



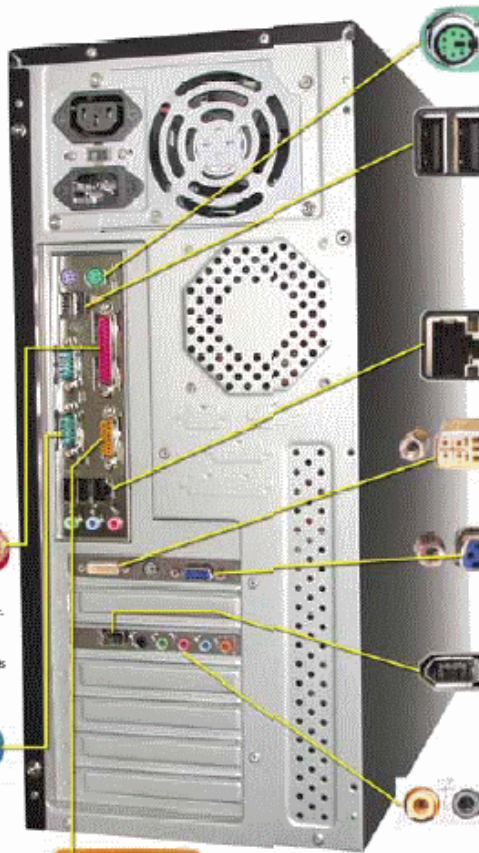
Parallel. Most commonly used to connect printers, the parallel port uses a 25-pin connector and can transmit 50KB to 100KB of data per second. Despite these slower-than-USB speeds, the parallel port is still useful for connecting printers, particularly because most users won't notice a speed difference when printing, and many older printers don't have USB connections. This port is also useful for connecting older scanners and Zip drives.



Serial. Serial ports are one of the oldest PC port types and are nearing the end of their lifecycle. Designed to connect mice, external modems, and older PDAs, most serial ports use a 9-pin connector. Some new motherboards don't even include a serial port.



Game/MIDI. Included on motherboards and some sound cards, the game/MIDI port uses a 15-pin connector to accommodate joysticks, gamepads, and other game controllers, as well as MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) instruments.



PS/2 (mouse and keyboard). These ports use a 6-pin connector to accommodate mice and keyboards. Although more peripherals today now use USB connections, many new motherboards still include these older ports, which manufacturers often color green, orange, blue, or purple for easy identification.

USB. Short for Universal Serial Bus, these ports accept the slim, rectangular USB connectors commonly found on peripherals ranging from mice, keyboards, and printers to game controllers, digital cameras, Web cams, and external hard drives. Unlike slower serial and parallel ports, a single USB port lets you daisy-chain up to 127 USB-enabled devices, which means you can use inexpensive extension hubs to supply all the USB ports you need. USB also differs from older ports in that USB devices are hot-swappable, meaning you can plug and unplug them at any time without damaging the devices or your motherboard, and when you plug in a USB device, Windows automatically recognizes and installs it. Most new motherboards include the newer USB 2.0 standard, which supports data rates of up to 480Mbps (megabits per second) and is backward compatible to the older slower 1.1 specification.

Ethernet. This port is part of an integrated or expansion network interface adapter (or NIC [network interface card]) and uses an RJ-45 connector to join the PC with a LAN (local-area network) or a broadband modem.



DVI. The DVI (Digital Video Interface) port can support a fully digital connection between the computer's graphics hardware and a digital monitor (such as an LCD [liquid-crystal display]), allowing for increased image quality over an analog connection. Many modern video cards include a DVI port, as well as a VGA port.



VGA. Short for Video Graphics Array, the VGA port provides an analog display signal that supports analog monitors and projectors through a 15-pin connector. Most video cards and an increasing number of new motherboards include some sort of VGA port.



FireWire. Also known as IEEE 1394, this high-speed port rivals USB 2.0 speeds and supports up to 63 external connected devices using a single 6-pin connection. Like USB, FireWire provides a hot-swappable environment that's convenient for external hard drives, digital cameras, CD burners, and similar devices that can benefit from a flexible, high-speed connection. Although not all motherboards include FireWire ports, FireWire PCI (Peripheral Component Interconnect) expansion cards are widely available and continue to drop in price.



Audio input/output. These 3.5mm minijacks, included with an audio expansion card or the motherboard (if it has integrated audio), provide audio output via an external speaker connection through the output jack and microphone, instrument, and other input through the input jack. Depending on the hardware, separate minijacks could support left, right, and center/subwoofer output channels and separate line-in and microphone input channels.

