



COMPUTER SCIENCE SYMBOLS

From time to time, symbols and punctuation used in Computer Science come up as quizbowl answers. They can be tossed up, but more often they are asked as bonus parts. Below are some of the most-commonly asked Computer Science symbols and punctuation in quizbowl, along with a few bullet points about each of them.

“!” – Exclamation Point:

- Used in RISC OS to denote application directories
- In Unix/PERL it is used as an “interpreter directive”, taking the form #!
- In RUBY, it is a suffix for functions and forms which modify their input

“@” – At Sign (also called “apetail” or “atmark”):

- ALGOL uses it to signify the lower bound of an array
- C# uses it to denote “verbatim strings”
- In PASCAL it denotes the location of a variable
- PERL uses it to prefix variable arrays
- Python 2.4 introduced it to “decorate” a function

“#” – Pound Sign:

- Denotes the start of a Hexidecimal code (#FFFFFF)
- In set theory it denotes the Cardinality (the number of elements in the set)
- In Unix, it denotes a comment
- In Unix Shells, it is used to denote a root admin
- Used in URLs as a fragment identifier

“\$” – Dollar Sign:

- Used to define String variables in older versions of BASIC
- In PASCAL-like programming languages, it is used to define Hex constants
- In Javascript, it is used to denote a common utility class
- In Windows, it ends the name of a hidden shared folder

“%” – Percent Sign:

- SQL uses it as a wildcard character
- BASIC uses it to denote an integer



“&” – Ampersand (also called “and symbol”):

- Used in C, C++, and Go as an operator denoting an object in memory
- Used in FORTRAN to treat two lines as one.
- Used in BASIC to denote characters as 32-bit
- Used in URLs to separate a query string

“*” – Asterisk:

- In Microsoft’s Command Prompt, it’s a wildcard
- In Microsoft Office’s GUI (the window you see), it is used to denote an unsaved document
- Fortran, Perl, Ruby, Python all use it to denote an exponent ($5^{**}8 = 5^8$)
- Used in /*example text*/ form in order to denote comments in many programming languages (like Java)
- Denotes a complex conjugate

“?” – Question Mark:

- Used in C to denote Boolean conditions
- Used in URL Query strings to denote the start of a query

