Tech Info Library

Format vs. Initialize: Difference Between Them (4/95)

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TOPIC ---

The terms format and initialization are often used interchangably. With regards
to Apple HD SC Setup, what is the difference between format and initialization?

DISCUSSION --

Formatting is a process that prepares a disk for storing information. Formatting
can be low-level which prepares a disk by dividing it into tracks and sectors
where information can be stored or high-level where only a directory is
created.

Low-Level Formatting

Low-level formatting is also commonly referred to as simply formatting. During
formatting, sector addresses, byte gaps, sync gaps, drivers, and partitions are
created on the disk.

High-Level Formatting

High-level formatting, commonly referred to as initialization, creates a
directory but does not write any sector information on to the hard drive.

This can get confusing because drive utilities vary greatly in the way they
handle initialization and formatting. Apple HD SC Setup, for example, performs
both initialization and formatting in the same operation while other utilities,
such as SiliverLining, Norton Utilities, and FWB Hard Disk Toolkit separate
initialization and formatting into two distinct operations.

The Erase Disk command from the Mac OS Finder can perform both a low-level
format and a high-level format if the disk is a floppy disk. On hard drives,
Erase Disk can only do a high-level format.

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