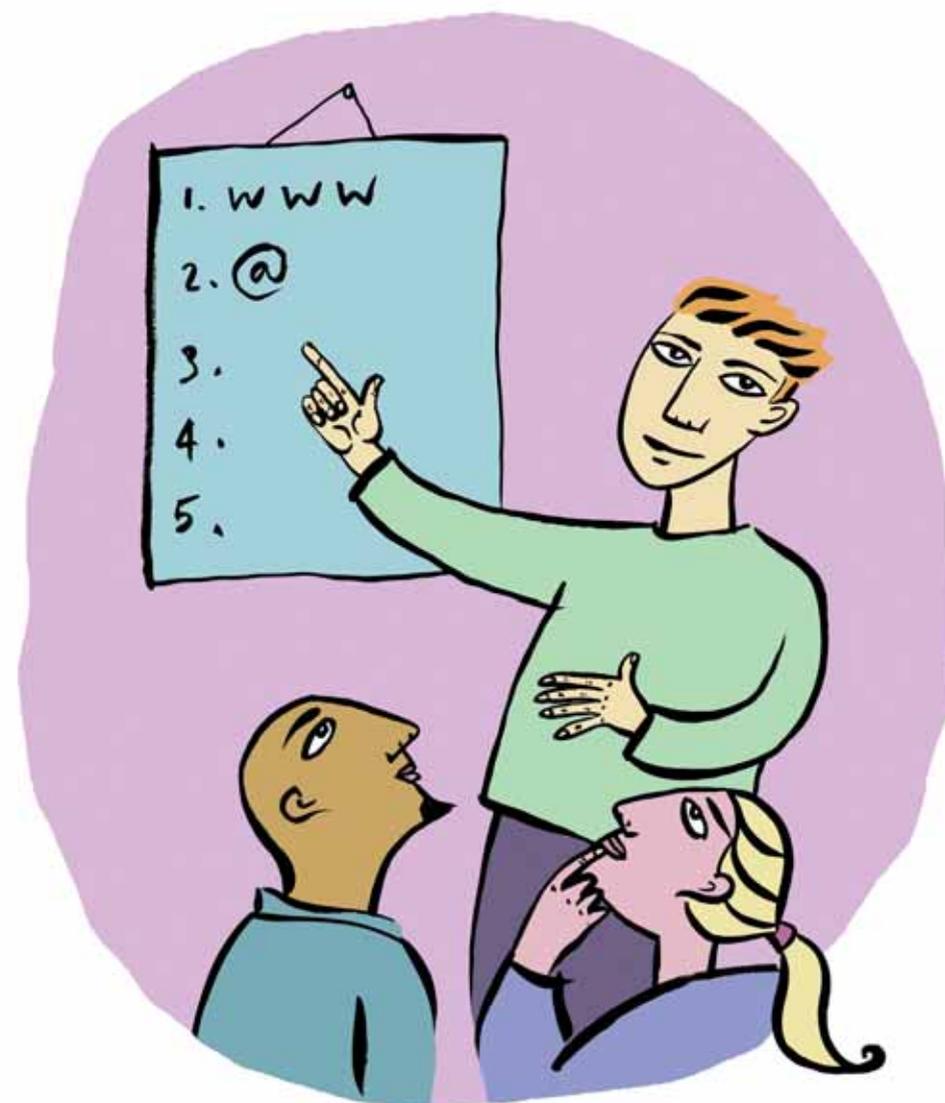


Internet basics



Using the Internet for **Internet basics**

by Ciarán Clissmann, Pintail Ltd. and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (The Library Council).

Lifesteps offers you a range of online and printed guides. Written by staff from Irish public libraries, each guide contains easy to follow, step by step explanations of how to use the Internet to achieve a specific goal or 'life step'.

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For updates, news on the project and for a full listing of all the guides, log on to www.lifesteps.ie

You can contact the Lifesteps team at lifesteps@librarycouncil.ie

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Introduction

This guide introduces the basic concepts of **computers** and the **Internet** and shows you how to get started **online**. When you have finished this guide you will be able to switch on, connect to the Internet and find information online, as well as having a good understanding of what is going on behind the scenes.

This whole guide is essentially background. Rather than have a separate background section, the main text of the guide is presented in the 'Step by Step' section.

Need to Know

You don't need to know anything in particular to use this guide.

Need to Have

You need to have the following to get full value from this guide:

- A computer
- An Internet connection – this may involve the use of a **modem**;
- A Web **Browser** program such as Internet Explorer or Netscape on your computer.

Related Guides

'Internet Basics' does not rely on your having read any other guides. However, hopefully you will find that this guide is very useful when using every other guide created by the LifeSteps project.

Quick Guide

The Internet is a very large collection of computers, all over the world, that talk to one another, sharing information in various ways. Two popular ways that information is shared are electronic mail (**email**) and the **World Wide Web**.

The Web is made up of two types of computer **program** – Web **server** programs, that store and send (or 'serve') information, and Web browser programs that

receive information from Web servers and display to human users. The Web information is in the form of a special sort of computer **file** called a **Web page**.

The most important part of the Web for most users is the Web browser program (Internet Explorer, Netscape, Opera, etc.). This asks for Web pages from servers and then displays them to users. The 'Browser' section of this guide explores the most important parts of a Web browser.

Web browsers display Web pages. Pages are made up mainly of text and pictures, for human reviewing. They also contain **links** and **forms**.

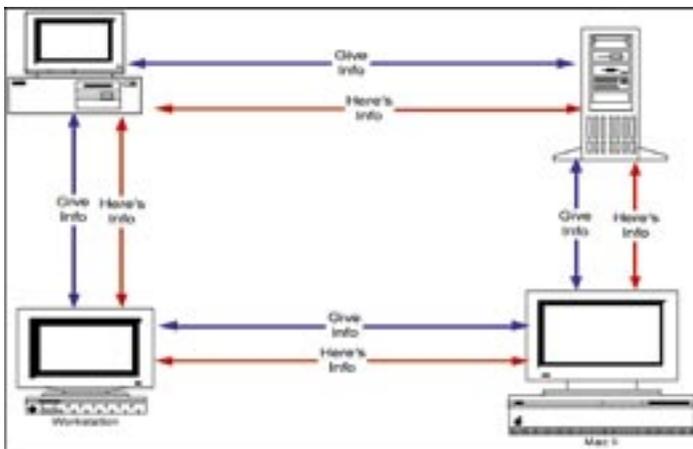
There are billions of Web pages. To help you to find the pages that you want, you use a **search engine**. A search engine lets you type in words that describe what you are looking for, and then gives you a list of Web pages that it thinks are relevant to your search.

Step-by-Step Guide

The Internet

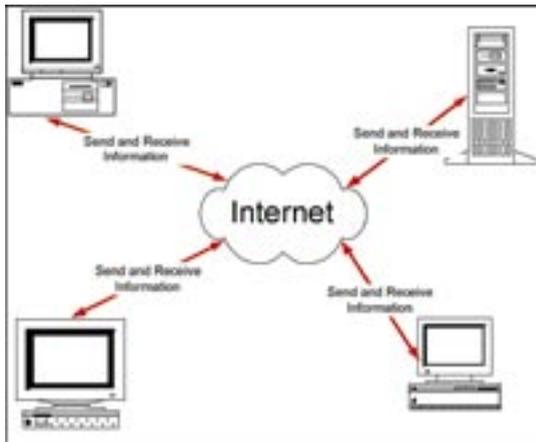
What is a Network?

A network is a collection of computers that are joined together so that they can share information.



What is the Internet?

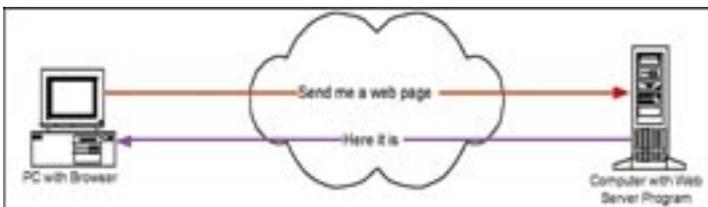
The Internet is a large collection of **computers**, all talking to one another over a **network**. All the computers run **programs** that let them talk to one another.



Many of the computers on the Internet run a collection of programs called the World Wide Web, or simply the Web.

The Web

There are two main programs on the Web – Web server programs and web browser programs. A web server is a program that sends information (web pages) from the hard disk of the computer it is running on, over the Internet, to a web browser running on some other computer. A web browser is a program (Netscape or Internet Explorer) that asks for and receives web pages and displays them on the screen of the computer on which it is running.



Moving Around the Web

Looking at Web pages on the Internet is really just pulling computer files off computers someplace, and showing them on the screen. But it is often talked about as if there was movement involved. Thus, you can **'go to'** a Web page, or you can **'surf from website to website'**. You can **'follow'** a link to another page, or **'jump to'** a favourite website. It can be likened to sitting in a parked car, while someone puts pictures of different places against the window, giving the illusion of movement. This 'going' on the Internet is illusory, but it is an easy way to describe the experience.

The Browser

Its role is to receive Web pages over the Internet from a Web server and display them on the screen, and to accept keystrokes and mouse-clicks from you and send them to the Web server over the Internet.

The following image shows the Internet Explorer version 6 Browser, with the most important parts labeled. As you can see, these are 'bars' at the top and bottom of the screen. The Web page you are looking at is shown in the main part of the browser screen - in this case, it is the popular search engine, Google.



The **Title Bar** shows the name of the Web page that you are looking at.

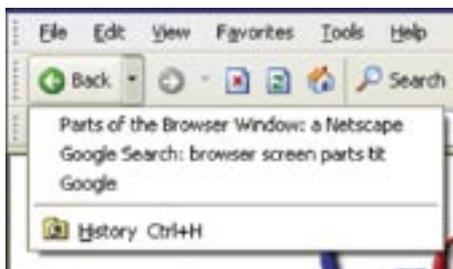
The **Menu Bar** shows all the various menus that exist, each with options that you can choose. These are like the menus in Microsoft Word or any other application program. You use these menus relatively rarely.

The **Address Bar** shows the Internet address, or **URL**, of the web page that you are currently looking at.

The **Status Bar** has a number of functions. When you hover your **mouse** over a link, the address that the link points to will usually appear in the status bar. When you are accessing a secure server, usually to pay for something, a small padlock icon appears in the status bar. (See the 'Shopping' LifeSteps guide for details).

The **Navigation Bar** is a set of buttons that help you to surf the Web. You use them by clicking on them with the mouse. These buttons are used *very often*. The most important ones are briefly noted here.

The **Back** button brings you back to the last Web page you were looking at. The back button can usually be used as often as you like, to go back as many steps as you like by using the little 'down-arrow' beside the back button. In the picture here, you can see the last three pages that were visited.



The **Forward** button brings you forward a step. So, if you visited a page, then went back to the previous one, and would now like to go forward again, you click this one. Much less often used.



The **Refresh** button tells the browser to get the page that you are looking at from the browser. If the page has changed since the last time that you looked at it, then refreshing it, by clicking on this button, will make the changes visible.

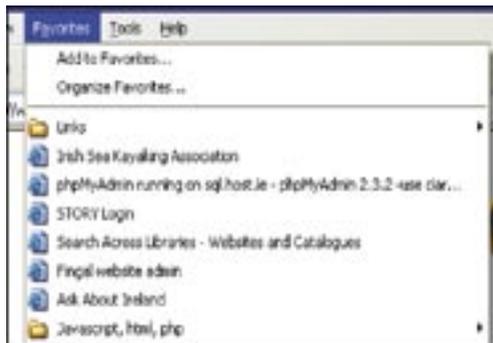


The **Home** button brings you back to your homepage on the Web. You can set any page you like to be your homepage.



Of the remaining buttons, most are not important for basic Web use. The exception is the **Favourites** button. This is used to record Web pages that you found useful and expect to visit again.

Favourites are also called 'Bookmarks', which is perhaps a clearer description of what they do. Clicking on the **Favourites** button lets you add the page you are looking at to your list of favourites. It also lets you choose from your list of favourites, so you can jump there.



Links

A link is an area on the computer screen (usually a word or words, or an image), which can be used to leave the Web page you are looking at and move to a different Web page. Links are used by clicking on them with the mouse. You can identify links by the fact that, as your mouse moves over them, it changes shape (usually from an *arrow* into a *hand with a pointing finger*). Links are often blue in colour and are underlined, or (if they are images) have a blue border.

Here, the last word is a link.

Google.ie offered in: [Gaeilge](#)

In this example, the picture is a link – you can see the border.



Web Page Addresses or URLs

Every Web page on the Internet has its own address. Web page addresses are often referred to as 'URLs' or Uniform Resource Locators.

If you know the URL of a web page you can type it into the address bar of the browser to visit the page.

Forms

Web forms are just like paper forms - you fill in various fields and you send the form away to be processed. At the Web server, a program reads the material that you typed in and then takes some action.

Common forms are 'login' forms, where you enter a name and a password and search forms, where you type in some words that describe what you are looking for on the Internet.

Here's a login form. As you can see, you type in a user name and a password and then click the button.



Searching the Internet:

Step by Step

This section brings you through the process of finding Web pages about a particular topic.

Finding information on the net relies on the use of search engines. The form lets you type in some words describing what you are looking for. The search engine then looks up a huge database of Web pages and descriptions of Web pages and tries to match those up with your search.



Let us imagine you are looking for Darina Allen's apple tart recipe. You type in 'Darina Allen apple tart recipe' into the form.



Here is the first page of the results:

Click on any of the results to jump to the Web page in question. But before you do, *look closely at the results*.



By reading the **search results**, rather than just clicking and hoping, you can identify two good prospects and discard two. In fact, the first link is the best, since the fourth, despite appearances, is a course outline rather than a recipe.



Clicking the first search result brings you to the Waitrose website where you find this page.

If you follow a link and find that it is not in fact what you wanted, use the 'back' button on the browser to bring you back to the search engine and try one of the other results.

Glossary

- ADSL** A service offered by telephone companies, which enables some telephone lines to carry a lot of information in a short time. ADSL turns a phone line into a broadband link. Only available to some phone lines, but very useful where available.
- Broadband** A word used to describe networks that can send a lot of information in a short time.
- Browser** A computer program, running on the human user's PC, which gets information from Web servers and displays it on the screen. These instructions are usually in the computer language HTML.
- Browser window** The browser window shows the browser program, and includes the various parts of the browser (navigation bar, address bar, etc.) and of course the main browser screen that displays Web pages.
- CD** Also called a CD-ROM. An optical disk, made of foil in a plastic coat, that stores computer files. Much larger in terms of storage capacity than a floppy.
- Computer** A computer is a machine that carries out long and detailed lists of instructions called programs.
- Cursor** The arrow or line or hand that moves around the screen when you move your computer mouse or while you are typing. People often refer to the cursor position as 'where you are' on a Web page or window.
- Email** Email or electronic mail is a service that sends messages across the Internet from one human user to another. Like a letter, email is person-to-person and it stores messages until they are read.
- File** A collection of computer information stored on a hard disk (or CD or floppy) and accessed when the user needs it. For example, a letter typed with a word processor and saved on the hard disk is in the form of a file. So is a song, in MP3 format, or a Web page.

Form	A part of a Web page where the human user can type in some information to be sent by the browser to the Web server. A form consists of fields that can have text typed into them, buttons that can be clicked and (sometimes) check boxes and radio buttons.
Hardware	Those parts of a computer you can see and touch, such as the screen, the hard disk, the mouse, etc.
Internet	A large collection of computers, connected together to allow them to share information with one another.
Link	A link, or hyperlink, is a part of a Web page that, if clicked with a mouse, opens a different Web page. Links are usually shown in blue and underlined on a web page.
Local	A word used to describe a computer that is in the same (geographic) location as the person using it. The opposite concept is 'remote' – a computer somewhere else, to which a local machine is connected using a network.
Memory	A part of the computer that stores information for a short period of time. This information can be very rapidly accessed by the CPU.
Modem	A device which allows a computer to connect to the Internet via standard analogue telephone lines.
Mouse	The small rounded device attached to the side of the computer that, when moved, moves the cursor on the computer screen.
Online	A word used as shorthand for 'on the Internet' or 'connected to the Internet'.
Operating system	The software program that tells a computer how to run and where to find the files it needs to deliver services to the user. The operating system makes the other software programs (word processor, browser, etc.) run and also handles the hard disk, the memory and so on. Microsoft Windows is a common operating system, so are Unix and Linux.

Processor	The electronic brain of a computer, that reads the instructions in a software program and tells the other parts of the hardware what to do. Also referred to as a <i>CPU</i> or <i>central processing unit</i> .
Program	A list of instructions that a computer understands. Programs usually have some part that shows information to the human users of the computer – for example, the display in a browser is part of the browser program. The browser also includes parts that are not visible to the human user, like the part that sends messages to the Web server.
Search engine	A program running on a Web server computer which creates and maintains a directory of Web pages on the Internet. The engine has a Web page with a form; you type in words describing what you are looking for; the engine looks up its directory and sends back a list of Web pages that it thinks will fit your search criteria.
Search results	The list of Web pages that are returned by a search engine in response to a search. Each result usually includes a link which can be clicked on to bring you to the Web page.
Server	A computer program which receives requests for Web pages from browsers, gets this information from its hard disk or from another program running on the same computer and then sends it back to the browser for consumption by the human user of the browser.
Software	Those parts of a computer that tell it what to do when you touch the hardware, and also what to show on screen. Software is made up of computer programs.
URL	The Uniform Resource Locator, or address, of a Web page. Like the phone number of a particular person, this is unique and goes direct to the Web page it is associated with.
Virus	A malicious computer program, created by online vandals, which can damage your computer by removing or changing information stored on it. All computers connected to the Internet should have anti-virus software installed on them and kept up to date.

- Web page** A Web page is a computer file which typically includes text, pictures, links and perhaps forms. The Web page also includes instructions to the browser about how the page should look on the screen (colours, layout, etc.).
- Word processor** A software program that is used to create letters and documents. Like a typing program, but including various formatting and layout options. The most common is Microsoft Word.
- World Wide Web** Also called the WWW or the Web. A service that sends information over the internet from Web server programs to Web browser programs. The browser then displays this information to the user on his computer screen.

Links

There are hundreds of websites on the Internet which provide background, introductory and tutorial information about the Internet, the Web and the technologies that make them work. For more websites on these topics please see our website at www.lifesteps.ie

Final Notes

Quality

The Internet is very large and contains an enormous amount of information. Some of this is very unreliable – this reflects the fact that anyone can publish information on the net, there are no editors and no quality control. However, much of the information online is of high quality and the Internet is one of the most important sources of information available today.

Security and Safety

There is very little that you can do on the Internet that will break anything. You should feel free to explore and experiment, surfing and browsing from website to website and becoming familiar with the technology and what it can do.

However, you should bear in mind that there are large amounts of offensive and sometimes harmful material on the Internet, often not suitable for juvenile or sensitive audiences. There are technologies available for protecting users from such material and you may wish to look into this.

Downloading anything other than text or pictures from the Internet should be done with great care. In particular, be cautious about downloading and installing software that you find on the net. A small but significant proportion of such material contains [viruses](#) and other programs that can damage your computer and the information that you store on it, as well as attacking other computers to which yours is connected. Ask the advice of someone with more experience, if in doubt.