
**A
Gentle
Introduction
to WEB**

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A Gentle Introduction to WEB was
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This version as of August 20, 1988

Coming to Terms with the WEB Universe

Sarcastic Introduction

Hmmmm.

So you've decided to delve into the world of electronic communications; you want to unlock the untold secrets of electronic mail, tap the limitless well-springs of discussion happening in electronic conferences, become a full-fledged bearer of the torch of modern communications.

Give up.

It's probably not worth it. It's just too much work. Complicated commands to memorize, endless technical nightmares of modem, bits, duplexes and parities abound. It's a hell of a lot easier to just keep using Canada Post and Bell to handle your life's information flow. Roll over and go back to sleep.

Or not.

The Real Introduction

You're a new member of the WEB electronic network. You may never have used a computer before, you may have been raised with keyboard in hand. Nevertheless, to effectively use WEB it helps to become familiar with what I'll call the "WEB Universe".

Like people, WEB has a personality, a character, a way of expressing itself. Becoming familiar with that character will make the task of figuring out how to use WEB for useful purposes much, much easier.

That's what this manual is for. It's not like a traditional computer manual; it isn't replete with things like "Pressing the [A] key will invoke the Zorp function which will qualidate your anthroperes". It's neither a road map nor a recipe book. It's more like a first date. If it serves its purpose well, you will come out the other end vaguely familiar with what WEB's all about and un-intimidated enough to give the whole thing a go.

Keeping this in mind, you're going to have to be prepared to devote a little time to the whole escapade. The instant electronic nirvana that you may have been promised takes a little more than flipping on your computer and phoning up. You're not going to have to spend a life on this, mind you, but think of how long it took you to learn to use a pencil. It's a whole new medium we're talking about here.

How Not to Use This Manual

This manual doesn't tell you how to use WEB. As an accompaniment to it you should have the "HOOKING UP" sheets appropriate to your computer and your software. They'll tell what to plug where, how to use your modem, explain your software program and let you know how to log onto WEB.

Once you're "logged on" to WEB, you're "on your own" as far as step-by-step instructions go. If you read this manual you should understand how WEB is structured and know what you're looking for and what to expect. You'll have an extensive "electronic help" library at your fingertips all the time so if, for example, you want to know how to send a mail message to Fred in Thunder Bay, all you need do is type **HELP MAIL** and simple instructions will appear.

If any advice can be passed along at this point it is this: don't be afraid to fool around and take chances. You might think that a logical way to send a mail message to Fred is by typing **MAIL TO FRED**. You may be right. You may be wrong. The worst that can go wrong is to get an error message and to try again. Have patience. It will take some time to adjust to WEB's way of working. Eventually it will become second nature; in the beginning you might fall off a couple of times.

In case of total and absolute catastrophe or if at wit's end, help is as near as the voice telephone and a call to WEB staff.

Have fun.

What's this all about, anyway?

Imagine that you're a freelance writer. You write articles for airline magazines: "The Wonders of Northern Cod", "How to Look Beautiful and be Famous". It's a little offensive to your sensibilities, but it pays well and you set your own hours.

Because you live in a funky co-op building in downtown Vancouver, you've been saved the hassle of investing in your own computer equipment for word processing. You and six other people in the building banded together a year ago to purchase equipment which is kept in a dingy room in the basement. There's a schedule on the wall which lets people reserve time and although there are the inevitable conflicts over "My deadline was yesterday...", it all works out pretty well.

One dreary day in May around two in the morning (you work really weird hours) you trudge down to the basement to work on your latest job. When you sit down at the terminal, you notice a bright orange note on the wall which says "READ THE FILE CALLED 'NEWS' ON THE GREEN FLOPPY DISK". Dutifully, you load up your word processor, put the green floppy disk in the disk drive and call up the file called **NEWS**. On your screen appears a message:

Hello fellow computer users. I've typed in this file called **NEWS** and saved it on the green floppy disk. I thought that we could all exchange notes and happenings by adding them on to the end of this file and then saving it again. That way we'd save a lot of paper and take advantage of the computer even more. To start, I'll let you know that I've just signed a contract for a new book on computer crime which is due on the 23rd of April. Good luck; I'll wait to hear from you all in this file. -Gail.

It immediately occurs to you what a stupid waste of time this exercise has been. Why didn't Gail just write her news on paper and post it to the wall rather than make you go through the 50,000-odd steps of reading it in video. You decide, however, that despite the attendant foolishness, you will humour her and you tack on to the end of the file:

Despite the fact that I think this is silly, I've decided to post here that I'm going on vacation from the sixteenth to the twenty-third and thus won't be around. Bye! - Myself

Through a bizarre coincidence, the next day just happens to be the sixteenth of the month and thus you head off towards Peterborough, Jewel of the Kawarthas, for a well-deserved vacation.

Time passes.

You return from Peterborough, Vacation Capital of the East, refreshed and relaxed. In your mail upon your return is a letter from Canadian Airlines asking for an article on "Drapes and The Modern House". Gack. But, they'll pay you ten thousand dollars for it, so what the heck. After the obligatory coming-home chores, you descend to the computer room to begin your work.

Upon the wall in the computer room is that same note saying "**READ THE FILE CALLED 'NEWS' ON THE GREEN FLOPPY DISK**". Your curiosity gets the better of you and before setting down to an intense writing binge, you pull out the green floppy and call up the NEWS file.

Surprise, surprise. The file has grown bigger; it now contains almost four pages of news and idle, mindless chit-chat. Around the bottom of the file is a note from Jorge, a cookbook writer from the third floor. It says:

I don't know how many of you saw this on the news, but the government just introduced Bill C-54 into the House. It's a new set of anti-pornography laws which, upon first read, appear rather draconian.

Following the note from Jorge is a response from Gail (the one who started all the NEWS nonsense). Gail wrote:

I saw the full text of Bill C-54 today. It's horrible, sweeping and seems to include almost everything in its list of banned stuff.

You read onwards and find a long discussion back and forth between Gail, Jorge and Stan (an electrician from the second floor) about Bill C-54. The last message concerning the topic is this one from Stan:

I suggest that we create a new file, called CENSOR, on the green floppy disk and continue our discussion of Bill C-54 and other such issues there. That way we can keep this NEWS file for more newsy sorts of stuff and still continue our discussion.

Unknown to himself and others, Stan has just officially ushered in the era of computer conferencing to your little group. A quiet revolution.

What was THAT all about?

Imagine, now, that the mysterious basement computer is not, indeed, in the basement, but cleverly concealed in an office next door to the El Mocambo in Toronto.

Rather than being a small word-processing computer, it's a rather larger one with lots of room to store things, lots of speed and the ability to have more than one person using it at the same time.

Rather than going through the hassle of travelling into the pit of Toronto to use it, you dial it up with your own terminal or computer from the comfort of your living room.

A rather convoluted hypothetical scenario, I admit, but perhaps you get what I'm driving at. WEB is not a mysterious thing and involves technology and ideas no more complex than the "green floppy disk" scenario. WEB members, each with their own computer or terminal, phone up the WEB computer using a modem (a black box which allows computers to communicate using telephone lines). When they're hooked up to WEB's computer, it's effectively as if the WEB computer were sitting on their desk.

In the same manner that our imaginary characters above traded news using the "green floppy disk", WEB users trade news using the WEB computer's disk storage. You phone up, leave a bit of news, someone else phones up five hours later and it's there for them to read. Instant publishing!

WEB, of course, is a considerably more powerful communications tool than the shared basement computer. It manages discussion in "conferences" or general areas of discussion. Each time you use WEB you need not read conversations you've already read, just new material. You can exchange private mail with other WEB users and with users of computer systems all over the world. You can send a WordPerfect file to your friend in Inuvik and receive a spreadsheet file from your Aunt in Digby. All of this happens on a Canada-wide basis, 24 hours a day, with a diverse group of users drawn from the non-profit sector.

Fascinated yet?

Some general terms to know

WEB

WEB can be talked about as a thing unto itself (like "WEB expects you to enter...") or once removed (like "Call up the WEB computer..."). It depends on how much into the fantasy world you want to fall... do people own their minds or ARE they their minds?

Online, Logged On

When you are communicating with the WEB computer using your own computer or terminal, you are "online", "logged on" or just basically electronically talking to WEB. When you're not online, you're "offline" or "logged off". The process of phoning up WEB and entering your user name and password is "logging on".

The People

The most important thing to remember about WEB users, if you want to know who they are, is something called their UserID. A UserID is a short word by which users are identified to WEB and to each other when using the system.

Everyone could go by their own name, but that would mean that everyone's name would have to be spelled correctly (for this matters to computers much more than to people) every time it was used. If, for example, you tried to mail an electronic message to "Peter Rukivine" rather than "Peter Rukavina", WEB wouldn't know that name from a hole in the ground and the letter wouldn't get sent. It's much easier to send things to "pruk" which is the UserID for "Peter Rukavina".

Most people's UserIDs are some sort of contraction of their first name and their last: "johnd" for "John Doe" or "gclarke" for "Gail Clarke", for example.

Other people use their organization's name as their UserID, hence "opirgp" for "OPIRG-Peterborough" and "oen" for the "Ontario Environment Network".

Your UserID is your choice and you should choose one that is both unique and easy to remember. That's what they're for, after all. If you know a person but not their UserID, WEB has a user directory function which will let you type in a name or part of a name and find out the UserID.

An important UserID to remember is "spider" (please note the biological connection with the word "web" for easy remembering). If you have questions about WEB, suggestions for improvements, or just plain need help, you can send a mail message to "spider". A member of the WEB staff will get your message and reply to you shortly.

The Conferences

WEB's strength is its role as a computer conferencing system.

Undoubtedly you already have a fair idea of what a non-electronic conference is (like "get in your car, drive to Duluth..."). You get together with a bunch of people with whom you share an interest or occupation or need and talk about it, read about it, and generally exchange information. Traditional conferences usually involve a great expense of time, energy and money to bring participants together because it is often that those sharing other ties don't share ones of geography.

Computer conferencing is very much like traditional conferencing in that its purpose is to bring like-minded people together in discussion; it is radically different in that it cuts through barriers of space and time. Conference participants needn't gather at the same time; Bob can call in at 2am and participate while Joyce uses her lunch hour. By the same token, participants can be as dispersed as telephone lines will allow. With WEB conferencing you're equally and as easily a participant if you live in Costa Rica or Kamloops.

WEB is home to conferences on many different topics, everything from an entire range of environmental issues to technical issues concerning computers, help wanted requests and personal politics.

WEB users participate only in the conferences which interest them; you create a list (which you may change at any time) of conferences which interest you and thereafter are informed of and may participate in any activity in those conferences. You may drop out of or join conferences at any time as your interests range.

Computer conferencing, although similar to its traditional cousin, is an entirely new medium of communication; as such it has a lot of new rules, habits and social graces that have been developed (and are developing).

For example, when people in many different countries began to communicate regularly using large university computers (and systems called things like BitNet, ARPANet and UseNet) problems became apparent with the use of humour. Things which are taken tongue in cheek or which are meant as a joke might not necessarily be taken as such by people in other countries (to say nothing of cultures within one's own country). To help alleviate this problem, the symbol ":-)" evolved as a sort of "I was chuckling when I wrote this" mark.

This "techno-punctuation" is only one example of a phenomenon which can really only be understood by getting your feet wet and diving right in.

Briefly the way conferencing works is that a group of users with a common interest "gather" in a conference. Someone enters an item, say:

There's going to be a hearing on the acid rain pollution of the pond in Nathan Phillips Square. Does anyone have any information on this?

Other participants in the conference read this and someone may enter a response like:

Yes, I have a file of information on the pond problems; I'll mail it to you tomorrow morning. Does anyone know how serious the problem is for the seagulls?

And onwards it goes. This "topic" of discussion (acid rain pollution of the pond) is called a conference "item". It was an initial "catalyst"; successive responses to it make an electronic "thread of discussion". When there is an entirely new topic to discuss (which still falls within the sphere of the conference), someone will enter a new item yet another discussion will be catalyzed.

That's pretty well the whole ball game. All that remains is to try it out.

Terms to know when conferencing

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Conference | A conference is a "theme area", a stream of discussion centering around one issue. Each conference has a "conference name", an abbreviated nomer for what it's all about ("cengen" for Canadian ENvironment GENeral discussion, for example). |
| Conference List | Each WEB user has a conference list. This list contains the names of the conferences that they want to participate in. Your conference list may change at any time. When you are participating in a conference you are said to have "joined" it. |
| Conference Item | An item is one chunk of a conference; it is a topic within an issue. A conference consists of a bunch of items and the corresponding responses to those items. |
| New Material | Items or responses to items in a conference you have joined which you haven't read yet. When you first join a conference, WEB creates a "participation file" for you. This file is like a bookmark; it tells WEB what you have |

read and what you haven't. As you read new material, the participation file gets updated to reflect this. Upon first joining a conference, your participation file is created such that the first item and the last item of that conference are marked as "new" for you; WEB marks everything else as "old". That way you don't have to go back and read the possibly hundreds and hundreds of old items in the conference before you begin.

Response

A response to an item. The responses following the initial item make up a discussion which is the essence of conferencing.

Fairwitness

An invented word thought to embody the notions of fairness and "witnessism". A fairwitness is a person, a "moderator" within a conference who has the ability, unlike the run-of-the-mill participant, to delete items and responses.

The Mail

Electronic mail (or "email" pronounced e-mail), on one level, is merely an electronic way of doing something its slower cousin Canada Post does by brute force. Unlike Canada Post, however, email is very, very fast. If you want to get a four page report from Toronto to Vancouver, Canada Post will take anywhere from three days to two weeks to complete the task and charge you an arm and a leg to boot.

Using electronic mail, you can send the same report, right from your word processor, in about a minute, and the receiver in Vancouver can retrieve it anytime thereafter.

While email might be wonderful and fine if you were just limited to sending messages to other WEB members, it's assumes a new height of wonderfulness when you consider the fact that WEB participates in a world-wide network of computer conferencing systems all of which exchange messages with each other. In the dark of night system phones system and messages are passed along. Sending a message to a colleague at the Sierra Club office in San Diego is as easy as sending one to OPIRG in Toronto. The time and cost factors are just as beneficial with this "outside" mail; getting a message to a system in the United Kingdom, for example, can happen overnight. All you need to know is the "electronic address" of the receiver — their UserID on their system is usually enough. There is a WEB command to search through the user lists of many other systems for a name you're looking for.

Mail messages are best created in your own word processor on your own computer; this will save you from tying up the WEB computer while composing and will allow you to write in an environment you are familiar working in. Consult the "HOOKING UP" sheet for your particular software to find out how the entire write-send process will work for you.

Be sure to read the section on "ASCII Text" below as well as the "File Transfer" section to follow. For information on how to send mail to users of other conferencing systems, consult the online help.

Terms to know when exchanging email

ASCII Text

ASCII, pronounced "ass-key"; describes the universal language that different computers may use in common to communicate with each other. Most word processors have the ability to save a file in ASCII. Since ASCII encodes only letters, numbers and symbols, things like underlining, bold facing and formatting commands are taken out when files are saved in this way. When you

send a mail message using WEB what you send is ASCII text. If you need to send someone a pure word processing file that they can then read into their word processor complete with all of the formatting codes involved, use "file transfer" as explained in the next chapter.

Mail message

Each time you send someone an electronic letter or receive one back, you are exchanging a "mail message". A mail message consists of consecutive lines of "straight text". This means that it cannot contain underlining, boldfacing, graphics or any of the other features you may be used to using in your word processor.

Mailbox

Each user has their own "electronic mailbox" which is where mail messages to them are stored until read. When you log on to WEB you will automatically be told if there are messages in your mailbox.

Gateway

Electronic mail to other systems is usually sent by "hop-skip-and-jumping" your message from one computer system to another (all automatically, of course) until it reaches its destination. For a message sent from WEB to reach its destination WEB must, indirectly, connect with the receiving computer. To use an analogy, let's say you want to drive from Hamilton to Peterborough. You can't go directly so you travel first to Toronto, then to Bowmanville and finally up to Peterborough. Fine. But if there's no road from Toronto to Bowmanville and an alternate route can't be found, you can't make the trip. In the same vein, there must be a "gateway" or "electronic path" between WEB and the receiving computer system.

Alias

Exactly as you might think. Aliases are words which really mean others words or collections of words. When WEB sends mail to other computer systems it needs to know the "gateway" to that system, the "electronic address" of the receiver. These can be quite complicated (like Robert Phillip Thomas Jones...); there is relief, however, in that WEB's user directory command will let you create an "alias" for a user on

another system. WEB remembers the full electronic address of the receiver but lets you refer to them as if they were another WEB user. When the mail message is sent, WEB automatically tacks on the complicated part of the address and sends it along to the right place.

Transferring Files

There will be times when you want to send other WEB users more than just ASCII text (see "The Mail" for definition); you may wish to send formatted word processor files containing things like underlining, boldfacing, and other formatting commands. You may wish to send a spreadsheet or database file which the receiver could load directly into their spreadsheet or database software. You may wish to send computer software programs, desktop publishing files or computer graphics files.

What these kind of computer files have in common, besides the fact that they aren't ASCII text, is that it's important that they be transferred completely correctly. Because phone lines, modems, and computers aren't always working perfectly there is always a chance that a character here or a character there will get missed. While it probably doesn't matter if an "a" gets bungled into a "k" when sending the word "apple" in a personal mail message to someone, losing a number or two from a financial spreadsheet or garbling a software program could result in much more dire problems.

To handle the error-free exchange of non-ASCII files, WEB has feature called "file transfer". Using processes called "kermit" and "xmodem", your terminal software and WEB perform automatic error checking as the file you are sending or receiving is being transferred. Using kermit or xmodem ensures that the file that is sent is exactly the same as the file that is received.

File transfer happens automatically with most terminal programs. You merely indicate to WEB the file you wish to transfer and the process proceeds automatically. Keep in mind, of course, that file transfers can take a long time; stuffing things through the phone lines takes a little longer than, for example, copying a disk.

In addition to letting you exchange files with other WEB users, file transfer allows you to receive public domain computer software from WEB's public file area. Stored there are numerous useful computer utilities.

Terms to know when transferring files

File Hmmm, you figure this one should be taken for granted, but perhaps not. Most simply in terms of you and WEB, a file is a named and hence manageable chunk of information. A file might be a letter from your word processor or a computer software program stored on WEB.

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Upload | The process of sending a file from your computer to WEB is called uploading. You upload a file TO and download a file FROM. |
| Download | The process of receiving a file from WEB is called downloading. You download a file FROM and upload a file TO. |
| Public File | A public file is one that is available for all users. Public files are stored in (surprise...) the "public file area". You can upload files that you want all users to be able to download. |
| Private File | A private file is one that is intended for one user only. It may be a file that another user has sent to you (they have UPloaded it, you will DOWNload it) or a file that you have sent another user (you UPload it, they DOWNload it). |
| Kermit | In technobabble, kermit is known as a "file transfer protocol". That all boils down to the notion that it is a method of moving files between computers while checking to make sure that the transfer is free of errors. |
| Xmodem | Xmodem is another file transfer protocol. |

WEBbing Around

Talking to WEB

Most things you'll do with WEB begin at the MAIN MENU. Once you've logged on to the system, this is the first thing you'll see. A menu, for the uninitiated, bears little resemblance to its culinary relative but for the fact that it gives you choices. A menu might look like this:

```
[R] Receive a file
[S] Send a file
[Q] Don't do anything
```

Select an option:

This menu is made up of three "options" each with their own "command". If, for example, you wanted to send a file, you would see that the command for that option is "S" and would thus enter an "S" after the "Select an option:" Sometimes menus will take on another form, looking something like this:

```
Respond, Pass, Quit, or Help?
```

On a menu like this the commands correspond to the capitalized first letters of the options; you might, for example, choose to "respond" and thus the command would be "R".

In most cases, even when it's not listed, you can type **HELP** instead of a command and the options on the menu will be further explained.

Speaking of Help

As mentioned in the introduction and hopefully noticed by this point, is that there is little in the way of specific information in this manual. WEB is a constantly evolving creature and any more specific a manual would soon be obsolete. Rather than trying to keep up in print with an electronic entity, information of the sort you'd usually expect to find in a reference manual has been organized as an online reference. From the MAIN MENU of WEB, for example, you can type the word **HELP** followed by another word and get help on what you've asked for. Of course if you type **HELP ARMADILLOS**, you probably won't get what you're looking for and, more importantly, if you type **HELP SENDING** you might not get an answer where **HELP SEND** will work for

sure. The help system has a limited vocabulary (like most of us); when you don't get what you're looking for, trying using a different phrase. Keep in mind that the vocabulary used in the manual to describe things is the vocabulary WEB itself uses and is usually the best bet.

Other useful words to know

- Keyword** An arcane computer word of unknown origin. If you're searching for something, say all the people named "Peter" who are WEB members, then the word "Peter" is called a keyword. Useful to know is that (contrary to the name) a keyword needn't be a whole word; if you know that someone's name begins with "Zxyu..." but don't know what comes after that you can use "Zxyu" as a keyword and expect to see all the names that begin that way.
- String** Another esoteric computer buzzword which means "group of characters". The rest of the world uses "word", but since "kjsdhjf" means just as much as "symphony" to a computer and the latter is not really a word, string comes into play as a name for both. Where you come across "enter a string", you can take it to mean "enter a word or something like it".
- Abort, Quit** Two short words which usually mean something like "stop what I'm doing now and return to the main menu as if nothing ever happened".
- Break/Delete** A key, or combination of keys which, when pressed, tell WEB to stop whatever it's doing and return to the menu. Useful if you've asked for a list of all the people in the world with the letter "e" somewhere in their name by mistake.
- Picospan** The conferencing software WEB uses.
- UNIX** The computer operating system WEB uses. If you don't care what an operating system is you needn't care what UNIX is.

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