

Git Good

How to understand Git

Sumner Evans

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Mines ACM

My name is Sumner, I'm a **software engineer at Beeper**.

- I graduated from Colorado School of Mines in 2018 with my bachelor's in CS and 2019 with a master's in CS.
- I am an adjunct professor. Currently I'm teaching CSCI 341. I've taught 400, 406, and 564 in the past as well.
- I enjoy skiing, volleyball, and soccer.
- I'm a 4th degree black belt in ATA taekwondo.

Overview

1. Why use Git?
2. Commits
3. Branches
4. Merging
5. Rebasing
6. Remotes
7. Advanced Tips

This talk is interactive!

If you have questions at any point, feel free to interrupt me.

Why use Git?



Example Scenario 1

1. You start a project called “my-proj” and write a ton of code.
2. You finally get it to (kinda) work.
3. You decide to make a copy of “my-proj” for backup purposes.
4. You continue development on “my-proj” but then screw something up really bad.
5. You decide to revert back to your copy.
6. Then you realize your copy doesn't have a bug fix that you actually wanted.
7. You then proceed to manually compare the files in the backup to those in your new code and figure out what you still want to have.

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1. You start working on a project with a partner.
2. You write a bunch of code.
3. You email the code in a .zip file, then go home for the weekend.
4. You and your partner had decided to work on two separate tasks over the weekend so you make some changes to the code and your partner makes some changes to the code.
5. You come together and start copying files. Then you realize you both modified `main()`.
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- VCS keeps track of *revisions*, changes in the code in entities called *changesets* or *commits*.
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Git is a very popular version control system.

Services such as GitHub and GitLab provide free hosting for Git repositories.

It has become the de-facto industry standard for source control.

Git is a distributed version control system

Distributed because you can use it without being connected to a central server. You have a full copy of the code on your own computer.

Version control because it keeps track of changes to files.

But how does it keep track of all of the changes?

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Commits



Commits: what are they?

Commits are sets of differences (diffs) in files.¹

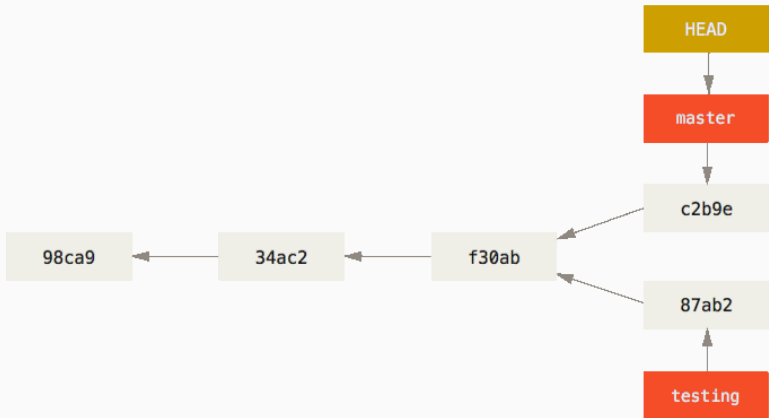
Commits reference their parent(s) and contain information about the changes made in the repo since that parent commit.

¹This is a bit of a lie, more on that later.

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Commits: they form a DAG, and are stored on the “heap”

Commits form a Directed Acyclic Graph (DAG). There are no loops in the graph, and every commit points to its parent(s).

Every single commit is stored in the `.git` directory of your repository² which can be thought of like a “heap” for commits. The parents of a commit are also stored in this “heap”.

We will return to this fact when we talk about *branches*.

²Technically another lie.

You can create a commit by running `git commit`. This will create a commit based on the checked-out commit with the changes that you have “staged”.

- You can stage changes by running `git add` and passing a list of files.
- You can stage all changes by running `git add -A`.
- Pro tip: If you want to add specific parts of files, use `git add -p`.

If you want to remove from the stage, you can run `git reset` (optionally passing a list of files to unstage).

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Commits: what will be committed?

If you ever want to know what will be included in your commit, you can run `git status` to show the list of files staged for commit.

```
> git status
On branch master
Your branch is up to date with 'origin/master'.

Changes to be committed:
  (use "git restore --staged <file>..." to unstage)
        modified:   git.tex

Changes not staged for commit:
  (use "git add <file>..." to update what will be committed)
  (use "git restore <file>..." to discard changes in working directory)
        modified:   git.pdf
        modified:   git.tex
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The `git.tex` file has only some lines staged for commit.

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Commits: what will be committed, but with more detail?

To see the details of the changes that are staged (that is, will be committed), you can run `git diff --cached`.

If you want to see the details of the changes that are *not* staged, you can run `git diff`.

`git diff` optionally accepts a list of files to diff.

```
diff --git a/git.tex b/git.tex
index 2c01a7b..91148d1 100644
--- a/git.tex
+++ b/git.tex
@@ -33,9 +33,7 @@
```

```
\section{Why use Git?}

-\begin{frame}{Why use Git? I}
-
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Branches



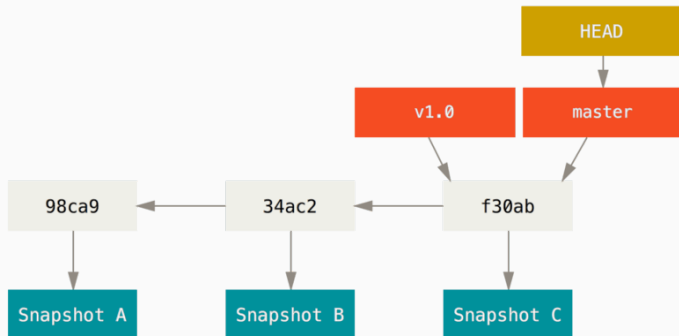
Branches: what are they?³

Remember how we said that the `.git` directory is like a “heap” for commits?

Branches are pointers to a specific commit in that heap. You can then follow that commit's parent pointers to reconstruct the graph.

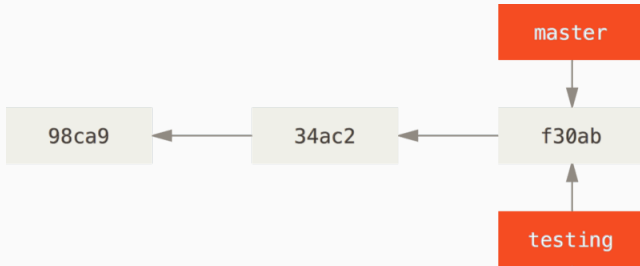
³Info in the rest of the *Branches* section is mainly from <https://git-scm.com/book/en/v2/Git-Branching-Branches-in-a-Nutshell>

Branches: pointers



Branches: creating them

Branches can be created using the `git branch <branch name>` command. **This will not change your HEAD pointer.**

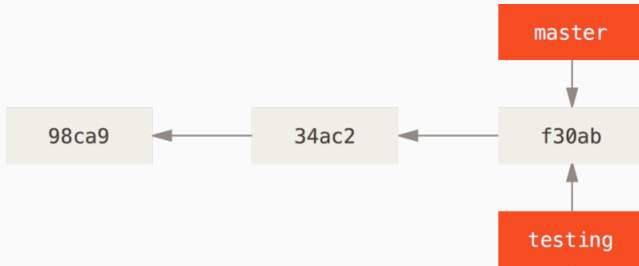


If you want to create a branch and also change the HEAD pointer to the newly created branch, you can use:
`git checkout -b <branch name>`.

You can use `git branch [-a]` to list (all) branches.

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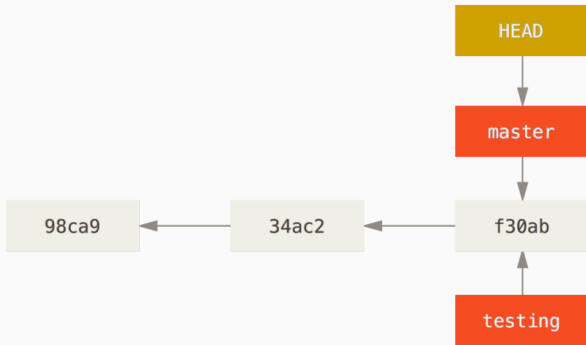
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Branches: moving HEAD around

HEAD is a special pointer to the current repository state. Checking out a commit/branch will update the files in your working directory.

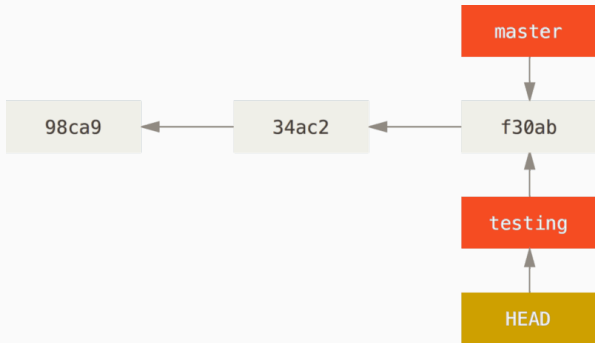
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Branches: checkout gotchas and pro-tips

- If you checkout a commit hash, you will be in a detached HEAD state because your HEAD pointer is not pointing to a branch.
- If you have uncommitted changes, switching branches *might* fail.

You can use `git stash` to save the changes in your working directory, then checkout the other branch, and then `git stash pop` to restore the changes.

Alternatively, you can just create a WIP commit and then switch to the other branch.

Pro tip: You can use `-` to refer to the previously checked out object.

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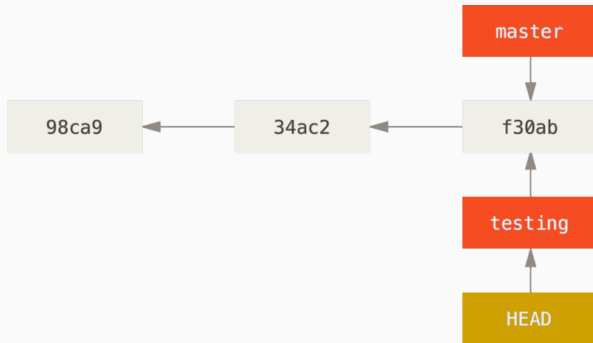
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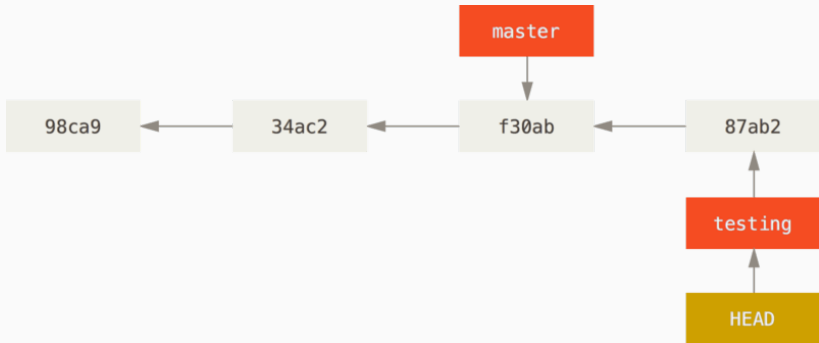
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If you commit something while HEAD is pointed to a branch, both HEAD and your branch will move to the new commit.



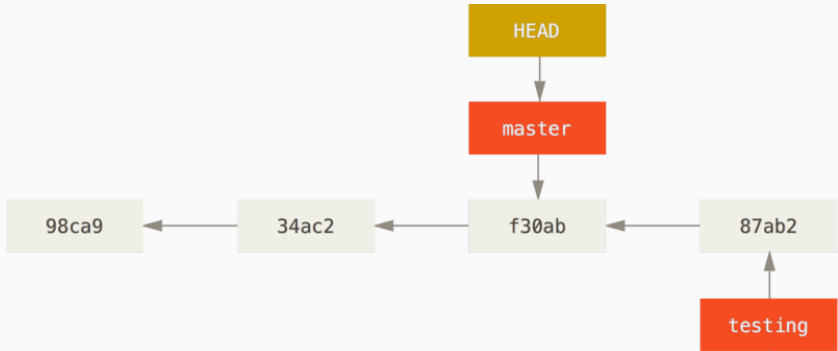
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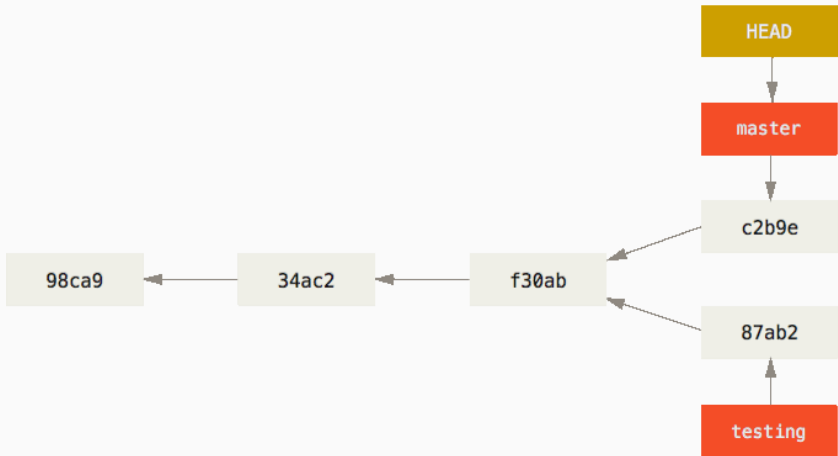
Branches: using multiple branches

Of course, you can always switch back to `master` using `git checkout master`.



Branches: divergence

If you make a commit on the master branch, the master pointer moves to that new commit creating **divergent** branch histories.



Branches: where am I?

Often, you want to get a summary of where you are in the repository. That's where `git log` comes in.

```
> git log
commit b08107c144003ba42495995d59234595d2d875b4 (HEAD -> master, origin/master, origin/HEAD)
Author: Sumner Evans <me@sumnerevans.com>
Date:   Mon Feb 13 14:35:57 2023 -0700

    fix some things

Signed-off-by: Sumner Evans <me@sumnerevans.com>

commit 6c1f8b53ac774dc6b0376810b4745951bd572519
Merge: 47bc626 67f0f4d
Author: Ethan Richards <42894274+ezrichards@users.noreply.github.com>
Date:   Mon Feb 13 14:06:08 2023 -0700

    Merge branch 'master' of github.com:ColoradoSchoolOfMines/mineshspc.com

...
```

This is mostly useless. Let's make it better.

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git log: but actually good

For `git log` to be useful, you want it to show *all* branches, show a graph, and get rid of most of the details.

```
> git log --all --graph --decorate --oneline
* b08107c (HEAD -> master, origin/master, origin/HEAD) fix some things
* 6c1f8b5 Merge branch 'master' of github.com:ColoradoSchoolOfMines/mineshspc.com
|\
| * 67f0f4d fix background color bug
* | 47bc626 Fix accordion
|/
* 186b52a Archive overhaul
* 385666b Fix accordion arrows
* 3d0f64a Archive preliminary updates
* aaaa02b Update FAQ and archive pages
* b2a64f7 Merge branch 'master' of github.com:ColoradoSchoolOfMines/mineshspc.com
|\
| * 1450745 make footer reveal
* | f7ddfa2 Fix alt text
|/
* 0f89721 created student confirm registration page
* 7b15e86 editing teams: ensure that you can't change from in-person to remote or vice versa
* e15bda6 save team below member list
* 853dcd1 add ability to add team members
```

- Branches are **pointers** to commits.
- Use `git checkout` to move between branches.
- Use `git log` to see where you are.

Merging



Merging: resolving divergent histories⁴

If you want to merge the changes from branch A into another branch B, you need to:

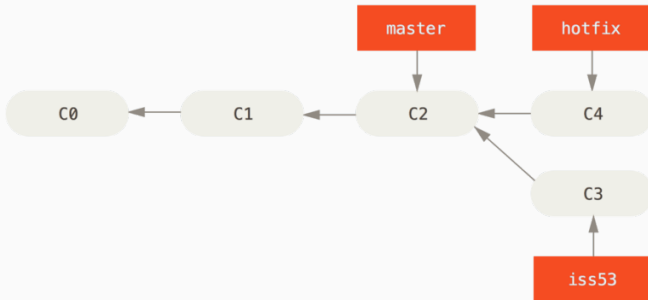
1. Switch to branch B (`git checkout B`)
2. Run `git merge A`.

This will do one of two things: fast-forward or create a merge commit.

⁴Info in the rest of the *Merging* section is mainly from <https://git-scm.com/book/en/v2/Git-Branching-Basic-Branching-and-Merging>

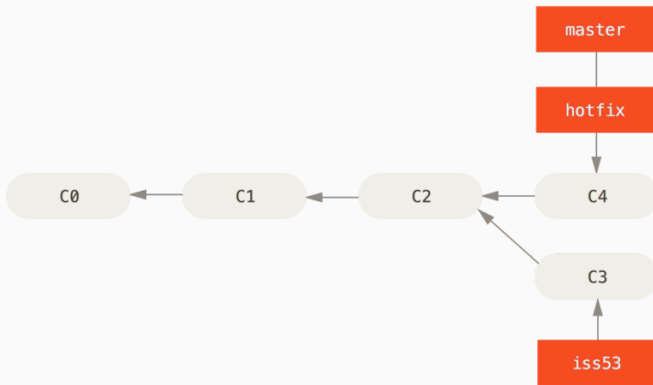
Merging: fast-forwarding

If the branch you are merging is directly ahead of the branch you are merging into, Git will just move the pointer in a **fast-forward merge**.



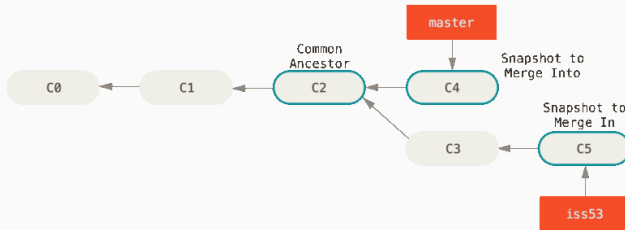
Merging: fast-forwarding

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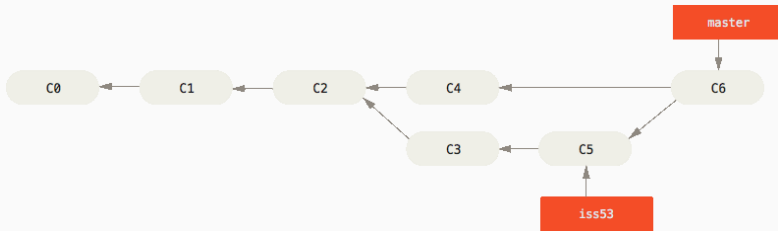
Merging: creating a merge commit

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Merging: resolving conflicts

Occasionally, this process doesn't go smoothly. If you changed the same part of the same file differently in the two branches you're merging, Git won't be able to merge them cleanly.

```
> git merge iss53
Auto-merging index.html
CONFLICT (content): Merge conflict in index.html
Automatic merge failed; fix conflicts and then commit the result.
```

You can always use `git status` to see what has been automatically merged and what files have conflicts.

```
> git status
On branch master
You have unmerged paths.
  (fix conflicts and run "git commit")

Unmerged paths:
  (use "git add <file>..." to mark resolution)

        both modified:   index.html

no changes added to commit (use "git add" and/or "git commit -a")
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Merging: editing files to resolve merge conflicts

You can use a merge tool to resolve conflicts, however I find that it's easier to just manually resolve the conflicts.

Visual Studio Code has a good UI for this. The process you should follow is as follows:

1. Open a file with the conflict.
2. Find one of the conflict-resolution markers.
3. Make edits to resolve the conflict.
4. Run `git add` on the file.
5. Repeat steps 1-4 until all conflicts are resolved.
6. Run `git commit` to commit the merge.

Merging: understanding conflict-resolution markers

In order to find the conflict-resolution markers, search for <<<<<<. Each conflict-resolution block should look something like this:

```
<<<<<< HEAD:index.html
<div id="footer">contact : email.support@github.com</div>
=====
<div id="footer">
  please contact us at support@github.com
</div>
>>>>>> iss53:index.html
```

The first part (between <<<<<< and =====) is what the branch you are merging *into* has. The second part (between ===== and >>>>>>) is what the branch you are merging *from* has.

Sometimes, you just one one side of the conflict, other times you need to be more nuanced in your merge.

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- Merging allows you to pull changes from one branch into another branch.
- Use `git merge A` to merge branch A into the current branch.
- Git will do a fast-forward merge if possible, otherwise it will create a merge commit.
- You might have to resolve merge conflicts.

Rebasing



Rebasing: maintaining linear histories

Most merge commits are useless. They clutter the history, and normally don't add anything of value to the understanding of how the codebase evolved.

```
* b08107c (HEAD -> master, origin/master, origin/HEAD) fix some things
* 6c1f8b5 Merge branch 'master' of github.com:ColoradoSchoolOfMines/mineshspc.com
|\
| * 67f0f4d fix background color bug
* | 47bc626 Fix accordion
|/
* 186b52a Archive overhaul
* 385666b Fix accordion arrows
```

Ideally the above history would be linear:

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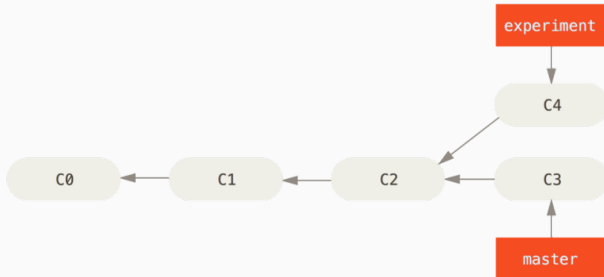
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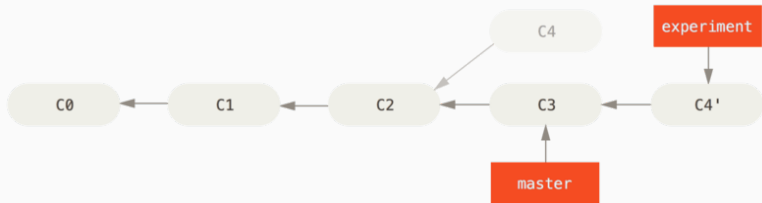
Rebasing: what it does

Rebasing allows you to take the commits from one branch and reapply them on top of another branch.



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Remotes



Remotes: what are they?

A remote is

Advanced Tips

Gitignore

Aliases

How to use Git with a remote

- Add Remote (`git remote add [name] [url]`): Adds a *remote*, a version of the repository hosted externally from your local machine. Most likely on something like Github or an company's internal network.
- Push (`git push -u origin master`): Pushes all changes on the given branch to the remote.
- Clone (`git clone`): Copies the entire repository to the location.
- Fetch (`git fetch`): Retrieves changes from the remote.
- Merge (`git merge`): Merges a branch into another branch. (More on branches later, but in this case, we are merging the `origin/master` into our local `master` branch.)
- Pull (`git pull`): Retrieves any new changes from the remote and merges them with your local changes.

Undoing Things

- Undo the last n commits (given that you haven't pushed them yet) `git reset --hard HEAD~n`
- Undo the n^{th} to last commit by creating a new commit that reverts all of the changes `git revert HEAD~n`
- Somebody's done it before. Just Google it.

When you have changes in your working directory, merges and switching branches (sometimes) doesn't work. You have two main options here:

1. Commit your changes. If you can do this, you should.
2. Occasionally you just don't want to commit. In this case, you will want to *stash* your changes using `git stash [save [stash_name]]`.
3. To un-stash, use `git stash pop`. You may have to resolve merge conflicts.

What is a submodule? It is literally a repository inside of another repository.

Why is this useful? If you have a custom library shared between many projects, you can place that library in a standalone Git repository. Then you can add it as a submodule to your products via `git submodule add [clone_url]`.

The submodule is its own repository so it can be contributed to independently, but it can also be modified and contributed to as a submodule.

The Random Stuff: Aliases

As one would expect from something designed and built by Linus Torvalds, Git supports the concept of *aliasing* one git command to another name.

For example, you might want to alias `checkout` to `co`. This particular alias can be achieved using

```
git config --global alias.co checkout.
```

Now you can invoke `git checkout` using `git co`.

Another option is using your shell's alias functionality. This is often more powerful, but that isn't part of this talk.

The Random Stuff: Resources/Tips

I obviously was unable to tell you about everything you can do with Git. I've really only scratched the surface.

- `man git *`: The man pages on Git are good. Use them as your first line of defense.
- `git-scm.com/book/en/v2`: A huge resource about how to do everything Git.
- `gitignore.io`: Generates a `.gitignore` file for a given project type, OS, and IDE.
- `git reset --hard HEAD`: Undoes all changes since the last commit.
- `git diff HEAD:file1 file2`: Shows the difference between `file1` and `file2`.

Where to Go from Here?

- If you haven't ever used Git, start by using it locally and with Github.
- If you know the basics, start exploring branches. Learn about them and find a flow which works best for you.
- If you know most things about Git, just keep using it. Try and start remembering how to do certain things that you find yourself often Googleing for.

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