LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Know relevant information about system software
- Recognize the characteristics of a typical graphical user interface or GUI
- Understand the basic features of system software, spreadsheet and databases
- Acquire specific vocabulary related to software and Internet utilities

KEY TERMS

- **Application software**
- **Operating system**
- **Software**
- **System software**

Information provided by programs and data is known as **software.**

Programs are sets of instructions that make the computer execute operations and tasks. There are two main types of **software:**

The **system software** refers to all programs which control the basic functions of a computer. They include operating systems, systems, system utilities (e.g. an anti-virus program, a back-up utility) and language translators (e.g. a compiler – the software that translates instructions into machine code).

The **application software** refers to all those applications – such as word processors and spreadsheets – which are used for specific purposes. Applications are usually stored on disks loaded into the RAM memory when activated by the user.

The **operating system** is the most important type of system software. It is usually supplied by the manufacturers and comprises a set of programs and files that control the hardware and software resources of a computer system. It controls all the elements that the user sees, and it communicates directly with the computer. In most configurations, the OS is automatically loaded into the RAM section when the computer is started up.

MS-DOS is an operating system developed by Microsoft in 1981 for all IBM PC compatibles. Today it's only used in old PCs. In this **text-based** OS you communicate with the computer by typing commands that exist within its library. For example, some basic DOS commands include: DIR (shows a list of all the files in a directory), COPY (makes a duplicate of a file), DEL (deletes files).

Windows XP is an update to all Windows versions, with a new visual design. It's more secure and reliable. It offers support to the latest technologies.

Exercise

1. Search the Web for information about **Windows Vista, Windows 98, Windows 2000, Windows Millennium and Mac OS.** Create a list containing the most relevant information.
2. What is the most reliable version of the Windows family?
3. What is the meaning of 'multi-tasking'?