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Information Systems 101
October 13, 2005

Biometrics

Biometrics is the technology of authenticating a person's identity by verifying a personal characteristic. Biometric devices grant users to programs, systems, or rooms by analyzing some biometric identifier (Schmidt 54-62). A biometric identifier is a physical or behavioral characteristic. Examples include fingerprints, facial features, hand geometry, voice patterns and eye patterns.

A biometric device translates a personal characteristic into a digital code that is compared with a digital code stored in the computer. If the digital code in the computer does not match the personal characteristic's code the computer denies access to the individual.

The most widely used biometric device today is a fingerprint scanner. A fingerprint scanner captures curves and identifications of a fingerprint. With the cost of fingerprint scanners less than \$100, experts believe this technology will become the home user's authentication device for e-commerce transactions. To conduct a credit-card transaction, the Web site would require users to hold a finger on the scanner. External fingerprint scanners usually plug into a parallel or USB port.¹ Businesses use fingerprint scanners to authenticate users before they can access a personal computer. Grade schools use fingerprint scanners as an alternative to lunch money. Students' account balances adjust for each lunch purchased.

¹ According to Carter and Juarez, newer keyboards and notebook computers have a fingerprint scanner built into them (42-53)