

Wizard in Training

Your GREX Beginner's Handbook

Table of Contents

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Janitorial Staff • A Bit of History • How GREX Works • Making Sense of This (Web) Booklet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Type Conventions ◦ A Note about !s • The Psychology of Electronic Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Emoticons • Netiquette: Social Lubricant in Cyberspace <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Flames ◦ Advertising • GREX Membership: What and Why • Donations: The Lifeblood of a Bottom Feeder <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Donations Especially Useful to GREX • The Ecology of a Small System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Mail Limits ◦ Resources: The Final Frontier ◦ Why GREX Isn't an Internet Service Provider (ISP) • Off to a Good Start - Getting Connected to GREX <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Dialing in to GREX ◦ Using Telnet to Connect to GREX ◦ Logging in • Creating a New Account <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Finding Your Terminal Type • Selecting a Shell • Changing Things about your Login • Getting More Help <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ The Info Conference ◦ GREX On-Line Helpers ◦ The Trouble Login ◦ More Documentation • Wandering through the Conferences: the Real GREX! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Terminology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting into the Conferencing System • Using the Conferencing System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Prompts ◦ Selecting a Conference ◦ Reading a Conference ◦ Seeing a List of Items ◦ Reading Specific Items ◦ Reading New Items in a Conference ◦ Responding to an Interesting Item ◦ Viewing Particular Responses ◦ Entering a New Item ◦ Forgetting a Boring or Annoying Item • Getting The Hang Of E-Mail <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Selecting a Mailer • Party <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Noises • The World Wide Web <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Accessing the Web through Lynx ◦ Making Your Own Home Page on GREX • Peek into Your Mathom Closet • Finger • Going One-on-One: Using Chat, Write, Talk, and Tel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Chat and Write ◦ Talk ◦ Tel ◦ Preventing People from Writing to You • Text Files and Editors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Your Home Directory ◦ Editors ◦ Using an Editor from within PicoSpan or Mail • Uploading and Downloading Files <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Transferring Files over a Dial-up Connection ◦ FTP • UNIX (Whats That?) • Bibliography • The GREX Statement of Principles
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[Table of Contents](#)

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[Table of Contents](#)

A Bit of History

GreX was conceived in 1990 by a dozen people with little more in common than a love for computer conferencing. Over the course of several months, they met once a week to discuss their ideas about how the ideal system might be run, and to work out a common vision. The process wasn't always smooth; each founder had very clear ideas and there were sometimes differences that were very hard to resolve. They persevered and finally arrived at a consensus.

Once their vision for GreX was formed, they spent the next several months working to pull the system together. Once they had collected the money and equipment their new system would need just to open to the public, they agreed amongst themselves that they would finance the system's operations out of their own pockets for the first year.

On July 18, 1991, GreX opened its lines to the modeming public.

GreX got its start running on a donated Sun-2/170, with only 5 phone lines, 4 Meg of RAM, and 2 ancient 80 Meg Fujitsu SMD hard drives. It was housed in the warehouse of a generous local business owner, Ken Ascher, for just the cost of the electricity and telephones. NetMeg, owned and operated by Meg Geddes, supplied the Internet mail feed.

Things have changed some since then. GreX is now living in its own apartment, a 12' by 12' room in a building near downtown Ann Arbor. We're running on a Sun-4/670 with 384MB of RAM, 31 gigabytes of disk and 7 dial-in phone lines. Most important, GreX is now attached to the Internet by a dedicated DSL connection!

[Table of Contents](#)

How GREX Works

Cyberspace Communications, Inc., is a Michigan non-profit corporation.

Any user may become a member of Grex just by making a donation of \$2 a month or \$18 a year to the system. The membership makes all major decisions about the system's direction.

The Board of Directors, elected by the members of Grex, makes routine administrative decisions. The Board normally meets once a month. Members (and anyone else who's interested) are welcome to attend.

Daily operations of Grex are managed by an all volunteer staff, which is responsible for keeping Grex up and running smoothly. The staff is appointed by the board and is responsible for keeping Grex up and happy. It's a thankless job that keeps them busy for hours every week. (Thanks, folks!) Normally, the staff is represented at all board meetings.

[Table of Contents](#)

Making Sense of This (Web) Booklet

There are a few things you'll need to understand to make sense of the instructions in this (web) booklet.

Type Conventions

If I want you to type something,

it will look like this.

If I want to show you what the words on the screen will be,

it will look like this.

So if you see:

Ok: chat

it means, type the word chat where you see Ok: on the screen.

A Note about !s

There is a convention that many UNIX programs observe: when you want to run one program from within another, you type a ! (pronounced bang) before the command. Most of the examples shown in this booklet don't use a !, but in some cases (such as when you are at a menu prompt) you may need one. So in general, if a command doesn't work right for you, try putting a ! in front of it.

[Table of Contents](#)

The Psychology of Electronic Communication

Communicating electronically is different from talking face to face or over the telephone. Without the feedback of facial and vocal cues, it's easy to misunderstand, especially because English is an inherently ambiguous language.

Take the time to wordsmith your comments. When you remove the ambiguity, you ensure that the hundreds of people who will read your words will understand them as you meant them. That can make all the difference in the world, especially since Grex has users coming in from all over the world, many of whom speak English as a second or third language.

It's also a good idea to give other people the benefit of the doubt if they say something that can be taken more than one way. As you become more familiar to the Grex old-timers and more familiar with the verbal shorthand we've developed, you'll find it becomes second nature.

Emoticons

One way to help keep your responses from being misinterpreted is to use emoticons (sometimes called smileys) to help readers know what facial expression to associate with your words. For instance, if you say something in jest, it's a good idea to put a :) after it. If you're sad about something, use :(. If you want to wink at someone, use ;) . There are many other possibilities - don't hesitate to experiment.

[Table of Contents](#)

Netiquette: Social Lubricant in Cyberspace

As with every community, Cyberspace has a system of norms that allows us to get along in harmony most of the time. Various nooks have variations on the norms, of course. An excellent Internet convention is to try to be generous in interpreting what you read, but diplomatic and refined in what you say.

Flames

A flame is a personal attack on another user, usually in a public forum like the conferences or Party. Public flame fests are unpleasant and make the system a stressful place to hang out.

From time to time it's likely that someone will make a remark that makes you really angry. When that happens, remember:

- *Take time to cool off before you respond.*
- *If the remark was intentionally provocative, the best response is no response.*
- *Respond to the idea and not the speaker.*
- *If you feel you absolutely must make a personal remark, please take it to e-mail and keep it private.*

Advertising

Grex is a not-for-profit organization. It is not a platform for serious business transactions. (This applies to private individuals as well as companies.) We do however have a classifieds conference specifically set up to let people with something to peddle meet

people who want to barter or buy.

[Table of Contents](#)

GREX Membership: What and Why

Becoming a member of Grex is easy. You can type

support

or sometimes

!support

at almost any prompt to get more information.

But what is a Grex membership, and why should you bother? After all, Grex is a free system.

Well, yes, you are free to use Grex, whether you're a member or not. But when you make a donation and become a Grex member, you buy a little piece of our collective. You become a part owner in an exciting social experiment. You get a voice in the running of the system, and most important, you help ensure that this valuable community resource can continue to be available to everyone.

Grex is entirely supported by its users. No large corporations or government agencies contribute any of the money needed to keep the system running. This means Grex is really and truly a grass roots organization, and it has the freedom to change in whatever directions its members would like. But it also means that it is entirely dependent on the good will of its users. If enough people don't commit to supporting Grex, it may go away.

[Table of Contents](#)

Donations: The Lifeblood of a Bottom Feeder

Without donations, Grex wouldn't exist today. We are always happy to accept any computer equipment in danger of becoming boat anchors and door stops. We use what we can to expand Grex. We repair and sell the rest to electronics hobbyists to buy the things we need. If you have out of date equipment around the house, please feel free to let us know! If you know of something that is in danger of being pushed off a dock, please give us a call! Contact us by sending e-mail to staff@grex.org.

Donations Especially Useful to GREX

If you have old Sun equipment that you don't need, we'd love to hear about it. We're also always interested in things like PCs and Macs, SCSI disks, RAM chips, modems, commercial software, and printers.

[Table of Contents](#)

The Ecology of a Small System

Mail Limits

Because of our limited resources, we ask that you limit the amount of mail passing through your account (both incoming and outgoing) to 100K per day or less. Please also refrain from sending large files. If you have to send them, please break them into 100K chunks first and send those out, one per day. Also, please don't sign up for a mailing list unless you're sure you can keep up with the traffic and not let the mail accumulate in your inbox!

Resources: The Final Frontier

GreX is an all volunteer system, supported, maintained, and expanded with funds donated by members and friends. As with any group that relies on the beneficence of the public, sometimes we can't grow fast enough to keep up with demand. It's important to realize that we all share GreX's resources equally. When the resources run out, we also share equally in the hassles and the responsibilities to help solve the problem. Please don't keep large files in your home directory for more than a few days and please read and remove your mail regularly.

Why GREX Is not an Internet Service Provider (ISP)

Our Internet link is currently one DSL line. This means that GreX isn't all that fast compared to the big guys that are well connected. While we're very grateful for the connection, the size of the link does require some restraint on everyone's part to avoid overtaxing it. Since lots of things use this link, like telnet, FTP, e-mail, etc., you shouldn't think of GreX as an Internet provider. Think of us instead as a conferencing system that has some Internet capabilities.

[Table of Contents](#)

Off to a Good Start - Getting Connected to GREX

There are two ways to log into GreX: by dialing into GreX's modem bank and by telnetting in over the Internet.

Dialing in to GREX

Dialing in to GreX requires comparatively little equipment.

You need:

- *a computer or terminal*
- *a modem*
- *working telephone service*
- *a communication package such as ProComm, Telix, Kermit, or the Windows Terminal program.*

Of course, it can't hurt to have some documentation about using GreX, or a friend who's familiar with the system, too.

Setting Up Your Communication Parameters

Almost any terminal program, on any computer, can connect to GreX. Refer to your documentation for the details of how your modem and communication program work.

Next set your modem to the highest speed it will support, up to 14400 bps.

Dialing

When you've set your communication parameters, you're ready to dial Grex. Tell your terminal program to dial

```
(734) 761-3000
```

When your modem connects to Grex, you'll hear a whistling in several tones. When it finishes, you'll see a welcome message on the screen, followed by the prompt

```
login:
```

Using Telnet to Connect to GREX

If your computer is already connected to the Internet through some other service, you can access Grex with a telnet program. Most of the time that means typing the command

```
telnet grex.org
```

Or it might mean starting the telnet program and then telling it to open a connection to grex.org. If you connected correctly, you should see the same prompt as above:

Logging in

***Note:** If this is your first time on Grex, see [Creating a New Account](#).

Type your Grex login ID (the one selected when you ran the Newuser program) at the login prompt. For instance, if your login is waffles, type

```
login: waffles
```

Next you'll be prompted for your password. If your password is pancakes, type

```
waffles's Password: pancakes
```

Grex won't show the letters you type here so that no one can learn your password by watching over your shoulder as you log in.

Finally, Grex will show you the terminal type you've selected. If you're logging in from the same type of computer as usual, just press the enter key; otherwise type in the appropriate terminal type.

***Note:** If you always log in from the same type of terminal, you can use the change program to tell Grex not to prompt you every time. See [Changing Things About Your Login](#).

[Table of Contents](#)

Creating a New Account

Creating an account on Grex is free. You don't have to send money or identification, you can create a new account and start conferencing during the same session!

To create a new account, simply type

```
login: newuser
```

The Grex Newuser program will tell you something about the system, then will ask you a series of questions. This booklet contains the information you'll need to answer the hard questions.

In answering the personal questions, keep in mind that 1) creating a new account doesn't obligate you to anything, ever and 2) you'll decide whether to let everyone see the information you entered. If you put the privacy switch on, only staff will see your information. (Staff won't divulge your private information without a court order.)

But, of course, if you don't want to answer any personal questions, that's OK too. We do recommend, however, that you give some contact information to Newuser, such as an alternate e-mail address or a physical address. That way, if you ever forget your password, you can send the Grex staff mail from your other address, and they will reset the password for you.

Finding Your Terminal Type

The computer and communications software you use to access Grex are together called your terminal. UNIX systems can theoretically be accessed by many users using very different computers and communication software. For this reason Grex and systems like it support a wide variety of terminal types. This, as you might expect, causes some confusion.

There are some programs on Grex that need to know how to talk to your terminal, which means you can't use them if you don't know your terminal type. That makes it worth figuring it out what terminal type you are using.

***Note:** *You don't have to know your terminal type to use Grex, but Grex will work better for you if you do.*

Usually the terminal type is explained in the communication program documentation under Terminal Emulation. Fortunately, almost all communication programs these days have the ability to look like a vt100 terminal (that's the name of a terminal standard developed by Digital Corporation), so if you aren't sure try that. If you find out that you made the wrong choice in the Newuser program, don't worry. You can change it later. (Computers are wonderful that way!)

[Table of Contents](#)

Selecting a Shell

A shell is a UNIX program which gets run as soon as you log in, and keeps running until you log off. All other programs that you run are launched from within your shell. It's kind of like a stage on which everything happens.

Grex offers a number of different shells for you to choose from. Which one you should choose depends on how familiar you are with UNIX and how you want to use Grex.

- **The Menu Shell**

The menu shell is very popular because it lets you choose most of Grex's options from a simple menu. It doesn't explain what those options mean, but if you've had some experience with conferencing systems this is your best bet.

- **The Lynx Shell**

The Lynx shell gives you the most information and takes the guess work out of using Grex. If you're completely unfamiliar with conferencing systems, UNIX, and the Internet, this is probably your best bet. It does take a certain amount of patience, though, because there is a lot of information and it continues to show up whether you need it or not.

- **The BBS Shell**

If you're familiar with conferencing systems and you know generally what you want to do here on Grex, whether it's conferencing, e-mail, chatting, or something else, you may find the BBS shell the easiest way to go. It requires that you learn a few simple commands, but it's fast and flexible. For a BBS Tipsheet, send a SASE to Grex INFO at the address listed in the [Getting More Help](#) section .

• **Programmer Shells**

(csh, zsh, ksh, sh, tcsh, and bash)

If you're familiar with UNIX and command-line interfaces and you want the full power of a UNIX system available to you when you're using Grex, you may find the C shell (csh), or one of the other UNIX shells mentioned above, the most efficient way to go. They require that you know standard UNIX commands, but they are quick and flexible. For a C shell Tipsheet, send a SASE to Grex INFO at the address listed in the [Getting More Help](#) section.

[Table of Contents](#)

Changing Things about your Login

When you run the Grex Newuser program, you make a number of decisions about things like what character would be used for backspace, which editor to use, etc.

If you've decided that something isn't quite right for you and you'd like to change it, the change program will help you fix things. From inside PicoSpan, type:

!change

or, from another shell, type:

change

The change program is completely menu driven and will prompt you each step of the way. It does all the hard stuff for you.

[Table of Contents](#)

Getting More Help

There are a number of good ways to get answers to your Grexish questions or problems. The first thing you might try is typing

help

(or possibly

!help

) wherever you happen to be. If that doesn't tell you what you need to know, try one of these other options.

The Info Conference

One of the best ways to get answers is to join the info conference, where people have been asking and answering questions throughout Grex's existence. If you don't find the answer to your question there, you can always post it and check back in a couple

of hours.

GREX On-Line Helpers

If you have an urgent question, you can type:

write help

That notifies a Grex helper (if one is logged on) that you have a question. Please wait several minutes for a response, since the helper may be helping someone else or in the middle of an uninterruptible process when you call.

A Grex helper is just a more experienced user who has agreed to answer basic Grex questions. Not every helper will know the answer to every question, and helpers don't have any capabilities (other than knowledge) that you don't have.

The Trouble Login

If you have trouble logging in, you can log in as trouble. That login automatically sends mail to the people who can help you straighten out account problems. Be sure to give us the information about your account and how we can reach you. (Staff clairvoyance is a very limited resource.)

More Documentation

If there's a document you want, or you need more information about a specific topic, send a request to comments@grex.org or mail your request to:

*Cyberspace Communications
P.O. Box 4432
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106*

[Table of Contents](#)

Wandering through the Conferences: the Real GREX!

While it's true that Grex has many services to offer, conferencing is the heart of the system. Without our conferences, we'd be little more than another file stop on the information highway. You'll find more than 100 conferences on Grex, with topics ranging from hobbies to public issues, from computers and games to life roles, with new conferences starting frequently.

So, what is computer conferencing? It's a way of letting a group of people talk to each other over time, with the computer acting as a scribe, keeping track of all that has been said. At any point, any participant in a conference can go back and see everything that has been discussed since the last restart.

Terminology

A conference is a general area for discussion of related topics. (You may have heard the term forum used elsewhere to describe what we call a conference on Grex.) For example the kitchen conference is where people talk about food, cooking and restaurants.

In the micros conference the topic is microcomputers. The coop conference is where you can learn more about how Grex is run and participate in the decision making process. And the smalls conference is dedicated to conversation about living with and raising children.

Each conference consists of items, which anyone in the conference can enter. An item is a topic for conversation related to the conference subject. For instance, in the smalls conference you might find items about toilet training, schools, and cute remarks the little shavers make. You might think of an item as a comment you've written on a piece of paper, and stuck on a bulletin board or kiosk in a busy place. As people wander by, they can read your item. After reading it, they can add a comment or response to the bottom of the page.

Over time, an item might have many responses and new conversations (called drift) may evolve from the original item; some popular items have hundreds of responses. Interaction between the participants of the conference spurs further discussion and brings up new points, which may spin off into new items...or not.

So, to summarize the terminology: A conference is a place where people discuss a particular topic, such as cooking or children. Each conference consists of items, each of which is a discussion. Items may have any number of responses, entered by any number of people.

[Table of Contents](#)

Getting into the Conferencing System

Grex's conferences can now be accessed in two different ways: through PicoSpan and through Backtalk. PicoSpan is a program written by Grex founder Marcus Watts in 1984, and it's the easiest thing to use when you're already logged on to Grex. Backtalk was written by Grex staffers Jan Wolter and Steve Weiss in 1996-98, and it operates through the World Wide Web. If you have access to the web, you can check out Backtalk by going to www.grex.org and following a few links.

Since this handbook is mainly about what you do when you're logged in to Grex, it will focus on PicoSpan. First, getting into it:

- *If You Use the Menu Shell:*

Select

B

for BBS.

- *If You Use the Lynx Shell:*

From the initial screen, choose

Grex Activities Menu

followed by

Computer conferencing

.

- *If You Use the BBS Shell:*

If you selected the BBS shell when you created your account, you should see the

Ok:

prompt as soon as you log in to Grex. That means you're already in PicoSpan.

- *If You Use One of the Programmer Shells:*

To get into the PicoSpan conferencing system from another shell, type:

bbs

at your shell's prompt.

[Table of Contents](#)

Using the Conferencing System

Prompts

First things first. The two basic prompts that PicoSpan gives you are:

Ok:

which means that you are reading a conference but not a specific item, and

Respond or pass?

which you see after you have just read an item.

***Note:** Your prompts may differ slightly from the above. For instance, they may include a few lines of explanatory text or mention more possible actions. Don't let that throw you - all the examples in this handbook still apply.

Selecting a Conference

When you begin conferencing for the first time, you will automatically start out in the agora conference. Agora is the main meeting hall on Grex, through which virtually everyone passes at one time or another. Almost any subject might come up in here so you'll probably find something there that interests you.

Many people never go any farther than agora, but there are lots of other choices! To see an updated list of all the conferences, type:

Ok: help conf

You'll be presented with a list of conferences sorted by subject. If you'd like to look in on, say, the kitchen conference, type:

Ok: join kitchen

The first time you do that you'll get a message saying

You are not a member of /bbs/kitchen2. Do you wish to Join, quit, or help?

Type **J** to join the conference.

Reading a Conference

Once you've found a conference you're interested in, you really only need to know a few commands to get started using PicoSpan.

The commands are **browse**, **read**, and **respond**.

Seeing a List of Items

The **browse** command presents a list of all the items in the conference. It will display the item name and the number that identifies that item to the system.

Once you enter a conference, type:

Ok: browse

A list of the items available will scroll across your screen. Note the numbers of any items that interest you.

***Note:** Many PicoSpan commands can be abbreviated. For instance, **browse** can be abbreviated as **b**. We won't discuss all the abbreviations here, but you may want to guess at them to save yourself some keystrokes.

If you've been in a conference before and want to see which items have changed since your last visit, type:

Ok: browse new

Reading Specific Items

Once you've found an item that interests you, the **read** command shows you the text of a particular item. If you don't specify an item number, PicoSpan will show all the items that you haven't read yet. (Not a good idea until you've gotten familiar with a conference.)

To read, say, item 5, type:

Ok: read 5

If you want to read several items, you can list all of them separated by a single space and they will come up in the order you listed them. So to read items 1, 7 and 4 in that order, type:

Ok: read 1 7 4

Reading New Items in a Conference

Once you've been reading a conference for a while, you might want to read everything anyone has said there since you last checked in.

To read all the new responses in a conference, type:

Ok: read new

To read all new responses in items 1, 7, and 4, type:

Ok: read 1 7 4 new

Responding to an Interesting Item

When you've finished reading an item, you may decide that you want to make a comment about the subject under discussion.

PicoSpan will automatically ask if you want to respond or pass. To respond to the item, enter:

Respond or pass? r

Then type in the text of your response. When you're done, type **Ctrl-D** or place a period on a line by itself and hit enter.

To pass on to the next item without responding, enter:

Respond or pass? p

(Actually, if you just hit the enter key without typing a command, that's the same as typing p.) If you are interested in responding to an item, but would rather do it later, you can type:

Respond or pass? postpone

The item will show up again the next time you read new responses.

Viewing Particular Responses

Responses, like items, all have numbers. Because a single item can have hundreds of responses, you may want to go back and view a few of them at a time without rereading the whole item. To view, say, response number 50, type:

Respond or pass? only 50

To view all the responses since response 34, simply type:

Respond or pass? 34

To view the original text of the item, type:

Respond or pass? only 0

To see the title of the item, type:

Respond or pass? header

Entering a New Item

Once you've been around a while, you'll very likely want to start a new item of your own to discuss something that no one has brought up yet.

To enter a brand new item:

Ok: enter

PicoSpan will then ask you for the text of the item and its title.

Forgetting a Boring or Annoying Item

The forget command lets you tell PicoSpan that you don't want to follow an individual item. When the topic of an item doesn't interest you or you find something irritating about the drift of the conversation, you can easily dismiss the item from the list of those you'll read in the future. (So the next time you do a read new or a browse, it won't show up even if it has new responses.)

To forget an item you have just read, type:

Respond or pass? forget

[Table of Contents](#)

Getting The Hang Of E-Mail

Using e-mail, you can: get to know people around the world, get back in touch with friends and family you haven't seen in far too long, and keep up to date on plans with your local friends.

E-mail here on Grex won't cost you anything, so feel free to send and receive lots of messages -- only, please, keep them reasonably small. We do have a limited amount of bandwidth to serve the more than 3000 users who log in each day.

So, how do you get started using e-mail? The first step is to collect some e-mail addresses for people you want to send mail to, and to give your e-mail address to people you want to hear from.

*Your e-mail address here is yourloginid@grex.org. In other words, if your login on Grex is **tina**, your address is: **tina@grex.org***

Selecting a Mailer

Grex offers several programs to allow you to send and receive mail. The only difference is in the way you use the program to read and send messages. Grex transmits all e-mail the same way, so that it will be compatible with other systems on the Internet.

- **Pine**

Pine is a simple, menu driven mailer. Many people who are used to using a mouse prefer this mailer. (Its main drawback is that it can be quite slow when Grex is busy.) You need to have your terminal type set correctly to use Pine. To run Pine, type:

Ok: pine

- **Elm**

Elm is also a simple, menu driven mailer. It's similar in concept to Pine, but it's been around longer and the details of how it works are a bit different. Elm, like Pine, requires that your terminal type be set correctly. To run Elm, type:

Ok: elm

- **UNIX Mail**

The UNIX Mail mailer will work on any terminal. It's a command line mailer, so it's a bit trickier to get used to, but once you get the hang of it, it's also faster to use and less of a strain on Grex's resources than the other two. To run Mail, type:

Ok: !mail

[Table of Contents](#)

Party

Party is a very popular program on Grex which allows users to have conversations in real time. It's similar to what are called chat rooms on the Internet.

You enter Party by typing:

Ok: party

If other people are already there (as is almost always the case), very soon you will start to see messages from them appearing on your screen. You can respond by simply typing what you want to say. Hit the Enter key to send the text to everyone.

Noises

Occasionally you may see text appear on your screen which looks like:

<robh hugs steve>

That is called a noise. Party has a table of many noises you can make. You make a noise by typing the noise's name followed by any parameters it takes. To make the noise above, for instance, robh typed:

/hug steve

To see a table of all the noises you can make, just enter a slash (/) by itself. But be warned, the list is over a thousand lines long. There is a catch all noise called emote which you may want to know about, because it lets you use it however you want. For instance, if robh types:

/emote quacks like a duck

everyone will see:

<robh quacks like a duck>

[Table of Contents](#)

The World Wide Web

The popularity of the World Wide Web is what has driven the Internet boom of the 1990s. That boom promises to become one of the most significant changes in our society begun in the twentieth century.

Accessing the Web through Lynx

Grex provides access to the textual portions of the Web through a browser called Lynx. We would like to be able to show you pictures too, but our link just can't handle that much traffic.

To run Lynx, type:

Ok: !lynx

You will see a web page on Grex which will help you to get started. There is lots of help for Lynx available online, but here are a few tips:

- If you know the address of a web page you want to visit, type **g** followed by the address.
- The up and down arrow keys are used for moving the cursor around within a page. Use them to highlight a link you want to follow and press **Enter** to go there.
- The left and right arrow keys move you backward and forward within the list of pages you have visited.
- Hit **?** for help.
- If your screen gets messed up for some reason, you can have Lynx redraw it by hitting **Ctrl-R**.
- Hit **q** to quit out of Lynx.

Making Your Own Home Page on GREX

If you'd like to create your own little corner of the Web you can do it on Grex. Its not quite as simple as typing in a text document; you will need to know HTML (Hypertext Markup Language). Many references are available both on the Web and in bookstores on HTML. And of course, you can't store pictures or multimedia files on Grex, but your page can contain references to them if they are elsewhere.

To make your own homepage on Grex, type:

Ok: `!mkhomepage`

You'll get a menu which lets you choose to create a new homepage or edit an old one, and also gives you more information. If you create a new one, it will be a file called `index.html` in a subdirectory of your home directory called `www`. The address people use to access your page depends on your user ID; for instance, if you login as **janc**, then your home page is: **<http://www.grex.org/~janc>**

If you'd like to see the list of frequently asked questions about Grex web pages, there is a link to it on the first page you see when you run Lynx.

[Table of Contents](#)

Peek into Your Mathom Closet

This is a quote from *The Fellowship of the Ring* by J.R.R. Tolkien:

So, though there was still some store of weapons in the Shire, these were used mostly as trophies, hanging above hearths or on walls, or gathered into the museum at Michel Delving. The Mathom-house it was called; for anything that Hobbits had no immediate use for, but were unwilling to throw away, they called a mathom. Their dwellings were apt to become rather crowded with mathoms, and many of the presents that passed from hand to hand were of that sort.

So mathom, strictly speaking, refers to that class of item that while useless, is too delightful to throw away. Most people have a closet somewhere in the house where at least a few pieces hide.

Here on Grex, mathom is also a program that allows you to create text gifts for the people you like. Larry Kestenbaum (polygon) suggested that we adopt the idea here on Grex, and Valerie Mates (valerie) created the program.

To run the Mathom program, type:

Ok: `mathom`

at any PicoSpan prompt. The program is pretty much self-explanatory. The commands may all be abbreviated to one letter. So for instance, when you see the prompt:

Look (at your mathom), Create (new mathom), Someone (else's mathom to look at), Who (has mathom?), Help, or Exit?

*that means you can enter **L** to look at your mathom, **C** to create a new mathom, etc.*

The first time someone gives you a mathom, the program will send you mail to let you know about it. Once you have mathom (either because you created it or because someone gave it to you), you can look at it or give it away.

[Table of Contents](#)

Finger

Recall that when you create a Grex account through the Newuser program, you are asked for some information about yourself. Your answers to those questions are stored in a file in your home directory called .plan.

You can see someone's .plan by using the finger command. At a PicoSpan prompt, type:

Ok: finger mta

to see mta's .plan. (You'll also see information about when mta last logged on, and a few other things.) If you enter finger with no parameters:

Ok: finger

you'll get a list of everyone who's on Grex right now.

Note that finger is a standard Internet protocol, so if you want them to, everyone on the Net can see what's in your .plan; or you can set it so that it is completely private. You can switch back and forth between these settings using the change program.

[Table of Contents](#)

Going One-on-One: Using Chat, Write, Talk, and Tel

Chat, Write, Talk, and Tel are all programs that let you converse with another user one-on-one in real time. This can be a good way to make arrangements on-line to meet with friends for dinner later, or to get to know another user more personally, even though you live thousands of miles apart.

Chat and Write

Chat and Write are essentially the same program with different options. Both allow one user on Grex to type text which then appears on another user's terminal, and vice-versa. Chat passes characters as they arrive, one character at a time, and Write passes them one line at a time.

To use Chat to talk to user aruba, type:

Ok: chat aruba

From now on, everything you type will appear on aruba's screen. This could potentially be quite confusing and annoying to the recipient, so there are a few rules of etiquette which have been established to make Chat and Write work more smoothly:

- *The person initiating the call waits for the other person to respond before saying anything.*

- To signal that it's the other persons turn to type, end your transmission with an **o** (for over) on its own line.
- Wait for the other person to signal with an **o** that it's your turn to type.
- When you want to end the conversation, type **oo?** (for over and out) on a line by itself. The other person will respond with **oo** if he or she is ready to sign off.

To exit Chat or Write, type **Ctrl-D**.

When someone taps you to talk using Chat or Write, you'll see a line on your screen that looks like:

message from popcorn on ttyq8 at 20:47...

Respond with:

Ok: write

or

Ok: chat

Talk

Talk is the most sophisticated of the conversational programs. It draws a horizontal line halfway down your screen. Whatever you type appears on the top half of the screen, and whatever the other person types appears on the bottom. That keeps the text from getting tangled.

You must have your terminal type set correctly for Talk to work. If you get all the text as a single column down the left side of your screen, it means your terminal type is set up incorrectly.

When someone taps you to talk using the Talk program, you'll see something like:

*Message from Talk_Daemon@grex.org at 13:23 ...
talk: connection requested by aruba@grex.org.
talk: respond with: talk aruba@grex.org*

Actually all you need to type to respond is:

Ok: talk aruba

The reason that the Talk program gave you a full Internet address is that Talk (unlike Chat and Write) is capable of connecting you to people on other machines besides Grex.

To exit talk press your interrupt character (usually **Ctrl-C**).

Tel

Tel is short for telegram, and it's a program you can use to send a quick message to someone else on Grex. To send a message to aruba, type:

Ok: !tel aruba

Then enter your text:

*Telegram to aruba on ttyrf..
Msg: How's it going?*

The message you typed will then appear on aruba's screen.

Preventing People from Writing to You

If you don't want anyone to tap you for a one-to-one conversation right now, you can close the chat door by going to any PicoSpan prompt and typing:

Ok: msg n

That will tell people who try to chat with you using Chat, Write, Talk, or Tel that you're busy right now and not accepting messages. If you decide that you're open to conversation later in your session, you can re-open the chat door by typing:

Ok: msg y

It's possible to be more selective about who is allowed to chat you and who isn't. The change program allows you to set those options.

[Table of Contents](#)

Text Files and Editors

Your Home Directory

*When someone creates a new account on Grex, a place is set aside for that account's files. This is called the account's **home directory**. Certain programs store information in files there, and on top of that you can put any files you want in your home directory, though we ask that you keep your total disk usage to under 1 megabyte.*

Most files on UNIX systems are text files, meaning they contain only printable characters (letters, numbers, and punctuation) and a few formatting characters (end-of-line markers and tabs) but no fancy formatting stuff. Occasionally you may want to create or modify text files in your home directory - such as the .plan file mentioned in the section on [Finger](#).

Editors

An editor program allows you to change text files and create new ones. Its also useful if you enter a long response in the Mail program or in PicoSpan, and then realize you made a mistake on the first line and need to go back and change it.

Most editors show you the full text of a file and allow you to move around in your text and to cut and paste blocks of text in different places. An editor is like a word processor, but without a lot of formatting commands (like boldface and italics) which don't apply to text files. Grex offers a number of different editors. Which one you should use should depend on what you're used to and how much fancy stuff you want to do.

- **Nano**

Nano is probably the best bet for a novice Grex user. It's designed to fit well with the Pine mailer (it was written by the same people), so if you selected Pine, you'll want to use Nano for a consistent interface. To use Nano to edit a file called foo, type:

Ok: nano foo

Nano shows you a list of commands you can type at the bottom of the screen, which makes it easy to get started without learning a lot of keystrokes first. The only drawbacks to using it are that it's a bit slow and you can't do anything fancy with it. But it's usually fast enough, and you usually don't need to do anything fancy.

- **Joe**

Joe is another simple editor you may want to try - it is similar to Wordstar. Type:

Ok: joe foo

*to edit the file foo with Joe. You can get it to show you a list of commands right on the screen by typing **Ctrl-K** followed by **h**.*

- **vi, emacs, and the rest**

If you are an experienced UNIX user, you can choose one of the standard UNIX editors. These are not for the timid, though.

Using an Editor from within PicoSpan or Mail

In order to use an editor from within PicoSpan or Mail or another program, you must first tell the system what editor you prefer. Type:

Ok: !change

and follow the prompts to do that. Then if you're typing a response in PicoSpan and would like to edit it in your editor, enter a colon on a line by itself:

>:

and PicoSpan will put you in your editor. To do the same thing in Mail, type:

& ~v

[Table of Contents](#)

Uploading and Downloading Files

There are times when you may want to copy a file that is currently on Grex onto your home computer, or vice-versa. Knowing how to do that is a very useful skill, because it allows you to compose long messages offline, to save text you like on your home computer (so you need not log onto Grex to get to it), and even to exchange personal computer programs with other users.

Copying a file from Grex to your home computer is called downloading the file. (Think of Grex as being upstairs, and your PC as being downstairs.) Sending files the other way is called uploading.

Transferring Files over a Dial-up Connection

There are several protocols used for transferring files over a dial-up connection.

The ones Grex supports are **Kermit**, **X-Modem**, **Y-Modem**, and **Z-Modem**. Which protocol you use depends on what your communications software will support. Check your documentation for references to transferring files.

Downloading over a Dial-up Connection

Downloading a file is a two-step process. First decide what protocol you are using, and be sure you know the filename. We'll suppose the file is called waffles.

1. First tell Grex to send the file. How you do this depends on the protocol you're using:

Kermit: **Ok: !kermit -s waffles**

X-Modem: **Ok: !sx waffles**

Y-Modem: **Ok: !sy waffles**

Z-Modem: **Ok: !sz waffles**

2. As soon as you get a message that says the file is ready to be sent, tell your communications program to receive the file. How you do that depends on what program you're using; you'll have to read the documentation to find out.

Uploading over a Dial-up Connection

Uploading is also a two-step process. Decide what protocol you're using, then:

1. First tell Grex to receive the file. Depending on the protocol, you would type:

Kermit: **Ok: !kermit -r**

X-Modem: **Ok: !rx**

Y-Modem: **Ok: !ry**

Z-Modem: **Ok: !rz**

2. After you get a message that says Grex is ready to receive, go to your communications program and tell it to send the file. Again, how you do that depends on your program, so check the documentation.

FTP

If you connect to Grex over the Internet using telnet, the best way to transfer files to your home computer is by using FTP. FTP stands for File Transfer Protocol, and you'll need an FTP program on your home computer to transfer files. How it works will depend on just which program you have, but basically you want to tell it to open a connection to **grex.org**, then give it your login ID and password.

After you're connected, if you have a graphical interface you should be able to drag and drop the files you want to move. If you have a command-line interface (such as the one that comes with Windows 95), the commands are **get** to get a file from Grex and **put** to put a file onto Grex.

[Table of Contents](#)

UNIX (Whats That?)

GreX runs a version of the UNIX operating system called SunOS 4.1.4. SunOS is the underlying software system that lets all the programs you use (such as PicoSpan, Mail, etc.) run, much as DOS, Mac OS, and Windows 95 allow programs to run on home computers. There are many versions of UNIX in existence; ours originally came from Sun Microsystems Inc., the makers of the Sun-4 computer GreX runs on now.

Explaining the intricacies of UNIX is a formidable task, well beyond the scope of this handbook. But you are welcome to use GreX to learn as much as you can about it, studying the documentation online and asking lots of questions.

[Table of Contents](#)

Bibliography

Much of what you need to know to make full use of all GREX's facilities can be found in a good UNIX reference. The most of the rest can be found in a good Internet reference. We recommend you check out the local library! Here are a few places to start:

Take me To Your Modem: a pocket guide to GREX

Cyberspace Communications, 1993

UNIX for Dummies by John R. Levine

IDG Books Worldwide 1993

Internet for Dummies by John R. Levine

IDG Books Worldwide 1993

Zen and the Art of the Internet: A Beginner's Guide by Brendon P. Kehoe

Prentice Hall, 1993

The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier by Howard Rheingold

Addison-Wesley, 1993

[Table of Contents](#)

The GREX Statement of Principles

This system is intended to foster community education and the spiritual and intellectual enrichment of its users, through the peaceable interchange of ideas.

The members of this system hope to attract a large, diverse, and mature group of thinking individuals and thereby to contribute to a better-informed citizenry.

Governance of the system is based on cooperative principles, including open membership, democratic control, and nonprofit economics.

This is an open-access system; the public is welcome. However, we encourage regular users to become members and help support the system financially. Voting on system policy matters is restricted to members.

It should go without saying that the system is specifically NOT intended for any illegal purpose.

Users are asked to be considerate of others, and are especially asked to make a point of setting a good example for those few who

may from time to time fail to return the favor.