Data Communication

Data communications refers to the transmission of this digital data between two or more computers and a computer network or data network is a telecommunications network that allows computers to exchange data. The physical connection between networked computing devices is established using either cable media or wireless media. The best-known computer network is the Internet.

This tutorial should teach you basics of Data Communication and Computer Network (DCN) and will also take you through various advance concepts related to Data Communication and Computer Network.

Why to Learn Data Communication & Computer Network?

Network Basic Understanding

A system of interconnected computers and computerized peripherals such as printers is called computer network. This interconnection among computers facilitates information sharing among them. Computers may connect to each other by either wired or wireless media.

Network Engineering

Networking engineering is a complicated task, which involves software, firmware, chip level engineering, hardware, and electric pulses. To ease network engineering, the whole networking concept is divided into multiple layers. Each layer is involved in some particular task and is independent of all other layers. But as a whole, almost all networking tasks depend on all of these layers. Layers share data between them and they depend on each other only to take input and send output.

Internet

A network of networks is called an internetwork, or simply the internet. It is the largest network in existence on this planet.The internet hugely connects all WANs and it can have connection to LANs and Home networks. Internet uses TCP/IP protocol suite and uses IP as its addressing protocol. Present day, Internet is widely implemented using IPv4. Because of shortage of address spaces, it is gradually migrating from IPv4 to IPv6.

Internet enables its users to share and access enormous amount of information worldwide. It uses WWW, FTP, email services, audio and video streaming etc. At huge level, internet works on Client-Server model.

Internet uses very high speed backbone of fiber optics. To inter-connect various continents, fibers are laid under sea known to us as submarine communication cable.

Applications of Communication & Computer Network

Computer systems and peripherals are connected to form a network.They provide numerous advantages:

- Resource sharing such as printers and storage devices
- Exchange of information by means of e-Mails and FTP
- Information sharing by using Web or Internet
- Interaction with other users using dynamic web pages
- IP phones
- Video conferences
- Parallel computing
- Instant messaging

Audience

This tutorial has been prepared for the computer science graduates to help them understand the basic to advanced concepts related to Data Communication and Computer Networking. After completing this tutorial you will find yourself at a moderate level of expertise in Data Communication and Computer Networking from where you can take yourself to next levels.

Prerequisites

Before you start proceeding with this tutorial, I'm making an assumption that you are already aware about basic computer concepts like what is keyboard, mouse, monitor, input, output, primary memory and secondary memory etc. If you are not well aware of these concepts then I will suggest to go through our short tutorial on Computer Fundamentals

A system of interconnected computers and computerized peripherals such as printers is called computer network. This interconnection among computers facilitates information sharing among them. Computers may connect to each other by either wired or wireless media.

Classification of Computer Networks

Computer networks are classified based on various factors.They includes:

- Geographical span
- Inter-connectivity
- Administration
- Architecture

Geographical Span

Geographically a network can be seen in one of the following categories:

- It may be spanned across your table, among Bluetooth enabled devices,. Ranging not more than few meters.
- It may be spanned across a whole building, including intermediate devices to connect all floors.
- It may be spanned across a whole city.
- It may be spanned across multiple cities or provinces.
- It may be one network covering whole world.

Inter-Connectivity

Components of a network can be connected to each other differently in some fashion. By connectedness we mean either logically , physically , or both ways.

- Every single device can be connected to every other device on network, making the network mesh.
- All devices can be connected to a single medium but geographically disconnected, created bus like structure.
- Each device is connected to its left and right peers only, creating linear structure.
- All devices connected together with a single device, creating star like structure.
- All devices connected arbitrarily using all previous ways to connect each other, resulting in a hybrid structure.

Administration

From an administrator's point of view, a network can be private network which belongs a single autonomous system and cannot be accessed outside its physical or logical domain.A network can be public which is accessed by all.

Network Architecture

Computer networks can be discriminated into various types such as Client-Server,peer-to-peer or hybrid, depending upon its architecture.

- There can be one or more systems acting as Server. Other being Client, requests the Server to serve requests.Server takes and processes request on behalf of Clients.
- Two systems can be connected Point-to-Point, or in back-to-back fashion. They both reside at the same level and called peers.
- There can be hybrid network which involves network architecture of both the above types.

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Generally, networks are distinguished based on their geographical span. A network can be as small as distance between your mobile phone and its Bluetooth headphone and as large as the internet itself, covering the whole geographical world,

Personal Area Network

A Personal Area Network (PAN) is smallest network which is very personal to a user. This may include Bluetooth enabled devices or infra-red enabled devices. PAN has connectivity range up to 10 meters. PAN may include wireless computer keyboard and mouse, Bluetooth enabled headphones, wireless printers and TV remotes.
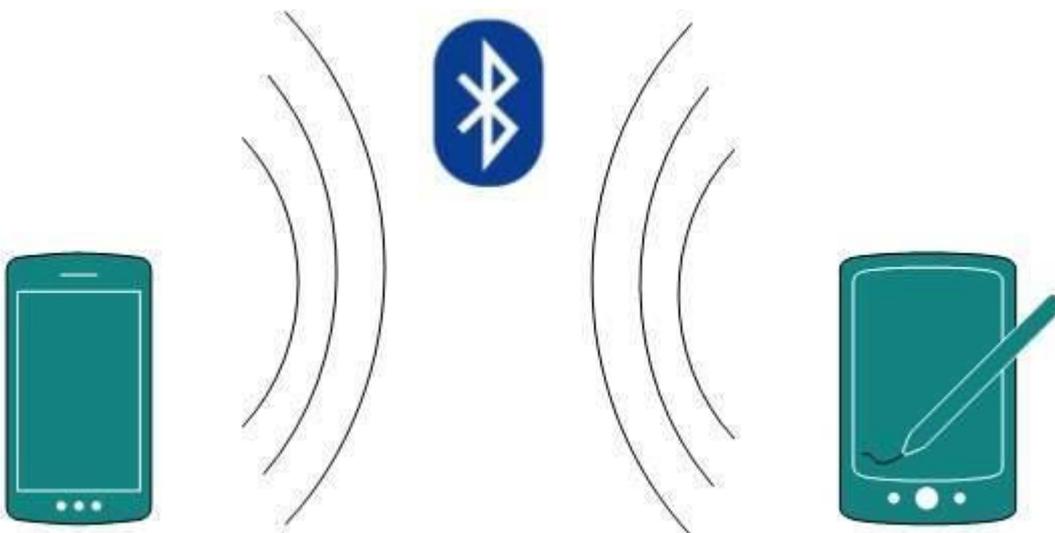

For example, Piconet is Bluetooth-enabled Personal Area Network which may contain up to 8 devices connected together in a master-slave fashion.

Local Area Network

A computer network spanned inside a building and operated under single administrative system is generally termed as Local Area Network (LAN). Usually,LAN covers an organization' offices, schools, colleges or universities. Number of systems connected in LAN may vary from as least as two to as much as 16 million.

LAN provides a useful way of sharing the resources between end users.The resources such as printers, file servers, scanners, and internet are easily sharable among computers.
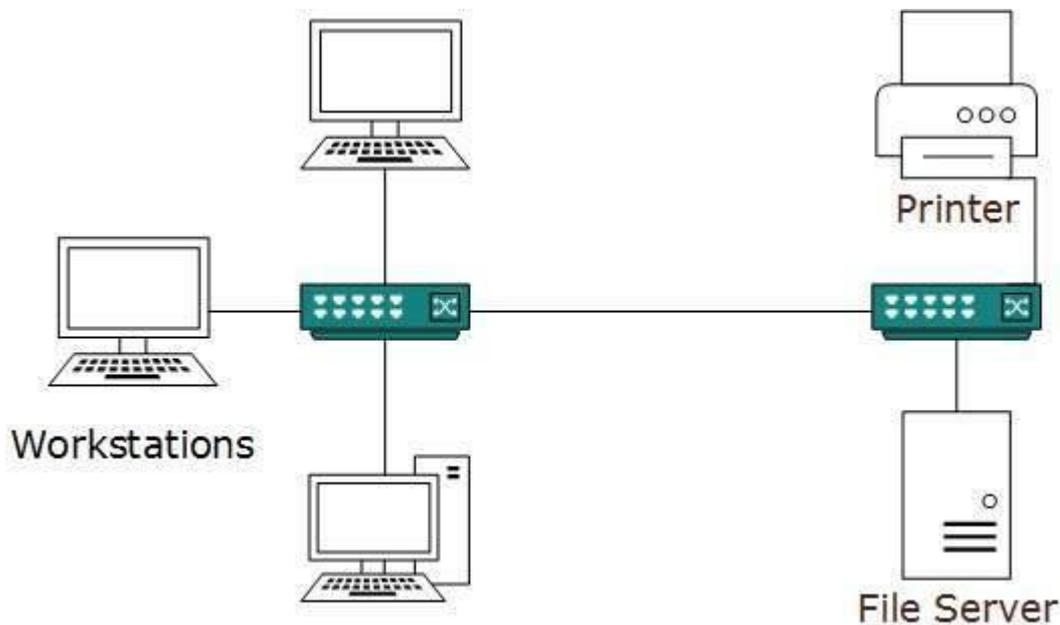
LANs are composed of inexpensive networking and routing equipment. It may contains local servers serving file storage and other locally shared applications. It mostly operates on private IP addresses and does not involve heavy routing. LAN works under its own local domain and controlled centrally.

LAN uses either Ethernet or Token-ring technology. Ethernet is most widely employed LAN technology and uses Star topology, while Token-ring is rarely seen.

LAN can be wired,wireless, or in both forms at once.

Metropolitan Area Network

The Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) generally expands throughout a city such as cable TV network. It can be in the form of Ethernet,Token-ring, ATM, or Fiber Distributed Data Interface (FDDI).

Metro Ethernet is a service which is provided by ISPs. This service enables its users to expand their Local Area Networks. For example, MAN can help an organization to connect all of its offices in a city.
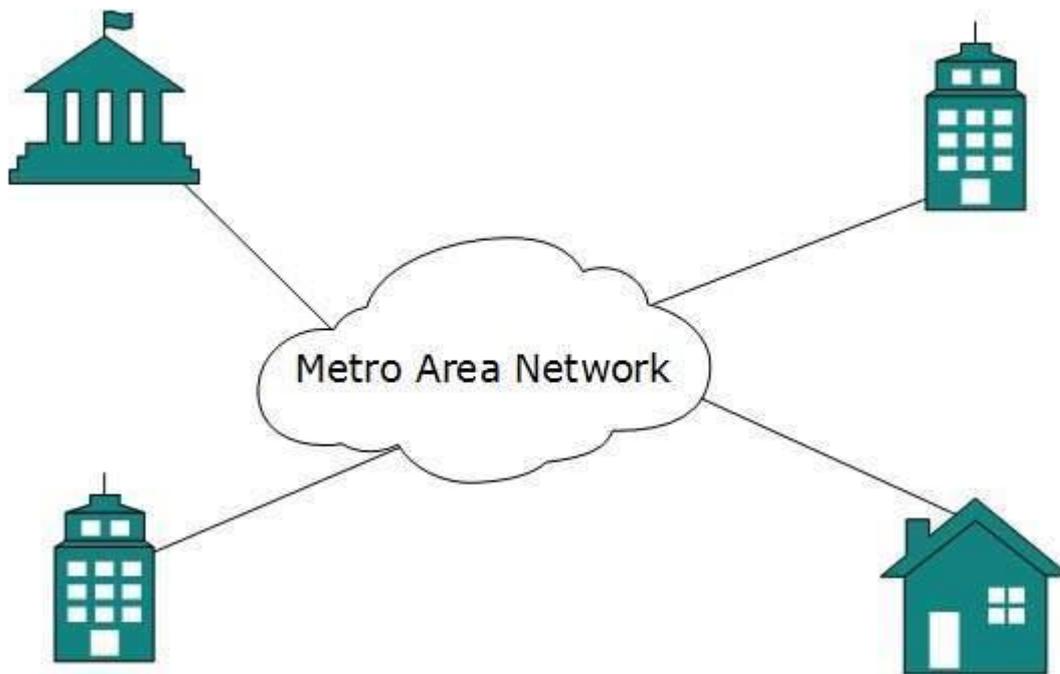
Backbone of MAN is high-capacity and high-speed fiber optics. MAN works in between Local Area Network and Wide Area Network. MAN provides uplink for LANs to WANs or internet.

Wide Area Network

As the name suggests,the Wide Area Network (WAN) covers a wide area which may span across provinces and even a whole country. Generally, telecommunication networks are Wide Area Network. These networks provide connectivity to MANs and LANs. Since they are equipped with very high speed backbone, WANs use very expensive network equipment.
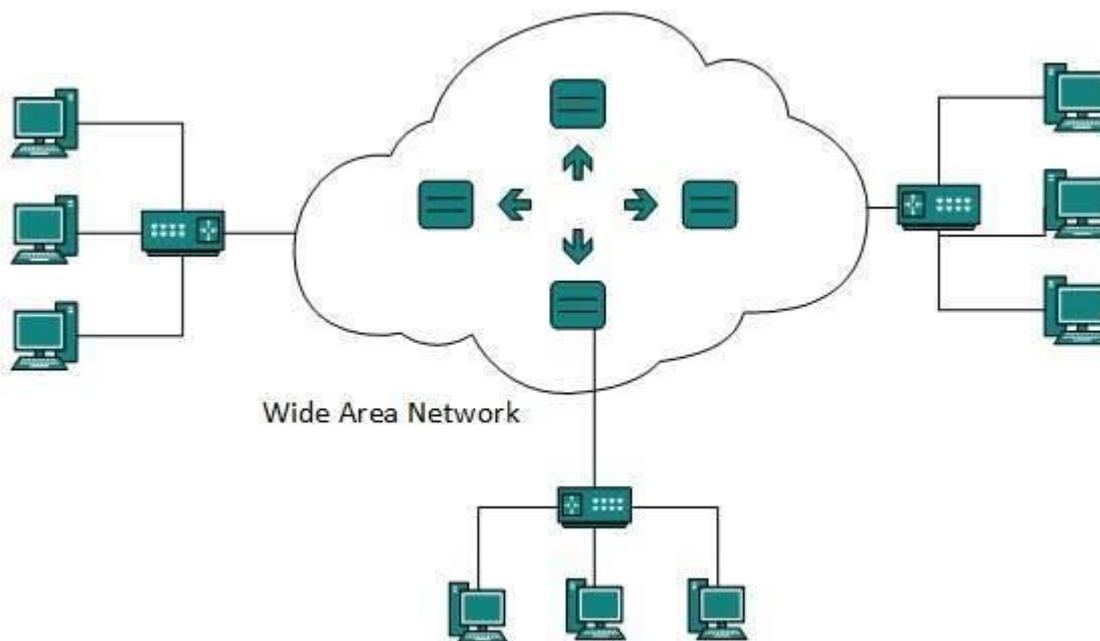
WAN may use advanced technologies such as Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM), Frame Relay, and Synchronous Optical Network (SONET). WAN may be managed by multiple administration.

Internetwork

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Internet is widely deployed on World Wide Web services using HTML linked pages and is accessible by client software known as Web Browsers. When a user requests a page using some web browser located on some Web Server anywhere in the world, the Web Server responds with the proper HTML page. The communication delay is very low.

Internet is serving many proposes and is involved in many aspects of life. Some of them are:

- Web sites
- E-mail
- Instant Messaging
- Blogging
- Social Media
- Marketing
- Networking
- Resource Sharing
- Audio and Video Streaming

Ethernet

Ethernet is a widely deployed LAN technology.This technology was invented by Bob Metcalfe and D.R. Boggs in the year 1970. It was standardized in IEEE 802.3 in 1980.

Ethernet shares media. Network which uses shared media has high probability of data collision. Ethernet uses Carrier Sense Multi Access/Collision Detection (CSMA/CD) technology to detect collisions. On the occurrence of collision in Ethernet, all its hosts roll back, wait for some random amount of time, and then re-transmit the data.

Ethernet connector is,network interface card equipped with 48-bits MAC address. This helps other Ethernet devices to identify and communicate with remote devices in Ethernet.

Traditional Ethernet uses 10BASE-T specifications.The number 10 depicts 10MBPS speed, BASE stands for baseband, and T stands for Thick Ethernet. 10BASE-T Ethernet provides transmission speed up to 10MBPS and uses coaxial cable or Cat-5 twisted pair cable with RJ-45 connector. Ethernet follows star topology with segment length up to 100 meters. All devices are connected to a hub/switch in a star fashion.

Fast-Ethernet

To encompass need of fast emerging software and hardware technologies, Ethernet extends itself as Fast-Ethernet. It can run on UTP, Optical Fiber, and wirelessly too. It can provide speed up to 100 MBPS. This standard is named as 100BASE-T in IEEE 803.2 using Cat-5 twisted pair cable. It uses CSMA/CD technique for wired media sharing among the Ethernet hosts and CSMA/CA (CA stands for Collision Avoidance) technique for wireless Ethernet LAN.

Fast Ethernet on fiber is defined under 100BASE-FX standard which provides speed up to 100 MBPS on fiber. Ethernet over fiber can be extended up to 100 meters in half-duplex mode and can reach maximum of 2000 meters in full-duplex over multimode fibers.

Giga-Ethernet

After being introduced in 1995, Fast-Ethernet could enjoy its high speed status only for 3 years till Giga-Ethernet introduced. Giga-Ethernet provides speed up to 1000 mbits/seconds. IEEE802.3ab

standardize Giga-Ethernet over UTP using Cat-5, Cat-5e and Cat-6 cables. IEEE802.3ah defines Giga-Ethernet over Fiber.

Virtual LAN

LAN uses Ethernet which in turn works on shared media. Shared media in Ethernet create one single Broadcast domain and one single Collision domain. Introduction of switches to Ethernet has removed single collision domain issue and each device connected to switch works in its separate collision domain. But even Switches cannot divide a network into separate Broadcast domains.

Virtual LAN is a solution to divide a single Broadcast domain into multiple Broadcast domains. Host in one VLAN cannot speak to a host in another. By default, all hosts are placed into the same VLAN.
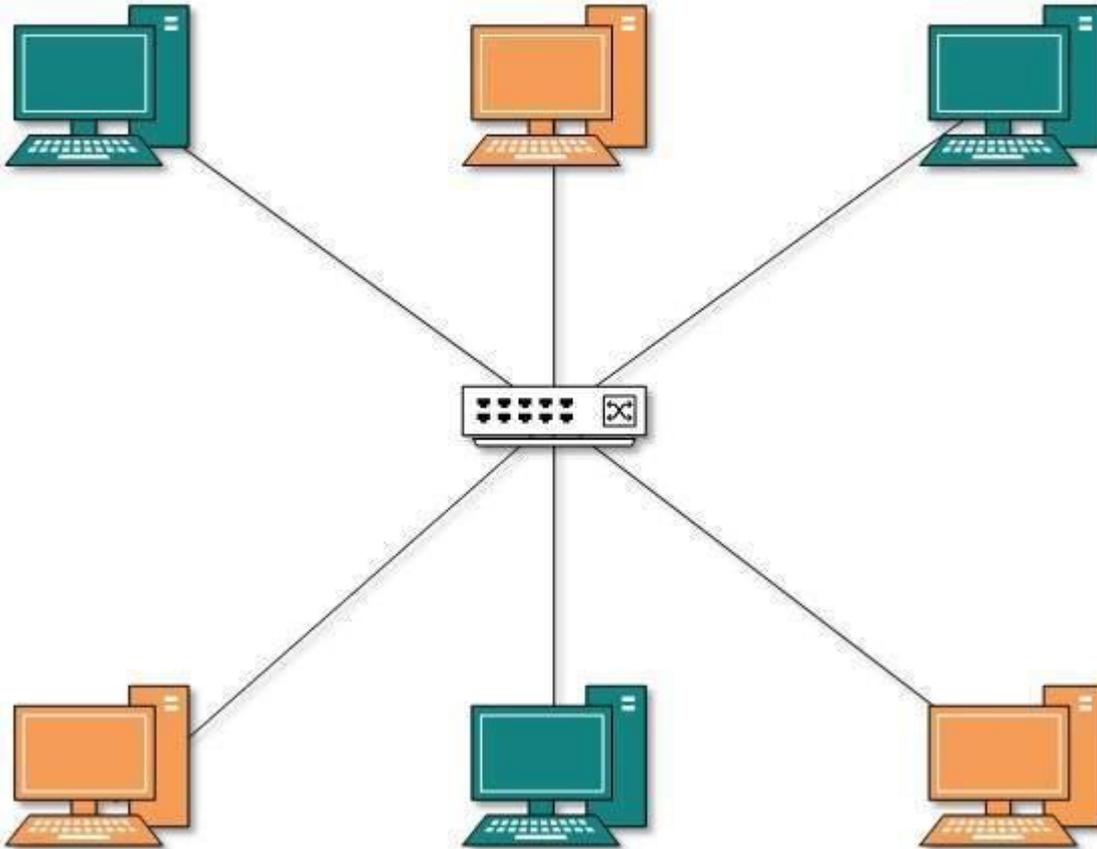
In this diagram, different VLANs are depicted in different color codes. Hosts in one VLAN, even if connected on the same Switch cannot see or speak to other hosts in different VLANs. VLAN is Layer-2 technology which works closely on Ethernet. To route packets between two different VLANs a Layer-3 device such as Router is required.

A Network Topology is the arrangement with which computer systems or network devices are connected to each other. Topologies may define both physical and logical aspect of the network. Both logical and physical topologies could be same or different in a same network.

Point-to-Point

Point-to-point networks contains exactly two hosts such as computer, switches or routers, servers connected back to back using a single piece of cable. Often, the receiving end of one host is connected to sending end of the other and vice-versa.
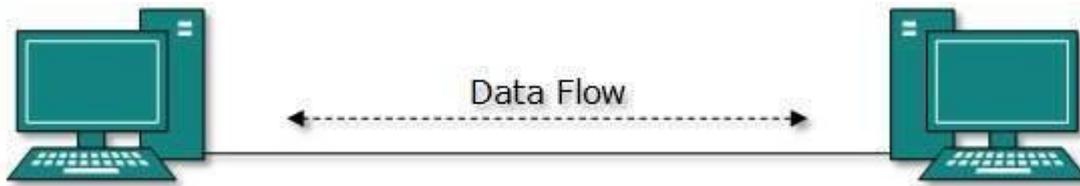
If the hosts are connected point-to-point logically, then may have multiple intermediate devices. But the end hosts are unaware of underlying network and see each other as if they are connected directly.

Bus Topology

In case of Bus topology, all devices share single communication line or cable.Bus topology may have problem while multiple hosts sending data at the same time. Therefore, Bus topology either uses CSMA/CD technology or recognizes one host as Bus Master to solve the issue. It is one of the simple forms of networking where a failure of a device does not affect the other devices. But failure of the shared communication line can make all other devices stop functioning.
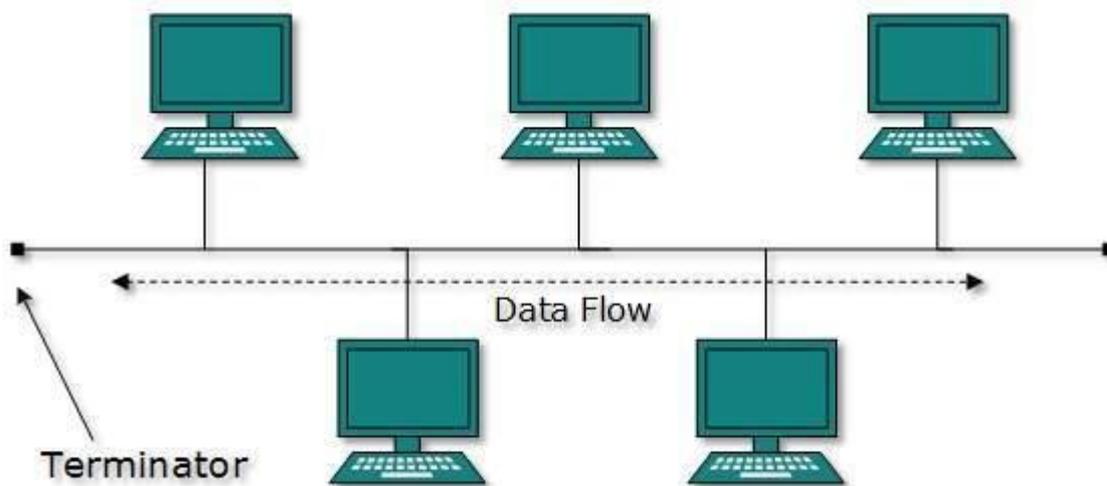

Both ends of the shared channel have line terminator. The data is sent in only one direction and as soon as it reaches the extreme end, the terminator removes the data from the line.

Star Topology

All hosts in Star topology are connected to a central device, known as hub device, using a point-to-point connection. That is, there exists a point to point connection between hosts and hub. The hub device can be any of the following:

- Layer-1 device such as hub or repeater
- Layer-2 device such as switch or bridge
- Layer-3 device such as router or gateway
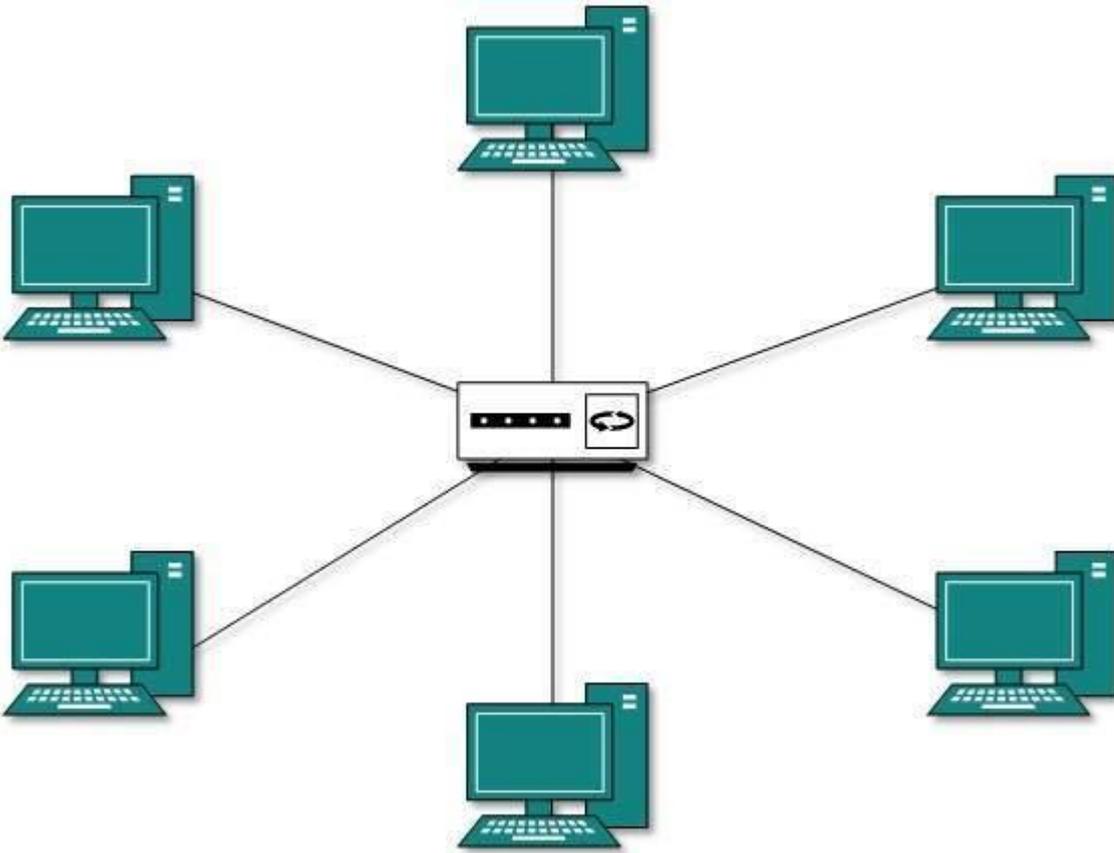
As in Bus topology, hub acts as single point of failure. If hub fails, connectivity of all hosts to all other hosts fails. Every communication between hosts, takes place through only the hub.Star topology is not expensive as to connect one more host, only one cable is required and configuration is simple.

Ring Topology

In ring topology, each host machine connects to exactly two other machines, creating a circular network structure. When one host tries to communicate or send message to a host which is not adjacent to it, the data travels through all intermediate hosts. To connect one more host in the existing structure, the administrator may need only one more extra cable.
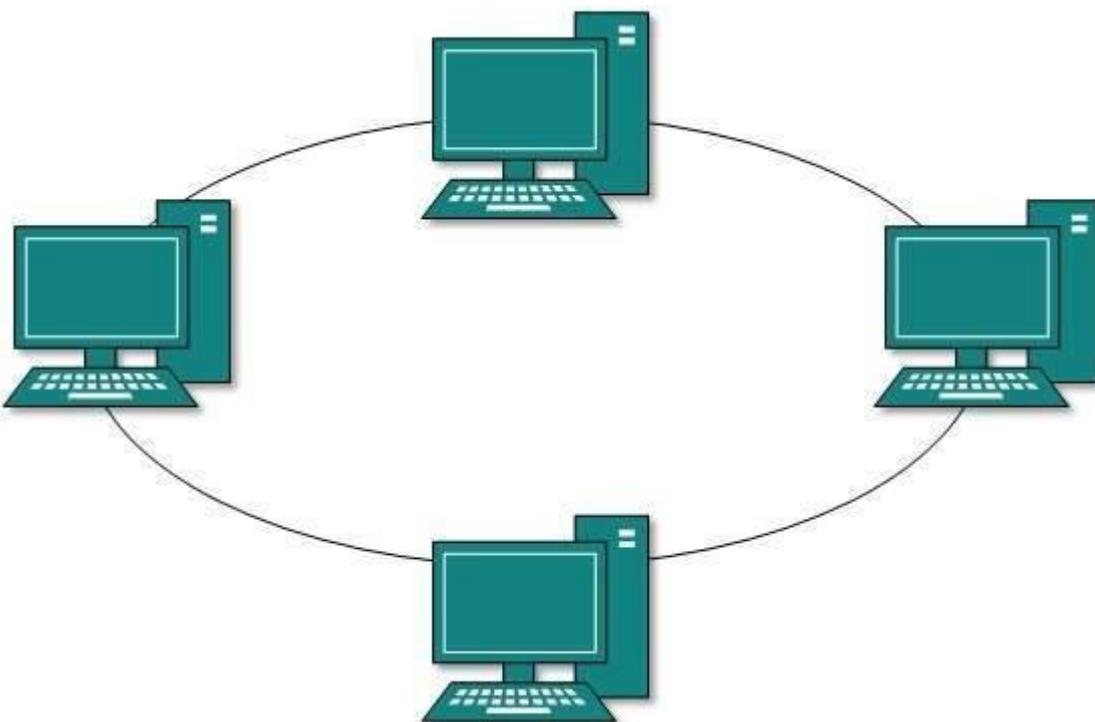
Failure of any host results in failure of the whole ring.Thus, every connection in the ring is a point of failure. There are methods which employ one more backup ring.

Mesh Topology

In this type of topology, a host is connected to one or multiple hosts.This topology has hosts in point-to-point connection with every other host or may also have hosts which are in point-to-point connection to few hosts only.
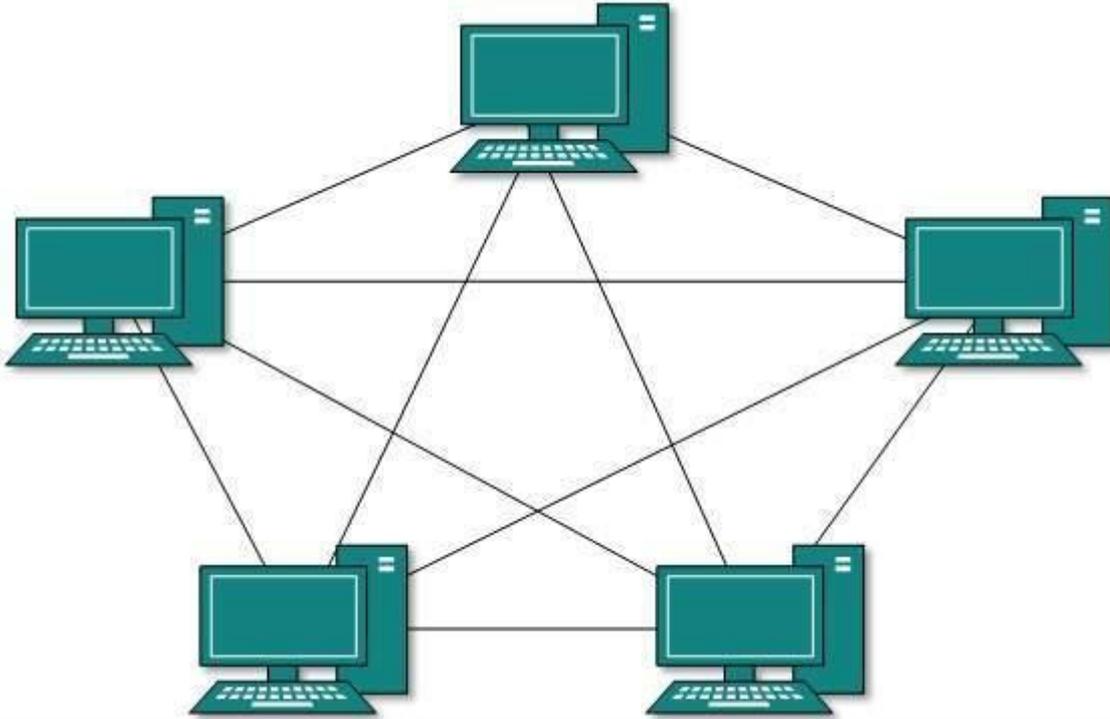

Hosts in Mesh topology also work as relay for other hosts which do not have direct point-to-point links. Mesh technology comes into two types:

- **Full Mesh**: All hosts have a point-to-point connection to every other host in the network. Thus for every new host n(n-1)/2 connections are required. It provides the most reliable network structure among all network topologies.
- **Partially Mesh**: Not all hosts have point-to-point connection to every other host. Hosts connect to each other in some arbitrarily fashion. This topology exists where we need to provide reliability to some hosts out of all.

Tree Topology

Also known as Hierarchical Topology, this is the most common form of network topology in use presently.This topology imitates as extended Star topology and inherits properties of bus topology.

This topology divides the network in to multiple levels/layers of network. Mainly in LANs, a network is bifurcated into three types of network devices. The lowermost is access-layer where computers are attached. The middle layer is known as distribution layer, which works as mediator between upper layer and lower layer. The highest layer is known as core layer, and is central point of the network, i.e. root of the tree from which all nodes fork.
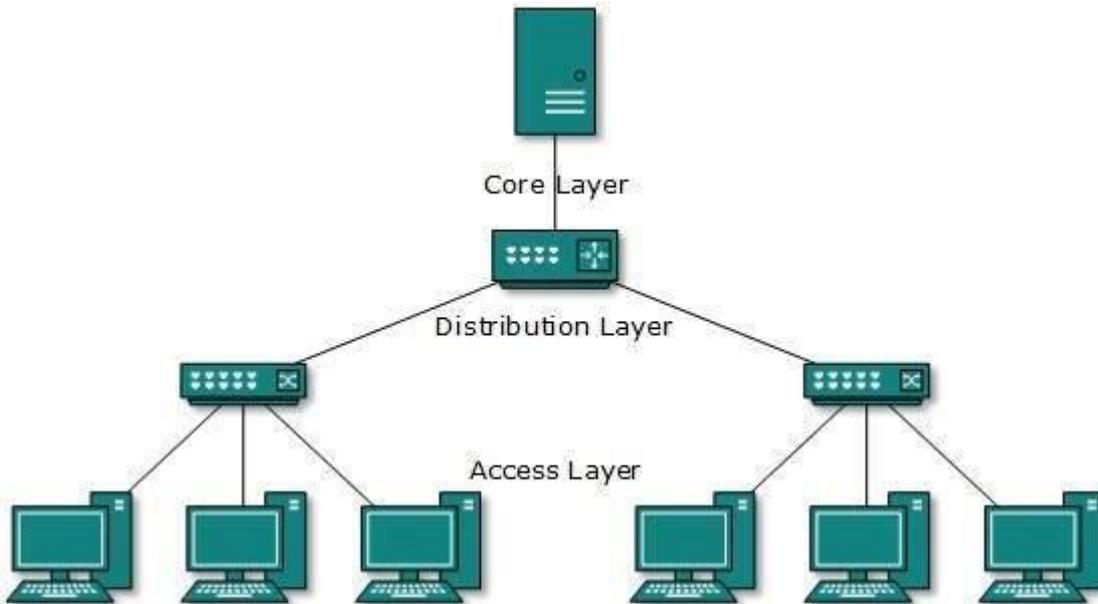
All neighboring hosts have point-to-point connection between them.Similar to the Bus topology, if the root goes down, then the entire network suffers even.though it is not the single point of failure. Every connection serves as point of failure, failing of which divides the network into unreachable segment.
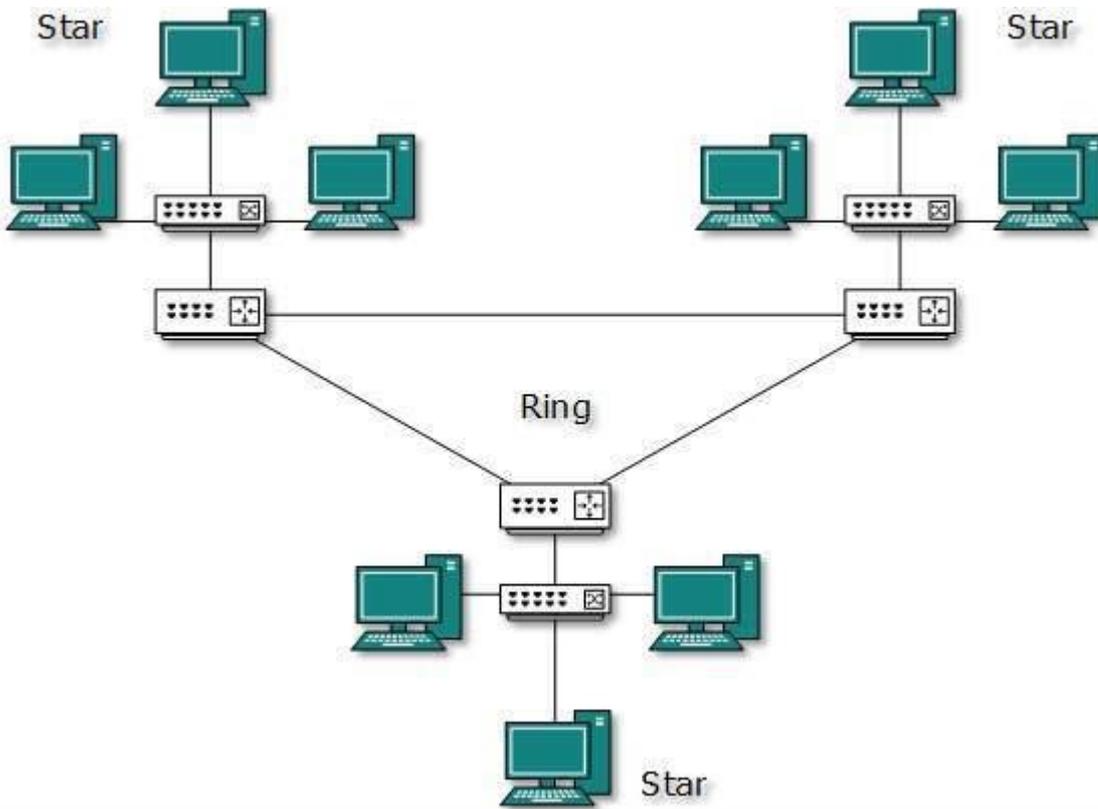
Daisy Chain

This topology connects all the hosts in a linear fashion. Similar to Ring topology, all hosts are connected to two hosts only, except the end hosts.Means, if the end hosts in daisy chain are connected then it represents Ring topology.
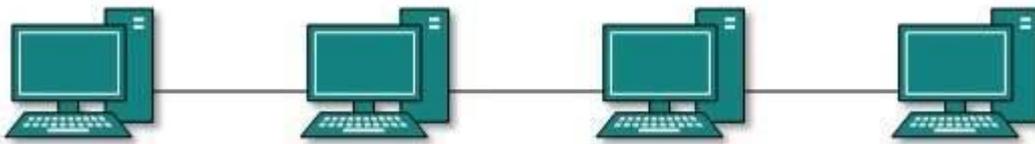
Each link in daisy chain topology represents single point of failure. Every link failure splits the network into two segments.Every intermediate host works as relay for its immediate hosts.

Hybrid Topology

A network structure whose design contains more than one topology is said to be hybrid topology. Hybrid topology inherits merits and demerits of all the incorporating topologies.

The above picture represents an arbitrarily hybrid topology. The combining topologies may contain attributes of Star, Ring, Bus, and Daisy-chain topologies. Most WANs are connected by means of Dual-Ring topology and networks connected to them are mostly Star topology networks. Internet is the best example of largest Hybrid topology