What's a MAC address and why do I need it?

Q: What's a MAC address and why do I need it?

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Answer

A MAC (Media Access Control) address is the unique hardware address of a network device such as an Ethernet card or a Wireless card. At MIT, the MAC address is registered and used to 'certify' users that want to use DHCP or Wireless on their computers. The MAC address information is kept in different locations depending on the operating system you are using. The address, sometimes called the physical or hardware address, is in the form of six pairs of digits separated by a colon or dash (e.g., 00:1A:22:3B:44:CD)

Macintosh OS X 10.6.x

1. Launch **System Profiler** found in the **Utilities folder**
2. Select the entry **Network** from the left column with the title **Contents**
3. Highlight the appropriate entry (typically Ethernet or Airport) from the listings in the right hand side of the pane
4. The MAC address will be found listed in the lower half of the window

Macintosh OS X 10.5.x

1. Open **System Preferences** (**Apple menu > System Preferences**).
2. Click **Network**.
3. In the left-hand panel, select a network device (for example Built-in Ethernet or AirPort).
4. In the right-hand panel of information for the device, click **Advanced**.
5. In the subsequent window:
    - For Ethernet, click the **Ethernet** tab; the **Ethernet ID** is the MAC address.
    - For AirPort, click the **AirPort** tab; the **AirPort ID** is the MAC address.

Macintosh OS X 10.4.x

1. Open **System Preferences** (**Apple menu > System Preferences**).
2. Click **Network**.
3. From the **Show** list, choose your network device.
4. Select the appropriate tab for the device:
    - For Ethernet, click the **Ethernet** tab; the **Ethernet ID** is the MAC address.
    - For AirPort, click the **AirPort** tab; the **AirPort ID** is the MAC address.

Windows XP/Vista/7

1. Select **Start > Run**.
2. Type **cmd** and click **OK**.
3. In the DOS window, type **ipconfig /all** (with a space between 'ipconfig' and '/all').
   Result: All your Ethernet devices should be listed, usually by vendor and some type of description. Your MAC address is listed as **Physical Address**.