Appendix A: Internet Primer

This primer is a supplemental reference guide designed to get you up and running on the Internet. The Internet, generally referred to as the “Net,” encompasses many different methods of manipulating information and communicating, including the World Wide Web (WWW), electronic mail, instant messaging, newsgroups, and file transfer.

TOOLS TO GET ONLINE

If you are not already online through your school or place of work, you will need either an Internet-capable phone or mobile device, or a computer. If you are using a computer, you will also need the following to hook up to the Net:

- A modem for options other than wireless (which requires a wireless card)
- An Internet service provider (ISP)
- A method to connect, which may include one of the following:
  - **Cable service.** Your local cable provider that may also offer television and telephone connections.
  - **A dish.** A dish offers connectivity through a satellite connection providing an option for high-speed service where other options may not be available.
  - **A digital subscriber line (DSL).** DSL service is not available in all geographic areas.
  - **Wireless connectivity.** While some locations offer free wireless service there is generally a fee for service.
  - **Dial-up service through regular telephone wires.** This option is extremely slow and if you use your regular telephone line for access, callers will hear a busy signal when you are online unless you have a dedicated separate telephone line.

Modems

A modem is a piece of equipment that changes computer information to the kind of information that can be passed over telephone or cable lines. It can be an external box or an internal card. Modems come in different speeds. The speed of a modem determines how quickly you can download or access information from the Internet. Modem speeds keep getting faster, but as of this writing 56K is the fastest available speed available over dial-up connections. Faster connections can be obtained through cable TV companies, satellite connections, or DSL servers, which are available from the telephone company. Some older computers do not support the fastest speeds for retrieving and displaying content from the Internet and do not provide the same level of service that the newer, faster computers can. Check your computer processor speed, the speed of available connections, and modem types and speeds to determine what is right for you. Your local computer hardware store and Internet service providers can help you with these decisions.

INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS

To access the Internet, most users go through an ISP. ISPs are companies that run the computers that enable you to get onto the Net; these computers are called servers. When you connect to the Net via dial-up service, your modem actually dials the phone number to connect to the ISP’s server. DSL subscribers are always connected unless they turn off their computer or disconnect.
their connection. Some cable and telephone companies provide Internet access, although all levels of services may not be available in all areas. When choosing an ISP, you should consider:

- **Price.** There are a variety of fee structures for Internet service. It is possible to obtain Internet access at no cost, but these providers generally bombard users with advertisements and may offer little or no technical support. Other providers provide free trial service for a limited time. Some ISPs allow unlimited use for a flat fee, some offer a certain amount of time per month before they begin charging extra, and some charge by the amount of time you are online from the moment you go online. Dial-up service is cheapest but is slow and not satisfactory for applications that require faster speeds or moving large files.

- **Traffic.** For dial-up service find out the “dial-up” number (the number your modem calls to link up) of an ISP and call it at different times during the day. Some ISPs get a lot of traffic and it can be difficult to get online; this is particularly true of the larger, national companies.

### ELECTRONIC MAIL

Electronic mail (e-mail) is a way of transmitting messages across a telephone line, network, or cable connection to other computers through your ISP. It works like this: You have a program called a mail browser (e.g., Microsoft Outlook) that enables you to send and read e-mail messages. To send e-mail, first type in the e-mail address. E-mail addresses look like this: username@servername.domainname—for example, clarabarton@nursingnet.com. Make sure to put what the message is about in the “subject” line. After writing your text in the “body” of the message, you can send it. The message is transmitted across telephone, cable, or network lines to the server, which sorts the mail and sends it to the correct e-mail address.

Whether you use e-mail for work or play, it is generally somewhat informal and not very lengthy. E-mail can be used for sending out memos, writing a note to a friend, and exchanging documents and files—even your résumé (see Appendix B).

Some things to remember when using e-mail:

- Try to check your e-mail often, especially if you belong to a mailing list (see section on electronic mailing lists). It is amazing how quickly your mailbox can fill up with messages.
- Do not send lengthy material via e-mail.
- Know your netiquette.
- Do not send anything too confidential or sensitive over e-mail; e-mail is easily accessed by others.
- Try to proofread your e-mail before you send it; it is all too common to see typos in e-mail messages, many of which could be eliminated if the messages were read over just once.
- Do not pass on jokes, stories, and other similar “mass mailings” out to anyone that you do not know well or who prefers to not receive these types of materials.
- Have fun with e-mail! It is a good way to keep in touch, get messages out to a lot of people, and make new friends!

Many people take advantage of e-mail services offered through Web sites that they can access from where they work or attend school, or from libraries. Yahoo! and some other sites offer free e-mail accounts. Many ISPs also allow their subscribers to access their e-mail via Web sites in addition to their regular e-mail application.

### THE WORLD WIDE WEB

The WWW provides a way to access Internet resources by content instead of file names. Since it was launched in 1992, the Web has virtually exploded into mainstream culture.
Browsers
To get to the Web, you must have a computer program called a Web browser. Some of the more popular Web browsers are Microsoft Explorer, Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari, and Opera. Once you are online with your server, you simply open the browser and you are ready to "surf" the Net.

Web Addresses
The Web is made up of millions of Web sites (or Web pages). Each Web site has an address, which is known as the URL (uniform resource locator). A typical URL looks like this: http://www.prenticehall.com/health; this is the address for the Prentice Hall Web site for the health professions. To get to any Web site, all you have to do is type the URL in the browser’s “go to” box (or something similar, depending on which browser you are using). If you are not certain where this box is, look on the opening page of the browser for a line of characters in print that starts with http://www.

You can dissect Web site addresses and figure out who and what they stand for:

- “http,” or hypertext transport protocol, appears in every Web site address (with a few exceptions). You will always see “://” after “http.”
- Generally you will see “www,” which tells the server to get the information from the WWW.
- The last two parts of the address are the domain name; in this case, prenticehall.com is the domain name. The domain indicates what kind of site it is. In our case it is “.com” (pronounced “dot-com”), which stands for “commercial.” Other domains you will probably come across include: “.edu,” education; “.org,” organization; and “.gov,” government. You get the idea.

Note: Do not get http and HTML confused. HTML stands for hyper text markup language, the programing language that enables you to develop a Web site. Also, when you read the address for a Web site out loud, remember that every “.” is pronounced “dot.”

Web Sites
Web sites are generally developed around a particular topic, such as nursing or healthcare. The amount of information available on the Web today is staggering and continues to grow. You can use the Web for general research, as an educational tool, as a shopping mall, to find a long lost friend, to get a new job (see Appendix B), or to answer practically any question you might have.

The first page you come to is called the home page, or sometimes the splash page. This page should convey the main ideas behind the entire Web site. It generally contains a menu for the entire site.

The home page contains links to other pages. They send you into further detail by a click of the mouse. Links are generally marked by keywords or images. It’s like an outline: The home page is your thesis, and each link is a breakdown of main ideas to be covered on that topic. To “follow a link” from the home page, look for highlighted text, buttons, or images and click on them with your mouse. For example, go to http://www.prenticehall.com/health and click on the word “nursing.” This is a link to resources for nurses that includes the Prentice Hall book catalog as well as other sites of interest.

Search Engines
Now that you have a basic idea of the workings of the Web, how do you go about finding Web sites that may interest you? There are a number of popular directories on the Web called search engines. Search engines are Web sites that contain Web site information (i.e., the URL and a short description) on virtually every topic imaginable.
Some of the larger and more popular search engines are:

- Google at http://www.google.com
- Yahoo! at http://www.yahoo.com

To use a search engine, type in one of the addresses listed above. When the home page for that site comes up, you will notice a search box in which you can type a keyword or phrase. The site will then bring up all the information that it has available on that topic as a list of sites. Sometimes you will need to narrow your search.

For example, if you type in “nursing,” hundreds of site listings will return. On the other hand, if you are too specific, you may not have any sites returned. You may have to try a few different word combinations to find the sites you are looking for.

**Bookmarks (Favorites)**

One very useful component of your Web browser is the ability to bookmark a site to revisit. This may also be referred to as marking a favorite. To bookmark a site, go to that site. After it has loaded, choose “bookmark” or a similar command (e.g., favorite), depending on your browser. Your browser will record the address of that site in your bookmark (favorites) folder. Anytime you want to return to that site, you simply open the bookmark (or favorites) folder and click on the title of that Website. It is possible to save a collection of Websites using social networking sites so you can access your list from anywhere.

**Patience**

Have patience when using the WWW. Accessing some Web sites can take time, depending on how elaborate the site is (e.g., how large it is, how many pictures are on it, and so on), how fast your modem can download the information, and what time of day you are surfing. You can speed things up a bit by turning off the autoload image option in your browser.

Also, you will encounter occasional problems. Sometimes the server of the Web site you are trying to reach may be down or there is a lot of activity on that site so it will not be accessible. Try that site later. Dial-up connections are subject to getting disconnected particularly if there is noise on the line. You may notice that your connection is slower on certain days or times of the day depending upon the amount of traffic online at the same time.

Finally, because the Web is so dynamic, sites and links change every day. You might find numerous links on Web pages that go nowhere. There are many reasons for this: People move their pages to new servers, get new Web site addresses, or take the pages down. Do not get discouraged; chances are there is another site right around the corner that contains all the information that you need. You can search for a particular site by enclosing the name in quotation marks to find its new location.

**MAILING LISTS AND LISTSERVS**

Mailing lists are electronic discussion groups that take place through e-mail. They are groups of people who “get together” online to discuss a specific topic. There are numerous mailing lists on nearly every topic imaginable.

Special software is used to run mailing lists. While the term Listserv is often used to refer to mail lists it actually refers to a commercial software product used for this purpose. Here is how it works:

- You find out about a mailing list dealing with a subject you are interested in discussing with others (e.g., culture and nursing).
Appendix A • Internet Primer 5

• To get involved in this discussion group, you have to subscribe to it. This can be done by clicking on a link on an Internet page or sending an e-mail message to that mailing list’s server.
• Most often, the mailing list server will automatically subscribe you to the list and send you instructions on how to post to the group. Posting means that you send out a comment to the entire mailing list to which you have subscribed.
• Once you have subscribed, you will begin to receive e-mail messages from the mailing list. Be careful: Some discussion groups have a large following and you may find your mailbox filling up rather quickly.

Newsgroups/Usenet

Newsgroups, like mailing lists, are another popular way of discussing specific topics over the Internet with other people who share the same interest. Unlike a mailing list, however, newsgroups take place on an entirely different network called Usenet.

Usenet is composed of thousands of newsgroups. Individual comments that people make to one another on a newsgroup are called articles. You post an article when you want to make a comment. The lines of discussion within a newsgroup are called threads. To read the discussions on any newsgroup, you must have a software program called a newsreader.

Generally, your ISP will provide you with a newsreader program as part of the software package or it may be bundled with your Web browser. When you open the newsreader, it should download any new newsgroups that have been added. You can look through the entire list and choose which newsgroups interest you. When you find one of interest, just open it up and begin reading the articles. Newsgroup addresses are called hierarchies. Following are some of the standard hierarchies with examples of each. There are many other categories, some of which are from foreign countries.

alt—groups generally alternative in nature (e.g., alt.education.distance, alt.alien.visitors)
bionet—groups discussing biology and biological sciences (e.g., bionet.general, bionet.immunology)
comp—groups discussing computer or computer science issues (e.g., comp.infosystems)
misc—groups that don’t fit into other categories (e.g., misc.fitness, misc.jobs)
news—groups about Usenet itself (e.g., news.groups)
rec—groups discussing hobbies, sports, music, and art (e.g., rec.food, rec.humor)
sci—groups discussing subjects related to the science and scientific research (e.g., sci.med.nursing, sci.psychology)
soc—groups discussing social issues, including politics and social programs (e.g., soc.culture, soc.college)
talk—public debating forums on controversial issues (e.g., talk.abortion, talk.religion)

One word of caution: People take newsgroups very seriously. If you want to post an article, be sure you understand the threads (lines of discussions) that have been taking place on the newsgroup. Read a number of articles and understand the threads before putting up your own opinion. Remember that these discussion groups are frequented by people from all over the world; because of this, newsgroups can offer a wealth of information. Many field experts frequent newsgroups. There may even be groups out there that you can monitor and to which you can provide expert advice.
PORTALS AND VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

Portals are Web sites that offer a personalized view for you based on information provided when you register. Portals organize data into a single, easy-to-use menu providing services such as e-mail, search capability, and online shopping. America Online (AOL) and Yahoo! represent general portal sites. There are also special interest or niche portals. Some examples of nursing and healthcare portals include Nursing Net, WebMD, and HealthCentral. Portals continue to evolve. The term virtual community refers to a group of people who share common interests, ideas, and feelings online. This may occur through bulletin boards, chat rooms, or user groups. Special interest portals may serve as a tool to create a virtual community that models the features of a neighborhood, complete with shopping and other services.

FTP

FTP stands for file transfer protocol. FTP is a means by which you can send and receive (upload and download) large documents and software over the Internet. FTP sites house these documents and software. Not all sites permit two-way traffic. Look for help with the FTP process under your browser’s Help button. FTP is not needed by the majority of users because file compression techniques, faster transfer speeds, and advances in hardware meet the majority of needs.

NETIQUETTE

Netiquette is just like it sounds: etiquette on the Internet. It is just basic, common courtesy to others. Because no single person owns or controls the Internet, it is left to the individual user to be facilitative and kind when participating in discussion groups, authoring Web pages, or sending e-mail messages. The following list contains general netiquette standards that most people on the Net attempt to abide by:

- Do not make assumptions.
- Do not be judgmental.
- Do not use all capital letters; this is interpreted as SHOUTING.
- Do proofread your messages carefully.
- Do be facilitative.
- Do be honest.
- Do be timely in your replies.
- Do try to make postings brief and to the point.

CONCLUSION

All of this information can be overwhelming at first, but, with time, you can learn to use the many invaluable resources the Internet has to offer. Understanding the many components that make up the Internet and using this knowledge to be discriminatory in the information that you find online will enable you to use the Internet as a research tool, an educational source, a meeting place, and a library. Now that you have this knowledge, you are ready to start surfing the Net.