

Essential CVS by Jennifer Vesperman. O'Reilly 2003 (ISBN 0-596-00459-1)

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I've been using CVS for quite some time now, but because of the way I work, and the sort of projects I work on, there are some features I have simply never had to use, or didn't even know existed. Essential CVS rounded out my knowledge of CVS well, and will form a valuable part of my reference library.

The structure of *Essential CVS* is logical. *Essential CVS* discusses what CVS is, why you would use it (including its uses for systems administrators), and then immediately presents a quick start guide. The quick start guide takes the form of a cook book of the common operations you would perform in every day CVS use: importing projects; checking in and out files; committing changes; updating your sandbox; and so on.

Essential CVS then moves onto chapters which cover some of the specifics. For example, chapter two discusses every day use of CVS, in a little more detail than the quick start. As I read the book from cover to cover, this felt a little strange, as there was repeated content quite frequently. Then again, it is obvious that this part of the book is built as a reference, in which case repeating information makes the book much more user friendly.

The quick start chapter presents enough information for you to walk away and start using CVS. The later, more specific, chapters, then provide the information you need to solve more specific questions as you encounter them. The book takes detail and accuracy seriously, for example in several places it mentions that comments in the CVS source code imply that a given feature may change in the future, and user caution should be shown.

Essential CVS also provides a large volume of command reference information, listing the command line parameters to the various CVS tools, and their use. Based on a brief perusal of the CVS man page, this is probably a good thing, as I found the format of the command reference within *Essential CVS* to be much more readable than the man page.

As the majority of *Essential CVS* is a reference book, it live and dies by the quality of its index. The difficult question as a reviewer is how to test an index? You could judge it on size, but that would only tell you that a lot of words were in the index. If those words are not relevant, then the index is still of little use. I chose instead of think of four or five things which I thought I might need with CVS, and then used the index to pull out the relevant information. Thus, if I could find the things I thought I needed in the index, then the index passes my simple test.

Essential CVS met all of my index tests. For all of the things I looked up in the index, which ranged from information on how to commit binary files sensibly to CVS, to how to access a repository remotely via SSH, and how to configure build scripts as a commit requirement, the index took me to the relevant information to within a page or two. Thus, I am happy to declare *Essential CVS* to be a useful reference book.

Jennifer is also an Australian, which is always a good thing.

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Essential CVS is a good reference book. If you're using CVS, planning on using CVS, or need a present for someone who does, then I heartily recommend this book.