

Introduction to Web Browsing

The Internet's World Wide Web, is a collection of over six billion Web Pages containing virtually all human knowledge (not to mention countless beliefs, opinions, attitudes, misconceptions, delusions, and who-knows-what-else). The program you use to look at these pages is called a *Web browser*. The best known and most widely used web browser is called Internet Explorer.

Even though there are over six billion pages of information on the Web, they all share certain features designed to make Web browsing easy. Learning to use those features requires only a small set of basic skills, which you can learn in minutes. This article aims to get computer beginners up-to-speed fast by presenting the necessary skills in a clear, simple, and brief manner.

Every Web Page has a URL

When you dial a mobile phone number, every mobile phone in the world doesn't ring. Only the phone you called rings because the number you dialed is unique to that phone. Just as every telephone has a unique number, every Web page has a unique address (also called a URL or Uniform Resource Locator). A URL isn't a number though. It's a group of letters separated by dots (full stops), as in these examples:

- www.google.com
- www.silversurfersatbedford.org.uk
- bbc.co.uk

In fact the full addresses of the three examples just quoted are:

- <http://www.google.com>
- <http://www.silversurfersatbedford.org.uk>
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk>

The <http://> part is called the *protocol*. HTTP stands for hypertext transfer protocol. This refers to the method of data transfer that all Web pages use. However it's not required to type this part when entering a web address since your Internet Explorer will insert it for you.

The next part, which is usually www (for World Wide Web) is called the *host name*. For many web pages the www is also optional. For example you could find the BBC web site by using www.bbc.co.uk or just bbc.co.uk. When in doubt include the www.

Those URLs take you to the *home page* for a given web site. The home page is a little like the cover of a book. It's the first thing you see, but there are plenty more pages inside the book. Each page "inside" a site has a longer name. For example, the URL for the BBC Gardening page is: bbc.co.uk/gardening.

Using Your Browser's Address Bar

The **Address bar** is the place where you see (and can type) a Web site's URL. Figure 1 shows what the Address bar looks like in Internet Explorer. The address bar always shows the URL of the page currently being displayed starting with `http://`.

Figure 1



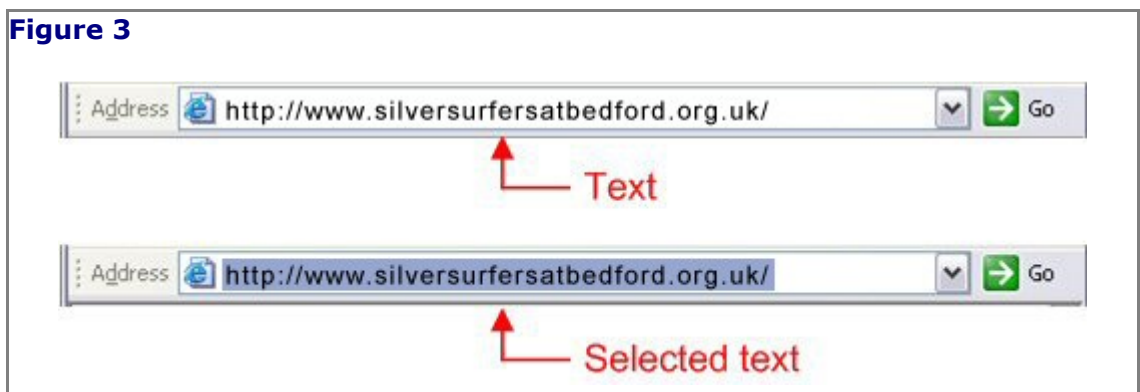
The **Cursor** is the blinking vertical bar that shows where the next thing you type will appear. The cursor is not the same as the mouse pointer (which is the little arrow that moves around on the screen when you move the mouse).

Figure 2



Text that is currently highlighted is referred to as **Selected**. Figure 3 shows a sample of regular text, and how that same text looks when selected.

Figure 3



To select the text simply click on it with the mouse. You can then type in the address of the web site you want to visit. See the next section for more details on how to do this.

Typing a New URL

Let's suppose you know of a web site you'd like to look at, and let's suppose you know the URL of this site. For example, you might have learned it from a TV show or magazine article. To go to this site you have to type the URL into your Web browser's Address bar.

Before you can type in the Address bar, you have to click on the address bar to get the cursor into the Address bar. Normally, when you first click on the Address bar, the entire address that's already in the bar will be selected. When you see selected text you know that any new text you type will instantly replace the selected text. (If you prefer you can press the **Delete** key on the keyboard at this point to remove the selected text, but you don't need to.)

So let's say you want to type a URL like yahoo.co.uk into your Web browser's Address bar. If you click once anywhere inside the address bar, all text currently there will be selected. So if you then type yahoo.co.uk, that new URL will replace the old URL. So you can just press the **Enter** key, or click the **Go** button to the right of the Address bar (if your browser has such a button) and that's it. You're at the Web site of that address.

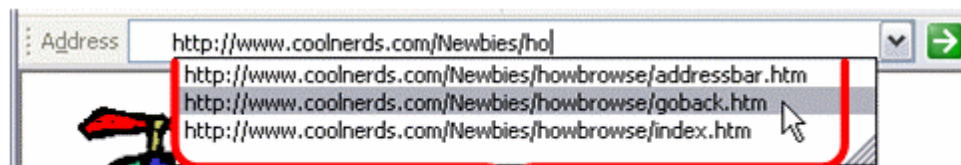
Note

If the first letters of the Web site you want to visit are <http://> then it's not necessary to type the <http://> part.

Using AutoComplete

Another thing you might notice while typing in the Address bar is that when you start typing the URL of a page you've visited in the past, similar URLs appear in a drop-down menu. The more you type, the shorter the list becomes, because only URLs whose first letters match what you've typed so far appear in the list. If you happen to notice that the URL you were about to type is already in the drop-down menu, you don't need to finish typing the URL. Instead, just click on the URL in the drop-menu that you want to visit.

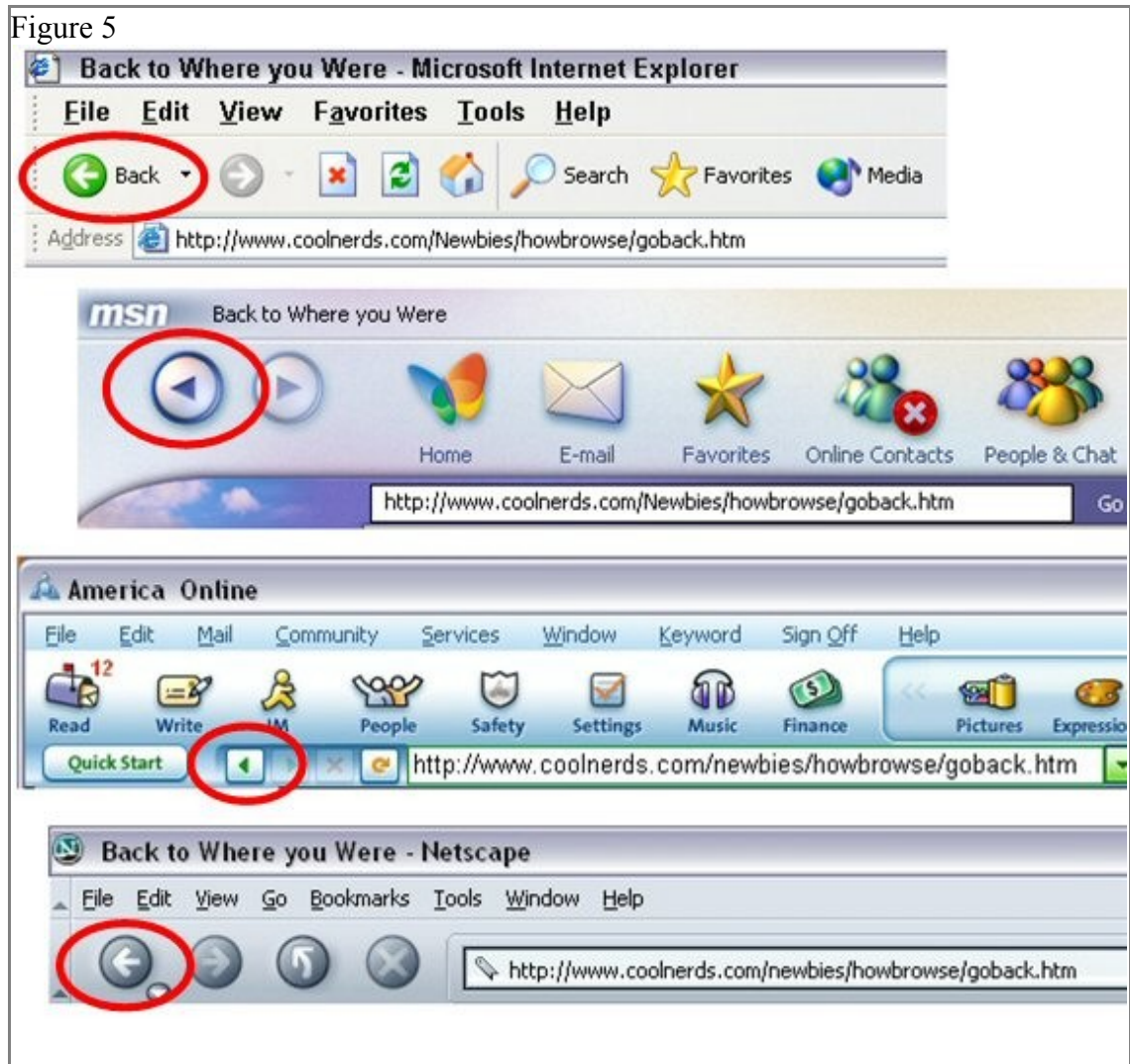
Figure 4



Click any URL in the menu to revisit that page

Getting Back to the Previous Page

Any time you want to go back to the page you just left, you can click the **Back** button in your Web browser's toolbar. The exact location of that button varies from one Web browser to the next. Figure 5 shows the location of the Back button (circled in red).



You can click the Back button repeatedly to retrace your steps. So if you've visited four web pages since you started browsing clicking the Back button four times will take you back to each of those pages in turn. This means you need never get lost while you're surfing the Web, you can always find your way back to where you started.

Once you get the hang of using hyperlinks, the Back button, and your Web browser's Address bar, you should find it pretty easy to get around on the World Wide Web.