FAT

Short for **File Allocation Table**, **FAT** is a method of keeping track of the contents of a hard drive used by early Microsoft operating systems. The table is a chart of numbers that correspond to cluster addresses on the hard drive. Below is a listing of the different types of FAT that have been used and the operating systems using them.

FAT8

The oldest FAT, FAT8 was used on 8-inch floppies with the 8086 processor.

FAT12

A File Allocation Table that uses 12-bit binary system that was derived from FAT8. A hard drive formatted using FAT12 can use a maximum of approximately 16,736,256 volume size, and today is no longer used. If your computer is running Windows 95 or above and your FAT within FDISK is being displayed as FAT12 your hard drive is corrupted, bad, or has a computer virus.

FAT16

FAT utilizing a 16-bit binary system. Used with Windows 3.x to Windows 95.

FAT32

Enhanced File Allocation Table utilizing a 28-bit binary system, first used in Windows 95 OSR2 and Windows 98, that saves disk space by using 4k Cluster. See FAT32 Page for extended information about FAT32.

Today, later versions of Microsoft Windows, such as Windows XP, Vista, and 7 are using NTFS and not FAT.

Related pages

» Computer hard drive help and support.