

LANGUAGE GAMES

Grokking tech talk

Solution
on pages
50–51

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Jargon is the specialised vocabulary and language of a particular field. Among the best documented is that used by computer enthusiasts, or *hackers*. Many terms that originated in hacker jargon, such as *Internet*, *face time*, and *spam*, have since entered mainstream English, but a great many more are not widely *grokked* (understood) outside hackerdom proper.

Below are 20 expressions from hacker jargon and slang, along with 20 definitions in random order. Can you match each term to its definition?

If you get 0 to 5 correct, consider yourself a *noob* (an unskilled rookie); 6 to 10, in the *larval stage* (a fledgling hacker); 11 to 15, a *wizard* (a highly competent expert); and 16 or more, an *ubergeek* (a hacker of world renown).

Answers and explanatory notes are given on pages 50–51.

1. <i>cargo cult programming</i>	a) the tendency for a program to stop working after a while, despite nothing having changed
2. <i>Wintendo</i>	b) an unintended but serendipitously useful property of a program
3. <i>Vulcan nerve pinch</i>	c) criticising your opponent's spelling instead of their arguments
4. <i>aeroplane rule</i>	d) an awesomely arcane programming technique
5. <i>blinkenlights</i>	e) a CD recorder of shoddy quality
6. <i>deep magic</i>	f) a programming style marked by superstitious use of unnecessary code
7. <i>spelling flame</i>	g) to disguise a word by systematically replacing some of its letters
8. <i>angry fruit salad</i>	h) someone whose job involves the physical design of microchips
9. <i>ad-hockery</i>	i) said of a program so encrusted with features that the underlying design becomes obscured
10. <i>splat</i>	j) a bug that causes the programmer great public embarrassment
11. <i>pumpkin holder</i>	k) the asterisk character (*)
12. <i>asbestos longjohns</i>	l) the keyboard combination that forces a machine to reboot
13. <i>sandbender</i>	m) someone granted the exclusive right to use a computing resource
14. <i>misbug</i>	n) gratuitous assumptions coded into a program that make it seem intelligent
15. <i>bit rot</i>	o) the front-panel lights on a computer or peripheral device
16. <i>rococo</i>	p) wasting time by fiddling with a computer's fonts, backgrounds, icon themes, etc.
17. <i>window dressing</i>	q) notional garments donned in anticipation of a verbal attack
18. <i>coaster toaster</i>	r) a graphical user interface with garish colours
19. <i>disemvowel</i>	s) a Windows machine kept only for playing videogames
20. <i>brown-paper-bag bug</i>	t) the notion that simpler systems are more robust