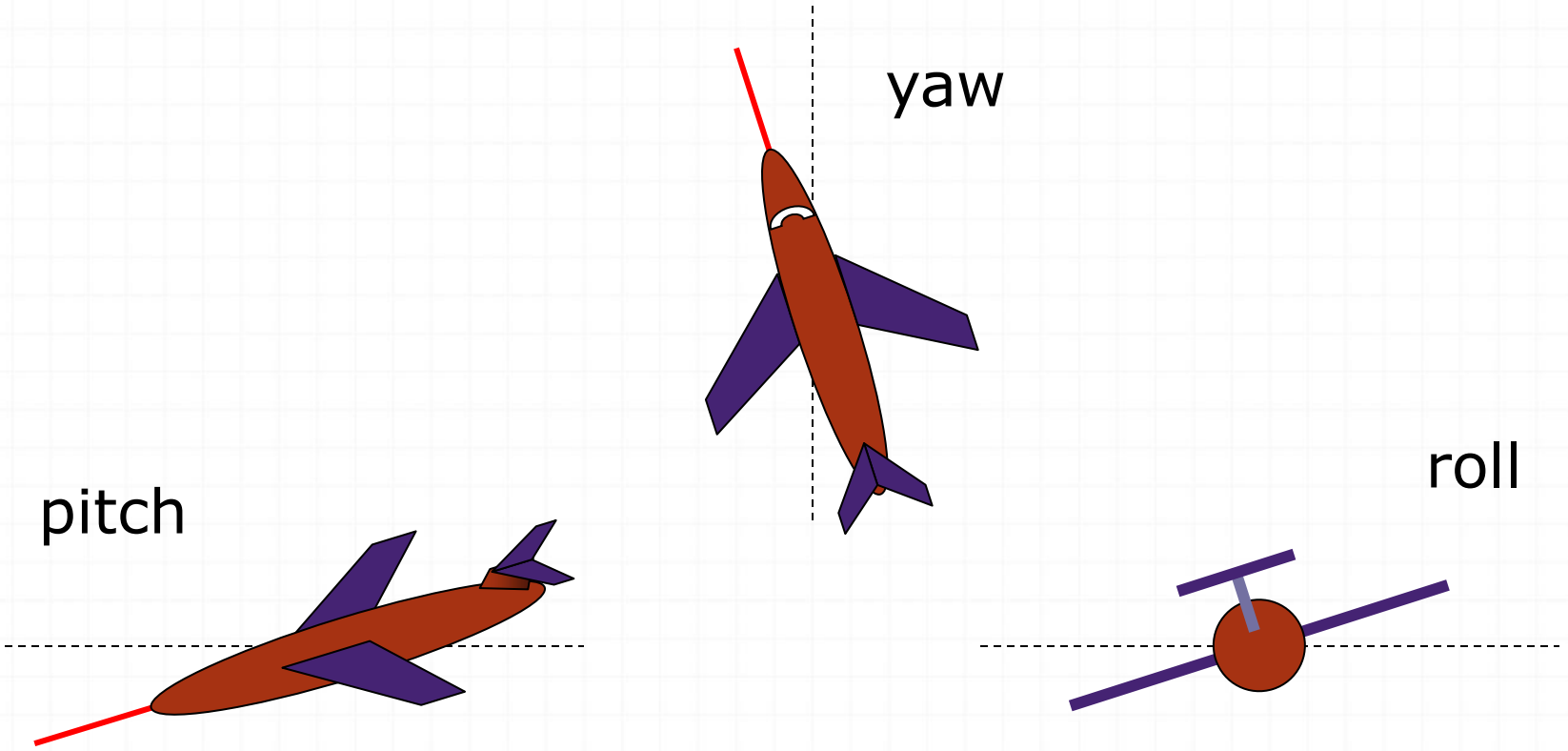
virtual reality and 3D interaction

positioning in 3D space
moving and grasping
seeing 3D (helmets and caves)

positioning in 3D space

- cockpit and virtual controls
  - steering wheels, knobs and dials … just like real!
- the 3D mouse
  - six-degrees of movement: x, y, z + roll, pitch, yaw
- data glove
  - fibre optics used to detect finger position
- VR helmets
  - detect head motion and possibly eye gaze
- whole body tracking
  - accelerometers strapped to limbs or reflective dots and video processing

pitch, yaw and roll



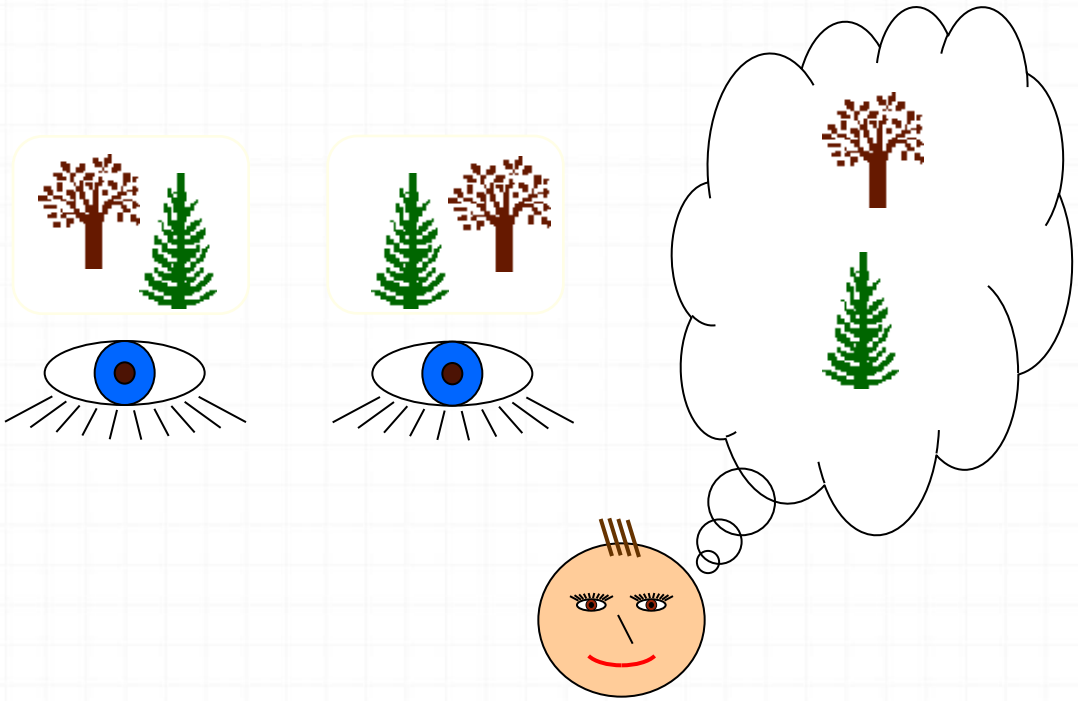
3D displays

- desktop VR
  - ordinary screen, mouse or keyboard control
  - perspective and motion give 3D effect
- seeing in 3D
  - use stereoscopic vision
  - VR helmets
  - screen plus shuttered specs, etc.

also see extra slides on 3D vision

VR headsets

- small TV screen for each eye
- slightly different angles
- 3D effect



VR motion sickness

- time delay
  - move head … lag … display moves
  - *conflict:* head movement vs. eyes
- depth perception
  - headset gives different stereo distance
  - but all focused in same plane
  - *conflict:* eye angle vs. focus
- conflicting cues => sickness
  - helps motivate improvements in technology

physical controls, sensors etc.

special displays and gauges
sound, touch, feel, smell
physical controls
environmental and bio-sensing

dedicated displays

- analogue representations:
  - dials, gauges, lights, etc.
- digital displays:
  - small LCD screens, LED lights, etc.
- head-up displays
  - found in aircraft cockpits
  - show most important controls
    … depending on context

Sounds

- beeps, bongs, clonks, whistles and whirrs
- used for error indications
- confirmation of actions e.g. keyclick

also see chapter 10

Touch, feel, smell

- touch and feeling important
  - in games … vibration, force feedback
  - in simulation … feel of surgical instruments
  - called *haptic* devices

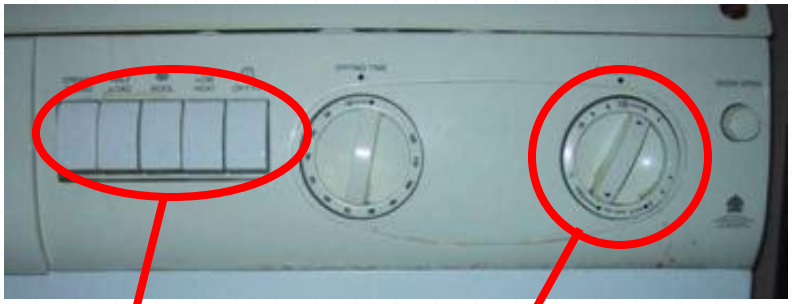
- texture, smell, taste
  - current technology very limited

BMW iDrive

- for controlling menus
- feel small ‘bumps’ for each item
- makes it easier to select options by feel
- uses haptic technology from Immersion Corp.

physical controls

- specialist controls needed …
  - industrial controls, consumer products, etc.



large buttons

clear dials

tiny buttons

multi-function control

easy-clean smooth buttons

Environment and bio-sensing

- sensors all around us
  - car courtesy light – small switch on door
  - ultrasound detectors – security, washbasins
  - RFID security tags in shops
  - temperature, weight, location
- … and even our own bodies …
  - iris scanners, body temperature, heart rate, galvanic skin response, blink rate

paper: printing and scanning

print technology
fonts, page description, WYSIWYG
scanning, OCR

Printing dots

- image made from small dots
  - allows any character set or graphic to be printed,
- critical features:
  - resolution
    - size and spacing of the dots
    - measured in dots per inch (dpi)
  - speed
    - usually measured in pages per minute
  - cost!!

Types of dot-based printers

- dot-matrix printers
  - use inked ribbon (like a typewriter
  - line of pins that can strike the ribbon, dotting the paper.
  - typical resolution 80-120 dpi
- ink-jet and bubble-jet printers
  - tiny blobs of ink sent from print head to paper
  - typically 300 dpi or better .
- laser printer
  - like photocopier: dots of electrostatic charge deposited on drum, which picks up toner (black powder form of ink) rolled onto paper which is then fixed with heat
  - typically 600 dpi or better.

Printing in the workplace

- shop tills
  - dot matrix
  - same print head used for several paper rolls
  - may also print cheques
- thermal printers
  - special heat-sensitive paper
  - paper heated by pins makes a dot
  - poor quality, but simple & low maintenance
  - used in some fax machines

Fonts

- Font – the particular style of text

Courier font
Helvetica font
Palatino font
Times Roman font

- §´∝≡↵ℑℜ⊗↵~ (special symbol)

- Size of a font measured in points (1 pt about 1/72”) (vaguely) related to its height

This is ten point Helvetica
This is twelve point
This is fourteen point
This is eighteen point
and this is twenty-four point

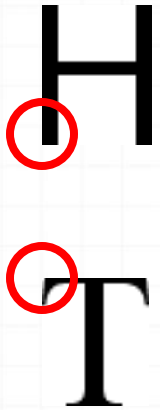
Fonts (ctd)

Pitch

- fixed-pitch – every character has the same width
  e.g. Courier
- variable-pitched – some characters wider
  e.g. Times Roman – compare the ‘i’ and the “m”

Serif or Sans-serif

- sans-serif – square-ended strokes
  e.g. Helvetica
- serif – with splayed ends (such as)
  e.g. Times Roman or Palatino



Readability of text

- lowercase
  - easy to read shape of words
- UPPERCASE
  - better for individual letters and non-words
    e.g. flight numbers: BA793 vs. ba793
- serif fonts
  - helps your eye on long lines of printed text
  - but sans serif often better on screen

Page Description Languages

- Pages very complex
  - different fonts, bitmaps, lines, digitised photos, etc.
- Can convert it all into a bitmap and send to the printer
  … but often huge !
- Alternatively Use a page description language
  - sends a *description* of the page can be sent,
  - instructions for curves, lines, text in different styles, etc.
  - like a programming language for printing!
- PostScript is the most common

Screen and page

- WYSIWYG
  - what you see is what you get
  - aim of word processing, etc.
- but …
  - screen: 72 dpi, landscape image
  - print: 600+ dpi, portrait
- can try to make them similar
  but never quite the same
- so … need different designs, graphics etc, for screen and print

Scanners

- Take paper and convert it into a bitmap
- Two sorts of scanner
  - flat-bed: paper placed on a glass plate, whole page converted into bitmap
  - hand-held: scanner passed over paper, digitising strip typically 3-4” wide
- Shines light at paper and note intensity of reflection
  - colour or greyscale
- Typical resolutions from 600–2400 dpi

Scanners (ctd)

Used in

- desktop publishing for incorporating photographs and other images
- document storage and retrieval systems, doing away with paper storage
- special scanners for slides and photographic negatives

Optical character recognition

- OCR converts bitmap back into text
- different fonts
  - create problems for simple “template matching” algorithms
  - more complex systems segment text, decompose it into lines and arcs, and decipher characters that way
- page format
  - columns, pictures, headers and footers

Paper-based interaction

- paper usually regarded as *output* only
- can be *input* too – OCR, scanning, etc.
- Xerox PaperWorks
  - glyphs – small patterns of /\\//\\\
    - used to identify forms etc.
    - used with scanner and fax to control applications
- more recently
  - papers micro printed - like wattermarks
    - identify *which* sheet and *where* you are
  - special ‘pen’ can read locations
    - know where they are writing

memory

short term and long term
speed, capacity, compression
formats, access

Short-term Memory - RAM

- Random access memory (RAM)
  - on silicon chips
  - 100 nano-second access time
  - usually volatile (lose information if power turned off)
  - data transferred at around 100 Mbytes/sec

Long-term Memory - disks

- magnetic disks
  - floppy disks store around 1.4 Mbytes
- optical disks
  - use lasers to read and sometimes write
  - more robust that magnetic media
  - CD-ROM
  - DVD - for AV applications, or very large files

Blurring boundaries

- PDAs
  - often use RAM for their main memory
- Flash-Memory
  - used in PDAs, cameras etc.
  - silicon based but persistent
  - plug-in USB devices for data transfer

virtual memory

- Problem:
  - running lots of programs + each program large
  - not enough RAM
- Solution - Virtual memory :
  - store some programs temporarily on disk
  - makes RAM appear bigger

Compression

- reduce amount of storage required
- lossless
  - recover exact text or image – e.g. GIF, ZIP
  - look for commonalities:
    - text: AAAAAAAAAABBBBBCCCCCCCC 10A[illegible]
    - video: compare successive frames and store change
- lossy
  - recover something like original – e.g. JPEG, MP3
  - exploit perception
    - JPEG: lose rapid changes and some colour
    - MP3: reduce accuracy of drowned out notes

Storage formats - text

- ASCII - 7-bit binary code for to each letter and character
- UTF-8 - 8-bit encoding of 16 bit character set
- RTF (rich text format)
  - text plus formatting and layout information
- SGML (standardized generalised markup language)
  - documents regarded as structured objects
- XML (extended markup language)
  - simpler version of SGML for web applications

Storage formats - media

- Images:
  - many storage formats :
    (PostScript, GIFF, JPEG, TIFF, PICT, etc.)
  - plus different compression techniques
    (to reduce their storage requirements)
- Audio/Video
  - again lots of formats :
    (QuickTime, MPEG, WAV, etc.)
  - compression even more important
  - also ‘streaming’ formats for network delivery

processing and networks

finite speed (but also Moore's law)
limits of interaction
networked computing

Finite processing speed

- Designers tend to assume fast processors, and make interfaces more and more complicated
- But problems occur, because processing cannot keep up with all the tasks it needs to do
  - cursor overshooting because system has buffered keypresses
  - icon wars - user clicks on icon, nothing happens, clicks on another, then system responds and windows fly everywhere
- Also problems if system is too fast - e.g. help screens may scroll through text much too rapidly to be read

Moore's law

- computers get faster and faster!

/e3/online/moores-law/

Networked computing

Networks allow access to ...

- large memory and processing
- other people (groupware, email)
- shared resources – esp. the web

Issues

- network delays – slow feedback
- conflicts - many people update data
- unpredictability

The internet

- history …
  - 1969: DARPANET US DoD, 4 sites
  - 1971: 23; 1984: 1000; 1989: 10000
- common language (protocols):
  - TCP – Transmission Control protocol
    - lower level, packets (like letters) between machines
  - IP – Internet Protocol
    - reliable channel (like phone call) between programs on machines
  - email, HTTP, all build on top of these