Welcome to the Infobahn!

Welcome to the Internet. Do you know what it can do for you?

by Jerry Stratton

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http://www.hoboes.com/NetLife/Joy/

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What Do I Need To Know?

You need to know what you're doing here. That's number one. What do you want from the Internet? Free information? Conversation? Software? Dead tunes? There's so much stuff out there that if you don't know what you want, you'll end up getting swamped with everything. Unless you have some plan of attack, you'll be lost like Hansel and Gretel in a cookie factory.

You might find the following documents useful:

- My Own What Your Children Are Doing on the Information Highway: http://www.hoboes.com/ Children/
- Negative Space's Neon Alley: http://www.hoboes.com/ NetLife/

What Do I Need To Have?

A heart, courage, a brain, a home? Don't worry, you'll get all of these on the net.

How Do I Get On-Line?

I'm assuming that if you're reading this, you're already on-line. If you're reading this from a public library or from the office, and you want to be on-line at home, you need a computer, some sort of modem, and an Internet Service Provider. If you have cable service in your area, check with them first. Cable-based Internet access generally comes with a modem, and they'll install it for you! Your computer needs to have "ethernet" installed. If you have a Macintosh, you probably have it. If you don't, well, they'll usually be able to install it for an extra fee.

If you don't have cable service, you'll probably need to buy your own modem, and then hire a dedicated Internet Service Provider to give you an Internet connection. Your modem will use your telephone line to connect with your ISP (Internet Service Provider). Your computer will also need software to make this connection; if you have a Macintosh, it not only comes with the software you need, it is easy to set up. Your ISP will be able to guide you through it. If you have Windows '95 or greater, well, it does come with the software you need. Your ISP should also have instructions for that. The information you're looking for has to do with "PPP" connections,

because that's the standard for talking to the Internet over telephone lines.

You can find Internet providers in the back of most computer magazines if your area has one, or in any Internet magazine. Shop around. If you don't mind seeing lots of advertisements, you might even be able to get a free computer and free Internet.

Internet Software

Once you have your Internet connection, you need to do something with it. An Internet connection is a lot like water pipes. Unless you also have a sink or a shower or a bath, it doesn't do you much good. The sinks, shower, and bath on the Internet are your *web browser*, your *e-mail*software, and your *Usenet news*reader.

The 'web browser' is your kitchen sink. It holds all the dirty stuff you don't know what to do with. All the information on the net is generally available on 'web pages', and you need a web browser to view these web pages. There are three major web browsers out there: Netscape, Internet Explorer, and Lynx. Lynx is text-only. It does not display images or movies, nor does it play sound, which is probably a good part of why you got your Internet connection in the first place. It does display the text of the net very well, however, so if you are blind (the Macintosh version of Lynx can read web pages to you out loud), have a slow computer, or have other special needs, Lynx is a very good choice to look into.

In general, however, Netscape and Explorer are the choices you're

looking at. Both of these packages are *huge* pieces of software. If you already have one of them, I recommend sticking with it. Both work pretty much the same. Netscape *might* be a little more reliable; Explorer has a few more features. But for just looking at web pages, either one will work fine.

If you're on a slower net connection, you might find Explorer's ability to turn off what are called 'frames' a useful feature. You might also find that Explorer's long-term memory of where you've been recently is better than Netscape's.

If you decide to make your own web page on the net, you might find Netscape Communicator's built-in web page editor useful. If you read Usenet news (and you should) you might find Netscape's built-in newsreader useful. I would recommend getting a specialized newsreader, however, in the long run.

Electronic mail is how you communicate with other individuals on the net. You'll need electronic mail software to read and send electronic mail (e-mail) messages. The best choice is most likely Eudora: the free version is great software, and if you need even more features, you can upgrade to the commercial version.

- Freeware: Lynx
- Netscape's Navigator
- Microsoft's InternetExplorer
- · Qualcomm's Eudora

You can look for other software at Download.Com. There is a lot of free, shareware, and public domain software available there for 'downloading', that is, for transferring from their computer to your computer. I also have my own list of recommended Internet software.

Shell Logins

A "shell" is a command-line interface to, generally, a Unix computer.

When connecting to your Unix account, you'll usually:

- 1. Be asked for your username (or "login"). Type it in, and press return.
- 2. Finally, you'll be asked for your password. Type it in and press return. Unix doesn't let you see your password as you type it in, in case someone's looking over your shoulder.

At this point, you're at what's called the "Unix command line". Here, you can type the name of the software you want to use. Some examples are:

- pine for electronic mail
- trn for Usenet news
- lynx for the World Wide Web

In general, you'll only use a 'shell' account if you already know what you're doing, so I won't be talking about that from here on.

What is the Net?

The Internet

The Internet is a collection of networks. That's what the name means: it's a way of hooking different networks together and translating their different languages to a Universal language and back again. So, for example, Apple Macintosh computers, on an Apple network can talk to Windows computers on a Novell network. They share data—electronic mail, literary works, risqué pictures—via the Internet, even though the Windows computers can't talk Apple, and the Apple computers aren't configured to talk Windows.

Because the Internet Protocol is kept reasonably simple, any computer can talk it, so most do. You've got VMS, Unix, OS/2, OS-9, Xenix, Penix, and Eunuchs all talking to each other in their own language, translated into and out of "the Internet Protocol". We've finally reversed the damage done by the Tower of Babel, and God, no doubt, is wondering what we're going to do for an encore.

And the **Lord** said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the **Lord** scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

There are elected and appointed officials in the United States who share the Old Testament opinion of a freely-informed populace. Fortunately, the Internet is designed to be far more flexible than a radio tower, and will likely be much harder to stomp. Jesus said, "I came not to send peace, but a sword." *He* knew what the Internet was about as well.

The Internet is *not* one big system. It's a whole bunch of little systems, each of which don't really care about the others, at least from a technical standpoint. Huge parts of the Internet are connecting and disconnecting at any given time, and this doesn't bother the other parts of the Internet that happen to be stable at that time.

There is no central control of the Internet. The Internet operates on the principle of cooperative anarchy. Each person or computer on the Internet cooperates with whatever other parts of the Internet it feels like cooperating with. The end result is that everyone cooperates with everyone else through intermediaries, so everything sails along fairly well.

Don't worry, eventually the government will step in to force cooperation and thus end all cooperation. But until then, the Internet is a very useful place to be.

Hosts

Each computer on the Internet is a *host*. Negative Space, for example, is a *host computer*. So is the Macintosh on my desktop. The Windows computer holding up my printer is *not* a host. It isn't directly on the net. It *could* be, but it's too much work when I've got a Macintosh here as well. Back when I used a modem and the telephone line to connect, my Macintosh was only a host computer during those times when I dialed in to the net. Now that I have a cable modem, my Macintosh is a host computer whenever I turn it on.

Host computers all have names. Each computer on the Internet is given a semi-unique number called an "IP address". The "IP" stands for "Internet Protocol". Computers that are meant to be reached by other people on the net generally also have a "hostname" to go along with that number. This means that, instead of having to type "192.215.84.34", people can type "cerebus.acusd.edu". As far as the Internet is concerned, they're the same thing: the Macintosh on my office desktop. But humans find it easier to remember the latter rather than the former. (And, as well, if my Mac's number ever changes, I can keep the same name attached to the *new* number, so people don't have to care what the number is at all.)

Host ComputerHostnameNegative Spacewww.hoboes.comThe Mac in my officecerebus.acusd.edu

Hosts on the net are divided into two kinds: servers and clients.

Clients take information, and servers give information. When you get a great piece of info from the net, you're getting it from a server of some sort. The server is running special computer software to do its serving. Clients get information. Servers give it. We'll talk about that later. In fact, we'll spend the rest of the chapters talking about it. Servers and clients are the birds and the bees of the net. And it's mostly a matter of semantics: all Internet hosts are clients, and most, even your personal computer, are also servers at some time.

A lot like the birds and the bees. Sometimes you're on top, sometimes you're on bottom, sometimes you have no idea where you are.

Domains

Hosts live in domains. "Domains" are those parts of the net that fall under one organization. Like the industrial world, there was once a time of company towns. Teetot, PWA, and Cerebus, for example, all exist in the domain *ACUSD.EDU*. That's the domain of the University of San Diego, my day job. Other companies, such as Qualcomm (QUALCOMM.COM) or General Instrument (GI.COM), have their own domains.

Service domains—cities, rather than company towns—are what you use from home nowadays, however. My service domain is "home.com", because I get my service through the ISP @HOME. But if you e-mail me, you'll usually e-mail to an address in the "hoboes.com" domain, because that's the domain I and some friends have created to give ourselves permanent e-mail addresses. You're

reading this document from a web server in the domain "hoboes.com".

Users

"The only two activities where the participants are called users," went a conversation at an Internet Engineering Task Force meeting, "are drugs and computers."

Computerized discussion groups are as addicting as any recreational drug. Humans are designed to need communication; under normal circumstances, this need is offset by an inability to communicate with more people than you can see and talk to at one time. The net provides untold millions of people in your bedroom, and provides an even greater rush to a healthy human than a tobacco fiend's morning nicotine fix.

Users on the net are identified by *electronic mail addresses*, similar to normal addresses. Each "e-mail" address consists of a user's "username" and the host computer's "hostname", separated by an '@' symbol. Often, the "hostname" is actually the organization's domain. The United States president's e-mail address is "president@whitehouse.gov". The e-mail address tells you what "area" of the net the user is from.

In order to talk to individuals on the net, you need to know their e-mail address. You'll find people's e-mail addresses by looking at the messages they send to you, or the messages that they send to

discussion groups.

A person's e-mail address is their identifier on the net. In general, no two e-mail addresses are alike. Either the username is different or the domain/hostname is different. (This is the net. There are no hard rules. Even this rule can be broken.)

What's Allowed?

Nothing is allowed on the net. Everything is accepted—by somebody, somewhere. There are two hundred million people on the net, and some of them are bound to be as crazy as you. A few are even crazier.

"Allowed" implies "permissions", and you don't have to ask anyone's permission before going ahead with your own favorite perversion. The "rules of the net" are not encoded in law, nor enforced by the local gestapo. Yet.

Civil law is a different story, of course. The laws of libel and assault should apply as much to the net as to any other conversational medium. Would you say this over the telephone? In a letter? On the bulletin board outside your local grocery? If it's legal there, it's probably legal here. And if it's illegal there, it's probably illegal here, if anyone decides to enforce it. But "illegal" means simply that if you do it, someone with a gun is going to kick your butt into prison. You're still allowed to do it: just be prepared for the consequences.

The People of the Net

Despite all the talk of on-line dictionaries and bibles, the real lure of the net is the people on the net. Once you have an e-mail address of your own, you can take part in loud and raucous philosophizing in giant rooms on the net, or quiet, intimate discussions with one or two other individuals. You can choose who you want to talk to (as long as they want to talk to you), and you can choose from—and even create—discussions on any possible topic, from revolution to evolution. And back again. You can talk with individuals, or you can talk with groups. And you can talk in *real-time* or by *message*.

Electronic mail allows you to exchange messages with individuals, and it also allows you to take part in mailing list discussion groups. Various newsreaders allow you to take part in a huge variety of Usenet discussion groups. In these discussion groups, an unlimited number of individuals 'post' articles to each group. Other individuals read these articles and reply to them. Electronic mail is more personal, allowing you to take part in private discussions or group discussions among a limited group of people.

The *talk* program allows you to 'talk' with another individual by typing. When you type, they see what you typed, and when they type, you see, immediately, what they typed. 'Talk' isn't used much anymore. It's too much like a telephone but without human voices. Chat rooms also exist on the net, where you can *conference* with larger groups of people. Usually, you'll see what they typed when they

press return, and they'll see what you typed when you press return. You'll type a sentence, press return, and then everybody else sees that sentence.

Internet discussions can move between Usenet, private mail, and conferences, with summaries of each posted to the others (or to web pages) when necessary. Nothing has to be static on the net.

The Word Made Flesh

Almost all discussions on the net take place via the written word. There is experimental software that transfers voice, and even video, across the net for two-way communications, but these require state-of-the-art computer equipment and a fast net connection. You have neither, and the vast majority of the people you'll be interacting with also have neither. (You can, of course, download Quicktime or Realvideo and get *one-way* transmissions in a tiny window on your video screen.)

What you look like is what you write. Nobody on the net can see your pimples, your bleached blond hair, your abs, or your BMW. All they see is what you type. So take care that what you type is what you mean.

"When you say something, make sure you have said it. The chances of your having said it are only fair."—

E.B.White

He wrote about pigs and spiders, so he knows what he's talking about.

Your writing style is how you will be perceived. On the net, clothes don't make the man: verbs do. And adjectives, participles, and gerunds. You may decide you'll want to use a spelling checker on everything you send out to the net. Or you may not. It depends on the image you want to present.

The language of the net is English. This makes sense. At 275 million *native* speakers, it is behind only Mandarin Chinese, and the Chinese government is not very amused by the freewheeling nature of the Internet.

We will no doubt see more languages used as more people come on board, but today, its your English comprehension skills that are the most important. If you want to be a good global netizen, you'll need to be able to comprehend written English. Otherwise you're going to end up flaming the wrong people and getting flamed unnecessarily.

If you *don't* understand English, make it obvious and we might take it easy on you...

And this isn't to say that you can't find regional discussions in just about any language you want. I'm part of a bilingual comic book discussion, French and English.

Conversational Norms On The Net

There are ways to talk that have evolved on the net. Most of them make it easier to understand what's showing up on your computer screen.

Provide Context: Reply And Summarize

Discussions can last for a long time. In the real world, discussions take place in real time, and everyone present knows who said what. On the Internet, discussions take place over long periods of time, and not everyone knows everyone else. It becomes necessary to point out, when you're saying something, just what it is that you're replying to.

When you reply to electronic mail or to a Usenet news article (yes, you get to reply to news articles! Nothing on the net is one-way... at least, nothing worthwhile), when you reply to someone else's message, what *they* said gets marked with a greater-than symbol. Here's an example:

Jerry Stratton (jerry@example.com) said: >Look, this is either an open list or it isn't. It >doesn't make any sense to congratulate StarNINE for >providing an open list, on the one hand, and in the >next paragraph flame someone else for mentioning a >competitor's product.

True, but this was more than just a "mention". It was a commercial posting, and those *should* go through the moderator before being posted to the list as a whole.

>If it *isn't* open, I'll be happy to start up a >mailing list for discussing general web-Mac >publishing issues.

We might need one in the future. I've heard that the name of this list is changing from "MacHTTP" to "WebSTAR", which presumably would mean it's becoming a proprietary discussion.

Steve

Everything that "Jerry Stratton" said has a single greater-than symbol

next to it. This is called *quoting*. Steve is *quoting* Jerry. Anyone coming into the discussion at this point doesn't have to go out and look for Jerry's message before understanding Steve's. The important parts are included in Steve's message.

What happens if more than one person's comments need to be included? Let's take a look at a reply to Steve's message.

```
Steve Spear (spear@example.edu) said:
>Jerry Stratton (jerry@example.com) said:
>>Look, this is either an open list or it isn't.
I don't particularly think it *is* an open list.
>>next paragraph flame someone else for mentioning a
>>competitor's product.
>True, but this was more than just a "mention". It
>was a commercial posting, and those *should* go
>through the moderator before being posted to
>the list as a whole.
Says who? I'll agree that it's a nice thing to do,
but I haven't seen any mention of that requirement
in the four months since I've been a member. It's
a great idea, but it needs to be made clear if
we expect anyone to follow it.
Mary
```

Mary has just jumped into the conversation, and she's responding to statements by Jerry *and* statements by Steve. This time, *Steve's* statements have a single greater-than symbol marking them. Jerry's have *two* greater-than symbols. Steve's statements are one message back, and Jerry's are two messages back.

This format carries two important pieces of information. Besides telling us who said what, it also tells us *when* they said it. I can tell from Mary's message that she's replying to Steve, and I can also see

that Steve was originally replying to Jerry. When you start seeing messages with parts of the discussion going two, three, or more messages back, the order in which things were said becomes important.

You should keep the number of lines you're replying to down to two to five, as in the messages above. Most of your message should be what *you* have to add. (If you only have one line to add, no one cares. Really. Send it to the individual, rather than the entire group.)

Sometimes, however, you'll need to include a large amount of the previous message. In this case, rather than quoting the entire message, *summarize* the message as you understood it. Often, your summary is simply deleting the text of a well known document or collection of facts. Make sure it's clear that you're summarizing rather than quoting. For example:

```
Jerry Stratton (jerry@example.com) said:
>[Text of U.S. constitution deleted.]
So? Who cares what a bunch of atheists in the eighteenth century said?
```

Summations are often placed inside square brackets like that. Summations really aren't commonly used: usually, it's better to quote the other person exactly. I'd say that summations are used to *flame* as often as they're used for anything else.

```
Steve Spear (spear@example.edu) said:
>[Meaningless drivel deleted.]
Are you *ever* going to rent a functioning brain?
```

Flaming

So now that we've seen one, what's a flame? It's a verb and a noun, for the most part. A flame is an insulting or caustic post. When you flame someone, you're replying to a message of theirs with derision. Flaming is an art, and should be approached as such. Never casually flame anyone unless you're ready to be casually flamed in return. The above example of a flame is quite poor. Here's a better one, courtesy Jeff Swanson of Usenet:

In the Serengeti, there is a small outcropping of rock which conceals a rich oasis. Tucked away, hidden from the burning sun by a stone ceiling, is a small pool of fresh water, and in this pool grow clues by the moist thousands. See your travel agent.

There are no rules when it comes to flames. Except possibly: avoid breaking the law. The best flames can be found on Usenet, although no discussion is safe. Listen to mother, and wear your asbestos underwear.

Laying the Page

No, this section has nothing to do with Washington, D.C.

Many people find computers harder to read than paper. There's just no pleasing some people, is there? Some idiots think that just because *they* don't have the time to learn Unix programming, *we* should cater to their every whim.

You should try to make your messages easy to view on computer screens. Standard paper layout techniques won't always apply. The easiest thing to do is to re-read your messages before you send them, and make sure they're easy to read. If they aren't, fix 'em. Here are a couple of hints:

- 1. Keep your paragraphs short.
- 2. Put an extra space between paragraphs to break 'em up.
- 3. Keep your lines less than seventy-five letters long!

Many mail readers are designed around eighty-character lines. If any of your lines are longer than this, they'll look ugly. You have to keep them shorter than seventy-five letters in case someone actually finds your message interesting, and "quotes" you: quoting adds a character to your lines.

Personally, I prefer to keep my lines down to about sixty-five characters. Or half a gram. However, this is becoming less and less important, as more and more software is able to invisibly wrap lines for you. Be careful when quoting unwrapped text, however. You should be able to find a "wrap" menu item that will preserve greater than symbols correctly. The following is wrong:

```
Mary Kotter (mkotter@example.com) said:
>I thought that _Sixth Sense_ was a great movie except
for its ending, which insults the intelligence of the
viewer.
```

I disagree. I didn't realize that Bruce was a ghost until the flashback sequence.

It is wrong because it implies that Mary Kotter said "I thought that _Sixth Sense_ was a great movie except", and that I am replying with

"for its ending, which insults the...". The correct format is:

Mary Kotter (mkotter@example.com) said:
>I thought that _Sixth Sense_ was a great movie except
>for its ending, which insults the intelligence of the
>viewer.

I disagree. I didn't realize that Bruce was a ghost until the flashback sequence.

What Mary said and what I'm replying are now more obvious. Look in your "edit" menu and see if you have a menu item for "wrapping" or "rewrapping" text.

Signatures

Everyone needs a signature. Everyone *wants* a signature. People even like *reading* signatures. But it helps if you're creative, literate, and a good writer. If you aren't, steal from someone else who is.

Signatures come at the end of messages, like signatures in paper letters. How you write your signature on paper says something about you, and what you put into your signature in e-mail also says something about you. Electronic mail signatures usually look something like:

Your Name

youraddress

A disgustingly revealing quote.

You may or may not want to tailor your quotes to your audience. A quote from Thomas Jefferson, for example, probably wouldn't be appropriate for the CHRISTIAN-L mailing list.

Keep your quotes short: four lines is a good bet. People don't want to read the same 40-line quote from "War and Peace" every single time you send your e-mail out.

Spoilers

If you take part in review discussions—reviews of movies, plays, and books—you'll come across *spoiler warnings*. This means that the person writing the message is about to talk about something important that happens in the movie, play, or book. And if you haven't already seen or read the item in discussion, reading the rest of the message may *spoil* your enjoyment of it—so don't read it until you've seen the movie, play, or read the book.

Usually, the "spoiler warning" is followed by a bunch of blank lines, or by a "^L". The "^L" (control-L) tells Unix computers not to show the rest of the article until the reader presses the space bar. If you aren't using Unix when you're reading the message, it's a toss-up whether or not your software will understand and hide the spoiler from you. Most good software will.

You should be careful about spoiling other people's enjoyment, and add your own "spoiler warning", followed by control-L or a page full of blank lines, when you tell people how the butler done it.

Show Some Emotion!

Nothing Left To Do But :*) :*)

Like any community, net folks have developed their own personal slang to help them get along and to help them get into trouble. The most common slang are the *emoticons*. Emoticons stand in for body language on the net. They're left and iconic, rather than right and detailed. Two emoticons are used by far the most often: the *smiley* and the *frown*.

- The Smiley is : *)
- The Frown is : * (

If you tilt your head to the left, you can see the faces. (You might have to use your imagination, especially if it has atrophied from too many years of prime-time television.) An art form has developed creating new and obtuse emoticons. The smiley and the frown, however, can handle most situations. The smiley shows happiness, or emphasizes the punchline of a bad joke. The frown shows sadness, or disapproval towards a third party.

Acronyms

You'll also see acronyms on the net like crazy. Internet users are the laziest typists in the world. The most common acronym is IMO, sometimes seen as IMHO, which are "In My Opinion" and "In My Humble Opinion". Usually, these are used by people who just realized they said something that could be mistaken for a fact, and they don't

want to have to back it up. It's a mistake, of course, because they'll be asked anyway.

One variation on this is IMNSHO, "In My Not-So Humble Opinion". Someone's itching for a fight. They *want* you to ask for cites.

Don't let them down.

- RTFM means read the fucking manual. If you're in a family newsgroup, people will claim it means read the *fine* manual, but they're lying and they know it.
- ROTFL or ROFL is Rolling on the Floor Laughing
- YMMV is *Your Mileage May Vary*, and means that what the writer just said may not apply to all situations. Don't sue when it turns out she was only talking about people wearing parachutes.

Creative Spellings

Most people on the net can't spell any better than Dan Quayle. The rest of us *choose* not to spell correctly. "Creative" spelling has a strong tradition in pre-Webster English and it's making a comeback in computers and the net. Shakespeare used it all the time, and he was no slouch when it came to literacy. You can combine words or misspell words to make a point. Usually, misspelling a word deliberately shows disapproval towards the subject at hand. The letter 'K' is unfortunately common in political discussions. Some people think Amerika is heading towards Nazism under Herr Klinton, for

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example.: * (
```

In discussions about the net in relation to the real world, you'll occasionally see "net." used as a prefix; it's pronounced "net dot". A net.hero ("net dot hero") is a hero of the net, as opposed to the real world. Using "net." is a sure sign of net.geekdom. This is from the Windows and CP/M world. Filenames had "dots" to separate the file's name from the file's type. Those of us who use Macintoshes are above that sort of thing. Those of us who use Unix *should* be above it. But the tradition lives on in net.lingo.

Yelling

There are ways of emphasizing and yelling, even on the net. The three basic ways of emphasizing a word or phrase is with asterisks, underscores, and all-capitals.

Asterisks are like "bolding" the text. Underscores are like "italicizing". All-capitals are just plain yelling.

Use emphasis sparingly. Use all-capitals hardly ever. If you were speaking in person, would you grab your listener by the throat and yell in their ear? In that case, all capitals are appropriate. Otherwise, hang back and calm down.

And don't forget the exclamation point and the question mark. No need to throw out the tried and true just because you have a few new tools.

```
Buzz!!!! *Wrong* answer.
```

```
Hello??? McFly? Anybody *in* there?
See also _Das Boot_ as a precursor to _Operation
Petticoat .
```

Whisper

It's harder to whisper than it is to yell. On the net, everyone can hear you scream, but not many can perceive a whisper.

All lower-case is one way of whispering, but there are still apparently a lot of people who can only type in one case, and they choose lower-case over upper-case so that they don't look like complete jackasses.

You can put words and phrases into *asides* by using parentheses—and nested parentheses (which occur when you make an aside about an aside (or if you can't control your stream of consciousness (as I seem to be having trouble with right now (what was I talking about?)))) are commonly used as well. Note that I have as many "close" parentheses as I have "open" parentheses. Otherwise, your reader never leaves the feeling that they're reading an "aside".

Stuttering

We pause and stutter all the time in normal conversation. I do, at least, but then I'm a computer geek. Pauses may not *say* much, but they carry a heavy load of information.

"What do you think of my parents?"

```
"... they're okay..."
```

"They're okay."

Big difference, what? Ellipses are an invaluable part of net.writing. So is "hemming" and "hawing". "Ahem". "Errr." "Hm…" Onomatopoeia lives on the Internet.

Simple High School English

High school English classes teach you how to write for high school English teachers. They don't teach you how to write to your friends.

Your English teacher would dismember you with an ax if you used ellipses, nested parentheses, emphasis, and creative spelling as much as we do on the net, but your English teacher isn't here. She's off at Playgirl On-Line.

You're on your own, and you'd better make sure people know what you mean when you say it.

Freedom Of Speech

Anyone on the net can receive electronic mail. It's part of the definition of being "on the net". People who are *completely* on the net can do 'talk' as well, engaging in immediate, written, conversations. Next year, you'll be able to talk by actually speaking into a microphone, and even, if you have a video camera, let the other person see you. There are people doing it today, but they're computer geeks and porn stars.

ADDRESSES

Your electronic mail address is your username, as provided by your Internet Service Provider '@' some mail computer. For example, my address is capvideo@example.com. My username is "capvideo" and the mail computer that handles my e-mail is "example.com". If you want people to talk to you or send you mail, you need to give them your address. If you want to talk to someone or send them mail, you need to get their address. Each address has two parts: the person and the place, and they're separated by the '@' sign.

Electronic Mail

My recommendation for e-mail software is a free package called Eudora". It follows the "user interface" standards for your computer, allowing you to more easily integrate the rest of your work with your electronic mail. You can then copy and paste from your mail to your word processor, for example, and vice versa. Besides Eudora, you can also use the built-in e-mail software in Netscape Communicator, but it's slow as crap.

Who Are You Sending It To?

You have to tell your mail software where the mail is supposed to go. *D'oh*. Usually, this is called "recipient" or "to". Their address is going to look a lot like yours.

Address Books And Nicknames

Most e-mail software allows you to keep an "address book". This is a list of people whose addresses you know. If "jerry" is in your address book, you'll be able to say "send this message to jerry" instead of "send this message to capvideo@example.com".

You can add addresses to your address book by hand, or you can tell your mail software to grab an address off of a message you're reading. In Eudora, look for the menu item *Make Nickname*.

Subject

You don't *need* to give your message a subject, but it helps. The subject gives your recipient some idea of what your message is about, and lets them know you're not a complete putz. If you're sending your message to a group of people, the subject lets those who want to read about your topic choose your message, and lets the others ignore it.

Whenever you *Reply* to a message, the letters "RE:" are added in front of the original subject. If you're changing the topic, change the subject. Otherwise, this lets your recipient know that you are replying to their message.

Subjects should be short, a phrase at most, and to the point. Subjects such as "This is important", "Important!!!", "I need help!", and "O.J. Simpson" tend to be left until there's nothing better to do. "Sex" usually gets people's attention, especially when combined with "free", as in, "Free Sex" or "Sex Free". YMMV. Some good examples of subjects:

FTD Order Confirmation

Recent Suicide Numbers from WHO

San Diego Convention Journal-Thursday

Eudora: Why a "username not found" error?

Carbon Copies

You can send your message to more than one person by putting multiple addresses in the "To" line. When you put someone's address in the "CC", or "Carbon Copy" line, it does the same thing: it sends the message to everyone you list. But it does it in a way that says "you're not part of this discussion, but I thought you might be interested in this particular message".

Some mail software allows readers to "reply" to all "recipients". Usually, this form of reply will *only* reply to those recipients on the "To" line. It will ignore those on the "CC" line.

Attachments

You can attach documents to your electronic mail message. If you've got a paper written in ClarisWorks, for example, or a budget spreadsheet that you want to send to someone, you'll do it by writing them a short message and *attaching* the file to that message. In Eudora, you select the menu item "Attach Document", and choose the document from the dialog box.

When you "attach" documents in this manner, they have to be *encoded* for electronic mailing. Basically, mail messages have to be all text, but most of your documents have special codes in them that the

software put there. So your mail software encodes the document in a special all-text format. In theory, the mail software used by whoever you send the mail to will *decode* the attached document and it'll be as good as new.

Remember also, that if you send someone a document that you wrote using a special software package, they have to have that software as well. If you wrote it with ClarisWorks, they need to have ClarisWorks. If you drew the picture using Adobe Photoshop LE, they need to have Adobe Photoshop. There are ways around this. Many document 'types' have a standard way of transferring information. You'll need to read your manual to know how to do this, but usually the "Save As..." menu item will have them. Word Processors, for example, can almost always save in "Rich Text Format", or "RTF". Every modern word processor should be able to read a file that's been saved in "RTF" format.

Did it Make it Through?

In general, if you don't get any message back, the person you sent to is ignoring you. If your mail didn't make it to the recipient, you will almost always get a message back saying that something went wrong. It *is* possible, albeit extremely rare, for mail to get completely lost, however, so you'll want to keep copies of important mail that you send. You can tell your e-mail software to automatically keep a copy of all "outgoing" mail. (You'll need to read the instructions to find out how.) You'll also want to do this if you like to refer back to messages you've already sent.

There are two common errors that will cause mail to be returned to you. In Internet terms, mail that gets returned to you is "bounced" back to you. Mail will be bounced to you if the "place" is wrong or if the "person" is wrong.

- If the "place" is wrong, you'll get a mail message back from the postmaster in *your* domain telling you that the "hostname" could not be found.
- If the "person" is wrong, you'll get a mail message back from the "place" computer telling you that the "username" does not exist.

In both of these cases, double-check the address to make sure you typed it correctly. Be especially careful of letters and numbers: '1's and '0's and '0's and 'O's.

Secure E-mail

You can send secure e-mail using "PGP". This will allow you to send mail that only the recipient can read, and to verify that you know the person sending you mail. In both cases, they have to be using PGP as well. PGP is the most trusted and most common security software for Internet communications.

Talking

You can "talk" with people in "real time" as well. The *talk* command is the "real time" equivalent of electronic mail. *Real time* means that the person on the other end sees what you type *when you type it*, and you see what they type at the same time. There is "talk" software for the Macintosh and for Windows. You can also use *talk* from your Unix "shell" account if you have one. From the Unix command line, type

talk email address and press return. For example, to talk to your friend arnie@example.com, type talk arnie@example.com and press return.

Your computer screen will split into two parts, and, at the top, it'll tell you what it's trying to do. When it starts, it "rings" the other person. If the other person answers, your "connection" is "established".

Whatever you type will appear in the top half, and whatever they type will appear in the bottom half of the screen.

Talk will not work on all addresses. Some people have e-mail addresses without having direct Internet connections. Both parties must have direct Internet access in order to "talk". Other times, their software fails to interact correctly with the your talk software. That's a common problem with Sun computers, for example. Look at Stairways for Macintosh 'talk' software, or Download.Com for other 'talk' software.

Talk Etiquette

"Talk" requests break up your screen, beep at you, and otherwise try to get your attention. It can be very annoying to get a "talk" request from someone while you're trying to do something else, and it gets *really* annoying when you get *lots* of "talk" requests.

You should generally not try to *talk* to people without asking permission first, through electronic mail. You should *especially* use email first for people with whom you have only a passing acquaintance, or whom you don't know at all.

Finding People

There are two ways of doing anything in this world: the easy way, and the hard way. Now, suppose you want to find out a person's e-mail address. How do you do it? Well, there's an easy way, and...

The Easy Way

The easiest way to find someone's electronic mail address is to telephone them and ask them for their address! It's easy and you only have to do it once.

The Hard Way

Since you're too embarrassed to give them a phone call, you can always try the on-line white pages. It won't work, but at least you'll feel like you did something.

Check out Yahoo's White Pages. You'll probably get a long listing of people whose name corresponds to your friend's name. Pay attention to where they're at! If you're looking for a "James Stratton" in Michigan, and find one in San Francisco, chances are pretty good that it's not the right one. On the other hand, if you find a Jerry Stratton in the United States of America, that doesn't particularly help you in deciding if it's a good address or not.

Freedom Of Assembly

Talking on the net isn't limited to just two people at a time. There are real-time discussion groups, places to hang out, and places to carry on long-term discussions.

Talking

You can use the various conferencing services to carry on real-time conversations with large numbers of people. Most of these services are text-only, although a number of MUDs and MOOs are now supporting Web access, which means that they can include pictures and hypertext. See the section on the web for more information about *that*.

There are two basic types of on-line, real-time gathering grounds: the *conference call*, and *virtual worlds*.

IRCing

Internet Relay Chat is pretty much one big text-only convention center. You've got lots of people in various chat rooms talking about vast numbers of topics. At any given time, there can be hundreds of different chat rooms, and you can create your own chat room if you like.

Each room is like a conference call with two to a hundred people.

You'll need special software to get onto the IRC. Look on Download.Com for anything with "IRC" in the title.

IRCs use "slash" commands. Everything that you type that *doesn't* start with a slash is something you *say*. Everyone else can "hear" you say it. If you type something with a slash in front of it, the IRC server assumes you're trying to tell it something. One of the more common slash commands is /help. You'll also use /list to list the available channels, and /join to join a channel. You have to "join" a channel before you can take part in the discussion on that channel.

What do people talk about on IRC? On the "france" channel, they're currently talking about "Nuclear complaints". Lets take a look:

Welcome to the Internet Relay Network Jerry

/join france

[You have joined channel france]

Gamma2: Bravo2: Hier a 23h30 boom moins de 20kt

FG982: *titanik* : je me bats avec depuis 2 mois pour faire un bot...

Bravo2: gamma2 delire!!!!

fredg: *axelle:* HAHAHAHAHAHAHAA (STressee) j'ai achete des bottes avec des protections (coquee) ;-)

FG982: jup: je pars pas, c'est fredg qui part!

Gamma2: Bravo2: Non, tout va bien

Jupiter: ah bon.,.

eddies: I know, and thats also wrong. But times change and france (and china) are the only countries who are still testing

fredg: axelle: merci de ta confiance :P

Jupiter: j avais pas suivi.. desole..

fredg: axelle: :-)

Bravo2: gamma: tu est ou maintenant?

axelle: *stressee* : prevoyante :) c bien :))

rhosm: bonjour

jERR: Vive les essais nuclaires!!!!!!!!

LILI: hi everyone

axelle: fredg: ben je suis les conseils de stressee

fredg: axelle: an je suis tres mauvais danceur mais tres doux

de maniere generale .. emem qd j'ecrase els pieds :-)

BeETLeJui: fredg passe le bonjour a stressee :-))))

Gamma2: *Eddies:* What's the problem then? You know there are many more dangerous items in the white sea?

On IRC, each line is something that someone said. At the beginning of the line is the nickname of the person who said it, followed by a colon. Sometimes, a statement will be directed to a specific person, and that person's name will follow the speaker's name. In the last statement, above, *Gamma2* is speaking to *Eddies*. Everyone can see what *Gamma2* said, however. It's just a way of keeping track if there is more than one conversation going on in the channel.

MUDDING

MUD is an acronym, and it stands for whatever the speaker wants it to stand for. They started out as role-playing games: Multi-User Dungeons. As they gained respectability, people started looking for more respectable names: Multi-User Domains, Multi-User Dwellings, Multi-User Damn-near-anything-except-Dungeon. They're still the

same old MUD, however. MUDs provide a level of interaction quite a bit greater than IRC. Not only are there other people you can talk to, but you can look at them, and you can walk from one room to another. Objects besides people can exist in MUDs, and you can pick them up, use them, and make your own. MUDs are a primitive—usually text only—form of *virtual world*.

It's quite easy to use a MUD. You have to have special "Mud" software (such as "Telnet") and you have to know of a MUD where you want to go. If, for example, you want to go to the MUD (actually, a MOO) at lambda.moo.mud.org, you can type telnet lambda.moo.mud.org 8888. The '8888' is the *port* that LambdaMOO operates on. Lots of MUDs work on strange ports. We'll talk more about ports later. Just remember that, if a MUD location includes a "port", you have to include the port when you telnet there.

What happens at MUDs? Let's visit LambdaMOO, da mudder of all MOOs. A "MOO" is a form of MUD. It stands for "MUD, Object Oriented", and means that it's easier to do certain things with objects in a MOO. That'll be for later, and if you're interested in things MOO, you can read Come to Valhalla for a beginner's guide. Here, however, is an uncensored direct example of what you can expect in a MUD: (Legend: I said; *They said*)

*** Connected ***

THE COAT CLOSET

The closet is a dark, cramped space. It appears to be very crowded in here; you keep bumping into what feels like coats, boots, and other people (apparently sleeping). One useful thing that you've discovered in your bumbling about is a metal doorknob set at waist level into what might be a door.

There is new news. Type 'news to read all news or 'news new' to read just new news.

Type '@tutorial' for an introduction to basic MOOing. If you have not already done so, please type 'help manners' and read the text carefully. It outlines the community standard of conduct, which each player is expected to follow while in LambdaMOO.

Daisy_Tattoo teleports out.

Guest is in love with The Bassmaster - cyberlove that is Guest sighs miserably

Carleen is not in love with JBF or Phatman- in fact, she can't stand them.

Guest [Caarleen]: Would seem there are some weirdos out here

Gareth has disconnected.

Guest [to Carleen]: MMMMh

Carleen [to Guest]: if you ever meet JBF or Phatman, do not speak to them

Gareth has connected.

Ebony_Guest has connected.

Ecru_Guest teleports out.

Spooky teleports in.

Open Door

You open the closet door and leave the darkness for the living room, closing the door behind you so as not to wake the sleeping people inside.

THE LIVING ROOM

It is very bright, open, and airy here, with large plate-glass windows looking southward over the pool to the gardens beyond.

On the north wall, there is a rough stonework fireplace. The east and west walls are almost completely covered with large, well-stocked bookcases. An exit in the northwest corner leads to the kitchen and, in a more northerly direction, to the entrance hall. The door into the coat closet is at the north end of the east wall, and at the south end is a sliding glass door leading out onto a wooden deck. There are two sets of couches, one clustered around the fireplace and one with a view out the windows.

You see README for New MOOers, Welcome Poster, a fireplace, Cockatoo, The Birthday Machine, lag meter, a map of LambdaHouse, SeaDog, Helpful Person Finder, and Zap-Zap_Gun here.

SarahBeth, Vida_Blue, Charlotte_Sometimes, Trax, the late Gilmore, ScrabbleMonster (daydreaming), Melon (distracted), Lavender_Guest, Louise Brooks (Ca Plane Pour Moi), Daisy_Tattoo, Stimpy, Cyan_Guest, and Sammael are here.

A previously unseen panel in the wall opens up, and Dr_Sperm tumbles out, looking a bit startled, but otherwise okay.

Look Birthday

Daisy_Tattoo holds up a BIG sign:

Lavender_Guest [to Vida_Blue]: hiya this evening?

The Birthday Machine is a computerized datebook shaped like a big birthday cake. Its function is to announce the birthdays of MOO-folk so register your birthday today! Among the fake frosting you can see dials marked DAY, MONTH, and YEAR and a button marked HELP. You can also simply use `HELP BIRTHDAY MACHINE' to get the help text. There is a little keyboard for typing in the names of MOO-folk whose birthday you wish to know.

CAsAnOva turns 17 years old today. Steve-2 turns 24 years old today. Tweff turns 18 years old today. Beladonna turns 23 years old today. Diablo turns 21 years old today. jasmyne turns 25 years old today.

After you make a regular character, come back and register your birthday!

Charlotte_Sometimes has disconnected.

ScrabbleMonster idles actively.

Cockatoo squawks, ":wipes his eyes...."I am old I guess.""

Louise_Brooks [to Daisy_Tattoo]: #388

Charlotte_Sometimes has connected.

Sammael embraces saidin and channels open a gateway, he walks into it and it closes behind him....taking him to another place.

SarahBeth [dasiy_tattoo]: #388...and you don't need to use that spammy sign..just ask okay?

Cockatoo squawks, "What's happenning Grunt?"

@quit

*** Disconnected ***

What's going on here? You've got people disconnecting, connecting, bemoaning their age, squawking, talking, and idling.

Here's what happened: when you first connect to LambdaMOO, you start out in the "Coat Closet". And some people are perfectly willing to do some strange things in coat closets, even in real life. From the Coat Closet, I opened the door and came out of the closet into the "Living Room". There was something called a "Birthday Machine", so I looked at it, and it told me the names of everyone on LambdaMOO who has a birthday today. All the while, other people are coming into and out of the Living Room and talking to each other. After I typed "look birthday", and before the MOO showed me the Birthday Machine, I saw Daisy_Tattoo hold up a big sign and I saw Lavender_Guest welcome Vida_Blue.

The locations of MUDs changes regularly, as some MUDs close down and others start up. You can find a list at Yahoo, and by keeping your ear to the silicon.

Discussion Groups

Discussion groups are sort of like e-mail, but with lots of people taking part. One person sends off a message (*posts* a message) to the group. Over the next few days, the other members of the group read the message (the *posting*), and some of them reply to it, adding their own comments.

The two major type of discussion groups are mailing lists and *Usenet news*. You can often find discussion groups as part of web pages, but these tend to be quite provincial.

Discussion Netiquette

The "Conversational Norms" apply as well to group discussion as they do to individual discussion. Group discussion carries with it an entire new set of norms and responsibilities.

Cites!

There are twenty million people on the net, and growing every day. Even your most basic assumptions will be questioned by *somebody* and when you actually start talking about something controversial, the flames can easily pile up a mile high.

If you're presenting something as a fact, tell your reader where you came by your information. If you're presenting something as opinion, label it as such. If you can, and it is important, explain how you arrived at that opinion.

The cry for "cites" is far more likely to come up on a political discussion, so you should detail your message accordingly. But anything controversial will generate arguments, and you would not believe what some people find to be controversial. Remember: somebody, somewhere, disagrees vehemently with what you're saying. And they've got the facts to back it up. Do you?

On a related note, be very, very careful of "attributions" in any discussion. Attributions are "who said what". People can get worried—rightfully so—when something someone else said is attributed to them, or when something they said is attributed to someone else. Remember that attributions follow the "greater than"

symbols, although as you venture onto Usenet you'll find that some 'noncomformists' use other symbols in place of the "greater than" and some idiots don't use any attribution symbol at all.

Ad Hominems

When tempers flare and arguments veer away from spirited discussion into insults, "ad hominems" become common. Attacking the messenger rather than the message is a technique some people use to avoid having to buttress their arguments with facts. However, it is also used when someone keeps posting the same drivel to the same newsgroup, long after everyone realizes they're a fool.

But your mileage may vary. In general, an ad hominem, insulting the poster rather than their arguments, is a sign of a poor loser, someone who realizes that they're wrong but who wants to get in the last word anyway. The idiots.

Me Too! And Summaries

When one person asks for information, other people may realize that they want the information as well. The result is a barrage of messages to the discussion group saying nothing except "I want it too!" This is annoying for everyone, even the Me-Tooers. The correct way to do this is to respond to the person who originally asked the message, and ask if they can either forward the information to you when it arrives, or if they can summarize the responses to the discussion group.

And, if *you* ask a question, and get lots of useful responses, summarizing to the group is good netiquette and can earn you quite a

few net.brownie points. You can "summarize" a group of postings by either writing a report on what everyone said, or by simply taking out the important parts of each person's message, and prefacing it with "John (john@sherwood.gov) said:".

Personal And Group Mail

There's a difference between personal and group mail. Personal mail shouldn't go to group discussions. If you're sending mail that's really meant for just one person, you should send it to that person. Besides the obvious fact that no one else wants to read it, you can't be sure that the individual you're sending to will read your message. A posting to Usenet might "expire" before your intended recipient gets a chance to read it, and messages to mailing lists might be ignored. Some people even have their computers automatically separate "mailing list" mail from "personal" mail, leaving "mailing list" mail for when they have the time. If you send your personal message to the mailing list, their software will tag it as "mailing list", not "personal". Depending on how little free time they have, they might end up just deleting all of their "mailing list" mail if it piles up too much.

Just The FAQs, Ma'am

Most high-traffic discussion groups have *FAQ* files or lists. A FAQ list is a list of Frequently Asked Questions, along with their answers. In any major discussion, there are certain questions that pop up repeatedly, and there really isn't much point in talking about them again and again. The FAQ list summarizes the past discussions, and the conclusions, if any, which were arrived at. This keeps the

discussion group moving on towards new items of interest rather than continually rehashing old themes.

You should always look diligently for the FAQ of any discussion group you're a part of. If it's a mailing list, you'll probably be told where the FAQ is when you receive your "welcome to the list" message. In Usenet newsgroups, the FAQ is hidden somewhere in the many articles waiting for you.

You can also find many FAQs on the Usenet newsgroup, news.answers or at FAQ.Org.

Personal Discussion Groups

If all you want to do is get together with a few friends and have an email discussion, the best way to do it is with a "distribution list", or a "group nickname". Each person in the group creates, in their address book, a nickname for the group. This nickname includes the e-mail address of each person in the group. When you create the nickname, give Pine or Eudora all the e-mail addresses when asked for the address. Separate the addresses from each other by commas.

Mailing Lists

When people on the net get together to discuss things in an organized manner, they usually use some form of *mailing list*. In its simplest form, a mailing list is just that: a list, on a central computer, of everyone who is taking part in the discussion. Members send their messages to that central computer, and the central computer copies

their messages and sends a copy to each person listed in the list of members.

Most mailing lists today include quite a few features above and beyond that. They'll have special archives where files of interest to the members are kept. The discussion itself might be archived there as well. Some mailing lists provide privacy to members, so that *other* members can't find out who is on the list and who is off. Some mailing lists aren't for discussion at all, but are for announcements. Only the list "owner" can send messages to the central address. Members aren't allowed to make announcements to the list.

Finding A Mailing List

There are mailing lists on virtually every topic you could want. And if there *isn't* a mailing list on a topic that you want to talk about, you can create one of your own! On the Macintosh, Macjordomo makes it very easy to set up your own mailing list, if your Internet Service Provider will give you an extra 'username'. They'll usually do it for five bucks or so. Many provide a limited number of extra usernames for free.

The easiest way to find a mailing list by topic is to use www.liszt.com.

Joining and Leaving

Once you *find* a mailing list, you still have to *join*. Joining a mailing list is called *subscribing*. You do this by sending an e-mail message to the mailing list's *control* address. Mailing lists usually have two addresses: the discussion address and the control address. Mail sent

to the discussion address is copied and sent to each member. Mail sent to the control address is responded to by the central computer. If you want to subscribe, unsubscribe, request an archive file, or do anything "controlling" your membership, you *must* send it to the control address. If you send it to the discussion address, all that's going to happen is that people are going to discuss how inappropriate your action was.

If you're lucky. If you're not, you'll get flamed from here to oblivion.

Sufficiently scared? Don't worry, it's just e-mail. Sticks and stones, and all that.

Now, where were we? Right, subscribing to a mailing list. We've found this great list, *Amazons International*, for the discussion of physically and psychologically strong women and the men and women who love them. In order to subscribe to *Amazons International*, we need to send a *subscription request* to the control address. We found out about *Amazons International* from Liszt, and it also told us what the control address is: *amazons-request@math.uio.no*. The description doesn't tell us what we need to actually say, so we can assume it's the standard. The standard "subscribe" request is: *subscribe list_name Firstname Lastname*. So, here's what I would send to amazons-request@math.uio.no:

subscribe amazons Jerry Stratton

I used "amazons" for the name of the list. How did I know that?

Because one of the many standards for "control" addresses is to add "-request" to the name of the list. Usually, you'll be told the name of the

list (and how to subscribe) in the description that you get from findlists.

Now, some day I might want to leave *Amazons International*. Joining requires subscribing, and leaving requires *unsubscribing*. Once again, this message has to go to the control address. And the message is:

unsubscribe amazons

You don't have to tell it your name, because it already knows it from when you subscribed.

Taking Part

So you're subscribed, now what? Now, it's time to brush up on your netiquette, because getting flamed in private mail is nothing compared to getting flamed in full view of your electronic friends. Be kind to others, and take a deep breath when they're not kind to you.

It's going to be hard to get people angry at you if you don't know how to take part in the discussion. When you have something to say to the members of a mailing list, you send the message via e-mail to the discussion address. If the discussion address is <code>amazons@math.uio.no</code>, that's where you send the message. And it'll get copied and sent to each and every person on the mailing list.

Error Messages

Sometimes you'll get very strange mail when you try to send something out to a mailing list, telling you that your mail was "undeliverable". If you want to worry about it, you're going to have to

play detective: most of these messages mean nothing. What happens is that *one* person who is listed as a member was unreachable. Their computer was dead, or they canceled their e-mail address without canceling their mailing list memberships. Your message went out fine to every other member. If you send your message out again, most members are going to get it twice and they're going to let you know that it's inappropriate to send messages twice.

If you are worried that your message didn't make it to *anyone*, look at the junk in the error message. If it says that it "couldn't reach a host", and that "host" is the part of the mailing list address after the '@', then perhaps the computer that the mailing list is on went down temporarily. Or, perhaps you misspelled the "host" part of the mailing list. Double-check your spelling and try again *if you can see where you made the mistake*.

If it says that it "couldn't find a user", and the user is the part of the mailing list address before the '@', then either the list address was changed and no one told you (the jerks!), or you misspelled the address. Double-check your spelling and try again *if you can see where you made the mistake*.

Continually retrying when you *can't* see where you made a mistake is a recipe for flames. The message probably went out fine to everybody except one person, and re-mailing it is continually resending it to everybody except that one person.

Usenet Newsgroups

Mailing lists are *controlled* discussion on the net. There's a central list of members, and some individual controls who is in and who is not in that list. In most cases, that control is handed to an impartial computer program, but the control is there.

Usenet has no such central control. Anyone can read and anyone can post to Usenet without asking for permission from a central "Usenet" moderator. There is no "list of users" for Usenet. There are *some* newsgroups that *do* have moderators, but they're the exception, not the rule. And even in those cases, the moderator doesn't control any form of membership list. The moderator approves messages one at a time, rather than controlling who joins and who doesn't.

The Usenet Hierarchy

Usenet is a collection of newsgroups on a huge variety of topics. A "newsgroup" is just a place to go and discuss whatever topic the newsgroup was created for. These newsgroups are arranged *hierarchically*. There are seven basic sets of newsgroups: computers, miscellaneous, recreational, science, social/sociological, talk, and Usenet news itself.

Within each of these "top-level" hierarchies, there are further "branches" specifying discussions in ever more detail. So, within the "rec" (recreation) newsgroups, there is "rec.music" for discussion of music, and within that there is rec.music.gdead, for discussion of the Grateful Dead musical group. Within the "comp" (computers)

discussion hierarchy, you'll find "comp.sys" for discussion of computer systems, "comp.sys.mac" for discussion of the Macintosh computer, and comp.sys.mac.hardware for discussion solely of hardware-related issues on the Macintosh.

There are other hierarchies outside the "big seven". One of the biggest is the *alternate* hierarchy. Within the "alt" groups, you'll find even more free-wheeling discussions than you'll find on the big seven.

Finding A Newsgroup

It is much easier to find a useful newsgroup than it is to find a useful mailing list. Go to DejaNews and look around. Also, if you go into your Usenet news reader, you can usually ask it to search the list of newsgroup names. Interested in discussing Rush Limbaugh? Type limbaugh as the search keyword. Here's a sample of what you might find:

alt.fan.rush-limbaugh	Derogation of others for fun and
	profit.
alt.fan.rush-limbaugh.tv-show	Rush's television programme.
alt.flame.rush-limbaugh	The opposition's version of
	alt.fan.rush-limbaugh.
alt.rush-limbaugh	Fans of the conservative activist
	radio announcer.

The descriptions of Usenet newsgroups are a bit shorter than the descriptions of mailing lists, so you may want to try a couple of times, with different keywords, if your first try doesn't find a newsgroup

based on the topic you want. There are thousands of newsgroups, and *one* of them is bound to have what you want.

Joining and Leaving

My favorite Usenet newsreader is MT Newswatcher. You can find it at Download.Com. You can also use Netscape Communicator if you already have that.

Reading Messages

Taking part in a newsgroup means "posting" an "article" to the newsgroup. It can also mean "lurking" on the newsgroup--just reading, not posting. If you're using Netscape or MT NewsWatcher to read your newsgroups, you can just click on the appropriate article or button to read or post to a newsgroup.

Replying To An Article

Somebody's got your blood boiling, and you want to flame them to Helen Bach. You've got two choices—three, really. You can, of course, just ignore them, and you probably should.

You can reply to the individual privately, or you can "follow-up" to the article so that everyone on the newsgroup can read your reply.

Replying privately sends the message off via normal e-mail. This means that only the individual you're replying to gets the message. If your message is not of value to the group as a whole, you should send

it off privately. "Following up" to the newsgroup sends the message to the entire Usenet newsgroup, so everyone can read it, and reply to it if they so desire.

Saving Articles To A File

Articles on the newsgroups disappear very quickly. If you want to archive an article for future reference, you'll have to save it as a file on your hard drive.

Canceling Messages

So you had a bad day and you just sent out a Usenet message threatening the life of the President of the United States. What can you do about it?

If you're fast, you can save your life, that's what you can do. You can "cancel" messages so that they don't go anywhere, after you've sent them. You can only cancel your own messages.

If your message hasn't gone upstream yet, your message is immediately canceled. Most likely, you aren't that lucky. If your message has gone upstream, your cancel also goes upstream, ferreting it out in the forests and tributaries of Usenet. If all goes well (and it won't), your message will be deleted from every newsfeed that accepted it. People who have already read your message will not have their memory erased, of course, and if they've saved a copy and forwarded it to the Secret Service, the cancel doesn't follow that far. But any new readers checking into Usenet won't see the message after it's been canceled.

Note that you can no longer count on this working well. Many news servers no longer accept general cancels, because they are too easily forged.

Important Newsgroups

There are a few newsgroups that are very important. Two are important for anyone reading Usenet news.

news.announce.newusers

This is a moderated newsgroup: you can read it, but you can't post to it. This is the most important newsgroup for new users. It explains all the things everyone else thinks are simple, such as how to post messages, what your writing style should be, and how newsgroups are created.

news.answers

All the FAQs are available on news.answers, at least, all the ones where the FAQ's author knows what they're talking about. You can find everything from the "Coffee Lovers" FAQ to FAQs that I can't even list here because even their *names* might land me in jail.

With Great Power Comes...

Most of the things that you do on the Internet, you do on a computer which is being used by many other people. You have a responsibility to make sure you don't allow electronic burglars to jeopardize the computer your account is on.

Passwords and Security

You have a username and a password for many things on the net. You must keep your passwords secret! If someone else gets your password, they can get into your account, read your mail, delete your files, change your files, change your mail, use your account as a stepping stone to breaking into other people's accounts, and generally cause havoc of biblical proportion.

Keep your password to yourself, and change it whenever you think it might have been 'compromised'. A good password is one that's easy for you to remember, and hard for a computer to guess. Every word in the English or any other major language is out. Numbers that have meaning, especially dates, are out. There are only a small number of dates, and computers are very good at checking every possible combination of a small list.

The current fashion is to use the first letter of an arcane phrase. "From the dawn of time, we came." could give "ftdotwc". Unix is case sensitive--uppercase letters are different letters than lowercase. So an even better password from that phrase, and just as easy to remember,

is "Ftdotwc". If you can include numbers and punctuation, that's even better: "Ftdot,wc."

By the way, since they're printed here, none of those examples are any good. Don't use them.

Your last name sucks as a password. Just thought I'd tell you that. Even backwards. It is important to remember the "it only takes one rule" on the net: it doesn't matter if *most* people aren't going to go to the trouble to try to guess your password, because *it only takes one*.

Services on the Net

The net is a hell of a lot more than just a bunch of gossips. It's a bunch of gossips who all write their own books. *If* information is power, *then* thar's gold in them that hills.

URLs Just Want to Have Fun

If you get on the net, you'll see lots of talk about *URLs*. An URL is a Universal Resource Locator. It's really meant to tell *computers* how to get around on the net, but it has ended up being used to tell *people* how to get around on the net.

A URL looks like:

```
service://host/filepath
```

The "service" is usually one of "http", "gopher" or "ftp", but there are quite a few others. The "host" is the name of the computer that the site calls home, and the "filepath" tells you *where* on that computer the site, or the file that you're looking for, is.

The Web

The World Wide Web—you may know it as "Netscape", but you're wrong—is the flashy part of the net. It's not just text anymore. You've got pictures, and, if the site you're going to is particularly progressive, you might see animation and hear sound.

If you want to see the web in all its glory, you'll need to use a graphical web browser. "Explorer" and "Netscape" are the two most common web browsers.

If you know the URL of a place you want to see, you can tell your web browser. Under graphical web browsers, there is usually an "Open Location..." item underneath the "File" menu. Choose this and type the URL you want.

The web is made up of "pages" and "links". A web "page" is a document on the web. A web page could be one line long, or a hundred, or more.

"Links" link web pages together, and they can also link web pages to other Internet services. A link is basically just a URL. In a graphical web browser, some words are highlighted, usually in red or blue. If you click on these highlighted words with the mouse, the web browser goes out and gets the page or service that the URL points to. A *blue* link is a link that your browser thinks you haven't seen yet, and a *red* link is one that you *have* seen.

Graphics are often linked as well, and some of them won't have blue or red highlights. It can't hurt to click on it. Well, it might be linked to www.fantasysex.com, and if your boss is looking, that could hurt.

Web Indices

There are a number of web indexes out there. One of the best is Yahoo. One of the reasons it's one of the best is that if you can't find what you want on Yahoo, Yahoo has links to the rest at the bottom of the page. I'd also recommend Alta Vista and DejaNews, if Yahoo doesn't have what you're looking for. You might also want to read Getting Around on the Internet, from What Your Children Are Doing on the Information Highway.

Gopher

Gopher is like the web that your grandfather used. It's a lot simpler, and there's none of this mucking about with making things look nice. Some gopher servers even run on IBM compatibles, replete with eight-character filenames. Try to find something useful in *that* murky swamp.

Conceptually, gopher is very similar to the web. However, it doesn't combine links with pages. All you get are links, presented as a menu. Web browsers nowadays also talk gopher, so you don't necessarily have to know this. You can recognize a gopher by the fact that things no longer look like a web page. (But then, you might also be on an FTP site, and even I don't want to go there.)

Bookmarks On The Web

If you do a lot of web browsing, you can get lost very easily. That's what "bookmarks" are for. They allow you to keep a list of sites that you think you'll want to come back to.

On graphical web browsers, there is a menu just for adding and using bookmarks. Unix uses keys, of course, rather than menus.

Once you get a lot of bookmarks, you can also organize them into folders: and you'll want to. It does you no good to have your favorite sites held in bookmarks when you can't find anything in your list of 100 bookmarks. Netscape and Explorer both allow you to "edit" your bookmarks, creating folders and moving bookmarks into those folders. I recommend that you do this every time your bookmarks extend off the bottom of your computer screen.

Telnet

Telnet allows you to log into other computers. A lot of libraries, for example, still require you to "telnet" in to find the information you want. The Library of Congress is a good example. You can get to most MOOs and MUDs by telnet as well, if you haven't got a specialized MUD client at hand.

When you telnet to a standard telnet site, such as *locis.loc.gov* (the Library of Congress), you have to use a telnet program (such as Better Telnet on the Macintosh, or just 'telnet' on Windows) and "Open" a "Session", "Connection", or "Remote Host". The remote host you type is the name of the site you want to go to: locis.loc.gov, for example.

If you also need to type a port, and you don't see a box to type the port number into, try just adding a space to the end of the hostname and type the port there: lambda.moo.mud.org 8888, for example.

Terminal Emulation

Occasionally, you'll be asked what kind of "terminal emulation" you're using. You'd better be using VT100 or one of its variants. If you're given a list of options, choose the option that sounds most like "vt100". If you are asked to type in the emulation, type "vt100", in all lower case. This will usually work.

An URL In Every Port?

A lot of special telnet services are on different "ports". A "port" is a hole in the host that allows data to get in and out. Each Internet service has a standard port that it uses. Telnet uses port 23. If the place you want to get to uses a different port, you need to let the telnet software know. Usually, there will be a box to type the port number into. If you don't know the port number, leave this box blank. If you do know the port number, go ahead and type it. If there is no box for the port, and you know that the port is a special one, try typing it after the hostname. Put a space between the hostname and the number. For example, to get to the Weather Underground, which has nothing to do with the rock group, the port is "3000". You can type telnet madlab.sprl.umich.edu 3000.

In a URL, you'll see the port after the host, separated by a colon. The URL for the Weather Underground is telnet://madlab.sprl.umich.edu:3000/. Normally, you don't see the port specified in a URL, because most things use the default port for that service.

Freedom of Press

The beauty of the Internet lies in the freedom it gives to individuals to publish to other individuals. In the eighteenth century the personal firearm revolutionized politics and encouraged the formation of the American republic. The computer is the rifle of the information age, and the personal computer will do the same thing to the clusters of informational power that the rifle did to clusters of political power. The twentieth century media giant will go the way of the eighteenth century tyrant.

Or, as Jello Biafra said, "Don't hate the media. Become the media."

There are numerous ways for you to publish to the net, and you'll need to talk to your Internet provider about your options. Here, I'm going to talk about just two: web pages and mailing lists.

Web Serving

If you have something you want the world to know, you can publish it from your Unix account. All you really need is something to put there. Talk to your ISP about how to do this, but usually you get web space as part of your Internet service package. In other words, if you're not using it, you're wasting money!

You normally write web pages with a special web editor, such as Netscape Communicator's Composer. You can also write them by hand, though I wouldn't recommend it. See my own Basic HTML here on Negative Space. Your main page has to be called "index.html", and the rest of them can have any filename ending in ".html".

Web pages are written using something called "HTML code". It's called code because it was created by programmers, and they call everything that they write "code", probably because normal people can't read it. HTML code, however, is just normal text with HyperText Markup Language "directives" sprinkled throughout it. For example, if you want to emphasize a word, you surround it with the HTML "emphasis" directive:

appears as

wow!

There are also directives for headlines, citations, strong text and lots of directives no one understands, such as blinking text.

If you want to link a word to another web page, you surround it with the "link" directive, which is just a URL:

```
<a href="http://www.hoboes.com/html/NetLife/">Neon Alley</a>
```

appears as

Neon Alley

and if the reader selects those words, they are transported to the Neon Alley on Negative Space. You don't have to worry about this if you're using a web editor to create your web pages, however. The web editor will do the 'code' for you, and all you have to concentrate on is

the *content*. If you want to pay for one, the two best web page editors are currently Adobe GoLive and Macromedia Dreamweaver.

If you want to see how someone else's web page is "coded", most web browsers allow you to "view" the "source" of any web page you're looking at.

Mailing Lists

If you and some of your new-found net friends around the world want to talk about something, but you haven't found a place already on the net to use, you can create your own mailing list. Your mailing list will be accessible to the entire Internet.

You can usually sign up with your Internet provider to get your own mailing list, for mere dollars a month. You can have a free-form mailing list, or you can *moderate* it.

If you decide to moderate your own mailing list, you must be prepared for the responsibilities! It is up to you to handle problems among list members, problems that list members and potential list members have using the mailing list, and any bounced mail that occurs when some list members disappear, or their computers go down temporarily.

Make sure there isn't *already* a mailing list devoted to your topic.

If you can't afford to pay for a mailing list, or your provider doesn't provide that service, and you have a Macintosh, I recommend looking at Leuca Software's Macjordomo.

Look at Negative Space Software Recommendations for more links to software that makes it easy to serve the net!

Signature

Jerry Stratton

"All night long their nets they threw to the stars in the twinkling foam--

Then down from the skies came the wooden shoe bringing the fishermen home.

'Twas all so pretty a sail it seemed as if it could not be.

And some folks thought 'twas a dream they'd dreamed of sailing that beautiful sea."

--Eugene Field, Wynken, Blynken, and Nod

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