

# Internet Terms, Addresses and Style Suggestions

## ★ ★ Understanding Internet Addresses ★ ★

### Host Names

Internet addresses are prevalent in our lives and populate our newsletters. These seemingly incomprehensible blocks of characters are here to stay. Knowing a little about their structure may help prevent publishing errors.

Central to each E-mail or Web address is the *host name*, the name of the computer to which the Web connection must be made or to which the E-mail must be delivered. A host name consists of groups of characters separated by periods: **abccom.com**, **thomas.loc.gov**, or **www.quinion.demon.co.uk**, for example.

The characters allowed in the groups are the letters *a* to *z*, the digits *0* to *9*, and the hyphen (which can appear as the first or last character of a group). Host names are not case-sensitive, so **WWW.Yahoo.Com**, **www.yahoo.com**, and **wWw.yaHOO.cOm** are all equivalent; for consistency, the names are usually written in all lowercase.

Every host name must contain at least two such groups, and the last one, called the top-level domain, must be one of restricted set of possibilities. Originally, the valid top-level domains included **com**, **edu**, **gov**, **int**, **mil**, **net**, **org**, and the two-letter country codes (for example, **th** for Thailand, **de** for Germany, and **za** for South Africa). Recently, the list was expanded to include **arts**, **firm**, **info**, **nom**, **rec**, **shop**, and **web**.

Host names are translated into numbers behind the scenes. A Web address such as **http://402.7.7.2** may be equivalent to **http://www.abccom.com**, however, whenever possible, use names rather than numbers both because names are less likely to change and because names are easier for people to remember and type correctly.

### E-mail Addresses

An Internet E-mail address consists of a user name, an *at* sign (ampersand), and a host name. In **president@whitehouse.gov**, for example, the **president** is the user name and **whitehouse.gov** is the host name. User names are generally either combinations of characters derived from a person's name or words indicating what the address is used for. They can contain characters (such as underscores, percent signs, ampersands, and plus signs) that are illegal in host names. User names are generally written in all lowercase.

Internet E-mail addresses cannot contain commas or spaces (among other characters). This prohibition makes things a little more difficult for subscribers to CompuServe (which has commas in its user numbers) and America Online (which allows spaces in its user names). The CompuServe address **76543,210** is fine for use within CompuServe, but for Internet use it must be converted to **76543.210@compuserve.com**. Similarly, the America Online address **J Smith** becomes the Internet address **jsmith@aol.com**.

### Web Addresses

A Web address consists of the characters **http://** followed by a host name and often some other information. Web addresses are the most common type of uniform resource locator (URL). There are other types of URLs, such as those for File Transfer Protocol (FTP), Gopher, and Usenet news.

The last part of a Web address, like the first part of an E-mail address is much less predictable than the host name. The simplest Web addresses (those for the main home pages of servers) stop after the host name; for example, **http://web.mit.edu** is the home page for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and

**http://www.w3.org** is the home page for the World Wide Web Consortium.

The host name is occasionally followed by a colon and a number (the *port number*), but most addresses don't include a port number because the default port, 80, is used. If an address does include :80 after the host name, that can be deleted; that is, **http://www.ora.com:80/homepages/comp.fonts/** is equivalent to **http://www.ora.com/homepages/com.fonts**.

A Web address that refers to something other than the main home page for a particular server will have additional information after the host name (and port number, if any)—normally a series of names, separated by slashes, that corresponds to a file or directory on the Web server. These names can be case-sensitive; for example, the address **http://info.med.yal.edu/caim/StyleManual\_Top.HTML** will not work if the case of any of the letters after the host name are changed. Most Web addresses that include file or directory names end in either a slash or the character **.htm** or **.html**, but many variations are possible.

Ideally, before publication of your newsletter, verify all Web addresses by typing them into a browser to make sure they have not been garbled somewhere along the line and that the pages still exist. Things change very rapidly on the Web.

## ★ ★ Internet Addresses in Text ★ ★

### URL Addresses

It is better to keep the **http://** at the beginning of a uniform resource locator (URL), even though it can generally be assumed for sites that begin with **www**. Recent versions of Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer allow omission of the **http://**, but not all browsers do. Also, some Internet resources are accessed by protocols other than the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP). For example, some Web pages on File Transfer Protocol (FTP) have URL's that begin with **ftp://**.

### Breaking Internet Addresses

E-mail and Web addresses are often very long and newsletter columns can be very narrow. It is best to allow breaks **after** slashes and other "punctuation" (characters that are neither letters nor digits) such as periods and underscores. However, never break addresses at hyphens, and never introduce hyphens into addresses to mark line breaks. That's because it is impossible to tell whether an end-of-line hyphen is really part of an address. With Internet addresses, adding or deleting a hyphen makes a new address. For example, mail sent to **rogers@groupz.net** will get to me, but mail sent to **rogers@group-z.net** will not.

An exception to the above rule is the *at* sign. It seems to be more closely associated with the following host name than with the preceding user name, so it makes sense to break **before**, rather than after, the **@** sign in an E-mail address.

If a URL or E-mail address appears at the end of a sentence, the proper punctuation should follow. Someone unfamiliar with such addresses may interpret the normal sentence punctuation as part of the address, but that does not justify suspending the rules of punctuation. After all, punctuation serves a purpose, and if a sentence requires a period, it should have one. As a last resort, simply rewrite the sentence.

### Setting Off Addresses

Most up-to-date word processing programs automatically format URL and E-mail addresses in hypertext (blue type with underlining) for quick linking. However, this is not very useful for a black and white newsletter, so try using bold type, quotation marks, parentheses, or angle brackets to set the addresses off.

## ★ ★ Internet Terms ★ ★

World Wide Web - capitalized, should be three separate words

WWW - an acronym, no hyphens, no periods

Web - a nickname, written with a capital when referring to the World Wide Web, but not when referring to a web belonging to an organization or individual

Web browser, Web site, Web server, Web page

webmaster - no caps like postmaster, not in charge of the entire Web, gender neutral job title

Internet - capitalized

Net - capitalized when referring to Internet

home page or homepage - decide on one for consistent use

E-mail or e-mail - decide on one and stick to it

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