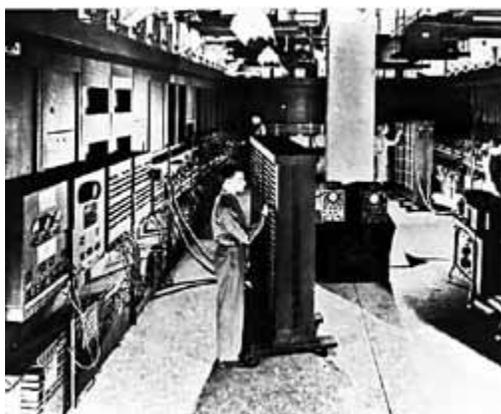


The Journey InsideSM: Introduction to Computers Student Handout: Historical Perspectives

Historical Perspectives

In the student video, you were introduced to the first working computer without mechanical components—the ENIAC. This huge machine plays an important part in the history of computers. The ENIAC was already out of date by the time it was constructed.

In almost every magazine or newspaper, you can find at least one advertisement encouraging you to buy the latest in computer equipment, a television set, or a car. What makes you stop and look at such an item? Do you stop and read the words or just look at the pictures?



The ENIAC—built during World War II:
Smithsonian Institution Photo No. 72-2644

Activities

1. Create an advertisement for the ENIAC. Use books, the Internet, a computer dictionary, and any other resources you have to help. Add graphics to help sell your product.

From today's perspective, the ENIAC does not seem very impressive, but the following paragraph from the June 1946 issue of *Scientific American* shows that its introduction was amazing:

"Capable of solving problems so complex that all previous methods of solution were considered impractical, an electronic robot, known as ENIAC—electronic numerical integrator and computer—has been announced by the War Department. It is able to compute 1,000 times faster than the most advanced general-purpose calculating machine, and solves in hours problems which would take years on a mechanical machine. Containing nearly 18,000 vacuum tubes, the 30-ton ENIAC occupies a room 30 by 50 feet."

2. Create an announcement similar to the one above for some computing device that you are familiar with today. Make it sound as exciting and impressive as this description of the ENIAC.

3. From the two activities below, select and complete one.
- Talk to adults who use a computer regularly in their jobs and write a short report or create a multimedia-based presentation on your discussions. Find out what kind of computer these people use and if they like or dislike using it. Find out exactly what kinds of tasks they use a computer to do. Find out how important they think a computer is helping them to do their job successfully.
 - Select a job that interests you and that you know makes use of a computer. Write a report or create a multimedia-based presentation about this job. Describe why the job appeals to you and just what the role of computer technology plays in doing this job.