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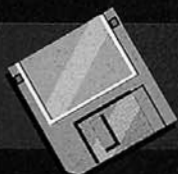


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Special Edition Using America Online, Second Edition

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To Barbara and Grayson with love and appreciation always.

About the Author

Gene Steinberg is an inveterate desktop computer user who first joined America Online in 1989. He quickly became addicted to the new online service and finally earned positions on its computing forum staff. At present, he is forum leader of the service's Macintosh Desktop Video and Multimedia Forum and curator of AOL Portrait Gallery, a library containing photos of America Online members and their families.

In his regular life, Gene has worked at several occupations. He first studied broadcasting in school and then worked for a number of years as a disc jockey and newscaster. Gene is now a full-time writer and computer software and systems consultant. His published work (in addition to the first edition of this book) includes *Using America Online with Your Mac*, *Using America Online with Windows 95*, and *Special Edition Using the Macintosh* for Que Corporation, and feature articles and product reviews for *Macworld*.

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Introduction

The way people live and work has undergone, for all intents and purposes, a revolution. No, not the revolutions of old where governments were overthrown and new leaders took over in the wake of violence and misery. This revolution is peaceful and there are no losers left to suffer, yet it impacts every element of our society.

It is a revolution in communications, and a revolution in the way we live and work. It begins with sending messages to others—not by dropping an envelope in a mail box or picking up the telephone to dial someone, but in sitting down in front of a personal computer, typing a letter to another person anywhere in the world, and having it reach its destination in moments.

It is a revolution in the way people work, where millions of citizens no longer brave the hustle and bustle, traffic jams, and crowded buses and trains. Instead they travel no farther than another room in their home, and again sit in front of a personal computer, perhaps with a fax machine and a modem, to do their regular work.

When millions of viewers watched television coverage of a murder trial involving a famous athlete accused of killing two people, many of them shared their views about the case across a picket fence that consisted not of wood and metal, but of ones and zeros, the binary language of computers—a picket fence found along an Information Superhighway that spanned the entire world. ■

The History of America Online

The dream of an Information Superhighway wasn't even a glimmer in anyone's eye in 1985, when America Online was founded as Quantum Computer Services. In that year, the Apple Macintosh was just a low-powered niche computer, and Microsoft Windows didn't exist. But the Commodore computer was king, and a new, easy-to-use, and affordable telecommunications service was established. It was called Q-Link.

Q-Link might best be compared to a national Bulletin Board Service (BBS), where computer owners could communicate with one another. Members with a specific interest, such as a special type of software, could congregate in a single meeting place called a *forum*. Members could meet for interactive conversations called *chats*.

From this humble beginning, support was added for other computer platforms, such as Apple II and Tandy's DeskMate. The Apple Macintosh and IBM PC and compatibles soon followed.

Today America Online is a publicly owned company that offers an online community for over five million members (with millions more joining each year). The service offers online shopping, information services such as daily newspapers and magazines, and even virtual reference books such as encyclopedias. In addition, America Online lets you reach out beyond the borders of its service, by providing a direct gateway to the Internet, which serves tens of millions of computer users across the world.

But just as important, America Online is like a huge city, with many people hanging out and communicating with one another on a host of subjects, from the time of day and the weather to the state of the nation and the world. The online experience is unlike any you've ever seen. After you have been introduced to America Online, you'll undoubtedly want to stick around.

Some Nuts and Bolts Information About America Online

Our daily press and broadcast news outlets commonly refer to communicating online as being a part of the Information Superhighway, and this is likely an apt expression. But it's an expression designed to represent the entire global information network, not just a single service, and I like to think of that network as more akin to a planet than a highway. So let's consider America Online as one large city (or country) that exists on that planet.

Let's take that description of a city a bit further. Besides all those people, you can find neighborhoods, highways, stores, libraries, and schools. You interact with that community from your own computer and modem, using America Online's unique graphical interface, which transports you from one place to another when you click an icon or type a simple keyboard command.

But behind that easy-to-use technology is a huge network of micro- and minicomputers storing many gigabytes of data, linked to the outside world by advanced fiber-optic telephone cables.

Looking at AOL's Distributed Network

Bear with me for a moment as I give you a few insights into the state-of-the-art equipment that resides at America Online's headquarters in Vienna, Virginia. It is a truly advanced setup.

America Online's computers are built on the client-server model with a peer-to-peer application architecture. The systems consist of Stratus RISC processors running the VOS operating system, Hewlett-Packard RISC processors running the UNIX operating system, and PCs running DOS or OS/2. All these computers are interconnected by high-speed networks. Using a technique called *distributed processing*, they can share information-handling tasks, resulting in extremely fast data processing, enabling thousands of simultaneous transactions. This capability means that thousands of America Online members can log on to the network at the same time without any loss in system performance.

America Online's computer rooms are at a temperature of a constant 70 degrees with low humidity. If a power outage occurs (which has happened occasionally), America Online has a battery backup system that provides full power to the system for a short time, until a diesel generator kicks on and continues to supply juice to keep the computers running. The generator can run up to 72 hours between fill-ups, which is more than enough time to replenish fuel or for power to be restored.

Each day, all the files on America Online's huge rigid drives are backed up. Backups are moved off site, so America Online's huge store of data is always protected in case of an emergency.

Understanding How Your Computer Links with America Online

When you connect to America Online, it seems like such a simple process. For you it involves a single click of the mouse, but behind that simple action is a complex process of data transfers and computer processing.

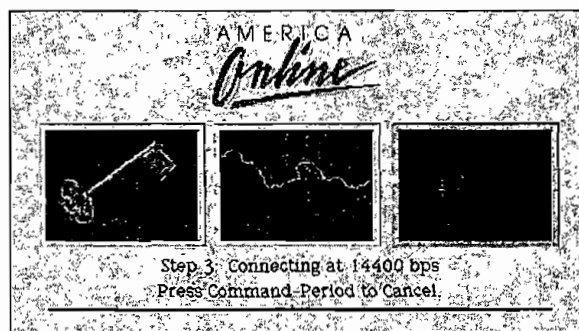
You generally hook up to America Online with two electronic boxes: your computer and a device called a modem. A modem is a small computer that converts a stream of digital ones and zeros into audible tones that are fed through telephone lines and received by another modem at a remote location.

NOTE There is another way to connect to America Online. If your computer is part of a network with TCP/IP access to the Internet, you can access America Online without ever calling a local telephone number via your modem. □

When you first dial up America Online (see fig. I.1), your software dials a local telephone number that connects your computer to a modem on what is called a PAD (packet assembler/disassembler) in the public data network. This PAD, owned and operated by a packet carrier company such as AOLNet, SprintNet, or Tymnet, is called a *node*.

FIG. I.1

Steps 1 and 2 get your modem ready to dial, and then dial the local telephone number; the third step connects to that number.



A *node* can be described as a collection of modems that can handle many connections from computers like yours at one time. These local nodes ensure that users who live far away from America Online's host computers don't have to pay long-distance phone charges for direct access to the America Online network.

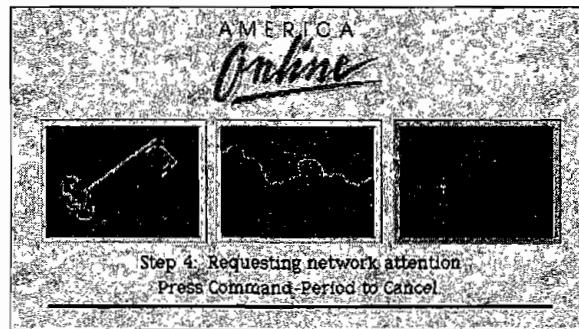
Requesting Network Attention

When your modem dials the local access number, the modem negotiates a connection with the node. Those blips, burps, and squeals that emanate from your modem (if the sound is turned on, of course) describe a process called *handshaking*. Your modem is adjusting its speed and method of communication to the remote modem.

After the connection is established, you receive a message on your computer, as shown in figure I.2.

FIG. I.2

The next stage of hooking up to America Online is to request network attention.

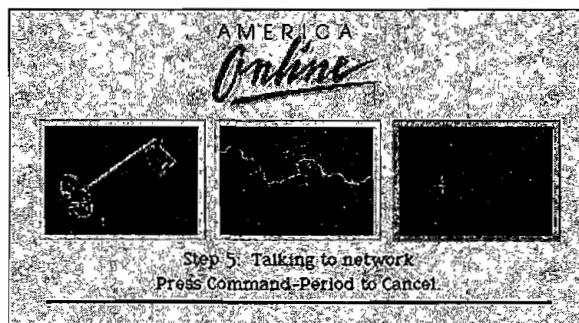


Talking to the Network

The next step is to tell the node who you are and whom you want to call. At this point, your software sends the address to the America Online host computer (see fig. I.3), saying something like, "Hey, I'm an America Online member. Can you connect me?"

FIG. I.3

The next stage of hooking up to America Online is to identify yourself.

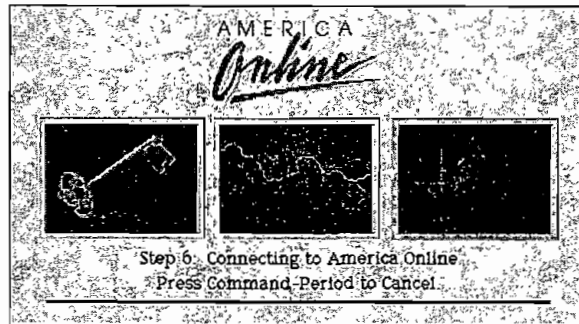


Connecting to America Online

After the carrier service knows the host computer to which you want to connect, the service dials up America Online's host computers by the fastest method possible (see fig. I.4). This setup might change periodically depending on line conditions. But it all happens behind the scenes and takes mere seconds to accomplish.

FIG. I.4

"Hey, there, anybody home?"



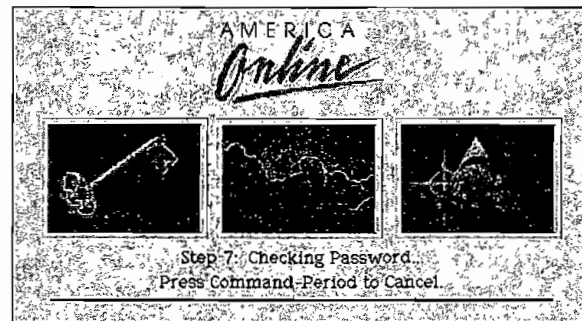
When connection with America Online's host computers has been made, the next step is to knock on the front door.

Using Your Password

Before AOL admits you, America Online's host computers have to know who you are and whether you have an active account. In seconds, the host computers examine the records of millions of America Online members to confirm who you are and to check whether anybody else inside the online community is presently using the same account (see fig. I.5).

FIG. I.5

"Hey, there, who are you?"



Then the front door is opened, and you're welcomed into the sprawling but friendly online universe.

Who Will Find This Book Helpful?

The main portion of this book has been written with the assumption that you are already a member of America Online, and that you have at least some experience using this service or other online services. With this book as a guide, you'll be able to discover many parts of the service you've never visited before and find resources you probably didn't know were available. This book also provides special coverage of the newest versions of America Online's Macintosh and Windows software, and plans for expanding Internet features.

But if you've never logged on to a service like America Online before, I've provided several appendixes that take you through the first steps of joining the service and learning to use AOL's Macintosh and Windows software. After you've begun to travel the sprawling online city, you can use the rest of this book as a reference for places to visit and things to do.

This book is organized into nine parts and the appendixes, each of which covers a specific area of the America Online network and the most effective and fun-filled ways to use the service.

Part I: Getting Online

The first part of this book concentrates on the AOL software for users of the Apple Macintosh and the Microsoft Windows operating system. While some of you have, no doubt, settled on one computing platform, it is more and more common for users to work in both environments. Toward that end, I offer advice on getting the most effective use of these two versions of America Online's software. Throughout the book, I provide instructions for both platforms and use illustrations representing both versions interchangeably, because they are designed to look and operate in very similar ways. In Part I, "Getting Online," you get power-user tips, information about software add-ons to make your online visits more fun, and valuable advice for mobile computing that you can apply not just to your America Online visits, but to general computing purposes too.

Part II: Communicating Online

Because America Online is so close in concept to a large city, communications skills are very important. In Part II, "Communicating Online," you learn how to meet other America Online members, participate in real-time chats and conferences, and use the service's advanced electronic mail and instant messaging capability (the latter is a feature that lets you communicate with fellow members while they are online—on a one-to-one basis). As you probably know, some of the world's most famous personalities (from the business, literary, political, and entertainment worlds) have appeared at AOL's popular interactive conferences.

You also learn the most effective methods of using America Online's active message boards. The elements of a message board are dissected, piece by piece, and you learn how to locate messages that may interest you and how you can get involved in some of these online discussions. There's also helpful information on the rules of the road, so you can learn the elements of online etiquette and present your messages in the most effective manner.

Part III: A Wealth of Entertainment at Your Fingertips

America Online has a huge amount of entertainment-related resources. In Part III, "A Wealth of Information at Your Fingertips," you read about forums devoted to movies,

television, and even radio. There is coverage of areas devoted to lifestyles and interests, ranging from hobbies to special information areas you might want to visit often. You'll discover information about board games, computer games, and video games, and explore forums devoted specifically to the world of sports.

Part IV: Kids and America Online

Because America Online is a family-oriented service, you'll be pleased to know that there are resources designed specifically for kids ages 5 through 14 in Part IV, "Kids and America Online." There are also special features, known as Parental Controls, that allow you to control your children's access to specific online areas and also to direct their ability to connect to the Internet.

Part V: Computing Resources Online

Because you interact with America Online through a personal computer, it's nice to know that there is a tremendous amount of support for computer users on this service. In Part V, "Computing Resources Online," you'll discover where you can learn to use your computer most effectively and how you can contact many of the major hardware and software manufacturers, online, to receive free technical support.

You also learn how to search AOL's huge databases, consisting of tens of thousands of Macintosh and Windows files, to find the software you want. I've included recommendations of some of the most popular files provided by the folks who manage AOL's computing and software forums.

Part VI: News and Reference

America Online can serve as a newspaper, a newsstand, and an encyclopedia. In Part VI, "News and Reference," you'll find resources that cover such topics as the top news stories of the day, updated real estate listings, and assistance to help you cope at tax time.

America Online has a special feature for students where they can literally page an online teacher for help with homework or a special research project. You can also continue your education during your online visits using the facilities offered by a number of educational institutions.

Part VII: Personal Finance

A growing number of online users actually buy popular merchandise at special prices on America Online. In Part VII, "Personal Finance," you'll learn the secrets of online shopping, check the latest stock market prices, and learn more about the firms you want to add to your portfolio.

Because shopping goes hand-in-hand with travel, you'll read about America Online's resources for travel information and you'll discover how you can easily make your own airline, hotel, and car rental reservations during your online visits.

Part VIII: Entering the Information Superhighway

This introduction has provided just a brief overview of the Information Superhighway. Part VIII, “Entering the Information Superhighway,” explores the subject in much more detail. You learn how to tap a global resource for information and discussion areas right from America Online.

There’s extensive coverage of such features as Internet e-mail, database searches, UseNet discussion groups, and the latest and perhaps the fastest growing Internet resource, the World Wide Web. All of these features, and more, are available to you when you log onto America Online.

In addition, I’ll tell you how you can access the World Wide Web on AOL while continuing to use other browser software, such as Microsoft’s Internet Explorer or Netscape.

Part IX: Making Your Online Visits More Productive

Not only does this book deal with ways to save money by using America Online’s resources the next time you buy a product, but Part IX tells you how you can reduce your online charges as well.

With the growing popularity of low-cost high-speed modems, and the availability of high-speed access to America Online, you’ll learn tips and tricks for improved connections and faster throughput. There’s also information on how to tweak your modem for best performance and how best to deal with connection problems.

Part X: Appendixes

Appendixes A–D serve as tutorials on joining America Online and using the software. Appendix D is a glossary of terminology and Appendix E lists America Online keywords, organized by subject matter.

Conventions Used in This Book

This book uses various conventions designed to make it easier to use. That way, you can quickly and easily learn the most important features of an America Online department or program feature and how to access them.

With most programs, you can use the mouse or keyboard to perform operations. The keyboard procedures may include shortcut key combinations or mnemonic keys.

In this book, key combinations for the Microsoft Windows environment are joined with plus signs (+). For example, Ctrl+X means hold down the Ctrl key, press the X key, and then release both keys. Some menu and dialog box options have underlined or highlighted characters that indicate mnemonic keys. To choose such an option using the

mnemonic key, press the Alt key and then press the indicated mnemonic key. In this book, mnemonic keys are underscored: for example, File.

Key combinations for the Macintosh are separated with a hyphen (-). The ⌘ symbol means to hold down the Apple command key on your keyboard and then press the mnemonic key.

The book uses several other typeface enhancements to indicate special text, as indicated in the following table.

Typeface	Meaning
<i>Italic</i>	Italic is used to indicate variables in commands or addresses, and also terms used for the first time.
Bold	Bold is used for text you type and for Internet addresses. AOL keywords are also in bold.
Computer type	This special type is used for on-screen messages and for commands (such as the DOS COPY or UNIX cp command).

TIP

Tips suggest easier or alternative methods of executing a procedure.

NOTE Notes provide additional information that may help you avoid problems or offer advice or general information related to the topic at hand. □

CAUTION

Cautions warn you of hazardous procedures and situations that can lead to unexpected or unpredictable results, including data loss or system damage.


TROUBLESHOOTING

Troubleshooting sections anticipate common problems—and then provide you with practical suggestions for solving those problems.

Cross-references direct you to related information in other parts of the book.

► **See** “Making E-Mail Work for You,” p. 95

Faster Than a Speeding Screenshot

Since 1994, I have written several books about America Online. Every time I revise one of my books, or write a new one, I've observed vast changes and improvements in the way the service is run and the way it looks.

As with any large city, America Online is growing and changing constantly. You will find that the service's look and feel develops and improves still further over time. Some of the places pictured in this book might look a little different on your screen, too. But the information in these pages will be useful for a long time as a guide to learning about America Online.

As you begin to explore the online community, keep this book at hand. When you have a question or want to learn more about a particular place, you can move directly to that chapter for the information you want.

I began writing books about America Online as an experienced visitor to the service. But as the writing progressed, I explored many of the nooks and crannies in the online city that I had never visited before. The process has been a tremendous, rewarding, learning experience.

The online community has, over the years, become my second home. It's a place where I can meet and interact with my friends and even conduct business. I have made deals and begun work projects with people whom I know only by e-mail.

Indeed, the dream of the Information Superhighway has, to us, become an up-close and personal reality, and I want you to share that dream, too. Let the pages that follow be your starting point on the road to a learning experience that might be unlike any other you've ever had.

Gene Steinberg

Scottsdale, Arizona

America Online address: aflgenes@aol.com

Getting Online

- 1 Getting Past the Opening Screen 15
- 2 How (and Why) to Upgrade Your AOL Software 27
- 3 Getting the Most from AOL's Macintosh Software 37
- 4 Getting the Most from AOL's Windows Software 53
- 5 America Online and Mobile Computing 65
- 6 Where Do We Begin? 81

Getting Past the Opening Screen

America Online has become the number one online service in the world for good reason. The software is relatively easy to use, and the online interface is friendly and accommodating.

Behind its simple, accessible interface, America Online's software offers a wealth of powerful features that allow you to enjoy a huge array of services and to explore the vast, uncharted waters of the worldwide Internet network.

Throughout this book, I want you to get used to some simple steps that will allow you to easily navigate AOL's vast landscape via keystrokes. I will often describe a particular area's location by its keyword, a keyboard command that you can specify *only* while you're connected to America Online. Keywords will take you just about anywhere on America Online, even if you don't know the exact route.

To use a keyword, press $\mathcal{H}$ -K if you're using a Macintosh or Ctrl+K for Windows; then enter the keyword in the entry field of the Keyword dialog box (see fig. 1.1). Press Enter, and in just a few seconds, you'll

Mac and Windows AOL features

Learn the differences between AOL's Mac and Windows software.

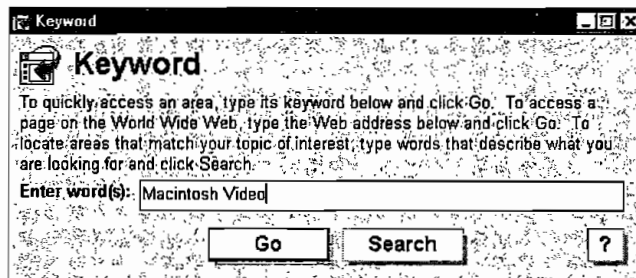
What you get when you upgrade

Explore the real differences among the various AOL software versions.

be transported to the place you want to visit. If the keyword that you enter is wrong, you'll see a message to that effect, and you'll have the option to search some alternate keywords to see which one is correct. ■■

FIG. 1.1

Use a keyword to go to a specific spot on America Online.



This book is filled with tips and tricks for making your online visits more fun and more productive. In addition, many chapters contain helpful troubleshooting advice, so if you run into a problem, you can find a simple solution. America Online has its own support area, too, conducted in a department that is free of online charges.

If you run into chronic problems in getting and staying online, you'll first want to read Chapter 41, "Secrets of High-Speed Access on AOL," for advice on coping with such difficulties and on configuring your modem for best performance.

If you still have a problem getting connected consistently, use the keyword **Help**. You'll go to AOL's customer service area, where you can get further assistance via an extensive list of text-based information. You'll also have access to an area called Tech Live, where you can have an online conversation with an AOL representative about your problem.

If You Are New to America Online

This book is written with the assumption that you are already an AOL member and that you have your software installed, so that you're ready to go out and enjoy your experiences in cyberspace.

I realize, though, that some of you are still fence-sitters. You've read about America Online in a magazine or your daily newspaper, or you've seen some of the ads on national TV, and you're curious enough to want to know what the service is all about. Perhaps you're using this book as a guidepost to help you decide whether it's worth signing up or not.

If you're in this category, I won't give you a sales pitch and say that you should join America Online, except for this: I became an AOL member in 1989, and I have never

looked back. The service has been a regular source of useful information and fun for me and my 10-year-old son (who has become a regular online visitor).

AOL also serves an important business function for me: the service allows me to communicate with my publisher and with my clients without ever leaving my home office. Through AOL's Internet capability, I'm able to send e-mail across the world and to log on to remote sites to obtain files that I need in my work as a writer and consultant.

I hope that this book will whet your appetite to explore the service, taking advantage of one of those 15-free-hour disks to experience America Online firsthand. If you haven't yet received one of those disks (or the disks that you find in a magazine are for a PC and you've got a Mac, for example), you can call America Online directly and ask for a sign-up kit. The number is (800) 827-6364.

See you online!

The First Bold Steps

If you haven't yet established an account and signed on, read the back of this book first. Seriously! The first three appendices are designed to be a full-featured tutorial for America Online. Appendix A, "If You're New to the Online World," takes you through the process of logging on to America Online for the first time, creating your online account, and taking a brief tour of the service.

In Appendix B and Appendix C, I dissect the Apple Macintosh and Windows versions of AOL's software, respectively, covering all the hidden features that you won't see described fully in the help menus.

After reading those sections, you'll soon become adept at using AOL's Mac and Windows software to navigate the service, and you'll be ready for the main event. In the rest of this book, I will take you through every department of America Online and also provide detailed coverage of all the newest Internet access features.

Which Platform Is Best for AOL?

Nope, I will not get involved in a platform war. More and more folks have a Mac at home and a Windows-based PC at work, or vice versa. Having to adapt to both computing platforms is normal, and you should be able to enjoy your online visits fully no matter which version of the software you use. The following section details the differences between the Mac and Windows AOL software versions.

NOTE If you're really interested in engaging in an online discussion about the merits of the Mac versus the Windows operating systems, you'll find ongoing discussions on the topic in the Windows magazine forum on AOL (keyword: **Windows**, then click the magazine's icon), Power Macintosh forum (keyword: **PowerMac**), and the Mac Operating Systems Forum (keyword: **MOS**). Several Internet Newsgroups also contain discussions (and sometimes outright arguments) about this, too. Before you plunge into those discussions, however, you'll want to read Chapters 9, "Using America Online Message Boards" and 32, "Joining and Participating in Internet Newsgroups" of this book. □

The Differences Between AOL for Macintosh and AOL for Windows

With a few exceptions here and there, I've included illustrations and instructions for the Macintosh and Windows versions of AOL software interchangeably. That's because the programs are meant to interface with you, the member, in a similar manner. AOL's software development teams have also worked hard to make both the Mac and Windows offer a similar user experience, in much the same way as the Mac and Windows versions of Microsoft Office software look and feel the same on the two computing platforms.

If you routinely switch between computing platforms, however, you'll encounter some differences. To a great extent, these differences are due to ways in which document windows and dialog boxes are displayed.

The following sections show the differences in the features of the Mac and Windows versions of AOL software.

Macintosh-only Features

The following features of Macintosh version 3.0 of the AOL software are not duplicated in the Windows version. Minor differences exist in the graphic formats supported (such as PICT on the Mac and BMP on the PC), but I won't detail them here.

- *Text-to-speech capability.* This feature uses Apple's PlainTalk and Speech Manager technologies, which allow text windows, chats, and Instant Messages to be spoken in voices that you select.
- *QuickTime movie support.* This feature allows movies created in Apple's QuickTime format to be played through AOL's software (provided that you have Apple's QuickTime System extension installed).
- *Spell Checking.* E-mail messages you write in the Mac version of AOL software can be spell-checked before you send them.

- ❑ *Apple Guide Help.* Apple's interactive help feature, Apple Guide, is fully supported on your Mac AOL software.

Windows-only Features

The following features of Windows version 3.0 of the AOL software are not duplicated (or available in a different form) in the Macintosh version. Minor differences exist in the graphic formats supported (such as PICT on the Mac and BMP on the PC), but I won't detail them here.

- ❑ *Graphics editing tools.* When you have a graphic image open in your AOL software, the Show Tools command (Edit menu) displays a toolbar that enables you to rotate, scale, and make minor adjustments in a graphic file.
- ❑ *Windows AVI movies.* This feature allows you to play movies created in AVI format, if you have the proper AVI drivers installed.
- ❑ *Windows help.* Windows online help lets you print help text windows for later review.

NOTE Because AOL's Mac and Windows software is in a constant state of development, you can expect that one platform's feature-set will occasionally leap-frog the other, and vice versa. ❑

Reviewing the AOL Software Changes

This book is written with the assumption that you will want to use the very latest AOL software, which at this writing is version 3.0. A good way to see if an upgrade makes sense to you is to see the list of changes from version to version. I'll summarize the newest AOL features, the ones described in detail throughout this book, in Chapter 2. In the meantime, here's a brief history of the changes and enhancements that AOL software has seen over the last few years.

Macintosh AOL 2.1

This version of AOL's software added the features described in the following sections.

High-Speed Support The program's telecommunications capabilities are updated to support connection at 9,600 bits per second and 14,400 bps, using AOL's expanded network of AOLNet and SprintNet access numbers. Modem personality files are available to provide optimum performance with most popular modems.

Localities *Localities* are files that contain connection setups to access AOL. You can create such setups for your home, for your office, and for use while you're on the road. Each Locality contains your connection numbers, any options that you select, and data on the kind of modem that you're using. (You can specify your desktop modem for home or office use and your PowerBook's or Duo's modem for use while you're traveling, for example.)

Multiple File Uploads This feature allows you to attach more than one file to an e-mail message and then to compress it with Aladdin's StuffIt program (a popular Mac compression program that's built into AOL's software). Support for the PKZip format (a PC compression technique) also is included.

Macintosh AOL 2.5 and 2.5.1

When you install this version of AOL's software, the service gives you a new interface, graphics-viewing options and other features that are described in the following sections.

New AOL Interface The differences between this version of AOL software and previous versions are obvious as soon as you log on. You'll see the following features:

- A new Main Menu screen, offering 14 departments through which you can access all services on AOL.
- When you log on to AOL, a screen called In the Spotlight appears above the Main Menu and informs you about featured areas and the latest news, and also tells you whether you've got e-mail waiting.

New Multimedia Capabilities AOL's graphical features are enhanced by an instant-photo feature that displays a picture on your screen while a file is being downloaded. When you check out a graphic file online, you'll find that many files offer miniature (*thumbnail*) views of the graphic.

In addition, you can open and view graphics created in ART, GIF, JPEG, and PICT formats, which means that you no longer have to download a separate viewer program to view many of the files that you download.

CAUTION

Viewing graphics with AOL's Macintosh software requires System 7.0 or later and a color-capable Macintosh (68020 CPU or better). If you don't need to view graphic files, you can use a black-and-white Mac (68000 CPU) and System 6.0.7 or later.

Additional Member Features In addition to the new interface, you have an assortment of new options that make your online visits more efficient and fun. These features include the following:

- Additional member preferences that confirm your actions when you designate e-mail with the Send Later option and when you add something to the Download Manager.
- You can use the Command key (⌘) to choose multiple, non-consecutive entries from your Address Book.
- You can add color to your e-mail for display on a color Macintosh. This option is available in the Edit menu.

Personal Choices You can customize four elements of your AOL software setup by accessing a single feature: Personal Choices.

Among the services and features that you can customize are:

- *Parental Controls.* This feature restricts access to certain parts of the service—a useful feature if you have children using your AOL account.
- *Marketing Preferences.* You can use this feature to allow AOL to send you special offers about new products from time to time.
- *Set Preferences.* This feature enables you to set your regular AOL program preferences.

In addition, you can add and delete screen names and also edit your member profile from the Personal Choices dialog box.

Mac AOL 2.6

This version of AOL's software was released in the spring of 1995. The software contains the added features described in the following sections.

Apple Speech Manager Support If you have Apple's PlainTalk or Speech Manager software installed, you can take advantage of the following new features:

- *Text-to-Speech.* This feature allows your Mac to read selected text, chat-room comments, and instant messages to you.
- *Speak Unknown Users.* This feature activates speech playback for selected text and for items typed in a chat-room window or contained in an instant message without having to preselect a sound for a particular member.

- *Allow Simultaneous Speech.* This feature allows your Mac to recite two instant messages to you at the same time (which, I suppose, creates a chorus effect, if you like such things).
- *Set Default Voices.* This feature allows you to attach a particular voice to an AOL member.

Multimedia Support America Online software now can play System 7 sound and MIDI sound files. You can also open and play QuickTime movies if you have Apple's QuickTime System extension installed.

World Wide Web Browser This feature was offered as a separate application that is linked to your Mac AOL software.

Background Downloading You can download files in the background while doing other work on AOL. You can read your newsgroups while you download your files, chat in the lobby, or look for more files during downloading. When you sign off during a background download, you can finish your download at another time, when you log on to AOL again. You cannot upload files in the background, however.

Mac AOL 2.7

This is the version of AOL software that shipped in the spring of 1996. It is the one still provided on floppy disks when you join AOL. You'll be able to upgrade to version 3.0 from AOL's free Upgrade area (keyword: **Upgrade**) or if you install from a CD-ROM.

Online Database Repair Tool One of the banes of the Mac AOL user's experience was occasional corruption of the Online Database file if your Mac crashed. This file contains your account information and other data AOL's program needs to run. Until now, some users managed to get around this problem by reinstalling the software from scratch, or running the Online Database file through Apple's ResEdit resource manager software. With Mac AOL 2.7, AOL has incorporated a special repair tool that will fix most cases of corruption of this file.

Updated World Wide Web Browser Mac AOL 2.7 offers an improved World Wide Web browser program, with more accurate translation of WWW pages. The Print command from the File menu provides fully formatted output of the active WWW page. There are also bug fixes, including improved communication with the regular Mac software and support for Macintosh drag-and-drop.

Windows AOL 2.0

Version 2.0 of AOL's Windows software allows members in the Windows environment to share many of the new interface capabilities offered in the Macintosh version. The following sections cover some of the specifics.

New AOL Interface The differences between this version of AOL software and previous versions are obvious as soon as you log on. You'll see the following features:

- A new Main Menu screen, offering 14 departments through which you can access all services on AOL.
- When you log on to AOL, the top screen, called In the Spotlight, appears above the Main Menu and informs you about featured areas and the latest news, and also tells you whether you have any e-mail waiting.

New Multimedia Capabilities AOL's graphical features are enhanced by an instant-photo feature that lets you see a picture appear on your screen as it's being downloaded. When you check out a graphic file online, you'll find many offer a miniature (thumbnail) view of what the file actually looks like.

In addition, you can open and view graphics created in the ART, BMP, GIF, and JPEG formats, which means that you no longer have to download a separate viewer program to view many of the files you download.

Personal Choices You can customize four elements of your AOL software setup by accessing a single feature, Personal Choices. Among the services and features that you can customize are:

- *Parental Controls.* This feature restricts access to certain parts of the service—a useful feature if you have children using your AOL account.
- *Marketing Preferences.* You can use this feature to allow AOL to send you special offers about new products from time to time.
- *Set Preferences.* This feature enables you to set your regular AOL program preferences.

In addition, you can add and delete screen names and also edit your member profile from the Personal Choices dialog box.

FlashSessions A feature first introduced in the Mac AOL software has been added to the Windows version. FlashSessions allow you to run an automated session to send and receive e-mail and to download attached files or files added to the program's Download Manager. It also helps you reduce your online charges by making your sessions more efficient.

Windows AOL 2.5

This version of Windows AOL software was released in the spring of 1995. The software includes the new features described in the following sections.

New Install Program The SETUP.EXE program has been redesigned to provide better performance and enhanced upgrading capability from older AOL software versions. The new installer offers the following features:

- Improved capability to detect modems
- Improved progress feedback during installation
- Automatic transfer of all artwork and account information from previous versions during the upgrade process

Favorite Places This feature allows you to easily mark your favorite AOL and Internet areas so that you can revisit them easily by choosing them from a directory listing.

Personal Filing Cabinet Personal Filing Cabinet is an organization tool that enables you to assemble your e-mail, downloaded files, list of Favorite Places (described in the following section), and newsgroups in a single location. This feature also supports the following capabilities:

- You can drag and drop items from one folder into another folder.
- You can select multiple items by Shift+clicking consecutive items and Ctrl+clicking non-consecutive items.
- You can create and delete folders for personalized file organization.
- You can search the material in the Personal Filing Cabinet.

World Wide Web Browser This feature, integrated into your AOL software, enables you to access World Wide Web pages on the Internet.

New Compression Support AOL's automatic decompression tool now supports ZIP files compressed with PKZip 2.0 and later.

Multimedia Support America Online's Windows software can now play WAV, MIDI, and AVI files. Simply open the File menu and choose the Open command; then select the file. To take advantage of this feature, you need a sound card for sound support and AVI drivers to play AVI movies. Sounds play automatically after they are downloaded.

Drag-and-Drop Support You can drag selected text from one open window and drop it into another window by using the Ctrl+click method. You can attach files to e-mail by clicking the file in File Manager and dragging it to the Attach File icon in the mail form. To play a sound, drag the sound icon from File Manager to any empty space in the AOL

for Windows application. For the sound feature to work, you need to have a sound card properly installed.

Background Downloading You can download files in the background while doing other work on AOL. You can read your newsgroups while you download your files, chat in the lobby, or browse for more files while downloading. When you sign off during a background download, you can finish your download at another time, when you log on to AOL again. You cannot upload files in the background, however.

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From Here...

Consider this chapter an introduction to the rapidly changing online landscape at America Online. Whether you're a new member or you've been active for a while, you can see the way the access software has developed over time, and the full range of features worth exploring further. I want you to consider this book to be a fun book, not a textbook, and I hope that you will keep it on hand for convenient reference as you become more involved with the online community.

AOL's software has undergone big changes over the years, and there's been a more compelling reason over time to upgrade to the newest version. AOL makes it easy, because the latest software is always free online, and available in an area you can reach via the keyword **Upgrade**.

But the preceding is only a taste of what is to come. In Chapter 2, I'll tell you all about version 3.0 of AOL's Mac and Windows software, both of which provide a whole new array of features, including the ability to run third-party Internet software as part of your AOL session without having to set up anything special.

How (and Why) to Upgrade Your AOL Software

It's a sure thing that constant software upgrades can bring many a headache. In addition to having to pay money for the new software, you have to get used to a new interface, new manuals, and perhaps new bugs.

Because the online universe is very competitive and many services are vying for your membership, AOL has been steadily upgrading its software to offer an improved user experience. But, unlike many of those productivity programs, AOL's software upgrades are always available online, free of charge. And there's plenty of helpful information, such as this book, to guide you through all the new features. ■

AOL's new software

Learn about the new features in version 3.0 of AOL's Mac and Windows software.

Where to get your upgrade

Learn where to download your copy of the new AOL software without paying for the online time.

If you're a Windows 3.1 user

Does it really make a big difference if you're using Windows 3.1 or Windows 95 with AOL?

New AOL Features

In the previous chapter, I detailed the progression of AOL's software, showing you all the changes beginning with version 2.0 of AOL's Mac and Windows software. If you are using any of those versions, no doubt you're wondering just what's so special about version 3.0, and whether it makes sense for you to upgrade.

The descriptions and illustrations shown in this book reflect the newest versions of the software. And when you see them, perhaps you'll see why I strongly recommend your upgrade. Just take a look at the list of new features offered below and you'll see many compelling reasons to get that AOL upgrade.

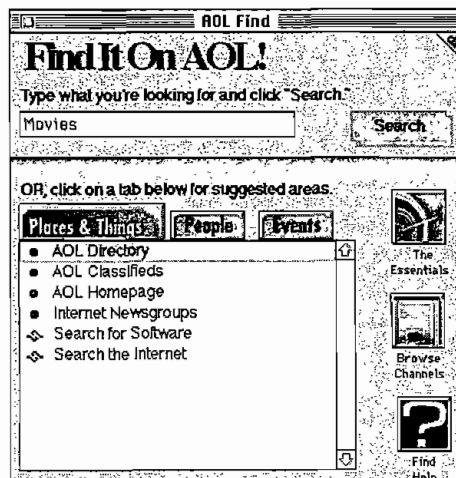
Mac AOL 3.0

In the fall of 1996, AOL made some major changes to the Macintosh software. These changes not only brought the software in line with the features offered in the Windows version, but surpassed it in some respects. They all combine to take you to a new level of user friendliness when you visit AOL. Here are some of the highlights of the new software.

Updated User Interface The new Mac AOL software brings with it big changes in the sign-off and sign-on screens. There's an updated Welcome menu, and the Main menu has been replaced with a Channels screen, offering a host of new online areas for you to visit. As you travel around AOL, you'll find that many of your favorite online departments have undergone reorganization that's available only with the new AOL software. Finding your way around is enhanced by a new integrated Find feature (see fig. 2.1) that lets you look for members, places, files, and upcoming online events, all from a simple, friendly interface.

FIG. 2.1

AOL's new Find feature lets you quickly locate people and places online.



Progressive Artwork Downloading In the past, whenever you visited a new online area in which an artwork download to your computer was necessary, things came to a screeching halt. You had to sit by for seconds and sometimes minutes, observing a procession of progress bars, till the artwork download was done.

Not so with Mac AOL 3.0. Using a feature called Smart Art, whenever you enter a new area that offers updated artwork, you can go about your business and enjoy the area without interruption. You'll see a skeleton window appear on your screen, with generic AOL icons replacing the fancy buttons. As you continue to browse through the area, the artwork will be transferred in the background. You'll see the outlines of the new AOL area change magically before your eyes until the artwork download is done (you'll see the flashing lights on your modem as all this is happening, if you have an external modem).

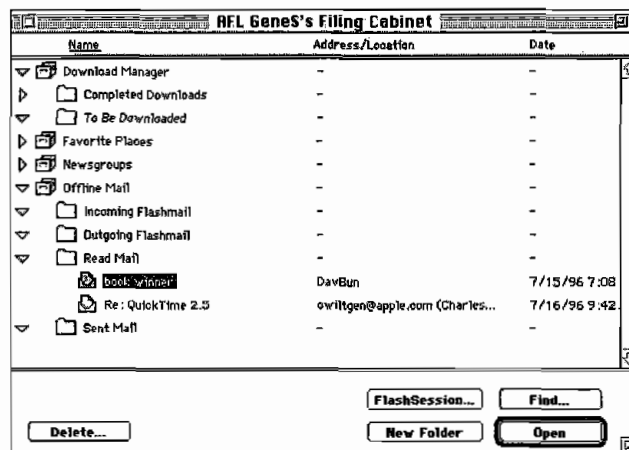
If you decide to close the new area's document window before the artwork is done, the download stops. It won't resume until or unless you visit that area again. And, of course, when the artwork download is finished, it's not repeated unless the artwork, or part of it, has changed.

Adjustable Artwork Database Sizing An important feature of AOL's World Wide Web browser has been carried over to the regular software, too. You have a new Art Storage Preferences option that lets you choose the maximum size of the downloaded artwork you receive from AOL. When the size you set is reached, the oldest, least used artwork will be cleared first.

Personal Filing Cabinet Personal Filing Cabinet (see fig. 2.2) is an organizational tool that enables you to assemble your e-mail, downloaded files, list of Favorite Places (described in the following section), and newsgroups in a single location. This feature also supports the following capabilities:

FIG. 2.2

The Mac version of AOL's Personal Filing Cabinet puts your stored mail and other stuff in a convenient Finder-like window for easy access and editing.

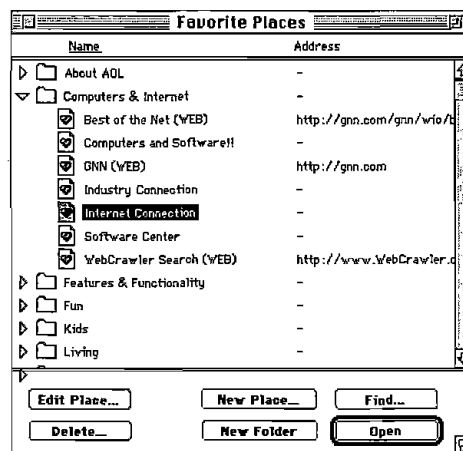


- You can drag and drop items from one folder into another folder.
- You can select multiple items by Shift+clicking consecutive items and Command+clicking non-consecutive items.
- You can create and delete folders for personalized file organization.
- You can search the material in the Personal Filing Cabinet.

Favorite Places This feature allows you to easily mark your favorite AOL and Internet areas (see fig. 2.3) so that you can revisit them easily by choosing them from a directory listing.

FIG. 2.3

Favorite Places is a feature that first started in the Windows AOL version, letting you build a custom list of your favorite online spots.



Improved World Wide Web Browser The Mac WWW browser is based on Microsoft's Internet Explorer and is now fully integrated into the regular AOL program. It's no longer a separate program that launches when you call up a WWW page. The browser appears as a standard AOL document window and offers speedier retrieval of Web pages. The new browser includes support for many of the HTML 3.0 features you find in Netscape. These include Netscape frames, which formats a WWW page as a set of separate panes, each with its own scrollable area.

Enhanced E-Mail Form The e-mail form has been enhanced to make it easier to use. You'll also find it more convenient to format your e-mail for the best possible appearance.

New Toolbar AOL's software now has a handy, color toolbar that puts your favorite features just a click away. The toolbar can be moved or hidden if you prefer.

Drag-and-Drop Support There's now support for Apple's drag-and-drop feature, which allows you to drag elements from one document window and place them in another (or on your Mac's desktop).

Support for Third-Party Internet Software With Mac AOL 3.0, you can now run a third-party Internet program, such as another WWW browser or Internet Relay Chat client, while you're logged on to AOL. All you have to do is open those programs and continue with your online session.

This feature, however, works with a regular connection to one of AOL's telephone access numbers. It doesn't work if you're logged on to AOL via PPP or SLIP Internet access (in which case you can already run that third-party Internet software).

Apple Guide Support You have full support for Apple Guide's interactive help features, which guide you through the most complex steps in using your AOL software.

E-Mail Spell Checker You can now spell check your AOL e-mail messages, so you can be sure everything is spelled properly before you send your e-mail.

Buddy Lists Is your AOL friend online? Whenever he or she logs on, you'll know with AOL's Buddy Lists feature. It takes just minutes to configure with the list screen names you want Buddy Lists to recognize. And if you want privacy, you can also bar your screen name from appearing on other Buddy Lists.

New Address Book AOL's Address Book has been redesigned to make it easier for you to build a personal listing of your online friends and colleagues.

Downloadable Software Enhancements The new AOL software is extensible, meaning that new features can be downloaded to your computer to expand the capabilities. As updates become available, you'll be offered either an opportunity to download them from a special software library, or they will be offered to you before you log off the service. You'll find, as a result, that the look and feel of the program will evolve over time as more updates are provided. Minor program bug fixes can also be offered in this way.

Windows AOL 3.0

In the summer of 1996, AOL made some major changes to the Windows client software. They all combine to take you to a new level of user friendliness when you visit AOL. And you'll find general performance is much better, too. Here are some of the highlights of the new software.

Updated User Interface The new Windows AOL software brings with it big changes in the sign-off and sign-on screens. There's an updated Welcome menu, and the Main menu has been replaced with a Channels screen, offering a host of new online areas for you to visit. As you travel around AOL, you'll find that many of your favorite online departments have undergone reorganization that's available only with the new AOL software. Finding your way around is enhanced by a new integrated Find feature that lets you look for members, places, files, and upcoming online events, all from a simple, friendly interface.

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Progressive Artwork Downloading In the past, whenever you visited a new online area in which an artwork download to your computer was necessary, things came to a halt. You had to sit by for seconds and sometimes minutes, observing a procession of progress bars, till the artwork download was done.

It won't happen anymore with Windows AOL 3.0. Using a feature called Smart Art, whenever you enter a new area that offers updated artwork, you can go about your business and enjoy the area without interruption. You'll see a skeleton window appear on your screen, with generic AOL icons replacing the fancy buttons. As you continue to browse through the area, the artwork will proceed to be transferred in the background. You'll see the outlines of the new AOL area change magically before your eyes until the artwork download is done (you'll see the flashing lights on your modem as all this is happening).

If you decide to close the new area's document window before the artwork is done, the download stops. It won't resume until or unless you visit that area again. And, of course, when the artwork download is finished, it's not repeated unless it's changed.

Adjustable Artwork Database Sizing An important feature of AOL's World Wide Web browser has been carried over to the regular software, too. You have a new Graphics Viewing Preferences option that lets you choose the maximum size of the downloaded artwork you receive from AOL. When the size you set is reached, the oldest, least-used artwork will be cleared first.

Adjustable Personal Filing Cabinet Size To keep your Personal Filing Cabinet from overwhelming your hard drive, there's now a feature to set the maximum size of the file. It's part of the Personal Filing Cabinet choices in your AOL program preferences.

Improved World Wide Web Browser The integrated WWW browser includes support for many of the HTML 3.0 features you find in Netscape. These include Netscape frames, which formats a WWW page as a set of separate panes, each with its own scrollable area.

Enhanced E-Mail Form There's a new feature on your e-mail and instant message forms, which looks like the formatting toolbar you find on many word processor programs. This toolbar provides a set of basic text-formatting features, such as changing the color of your text or the background of your message. You can change point sizes, and text styling, and add hyperlinks to your favorite online area (including an Internet-based source).

New Flashbar AOL's handy Flashbar has been updated with new colorful icons, and more logical choices. And, if you somehow forget what a particular Flashbar icon means, just hold the mouse cursor above that icon, and in a few seconds you'll see a handy display showing its purpose.

Support for Third-Party Internet Software In the past, whenever you wanted to use another WWW browser, FTP, or Internet Relay Chat program with your AOL session, you had to go through some convoluted steps in installing a custom Winsock.dll file in your Windows directory.

With Windows AOL 3.0, there's a feature that auto-loads AOL's own Winsock software whenever the program is launched. To use a third-party Internet program, all you have to do is open it and use it.

This feature, however, works with a regular connection to one of AOL's telephone access numbers. It doesn't work if you're using another Winsock.dll file, say to allow you PPP or SLIP Internet access.

Right Mouse Button Support At last AOL has recognized that extra button on your mouse. You'll find that when you click the right mouse button while in a text document, it brings up a special shortcut menu in your AOL software. The special menu provides a full range of text-formatting features, which are similar to those offered via the toolbar in your AOL e-mail form.

Buddy Lists Is your AOL friend online? Whenever he or she logs on, you'll know with AOL's Buddy Lists feature. It takes just minutes to configure with the list screen names you want Buddy Lists to recognize. And if you want privacy, you can also bar your screen name from appearing on other Buddy Lists.

Downloadable Software Enhancements The new AOL software is extensible, meaning that new features can be downloaded to your computer to expand the capabilities. As updates become available, you'll be offered either an opportunity to download them from a special software library, or they will be offered to you before you log off the service. You'll find, as a result, that the look and feel of the program will evolve over time as more updates are provided. Minor program bug fixes can also be offered in this way.

Speedy Application Launches When you open your Windows AOL software, you'll find the program launches much faster, shaving many seconds off the time it takes before the program is ready for you to begin your online visit.

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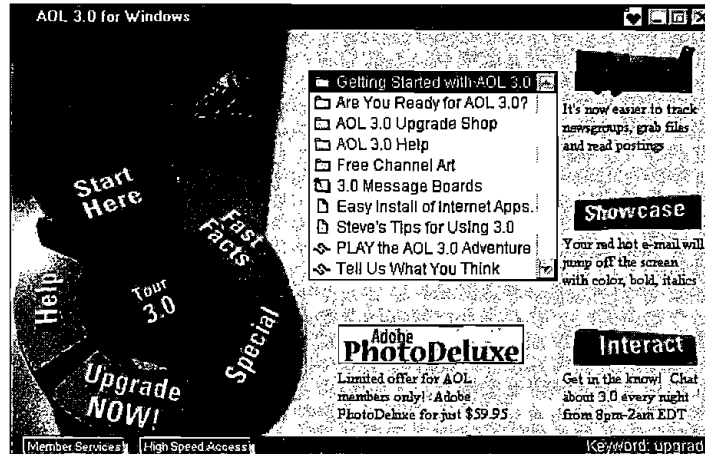
Where to Get the Latest AOL Software

The nicest thing about the newest versions of AOL software is the lack of the upgrade notice and the little check boxes for you to add your credit card number. That's because AOL's software upgrades are free, and available online as soon as the product is released.

To get your AOL upgrade, simply use the keyword **Upgrade** (see fig. 2.4). You'll be taken to an area free of online charges, and given the chance to download the latest software.

FIG. 2.4

AOL's Upgrade center provides the latest service software for you to download.



TIP

To keep your AOL software download-free, choose the Download Now option in AOL's Upgrade center. The Download Later option returns you to the paying area, which means the download will be on your time, not AOL's.

During the early phases of an AOL software introduction, you may find the pre-release version offered in a public preview. This is very similar to what Netscape and Microsoft have done with their WWW browser software. A public preview lets you get an early look at a new software package and have the opportunity to try it out and report your reactions (and maybe the bugs you encounter) directly to the development staff, to help make the release version a more reliable product.

Some Quick Installation Tips

Installing the newest AOL software is almost always a double-click away. AOL's software installers, both the Mac and Windows versions, take you through the process quickly, and the software is up and running within a few minutes. Here's some helpful advice to consider when you upgrade.

- **For Mac Users Only:** If you're upgrading from a previous version of the software on a Mac, use the Upgrade option when you open your AOL software for the first time. That will transfer all of the account information, program preferences, and much of the downloaded artwork to the new version.
- **For Windows Users Only:** All of your program settings, account information, and downloaded artwork transfers to the new version during the installation process.

If you don't want the information transferred, just delete the path name when prompted during the install.

- ❑ If you have experienced crashes or other problems with your old AOL software, you may prefer to do a clean installation instead. In that way, a new version of the program is installed, and nothing is carried over from the previous installation. You only need to enter your screen name and password where the certificate number information is requested to restore your account information to the new software version.

CAUTION

Files you've downloaded from AOL's software libraries will not be transferred to the new version of AOL's client software when you install it. If you intend to delete the older version of AOL's software, be sure you move the downloaded files to a new location—otherwise you'll delete them, too.

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Windows 3.1 versus Windows 95—Does It Make Any Difference for AOL?

The version of AOL software described in this book is the 16-bit version, which works in essentially the same way for both versions of Windows. However, by the time you read this book, a true 32-bit Windows 95-compliant version may well be available, also.

The 32-bit version will be offered as a downloadable upgrade, and you can expect the features to be essentially the same as the Windows 3.1 version, with the exception of enhancements to support the newer operating system. One of these is support for the Add/Remove Programs utility. This will allow for fast installation and removal of the AOL program and support files.

From Here...

In the future, you may expect AOL's software to change greatly from the versions described here. As Apple and Microsoft enhance their operating systems with new features, AOL will upgrade its software to take advantage of those features, and provide a wider array of options that will make your online sessions speedier and even more enjoyable.

- ❑ To discover the secrets of mastering your AOL Macintosh software, read Chapter 3, "Getting the Most from AOL's Macintosh Software."

- To discover the secrets of mastering your AOL Windows software, read Chapter 4, “Getting the Most from AOL’s Windows Software.”
- You’ll find detailed information on AOL’s services throughout this book, but your best launching point is Chapter 6, “Where Do We Begin?”
- If you want to learn the secret of reducing your online bills, read Chapter 39, “How to Save Time and Money.”
- If you want your children to share your online experiences, read the three chapters of Part IV, “Kids and America Online.”
- The mysteries of the global Internet network are explained in the seven chapters of Part VIII, “Entering the Information Superhighway.”
- If you’re new to America Online, you’ll want to read Appendix A, “If You’re New to the OnlineWorld.”
- New Macintosh users of AOL software will want to read Appendix B, “Using Your America Online Macintosh Software.”
- New Windows users of AOL software will want to read Appendix C, “Using Your America Online Windows Software.”

Getting the Most from AOL's Macintosh Software

Logging on and visiting your favorite online places is only half the story. It's so easy to take the software for granted. The interface is so comfortable, you tend to forget how sophisticated the underlying software is, a flexible telecommunications program with many hooks into the best the Mac operating system has to offer.

In this chapter, we'll try to stretch the software's boundaries further and see just how far you can go with a few simple add-ons. ■

The secrets to a productive online visit

Explore how to plan your AOL sessions for the best possible performance.

Enhancement software

Learn about handy utilities that will make your AOL software work better and go farther.

Be sure it's spelled properly

Learn how to automatically spell check your online documents as you're writing them.

Planning Your Online Visits

Many of you are motivated by the thrill of discovery and adventure when you begin your online visits. I'm certainly not one to pour cold water on the fun of just hanging out and looking around. But if you take a few moments to plan what you're going to do during your visit, and the places you're going to visit you can definitely make your logins more productive and save a few bucks, too.

The best way to make your online visits more fun is to have a plan of action before you log on. Decide in advance the areas you wish to visit and what you want to do when you get there. Here's a sample plan to govern a typical visit (feel free to adjust this to your special needs):

1. Check e-mail.
2. Send responses to previously composed e-mail.
3. Check messages in your favorite online forum.
4. Respond to messages that interest you.
5. Attend online conferences.
6. Choose software to download, using the Download Later Option.
7. Set FlashSession to receive files.
8. Log off.

Throughout this book, I'll cover the subjects of participating in message boards, using AOL FlashSessions, and the most effective ways to find and download software that interests you. Some of the relevant chapters you might want to read include Chapter 6, "Where Do We Begin?" Chapter 8, "Using America Online E-Mail," Chapter 9, "Using America Online Message Boards," Chapter 10, "Chatting Online," and Chapter 20, "Tips and Tricks on Finding Software."

Making Your AOL Software Work Faster

Your enjoyment of your online visits can be much greater if you can only get your AOL software to work better. Not every step I'm about to describe comes free; some of it involves getting new hardware. But by considering these options, you may be able to fine-tune your AOL software for the maximum possible performance on your Mac. You'll also want to read the section following this one, covering AOL Software Add-Ons, for additional techniques that will get you the best possible speed during your online visits.

You can speed up your AOL software by doing one or more of the following:

- **Get a Faster Modem.** America Online supports connection speeds up to 28,800 bps (v.34) in many U.S. cities. If you have a high-speed access number in your city, a faster modem will more than pay for itself in reduced online charges. And it will make your AOL software perform at a much higher level, not only for software downloads and uploads, but for text display, too. The keyword Access will allow you to review the latest telephone connection numbers. You'll learn more about getting the best possible performance from your modem in Chapter 41, "Secrets of High-Speed Access on AOL."
- **Get a Faster Mac.** If you have more than one Mac at your home or work site, installing AOL software on the fastest computer will offer speedier screen redraws, faster application launching, and other performance enhancements. If you have an older model Mac, the new low-cost Macs and Macintosh clones, and their extraordinary higher-speed capability, can be quite attractive items to consider.
- **Get the Program More RAM.** Viewing graphic files is RAM-intensive, taking up a large portion of the memory space AOL's software occupies. If you have enough available memory, you can give more to the AOL application. Just do the following:
 1. Be sure to quit the AOL application.
 2. Click the AOL application icon once.
 3. Choose Get Info from the Finder's Special menu.
 4. Enter a larger figure in the Preferred Size list box. An additional 500K to 1,000K is enough for starters.
 5. Close the Get Info window and launch AOL's program.
- **Turn off Virtual Memory.** Apple's virtual memory makes your RAM go further by allowing hard drive space to be used as RAM. But because a hard drive runs much slower than real RAM, you may experience lags in some programs. Graphic redraws in AOL's software may slow down with virtual memory. You may get somewhat better performance from Connectix RAM Doubler, which simulates virtual memory, but uses your real RAM instead.
- **Use Few System Extensions.** Some system extensions, because of minor conflicts with other software, can slow down your Mac's performance. You should be certain that all of the system add-ons you're using have a beneficial effect. The programs I describe in the next section of this book will work reliably in most installations with little or no performance impact.

Getting There Faster with the Favorite Places Feature

One of the quickest ways to speed up travel around AOL is to add your favorite AOL spots to the list of Favorite Places (see fig. 3.1). This is done simply by clicking the handy icon at the upper right of an area's title bar, which brings up a request for you to confirm if you want the area added to your list (see fig. 3.2).

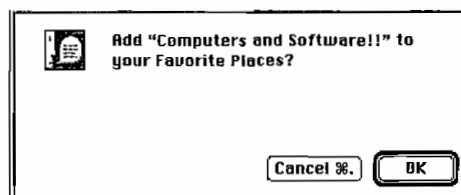
FIG. 3.1

Click the heart-shaped icon on the right side of the title bar to add this area to your list of Favorite Sites.



FIG. 3.2

If you do want your Favorite Places selection added, a sound will confirm your selection.



You can bring up your Favorite Places directory at any time while using your AOL software by clicking the icon at the right side of the program's Flashbar. You can also select a general preference to display the Favorite Places window as soon as your AOL program starts. Once you've added an item to your personal Favorite Places listing (see fig. 3.3), you can go to a specific site by double-clicking its entry. And it even works on Internet newsgroups and Web sites.

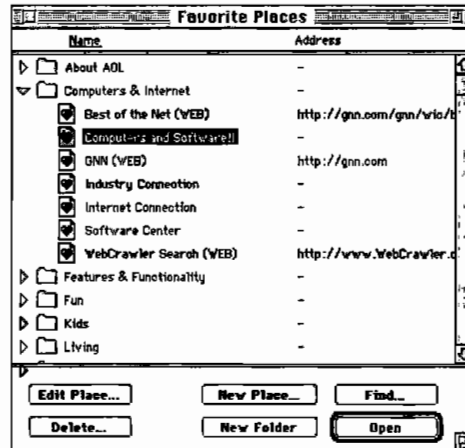
AOL Software Add-Ons

Most of your online activities can be performed quickly and effectively using AOL software alone. However, there are some convenient tools available that will not only provide some features missing from AOL's software, but they offer additional tools that will add extraordinary power to help automate your online visits. There are other tools that won't

make your software run any faster or speed up any processes, but they will make your visits more fun. I'll cover these first.

FIG. 3.3

Your personal Favorite Sites window is truly personal; you can alter its look to your taste.



How to Let AOL Talk to You

Beginning with version 2.6, AOL's Mac software supports Apple's Speech Manager technology. Apple's Speech Manager (and PlainTalk speech recognition software) can read text back to you. This provides for some fascinating possibilities during your AOL sessions. At the very least, you don't have to be in front of your computer during a conference, because the text can be read back to you as it appears on your screen.

CAUTION

Sound capabilities are only available in your AOL Mac software if you have a Macintosh with PlainTalk or Speech Manager software installed. Otherwise, this feature, which appears in the Edit menu, won't work.

NOTE Apple's speech technology (and similar features used on other computing platforms) is not advanced enough to provide perfect speech-to-text capability. Some words may not be enunciated properly by your computerized speaker, making those words difficult to understand. In other cases, when the way a word is pronounced varies by its context, you may have difficulty figuring out what the computer is trying to tell you. The talking computer that many of you know from *Star Trek* episodes is something we shouldn't expect to see for quite some time. ☐

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Using QuickKeys

After you've worked with AOL's software for a while, you begin to think about little things you wish you could do that aren't yet supported; or a means to record frequently used steps so you don't have to do them all manually. One easy way to make your software do more is CE Software's QuickKeys, a commercial program you can buy from your favorite software dealer.

QuickKeys is a macro program, but it also adds handy shortcuts that allow you to extend beyond that capability. In its simplest form, it records the keystrokes and mouse actions you take and allows you to play them back with a single keyboard command that you select.

In addition to recording what you do, it can also support features that are not a part of America Online's software. For example, I use QuickKeys to insert my online signature at the end of all of my e-mail and messages.

Extending the Extended Keyboard If you have an Apple Extended Keyboard, Apple Design Keyboard, or a similar keyboard that includes Function keys F1 through F4, Undo, Cut, Copy, and Paste, you'll notice quickly enough that America Online's Macintosh software supports none of these keystrokes. While Macintosh drag and drop helps you to move selected blocks of text around, having those simple keystrokes is helpful, but only at the core of what a program like QuickKeys can do.

QuickKeys lets you use those missing keystrokes (and any others you want), working seamlessly in the background, so you don't even notice that it's this program doing the magic rather than the AOL software.

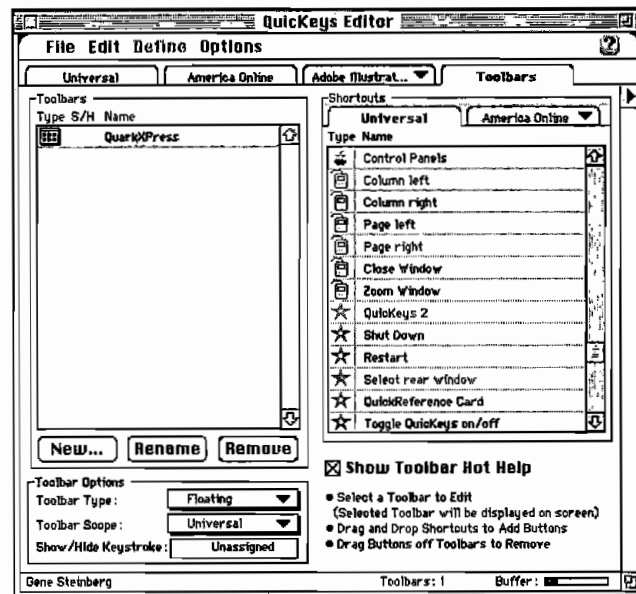
QuickKeys is configured via keysets, which are files containing all of the shortcuts that are dedicated to a specific program. There are also so-called universal shortcuts that will work in the same way in any program.

Using QuickKeys Toolbars The most effective way to harness the power of QuickKeys is to let the program help you make a custom toolbar for your favorite programs. It's done through the handy QuickKeys editor (see fig. 3.4), a utility that lets you quickly create your shortcuts.

Once you've created your brand-new toolbar for a particular program, you can get on with the process of creating shortcuts for it. You can choose existing shortcuts from the QuickKeys editor, or make new ones. The program's online help and clear-cut manual will show you the way. Once the shortcuts are created, you simply drag them to the new toolbar, and you'll be left with a series of blank icons on the toolbar (see fig. 3.5).

FIG. 3.4

The QuickKeys editing utility allows you to build keystrokes, toolbars, and more to make your Mac (and your AOL sessions) more productive.

**FIG. 3.5**

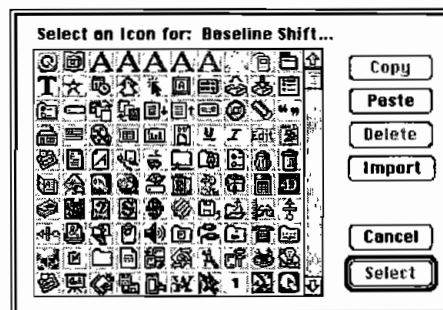
The second step in making a custom program toolbar is to drag the shortcuts to a blank toolbar window.



Of course, a blank icon is apt to appear somewhat drab. While the name of the shortcut will appear below the toolbar when you move the mouse cursor above it (just like AOL's own toolbar), you'll want to apply a pretty face to the icons you've selected. For that, QuickKeys gives you a boatload of choices. To create an icon for the toolbar, double-click the appropriate icon to bring up the display (see fig. 3.6).

FIG. 3.6

Just choose the toolbar icon you want from the choices supplied via QuickKeys.



Once you've set up your shortcuts, click the OK button to automatically save the changes you've made. If your shortcuts have become complex, you can even print a QuickReference Card the program creates for you, so that you can see a hard copy of all of the shortcuts you've selected.

QuickKeys can automate such a wide range of functions, it is limited only by your imagination. You can change printers on the fly, launch applications, open documents, restart and shut down your Macintosh, even scroll your document screen horizontally, which is useful when you want to view a document that may exceed the width of your Mac's monitor.

If you want to learn more about QuickKeys and download some really flexible keyboard shortcuts that you can use with AOL's software and other programs, visit the publisher's forum on AOL keyword: **CESoftware**.

Using Tempo II Plus

Tempo II Plus from Affinity Microsystems is another highly sophisticated macro utility for the Macintosh. Tempo can record your actions and play them back instantly. Beyond that, you can add intelligence to macros by having them test for conditions. Tempo uses *externals*, which are modules that provide many of the program's advanced functions.

One of the most popular uses for Tempo II Plus is automating the process of reading messages on America Online. With Tempo, you can connect to AOL, copy all new messages from your favorite forums, and then disconnect. Tempo can do this in a fraction of the time it would take you to do it manually, without you having to babysit the process.

Automating the Message Reading Process

Once you've set up your macro (or series of linked macros), you can call it up via a single keystroke. When you activate the macro, Tempo launches the America Online program and clicks the Sign On button. Then, Tempo waits until the Welcome to America Online window appears and checks for your mail. You can use the following examples to create macros that will read messages for you.

Reading all Messages in a Folder By clicking the Find New icon for a selected folder in an AOL message board, Tempo determines from the response whether there are new messages or not. If there are new messages, Tempo clicks the Read button, copies the first message to another document, sends a keyboard return, and looks for a right arrow with the words Next Message (see fig. 3.7).

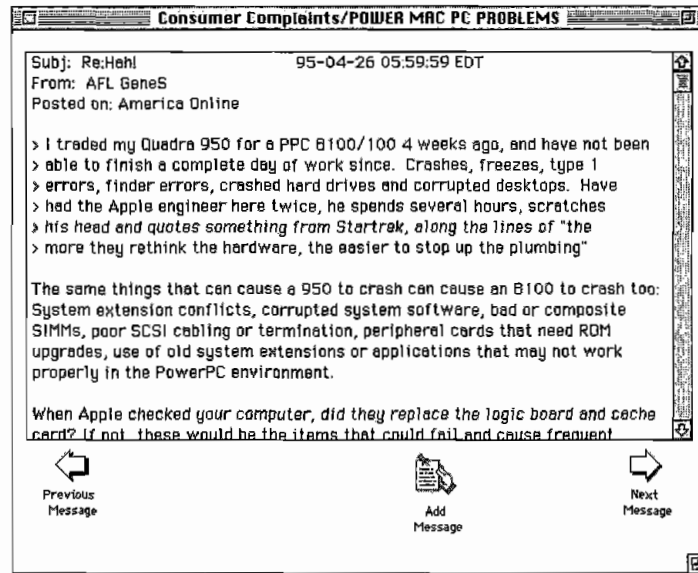
If this icon appears, Tempo clicks the right arrow and repeats the same copy routine. When the right arrow is gone, Tempo closes the message window, closes the folder window, and goes on to test the next folder.

Tempo uses its BitMatch external module to look for the arrow. That way it knows which macro to play. You need to enter the commands in the format shown below:

```
BitMatch(image,true macro,false macro)
```

FIG. 3.7

The Next Message arrow on a regular message board screen.



You'll notice how closely this series of commands resembles a programming language. In this case, you can name your Tempo External macro:

```
BitMatch(next msg,Copy next,check next folder)
```

Basically, here's what the macro is doing: If the Next Message arrow icon is there, Tempo plays the macro that copies the next message. If the Next Message arrow is not there, Tempo plays the macro that closes the current window and message folder and then types a down arrow to go to the next folder.

If the message board is threaded and displays responses to individual messages, a similar BitMatch routine can test for an icon such as Next Response, and copy those responses as well, continuing until that icon is no longer present. If you want to know more about the setup of AOL's message boards, read Chapter 9, "Using America Online Message Boards."

To snap a BitMap image (which captures a portion of your screen), you type Tempo's BitMap FKey, ⌘-Shift-8. This attaches a small marquee to the cursor arrow (see fig. 3.8). You can press the plus or minus keys to enlarge or reduce the marquee to fit the image. When you click the mouse button, it takes a snapshot of the area within the marquee and lets you name it, then saves it as either Window-relative or Screen-relative. If it's saved as Window-relative (the same location as the Window is at the time), Tempo always looks at the same spot in the window for the image that matches the one you shot, even if you move the window around.

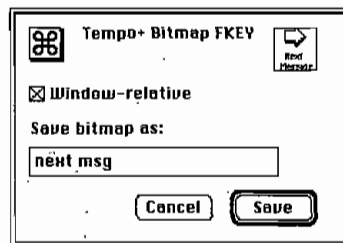
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FIG. 3.8

You can save your screen image at Tempo's Save Bitmap dialog box.



Checking Every Folder After the macro I've just described has copied all of the new messages to a folder, Tempo types a down arrow to select the next folder. Now's the time for a Check Folders For New Messages macro and a Check For Last Folder macro.

The first macro, Check Folders For New Messages, clicks the Find New button that you see when you open a message board window, and once again uses the BitMatch external described above to look at the response. If new messages have been added since the last time you opened this folder, a list of the new messages appears, and Tempo branches to the copy routine outlined above.

If there are no new messages, Tempo sees the dialog box indicating that fact and checks for the name of the message folder. Tempo gets the name of the folder by clicking the Read First Message icon. This opens a window with the folder name as the window name. Tempo copies the name of the window into an internal variable, which is like Apple's own clipboard except that Tempo saves it to its own file. Then Tempo compares that window name to the name of the last window it had opened. If the names are the same, then you've traveled through all the folders and you're done with the current forum. If the window name is new, then Tempo continues testing the folders.

Two Tempo externals make it possible to scan AOL's message boards: GetWindowName and Eval. The first external macro copies the name of the message window to a variable—for example, the window name. When the next window is opened, it copies that name to another variable, such as new window name. The Eval external then compares the two and lets Tempo know if they match or not. If they don't match, Eval copies the name of the new message window into the old window variable to use the next time around.

Copying the Message Contents to a Storage File Your Copy Messages macro could simply click in the message window, select all the text, copy, switch to a word processor, save, and return. This would give you one long file of all your messages.

If you'd rather store them more usefully, Tempo can select the name portion of the message, store that as a name variable, and perform the same routine with the date or subject portions. Tempo will then copy the text, switch to a database, type out the name and other saved portions into their proper fields, and finally paste in the text of the message.

This way, your messages will be neatly filed by categories that are more meaningful to you. If you'd rather cut online time to a minimum, combine the two: First copy all messages to a single file, then, offline, let Tempo parse the files for you, copying them to your database.

Other Macro Possibilities Tempo II Plus can also be used to automate complex routines such as these within and between any Macintosh applications. It can even be used with other scripting programs, such as Apple's own AppleScript. And, because Tempo can share variables with AppleScript, it can pass along to unscriptable programs information that is generated by AppleScript or other programs, including FileMaker Pro, HyperCard, Frontier, and others.

If you've never used a macro program, you may find some of the steps described above somewhat complex. Not to worry. Tempo II Plus comes with thorough documentation that will show you how to easily access all these powerful macro creation capabilities.

As for the macros I've just detailed, they were created especially for this book by Affinity, and you'll find this entire macro file and others in the company's support area on AOL (keyword: **Affinity**). You'll also find complete details about this marvelous program there, in case I've whetted your appetite for more.

A Brief Note about DM Assist Although AOL's Download Manager is a useful way to control your downloading activities, it has some limitations. You cannot, for example, change the order of files shown in the directory, nor can you restrict your download to certain files and hold other entries for later download. It's all or nothing, with only the Finish Later option in your download progress bar enabling you to stop the process.

AOL DM Assist works with the Download Manager to address some of its limitations. It enables you to rearrange the downloading order, put queued files on hold for later FlashSessions, and even rename a partially downloaded file. The program is available in the software libraries of the Macintosh Utilities Forum (keyword: **MUT**).

Using Now Menus

Now Menu (see fig. 3.9) is part of Now Utilities, a popular set of system enhancements from Now Software. It's an enormously flexible utility that creates hierarchical menus on your Apple menu (sub-menus), adds icons on your menu bar to provide pull-down commands to launch applications, and creates pop-up menus that you can access by a keyboard shortcut.

Each of those pop-up menus can be easily configured with a number of options, such as active applications and recently used files, and you can add your installed applications (such as AOL's software) one by one to the list, which makes those menus an application launching dock. But one of the neatest features of Now Menu is the capability to add

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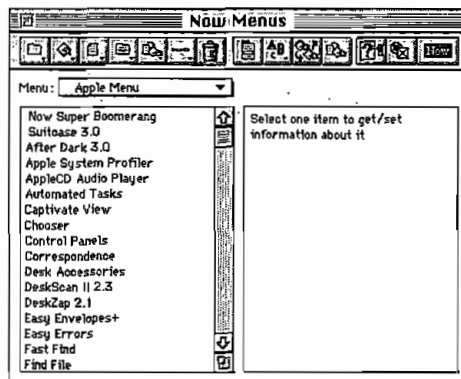
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keyboard shortcuts to menu bar commands on the fly (see fig. 3.10), simply by highlighting a command and typing the keyboard shortcut you want to use.

FIG. 3.9

Now Menus from Now Software lets you create keyboard command shortcuts on the fly.

**FIG. 3.10**

Attach a keystroke to menu bar commands with Now Menus, such as the one I've added to the Go To Menu (⌘-Shift-C for the Channels Menu). You can choose any free keyboard shortcut for a specific command.

Go To:	
Sign Off	
Exit Free Area	⌘E
Channels	⇧⌘C
Welcome Menu	
Keyword...	⌘K
Find...	⌘F
Online Clock	
Favorite Places	
Edit Go To Menu...	
New Services	⌘1
Discover America Online	⌘2
Sign On A Friend	⌘3
Top News	⌘4
Stock Quotes	⌘5
Center Stage	⌘6
Internet Connection	⌘7
Reference Desk	⌘8
Entertainment	⌘9
Market Place	⌘0

NOTE In Now Utilities 6, the version shipping when this book was being prepared, the option to add custom keystrokes for menu bar commands was optional. You have to activate the feature in the Now Menus Control Panel. It's a check box labeled Assign Hot Keys directly in menus.

CAUTION

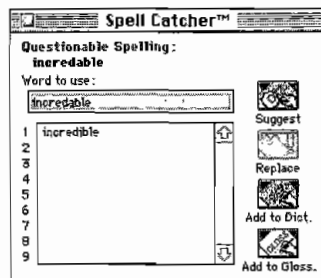
When you add a keyboard shortcut with Now Menus, you should first check to make sure that command is not already attached to another function in that program (Now Menus won't put up any warning about it). Otherwise, you may find the command doesn't work or performs the newly selected function rather than the original function. Fortunately, if this happens, you can remove a Now Menus command shortcut simply by highlighting that item and pressing the Delete key.

How Do You Spell it?

Version 3.0 of AOL's Mac software includes a built-in spell checker, just like your word processing program. It lets you check your e-mail, but doesn't support the messages you post in a message board or an Internet newsgroup. If you want to take spell checking to new heights, consider Casady & Greene's Spell Catcher (formerly known as Thunder 7). As you type, Spell Catcher works behind the scenes, monitoring your keystrokes. If you make a mistake, the program sounds a pre-selected warning (or flashes the menu bar—my preferred way of doing it). If you receive this warning, you can fix the mistake, or if you need further advice, type a handy keyboard shortcut to bring up the program's suggestion window (see fig. 3.11).

FIG. 3.11

Spell Catcher checks your keystrokes as you type, and warns you when you've made a mistake.



Spell Catcher also includes a handy thesaurus to help you find the right word for the right purpose, the ability to automatically modify selected words, Internet-style quoting, the ability to change uppercase to lowercase, and much more, including batch spell checking. It also offers a feature called Ghostwriter that backs up your keystrokes in text format, so you can easily retrieve them in the event your Mac crashes.

Another useful spell-checking program is Deneba's Coach Professional, which shares many of the basic features for Spell Checker but doesn't offer the same breadth of options.

Keyboard Power

Even if you haven't enhanced the capability of navigating through AOL's software with Now Menus, QuickKeys, Tempo II Plus, or a similar program, you've still got a good basic set of keyboard commands that you'll want to keep in mind.

Table 3.1 lists many of the keyboard shortcuts available with your America Online Macintosh software. They are based on AOL version 3.0, which became available at the time this book was written. Future versions may offer additional shortcuts.

Table 3.1 Macintosh Keyboard Shortcuts

Function	Keyboard Shortcut
AOL guide	⌘-?
Bold	⌘-B
Check spelling	⌘-=
Close window	⌘-W
Compose mail	⌘-M
Copy	⌘-C
Cut	⌘-X
Exit free area	⌘-E
Find a member online	⌘-F
Get member's profile	⌘-G
Insert hyperlink	⌘-H
Locate a member online	⌘-L
Move to next entry field	Tab
New memo	⌘-N
Open an existing file	⌘-O
Open keyword window	⌘-K
Open lobby window	⌘-L
Paste	⌘-V
Plain text	⌘-T
Print	⌘-P
Quit application	⌘-Q
Read new mail	⌘-R

Function	Keyboard Shortcut
Save a file	⌘-S
Send an instant message	⌘-I
Underline text	⌘-Underline
Undo	⌘-Z

From Here...

Beyond the menus and commands, it is easy to configure America Online's Macintosh software to provide greatly enhanced performance and make your online visits more fun and more productive. By working with the tools I've described here and browsing through AOL's software libraries, you'll find many additional techniques to increase your online computing power.

- If you must cross computing platforms from time to time, you'll want to read Chapter 4, "Getting the Most from AOL's Windows Software."
- You'll find a detailed overview of AOL's services throughout this book, but your best launching point is Chapter 6, "Where Do We Begin?"
- If you want your children to share your online experiences with you, read the three chapters in Part IV, "Kids and America Online."
- The mysteries behind the global Internet network are explained in the chapters that comprise Part VIII, "Entering the Information Superhighway."
- And if you want to learn secrets about reducing your online bills, read Chapter 39, "How to Save Time and Money."
- If you're new to America Online, you'll want to read Appendix A, "If You're New to the Online World."
- New Macintosh users of AOL software will want to read Appendix B, "Using Your America Online Macintosh Software."

Getting the Most from AOL's Windows Software

It's very easy to take your AOL software for granted after a while. The process is so simple: logging on, visiting your favorite parts of the service, then logging off. You may tend to ignore the underlying software you've used, which is a highly sophisticated telecommunications program. And you may not have taken the time to see just how far you can stretch the software's boundaries to provide a superior online experience and make your visits more productive. ■

Reduce online time

Learn how to plan your AOL sessions for the best possible performance.

AOL and OS/2

Explore how to make your AOL software work under IBM's operating system.

Getting help for free

Discover how to use online troubleshooting forums.

Planning Your Online Visits

Many of your online visits will no doubt be motivated by the thrill of discovery and adventure. I'm not one to pour cold water on the fun of just hanging out and looking around. But, if you take a few moments to plan what you're going to do during your visit, and the places you're going to visit, you can definitely make your logins more productive and save a few bucks, too.

The best way to make your online visits more fun is to have a plan of action before you log on. Decide in advance the areas you want to visit, and what you want to do when you get there. Here's a sample plan to govern a typical visit (feel free to adjust this to your special needs):

1. Check e-mail.
2. Send responses to previously composed e-mail.
3. Check messages in your favorite online forum(s).
4. Respond to messages that interest you.
5. Attend online conference.
6. Choose software to download, using the Download Later Option.
7. Set FlashSession to receive files.
8. Log off.

Getting There Faster with the Favorite Places Feature

One of the quickest ways to speed up travel around AOL is to add your favorite AOL spots (see fig. 4.1) to the list of Favorite Places. This is done by simply clicking the heart-shaped icon at the upper right of an area's title bar, which brings up a request for you to confirm that you want the area added to your list (see fig. 4.2).

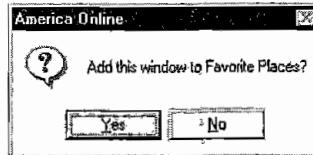
FIG. 4.1

Click the heart-shaped icon on the right side of the title bar to add this area to your list of Favorite Places.



FIG. 4.2

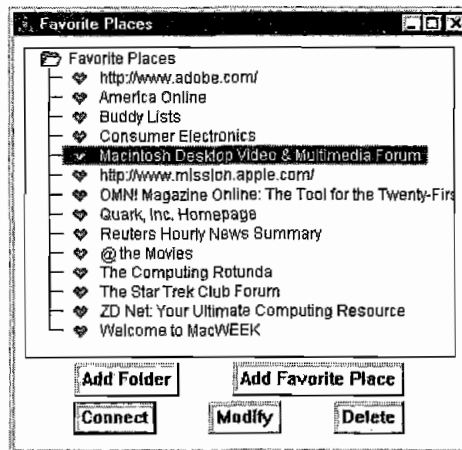
If you do want your Favorite Places selection added to the list, a sound and screen message will confirm your selection.



You can bring up your Favorite Places directory at any time while using your AOL software by clicking the heart-shaped folder icon at the right side of the program's Flashbar. You can also select a general preference to display the Favorite Places window as soon as your AOL program starts. Once you've added an item to your personal Favorite Places listing (see fig. 4.3), you can go to a specific site by double-clicking its entry. And it even works on Internet newsgroups and Web sites.

FIG. 4.3

Your personal Favorite Places window displays the online areas you've added. You can move the selections around as you see fit by selecting and dragging an item to its new position.



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Learning the Ropes

Throughout this book, I'll cover the subjects of participating in message boards, using AOL FlashSessions, and the most effective ways to find and download software that interests you. Some of the chapters about these subjects you might want to read include Chapter 6, "Where Do We Begin?," Chapter 8, "Using America Online E-Mail," Chapter 9, "Using America Online Message Boards," Chapter 10, "Chatting Online," and Chapter 20, "Tips and Tricks on Finding Software."

Making Your AOL Software Work Faster

Your enjoyment of your online visits can be much greater if you can only get your AOL software to work better. Not every step I'm about to describe comes free; some of it involves getting new hardware. But, by considering these options, you may be able to fine-tune your AOL software for the maximum possible performance on your PC. You'll also want to read the section following this one, "AOL Software Add-Ons," for brief descriptions of some very popular software that will make your online visits go faster and more efficiently.

You can speed up your AOL software by doing one or more of the following:

- *Get a Faster Modem.* America Online supports connection speeds of up to 28,800 bps (V.34) in many U.S. cities. If you have a high-speed access number in your city, a faster modem will more than pay for itself in reduced online charges. It will also make your AOL software perform at a much higher level, not only for software downloads and uploads, but for text display, too. Keyword **Access** enables you to review the latest telephone connection numbers. You'll learn more about getting the best possible performance from your modem in Chapter 41, "Secrets of High-Speed Access on AOL."
- *Get a Faster PC.* If you have more than one PC at your home or work site, installing AOL software on the fastest computer offers speedier screen redraws, faster application launching, and other performance enhancements. If you have an older model, the new low-cost Pentium PCs, and their extraordinary higher speed capability, can be quite attractive items to consider.
- *Get More RAM.* Viewing graphics files is RAM-intensive, and using AOL's integrated Web browser with its image caching routine can also eat up additional memory. Computer manufacturers, striving to keep costs down, often supply the bare minimum amount of memory with their models. You may want to consider a RAM upgrade at the earliest opportunity.
- *Operating System Fine-Tuning.* There are a huge number of software products that are designed to add functions to the Windows operating system, or add cute little effects, visual and sound. But, some of these programs can also rob your computer of the best possible performance, or cause incompatibilities with other software. You should always select system enhancements with care, and see if they really do improve the way your computer runs, and not the reverse. Product reviews in your favorite computing magazine (many of which have forums on AOL) are a good resource on this subject.

AOL Software Add-Ons

AOL's own software provides an enormous degree of flexibility, enabling you to automate a number of online functions. The ability to easily include your regular online spots as part of your custom Favorite Sites listing, for example, makes for fast navigation around the network. However, there are some convenient tools available that not only provide some features missing from AOL's software, but will add extraordinary power to help automate your online visits.

NOTE In order to locate any file in the software libraries of AOL's Computing department, including the ones that are described in this chapter, simply choose the Find command from the Go To menu of your Windows AOL software and select the option to search for software. When the search window comes up, enter the name or subject of your file search in the list field. A complete list of the selections that match your search will appear in a few seconds. To get more information about a file, and to download the file, simply double-click the name of a file that interests you from the listings you receive. For more information on finding and downloading software, see Chapter 20, "Tips and Tricks on Finding Software." □

CAUTION

The arrival of Windows 95 has created a big question mark about the compatibility of some of the Add-On programs for AOL's software. If you are using Microsoft's new operating system, you'll want to read online file descriptions carefully before downloading the programs you want. You can expect that many of these handy utilities will be upgraded as necessary to be fully compatible with Windows 95 and future versions of AOL's own software.

You'll find these and other handy programs listed in the Windows AOL Add-Ons library of the Windows forum (keyword: **Windows forum**).

NOTE Before downloading any of these handy Windows AOL utilities, be sure to check the file descriptions about hardware and software needs. Some of these programs (such as PowerTools) require that you install Visual Basic Runtime Version 3.0, a free program available in AOL's software libraries, which can be located using the File Search tool. For more information on finding and downloading software, see Chapter 20, "Tips and Tricks on Finding Software." □

CAUTION

Although the programs described in this chapter are very popular with users of the Windows version of AOL software, they are not officially supported or endorsed by America Online, Inc. You are therefore using such software at your own risk. Should you have any problems in using this software, your best resources for support are the publishers or authors of these programs.

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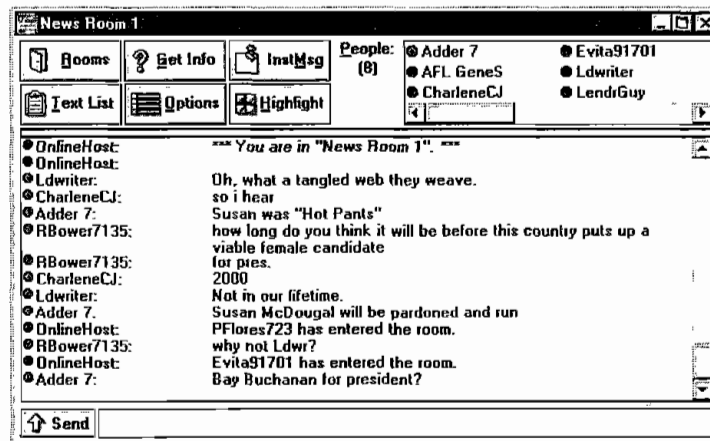
CROOM

Author: **Tartan Software**

CROOM is a program that adds style and color to your chat and conference room visits (see fig. 4.4). Features include the ability to highlight other members' chat text in the color of your choice, choosing another font or type style for chat text, and changing the background color. You can also send macros created in other programs (such as Whale Express, which is described later in this chapter) from your keyboard.

FIG. 4.4

Add style and color to your chat room visits with CROOM, which has enhanced the chat room shown.



CROOM also offers an expanded people list, so you can see an expanded listing of those present in a chat. You also have an Ignore Members option, which enables you to hide the chat text originating from the members you designate. At the risk of seeming anti-social, it's a way to cope with possible online harassment, or for times when you may not wish to be in touch with a particular member for reasons of your own. Settings you make are saved by the program, so they can be used again for future online visits.

PICPOP

Author: **Compunik Creations**

Here's a shareware program that adds exciting multimedia possibilities to your online visits. It works with your e-mail, instant messages, message board postings, and your chat room postings. After it's installed, in the material you send, you simply type:

```
{p picfile soundfile}
```

(Picfile refers to the name of your picture file, and soundfile refers to the name of your sound file.) When the recipient opens this material, a picture pops up on the recipient's screen, and a sound plays. The program supports BMP and GIF image file formats, and the WAV sound format.

NOTE To see the pictures and hear the sounds, your recipient also has to have a copy of PICPOP installed, along with the corresponding picture and sound files. □

You change the default sounds of Windows AOL just like you change any other sound association, through the Control Panel.

SWEETALK

Author: **Compunik Creations**

SWEETALK (see fig. 4.5) attaches fixed sounds and images to your online messages, but this program goes one step further. The authors tell me that this shareware program is dedicated to online romantics. It offers the following features:

FIG. 4.5

SWEETALK puts up a movable button bar that can be used to access its features.



- When SWEETALK is opened (or closed), Windows AOL automatically opens and closes, too.
- SWEETALK lets you send a sound (or a WAV) to “say” sweet stuff to your online friend or sweetheart (male or female equally implied).
- SWEETALK lets you send phrases (sweet nothings), up to 1,000 characters, without typing them.
- SWEETALK saves that special e-mail or posted message to a file with the click of a button.
- When you go online, clicking a button called Who’s-On-First very quickly tells you if your friends are online and where. Then a couple of clicks enable you to send Instant Messages to the ones that are online.
- For those times when someone is sending you not-so-sweet Instant Messages (IMs), there is a virtual switch that automatically turns IMs off and on.
- SWEETALK also offers meters that display how long you have been sweet-talking in the pay areas and free areas of AOL.
- SWEETALK gives you a convenient scrollable list of sounds and phrases.

PowerTools for AOL

Author: **BPS SoftWare**

By far the most popular AOL add-on is probably PowerTools. More than 110,000 AOL members had downloaded various versions of this shareware program as of the time this

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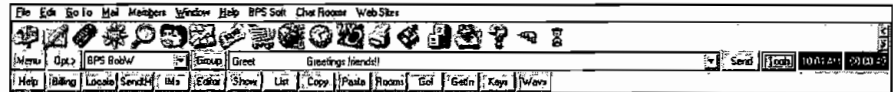
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book was being prepared. The program offers a set of very powerful enhancements for AOL's program (see fig. 4.6). The major features include a colorized chat room, a macro "phrase" manager, an instant answering machine, and a wide array of other tools. The product's Control Panel attaches to the bottom of your AOL window and provides buttons and controls for many common and special tasks. A wide variety of add-on modules greatly increases the program's flexibility.

FIG. 4.6

When you install PowerTools, the entire look and feel of your AOL software undergoes many changes, typified by the new, expanded toolbar functions shown here.



Here are some of the major features of this program:

- ☐ PowerTools gives you many options to customize your AOL Flashbar, and its own toolbars.
- ☐ A Hotlist Manager replaces AOL's Favorite Places feature, and lets you store additional locations to revisit, such as your favorite People Connection rooms, ftp sites, and more.
- ☐ An Auto SignOn feature expands upon AOL's FlashSession feature by enabling you to automatically log on whenever you perform a function that requires you to be online.
- ☐ PowerTools replaces AOL's chat room window with its own Color Chat window, which enables you to assign colors for member names, extract chat text by member name, and enhance your logging options.
- ☐ PowerTools incorporates a Get In button that keeps trying to enter a crowded chat room until someone leaves, enabling you to automatically enter.
- ☐ You can establish a library of standard text phrases, organize them by category, and use the program's Phrase Manager to play them as you wish. You can even insert variables within your stored phrases, so phrases can be linked. The phrases can be sent as part of your e-mail, instant messages, or message board postings.
- ☐ An IM Manager can be configured to return Instant Messages with preselected phrases, arrange IM windows neatly on your desktop, selectively ignore messages, and log the messages to a file complete with your comments.

- Additional features let you manage your text messages, send WAV files from a pop-up list, and keep an accurate billing log of your online sessions, covering all screen names, so you can keep precise records of your accumulated online time.

PowerTools has enhancements for just about everything you do online (and perhaps many of the things you only imagined doing more efficiently). Because it is shareware, you can try it before you buy—it may become an indispensable tool for you.

Whale Express

Author: **Bill Pytlovany (Tartan Software)**

Whale Express is a scripting utility that enables you to create scripts to sign-on, sign-off, retrieve and send mail, send and capture text and posts, and more. The version posted on AOL is a trial version that lets you store up to 10 commands. When you download Whale Express, you'll find ordering information in the README file.

Whale Express comes with sample scripts and Windows-based help that assists you in writing powerful online scripts to automate your AOL visit. Even capturing e-mail from multiple screen names is possible with the NewScreenName command.

E-mail can be created while you are offline using the Whale Express integrated editor, and sent via the SendMail script command. Online lectures can be prepared and reused over and over using the SendText command. Entire message boards can now be read and captured in a text file with the intelligent ReadList command.

The scripting language is easy to understand and requires no knowledge of complex programming structures. Error handling and calling other scripts can all be done with simple commands.

AOL for OS/2?

If you're a user of OS/2, you might be hoping that a version of America Online's software specifically tailored for this operating system might come some day. But, it isn't something you should hold your breath for. However, as I've explained in Chapter 19, "Visiting the Computing and Software Forums," there is indeed a very active OS/2 forum on AOL, and the forum creators had to get online somehow to write about it.

With a little advice from the folks at the OS/2 forum, I've put together a few tips to get AOL's software up and running with pretty good compatibility in that environment. AOL's programmers have put a special (and largely unrecognized) emphasis on ensuring optimal compatibility with the Windows version of AOL's software OS/2's Win-OS/2, both Seamless and Full Screen Modes.

Here are some suggestions you might consider to get the best possible performance from the Windows AOL-OS/2 combo:

- For proper connections to AOL, you **MUST** have a serial I/O card that has a 16550a UART (an 8K buffer chip) on it or an internal modem that has a 16550a UART on it. Most older serial cards don't have a 16550a UART, but fortunately a new card with a 16550a UART is fairly inexpensive and readily available at most retail outlets.
- Download and install Ray Gwinn's SIO COM drivers for OS/2. You can get a copy of SIO from the OS/2 Forum library's "Top Picks" area. I'll include some settings a little later in this section.
- Increase EMS_MEMORY_LIMIT to 8M in your Windows AOL software object settings notebook.
- Set IDLE_SENSITIVITY to 100 in the same settings notebook.
- Run your windows AOL software in Standard Mode if possible, as it seems to run better in that mode.
- If you are using Windows for Workgroups v3.11, replace your Windows COM drivers with the Windows v3.1 COM drivers.
- It is reported that on some systems it may be necessary to turn off the AOL Web browser's caching feature, although in other systems the feature seems to work properly.
- As a general rule, you'll want to disable the browser's internal helper applications feature and use external helper applications instead. The OS/2 forum staff reports good success with native OS/2 helper programs.
- Disable your Windows's AOL software's auto-extraction (expansion) feature. For file compression and expanding utilities, you'll want to use InfoZip's ZIP and UNZIP programs for OS/2. You'll find them available for download from the New Files & Free Uploading library of the OS/2 forum. For additional information, you'll want to check out the file descriptions directly.
- In some cases setting SIO_Mode_DTR to Handshake Signal will help provide better connections to AOL.
- Similarly, the OS/2 experts on AOL suggest you set SIO_Screen_Sync_Kludge to ON.

If you're still having problems getting your AOL software to work properly under OS/2, contact the folks at the OS/2 forum for assistance. Keyword: **OS/2**.

CAUTION

There have been some reports of occasional difficulty during the initial installation (but not updating) of Windows AOL software when the SIO drivers are installed. The workaround for this is to do the initial installation of the program under native DOS/Windows. You might also try temporarily disabling the SIO/VSIO drivers and re-enabling the native OS/2 COM/VCOM drivers in your OS/2 config.sys. Then reboot and install your Windows AOL software, disable OS/2's native COM/VCOM drivers and re-enable the SIO/VSIO drivers and reboot again.

Keyboard Power

Even if you haven't enhanced your ability to navigate through AOL's software with some of the handy macro utilities I've discussed in this chapter, there is still a good basic set of keyboard commands available that you should keep in mind.

Table 4.1 is a list of many of the keyboard shortcuts available with your America Online Windows software. They are based on AOL version 3.0, which became available at the time this book was written. Future software versions may offer additional shortcuts.

Table 4.1 Keyboard Shortcuts for Windows

Function	Keyboard Shortcut
Access Download Manager	Ctrl+T
Cancel an action	Esc
Cascade windows	Shift+F5
Close a window	Ctrl+F4
Copy	Ctrl+C
Cut	Ctrl+X
Find a member, file, area	Ctrl+F
Get member profile	Ctrl+G
Locate a member online	Ctrl+L
Move to next button	Tab
Move to next window	Ctrl+F6
Move to previous button	Shift+Tab
Open a new text file	Ctrl+N

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Table 4.1 Continued

Function	Keyboard Shortcut
Open an existing file	Ctrl+O
Open Channel	Ctrl+D
Open Keyword window	Ctrl+K
Open Mail window	Ctrl+M
Paste	Ctrl+V
Read new mail	Ctrl+R
Save a file	Ctrl+S
Scroll down a page	Page Down
Scroll up a page	Page Up
Send an instant message	Ctrl+I
Tile windows	Shift+F4

From Here...

Beyond the menus and commands, it is easy to configure America Online Windows software to provide greatly enhanced performance and make your online visits more fun and more productive. AOL's software libraries contain dozens of handy utilities in addition to the ones I've described here. By spending a little time browsing through the file descriptions, you'll find many additional techniques to increase your online computing power.

- You'll find a detailed overview of AOL's services throughout this book, but your best launching point is Chapter 6, "Where Do We Begin?"
- If you want your children to share your online experiences with you, read the three chapters in Part IV, "Kids and America Online."
- The mysteries behind the global Internet network are explained in the chapters that comprise Part VIII, "Entering the Information Superhighway."
- If you're new to America Online, you'll want to read Appendix A, "If You're New to the Online World."
- New users of AOL's Windows software will want to read Appendix C, "Using Your America Online Windows Software."

America Online and Mobile Computing

We live in a mobile society. We travel often, and whether it's for business or pleasure, no doubt you'll want your personal computer at hand to stay in touch, or to get some necessary work done. Whether you take a Macintosh PowerBook or PC laptop with you, you probably want to reach out to the world awaiting you on America Online. ■

Getting connected

Quickly find your local access numbers to America Online.

Finding new connection numbers

Change your access numbers in your America Online software.

Connecting to AOL at 28,800 bps

Choose from hundreds of high-speed access numbers worldwide.

Easily connecting in different cities

Save multiple-connection settings that you can switch to with a couple of mouse clicks.

Accessing AOL while traveling

Log on to AOL easily from hotels and offices in cities across the world.

Enjoying mobile computing

Prepare your portable computer for travel.

Finding Local Access Numbers

Online services are quite competitive, and the cost of connecting to America Online, in particular, will come down over time to keep up with industry price trends. Unless you have money to burn, though, you still need to watch your online costs. By finding the closest number to the place from which you are calling, you keep your telephone bills from going through the ceiling.

Although not every location in the United States has a local access number, most do, and those are the ones you want to use. In addition, through AOL's GlobalNet access network, you can also hook up to America Online in other parts of the world.

After you know the number, you also need to tell the America Online software that you know it. Locating those numbers involves just a few quick steps.

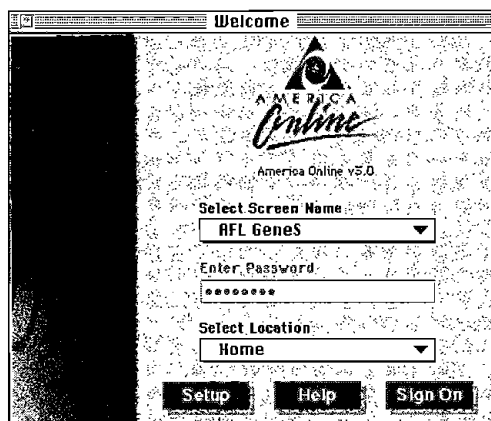
Getting Numbers the Easy Way

In the latest releases of America Online's Mac and Windows software, you can find a local access number not only while you're online or when you're first configuring your America Online software (see Appendixes B and C), but anytime you find yourself wanting to call America Online from a location where you are not certain of your local access number.

If you have not already done so, open the America Online program and select New Local# from the pop-up menu (see fig. 5.1). If you need to dial 9 or some other access code to reach an outside line, first enter that code in the connection setup document. The same goes for any codes you have to enter to disable call waiting. Refer to Appendix B, "Using Your America Online Macintosh Software," and Appendix C, "Using Your America Online Windows Software," for information on setting options in the Connection Settings dialog box.

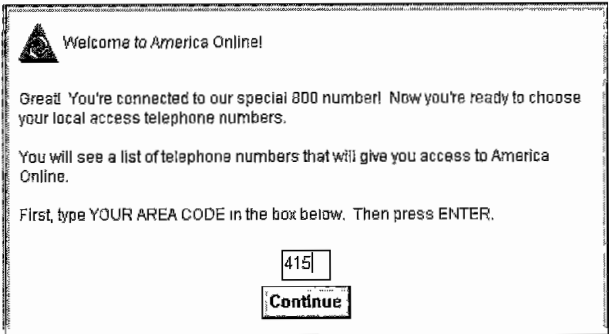
FIG. 5.1

New Local# is America Online's automated process to find your local access number.



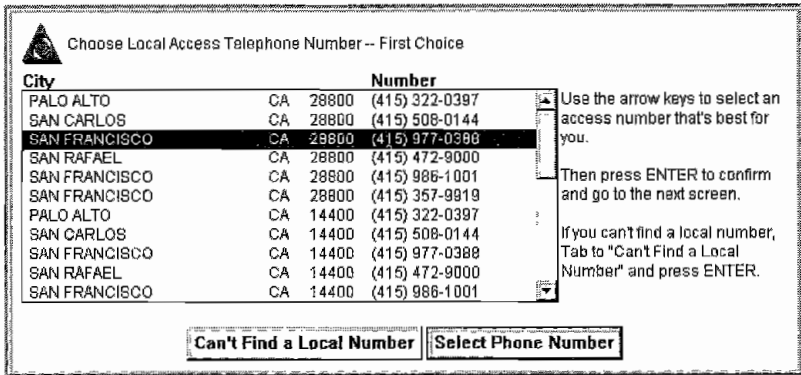
With your calling options now set, begin the connection to America Online's toll-free number by clicking the Sign On button, or pressing Enter. In just a few seconds, you are looking at America Online's Access Number Location screen (see fig. 5.2). To find the location of the phone numbers closest to you, simply enter the area code so that the program knows what area of the country to search for your access numbers. Enter the area code from which you're calling, or an area code from somewhere you plan to travel, and click the Continue button.

FIG. 5.2
Type your area code in America Online's Access Number Locator window.



The next step is to select your first connection number from the list of available access numbers (see fig. 5.3).

FIG. 5.3
You can choose your first connection choice from a list of numbers.



To select a number as your first choice, double-click the number closest to the location from which you are calling (or will be calling). Now, in case you're unable to connect using the first number, the America Online host computers repeat the process by asking you to select a number as your second choice. Double-click the number of your second choice, or optionally click the Same as First Choice button if no other number is acceptable. If you are unable to locate a nearby access number, the Can't Find a Local Number button will offer you the choice of phone numbers in another area code that might be suitable (but you'll want to check long-distance charges to be sure it's practical).

Now the Magic Begins

After you confirm your access number choices, America Online disconnects from the toll-free 800 number and automatically presents you with a new, untitled Connection Settings window with the selected numbers already entered in the proper places (see fig. 5.4 for the Mac version and fig. 5.5 for the Windows variation).

FIG. 5.4

The two access numbers you selected are automatically entered in their respective boxes in the Mac version of AOL software.

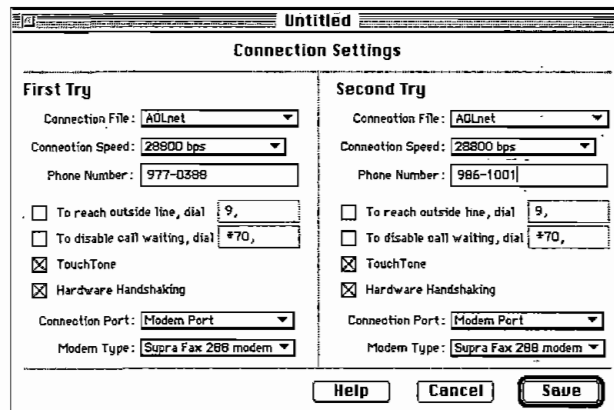
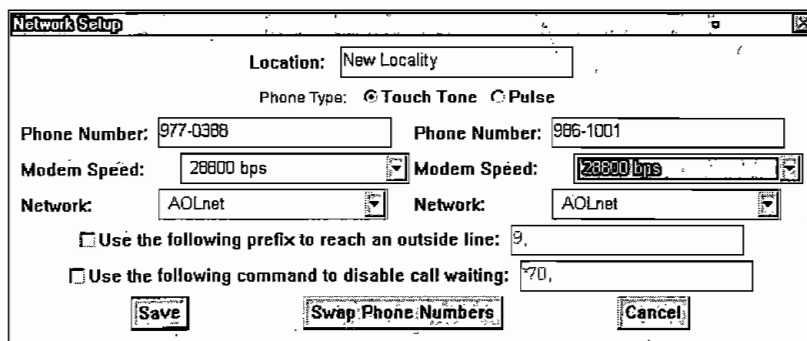


FIG. 5.5

The Windows version of AOL software offers similar settings, but with an option to swap phone numbers.



The new setup window matches your regular Setup box, but without custom-calling settings, such as hardware handshake and other options. Before saving this file, you should add whatever additional options you want.

After you make your corrections or changes, choose Save from the File menu, and enter the name of your new Locality file. When I travel, I generally name the files after the city to which I'm traveling, such as Boston, Paris, San Francisco, and so on.

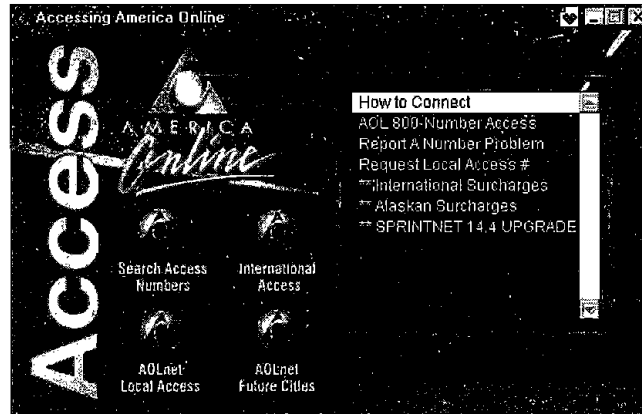
Wait! I'm Already Signed On!

Great! You like to plan ahead, which is better than a last-minute scramble to take care of forgotten details. If you're already online and want to find local access numbers, enter the

keyword **Access**. You are then taken to a free area online that contains a database of all the access phone numbers you could ever need while on your world-wide excursions (see fig. 5.6).

FIG. 5.6

Use America Online's local telephone access number menu to find a local connection.

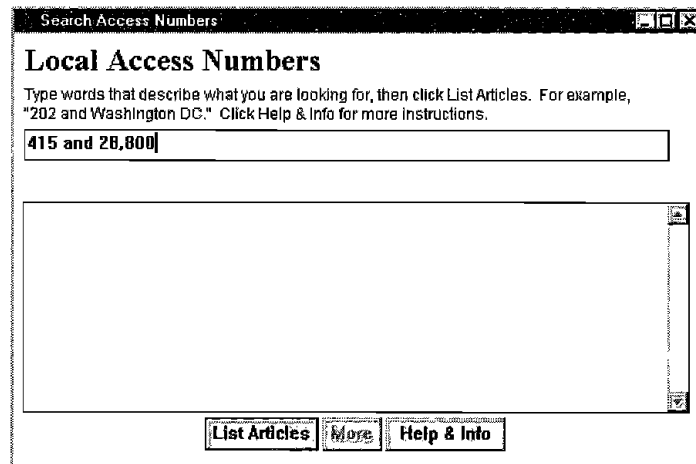


These numbers are generally considered local telephone calls from most cities and do not incur toll charges from most residential telephones. If the nearest access number is not a local call, your local telephone service adds the per-minute charges to your phone bill. These charges are separate from the America Online connect time charges. You might want to call the phone company in the city you're visiting to learn just what toll charges you might incur. This may be important if you're connecting from a hotel, where you may be charged an extra fee for long-distance access.

After you arrive at the Accessing America Online screen in the free area (an area where you don't incur online charges), click the Search Access Numbers item, and press Return or Enter on your keyboard to open the Search Access Numbers screen (see fig. 5.7).

FIG. 5.7

The Search Access Numbers screen is the most versatile method of locating the AOL connection number closest to you.



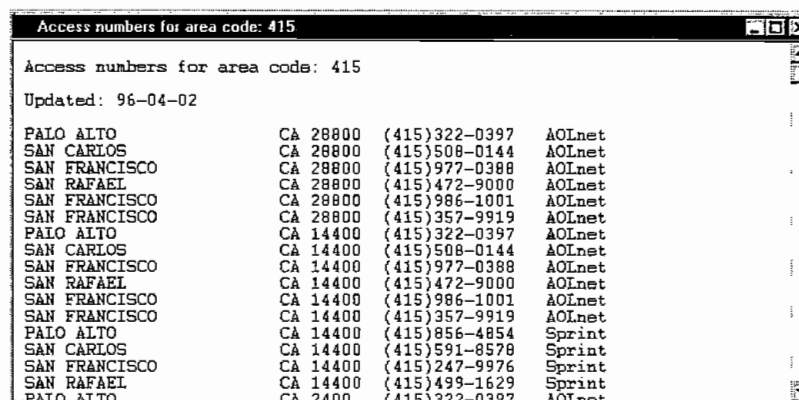
A text entry field, which is the smaller of the two panes in the window, is set up for you to enter the location or area code from which you are calling.

America Online has arranged the telephone number database into a collection of searchable documents arranged by area code. Entering the area code from which you're calling is the fastest way to locate a nearby access number. In figure 5.7, 415 has been entered as the area code from which to connect to America Online; 28,800 indicates that the search should be for numbers offering 28,000 bps access for this area code. If no 28,800 bps access numbers are available in the entered area code, the search will result in no matches. If 28,800 bps numbers are found in the area code, then all access numbers are displayed, including lower-speed access numbers.

Because not all areas have 28,800 bps hookups yet, you'll probably want to enter just the area code by itself in the search field. Then click the List Articles button or press Return or Enter to display the matching online document containing the results of the search (see fig. 5.8).

FIG. 5.8

Here are the results from the search for numbers in area code 415.



Access numbers for area code: 415			
Updated: 96-04-02			
PALO ALTO	CA 28800	(415)322-0397	AOLnet
SAN CARLOS	CA 28800	(415)508-0144	AOLnet
SAN FRANCISCO	CA 28800	(415)977-0388	AOLnet
SAN RAFAEL	CA 28800	(415)472-9000	AOLnet
SAN FRANCISCO	CA 28800	(415)986-1001	AOLnet
SAN FRANCISCO	CA 28800	(415)357-9919	AOLnet
PALO ALTO	CA 14400	(415)322-0397	AOLnet
SAN CARLOS	CA 14400	(415)508-0144	AOLnet
SAN FRANCISCO	CA 14400	(415)977-0388	AOLnet
SAN RAFAEL	CA 14400	(415)472-9000	AOLnet
SAN FRANCISCO	CA 14400	(415)986-1001	AOLnet
SAN FRANCISCO	CA 14400	(415)357-9919	AOLnet
PALO ALTO	CA 14400	(415)856-4854	Sprint
SAN CARLOS	CA 14400	(415)591-8578	Sprint
SAN FRANCISCO	CA 14400	(415)247-9976	Sprint
SAN RAFAEL	CA 14400	(415)499-1629	Sprint
PALO ALTO	CA 2400	(415)322-0397	AOLnet

If you want to view the numbers contained in the document, double-click the title to open a window containing the actual list of telephone numbers and the cities in which they are located.

CAUTION

There's an extra charge for using AOL's 800 phone number, some AOL numbers in Canada, and AOL's GlobalNet service in other parts of the world. Check the updated rates shown in the Access area before using any of these numbers, so you won't see any unexpected surprises added to your AOL bill.

Maintaining a Phone Book

I heartily recommend that you save the entire list of numbers for your chosen area code, and not just the number closest to your current location. If you unexpectedly find yourself a city or two away from your usual calling place, looking up the nearest number is as

simple as double-clicking the saved list. Choose Save from the America Online File menu to save the list to your hard disk or floppy. Or just choose **F**ile, **P**rint to make a hard copy of your list of phone numbers.

Searching by area code is simple; it offers you all the numbers serving the area in which you live, and keeps you prepared when you need to call from anywhere in your area code's coverage (and, in many cases, even nearby area codes).

TIP

You also can search for an access number by typing a city name, the communications carrier (AOLNet, SprintNet, or Tymnet), or even the first three digits of the telephone number.

What to Do When You're Not Near a Phone

If you don't have immediate access to your computer or to America Online, there's another way to get the nearest local access number, and that is to telephone SprintNet, which provides a large portion of AOL's high-speed connection network. Just dial 1-800-473-7983, and tell the operator your location. The operator will suggest the nearest access numbers.

TIP

Before you hit the trail, please be sure to make a note of the local access numbers for your destination. You can find these numbers easily while you're online, as described earlier in this section.

You might want to get more than one number, just in case the primary number you try is busy for some reason. Using the steps described earlier in this chapter, you can create new Location setups to add these new numbers.

CAUTION

Please bear in mind that SprintNet's operators don't usually have a map handy. So it's up to you to determine whether the numbers you get are local or not. Usually a quick call to the local phone company will produce that information.

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Changing Your Modem Setup

Earlier in this chapter, you learned how to have America Online software locate numbers for you by searching the database of access numbers. You can learn one more trick: creating new connection documents by editing existing connection settings offline.

By creating new connection documents in this fashion, you are able to save various options and access numbers for simple point-and-shoot selection from the Welcome to America Online screen, as shown earlier in figure 5.1. One reason for doing this is to connect to the same access numbers from two locations; one that requires you to dial 9 to reach an outside line (such as an office, perhaps), and the other that doesn't (such as your home).

For more information about setting up your modem, see Appendixes A, "If You're New to the Online World," B, "Using Your America Online Macintosh Software," and C, "Using Your America Online Windows Software."

1. Open America Online.
2. Choose New Location from the Select Location pop-up menu on your sign-on screen.

This brings up the screen shown in figure 5.9.

FIG. 5.9

You can create a new location profile by using America Online's new location management feature.

3. Enter the appropriate information and check the options you need. Appendixes B and C describe the options you'll want to consider. Don't forget to select a modem type and communications port, if necessary.
4. Click the Save button to give your new setup a name and write it to your hard drive.

After saving the new setup to your hard drive, you can select it from the Locality pop-up menu that appears when you open America Online.

By this point, you have all the information you need to enter the correct information in your America Online Connection Setup documents, obtain that information from America Online, and add and change new connection documents when your travel plans dictate.

Sending Faxes on America Online

We know the Information Superhighway still needs a few more on- and off-ramps for the rest of the world. When the time comes to send mail to someone who does not yet have access to AOL or other e-mail services, what can you do? Why, send regular U.S. mail or a fax, of course!

Using your America Online software to send information is just as easy as sending e-mail. In fact, the only difference between e-mail and fax/paper mail is how the mail is addressed. The form is exactly the same as the one you use to send e-mail to online members.

You can send paper or fax mail by following these steps:

1. From the Mail menu, select Send Fax/Paper Mail. Alternatively, select Compose Mail.
2. In the To field, type:

Addressee Name@usmail

For example, to send paper mail to John Smith, type:

John Smith@usmail

3. Type in the addressee name exactly as it would appear on an envelope, as many as 33 characters. You will be prompted later for the complete mail address and your own return address.

You are able to easily send the same message to multiple postal addresses by separating each addressee name with a comma. For example:

John Smith@usmail, Jane Jones@usmail, Mike Johnson@usmail

NOTE You cannot send a message to paper mail and regular e-mail or paper mail and fax mail addresses at the same time.

4. When you are ready to send your mail, select the Send Now icon.
5. You are presented with a window to enter the return address. Enter the address, select Continue, and type the address to which your paper mail should be sent.

Certain formatting rules apply to paper mail. You can learn more about these rules, and other information unique to paper mail, online by choosing Mail, Fax/Paper while connected to the America Online service.

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Fax mail is even easier. In the Compose Mail window, type the fax address in the To or CC field in this format:

addressee@phone number, such as **John Smith@415-555-1234**

Voila! Your fax is on its way.

The phone number portion of the address must contain the area code of the receiving number and should not contain any other prefixes, such as a 1, before the area code. You can send fax mail to other fax addresses by separating the addresses with a comma, as in paper mail, and you can send fax mail to normal AOL screen name addresses by way of additional recipients listed in the To or CC boxes. As with paper mail, special formatting rules apply. You can learn about these rules using the same path as paper mail.

NOTE When you send e-mail or an instant message, you only pay for your online time. Fax or paper mail is an extra cost service. You'll want to review America Online's current prices before you use this feature. ☐

If you have general questions about the fax or paper mail service, or specific questions about fax or paper mail you've sent, send your questions to America Online through the free customer support area online; the keyword is **Help**.

Why Send E-Mail to Yourself?

Nope, it's not just another way to talk to yourself.

It's clearly difficult, if not impossible, to take everything you need for efficient computing with you on a trip. Later in this chapter, in the section titled "Hard-Won Tips for Computing on the Road," I describe some of the essential items you should pack in your bag. The important watchword in personal computing, though, is backup. You should back up all of your critical documents on another disk, if possible. That way, if your computer breaks down or your hard drive fails for some reason, you have another copy of your document to work on.

Having an extra drive or two on the road isn't always practical, but America Online gives you a convenient outlet to back up your most important work—the service's e-mail feature. Simply attach any file that you work on to a piece of America Online e-mail (see Chapter 8, "Using America Online E-Mail"), and send it to yourself. The file will be waiting safely in your America Online mailbox when you arrive home. It will wait up to one month for your arrival (after a month, e-mail is automatically deleted from your online mailbox).

America Online and Cellular Phones

They are found all over the countryside. Cellular telephones are used by millions of people on the road to stay in touch with the office or the home. Almost every part of the country can support cellular connections. There are times when you will travel to places where no telephone line is handy, but you still need to stay in touch. You may want to consider attaching a modem to your cellular telephone so that you can connect to your favorite online service—America Online. Unfortunately, cellular phones, while quite reliable in regular use, present unique problems in maintaining stable connections.

TIP

To avoid getting a Mail Waiting notice every time you log on while on vacation, you can create an alternate screen name and have mail you don't want to read right away addressed there.

Connecting to a Cellular Telephone

The important thing to realize is that, while the technology behind them is truly a wonderful achievement, cellular telephone connections aren't nearly as stable as your regular home telephone. As you travel from place to place, the signal from your telephone is passed off from one cellular center to another. The quality of the signal can vary as you drive past tall buildings and hills. To cope with this occurrence, Microcom, a developer of the technology for modem error correction schemes, has an MNP-10 error correction protocol that's supported by some modems. The manual for your modem should indicate whether this compression scheme is supported.

A modem that doesn't have MNP-10 most likely works, but at reduced efficiency. You also need an interface of some sort to hook up directly to a cellular telephone. Global Village, a manufacturer of Macintosh modems, has a product that is designed to provide improved cellular connections. Called the PowerPort Coupler, this product is a base to which you can attach the headset of your cellular phone (or even a pay phone). The other end hooks into your laptop's modem. This acoustic coupler promises reliable transmissions at up to 9600 bps.

Many PC-card modems include support for MNP-10. If you have a PC laptop or a recent Macintosh PowerBook computer (or a similar model), you may want to check into one of these products. Two manufacturers of cellular-compatible, high-speed modems are Apex and Megahertz. Many PC-card modems designed for a PC will work on a Mac that supports this interface, although you may need different software. Check with the manufacturer about compatibility issues.

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Wireless Modems

One solution to this dilemma is the arrival of devices that incorporate a cellular telephone and a modem (wireless modems). Manufacturers such as Motorola are introducing these units that, although presenting the utmost in convenience while traveling, are higher priced than a separate phone and modem.

There's yet another type of wireless modem, one that operates similarly to your stereo or TV's remote control. This sort of modem includes a transmission/receiving device that attaches to your standard phone line (or even the modem jack on a cellular phone) and to a convenient AC outlet. The modem itself looks similar to a regular PC-card modem, but has a small rectangular module attached to it that exchanges signals with the device that's hooked up to your phone line.

One wireless modem I've used is the AirPlex from VST Power Systems, Inc. (a manufacturer of accessories for Macintosh PowerBooks). The AirPlex has a transmission range of up to 50 feet. It gives you the freedom of total portability—you can telecommunicate free of both your power and phone lines (well, at least until the battery power runs out).

Hard-Won Tips for Computing on the Road

I know that business trips sometimes come on short notice, and there isn't much time to plan in advance. But if you take a few moments to assemble your computing equipment and add a few extras, your mobile personal computing experience and your visits to America Online will be fast, efficient, and relatively trouble-free. A few ideas follow to make computing on the road easier.

When you book your hotel reservation, it is a good idea to ask if the phones in the rooms have a data port—a euphemism for a modem line. Many hotel phones do not have such a connection, although an increasing number do. If the room doesn't have a modem connection, but it has a standard modular (RJ-11) phone plug, you can disconnect that plug from the telephone and attach it directly to your modem (I've done it often).

But here's the important part: Double-check to see if the hotel is using a PBX (digital) telephone system. A PBX system provides state-of-the-art service, but it's also a serious problem for an analog telephone device, such as your computer's modem. Hooking up your modem to a PBX line may damage the modem. If the hotel uses a PBX installation, contact the manufacturer of your modem as to whether they have a special interface card or module for use with such services. Global Village Corporation has such an interface available; the device is designed for use with their modems, but may work with other models too, on both a Mac and a PC. Another product you might consider is the DataDapter from Konexx, which is designed to work with any modem.

A final bit of advice: Some hotels will exact a large surcharge for telephone calls you make from your room (even local calls in many cases). You may find, after your arrival, that another access number for America Online will run up a lower surcharge. At the very least, you may want to be more careful about the amount of time you spend online if the hotel adds a per-minute charge for your call.

Before leaving on a trip, you'll probably want to get some useful accessories that are bound to make your laptop computer work more effectively on the road. The following sections concentrate strictly on items that you can easily pack in a portable computer case or an overnight bag. A visit to your favorite computer dealer will reveal many more treasures from which to choose.

NOTE If you experience sudden disconnections while you're online, it may be because someone is trying to reach you on the hotel phone. Before beginning your AOL session, you may want to ask the hotel operator to hold your calls (if possible) until you're done to avoid this problem. □

Modem—Internal or External?

If you're buying a new laptop computer, you may want to consider the convenience of having it equipped with an internal modem. Although it may cost a few bucks extra, you don't need to pack an extra device in your storage case. Because America Online is adding 28,800 bps (V.34) connection numbers throughout the country, consider a high-speed modem. It'll also help you save money because your online sessions will be shorter, and, if you connect with a long-distance call or with a cellular phone, your phone bills also will be reduced.

NOTE External modems will generally work on both a Macintosh or a PC. The only difference is the modem cable and the software. However, internal modems (except for PC-card models) are usually designed to support a specific computing platform or model. Make sure a modem is fully compatible with your laptop before you purchase it. □

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Portable Fixed Hard Drive

The hard drives that come in laptops (except for the most expensive models) generally have limited capacity. They are also expensive to replace. If you're doing a large presentation or heavy-duty graphics work requiring a great deal of storage space, you'll want to consider products such as the APS Technologies Companion II or the Liberty portable drives, both of which offer the extra storage capacity you may need in small, convenient cases. VST Power Systems, Inc. also has a line of high-capacity drives and magneto-optical (MO) devices that fit into the expansion bay of some laptop computers.

For laptops with one or more PC-card slots, you may want to look into adding a small hard drive to fit into a slot (if the slots aren't already occupied). One manufacturer of such products is Kingston Technology, which also manufactures a hard drive that attaches to the parallel port of a PC.

Portable Removable Hard Drive

If you need to transfer files to different locations, a removable drive is a plus. The ever-popular Iomega ZIP drive uses media hardly bigger than a floppy disk. The 3 1/2-inch Iomega Jaz and SyQuest cartridges weigh just three ounces and are also quite suitable for travel.

TIP

If your laptop computer has a PC-card slot, you can plug in an additional drive or other peripheral device, such as a high-speed modem. Check the manual or contact the manufacturer for expansion compatibility.

Other convenient removable devices include the Zip drive and Bernoulli cartridge drives from Iomega, and a portable optical drive (which is available from a number of manufacturers).

If you need high capacity, consider Iomega's Jaz or SyQuest's SyJet, both of which support low-cost media that stores more than 1G of data.

TIP

Some laptops provide the ability to customize settings, such as when the hard drive powers down, to conserve battery life. Check your computer's manual for the particulars.

Laptop Carrying Cases

So many shapes and sizes of carrying cases are now available that you are bound to find one that meets your needs. Some products combine an overnight bag with a compartment for your laptop and some accessories. Other cases are hardly larger than the computer. My suggestion is that you get one with straps to hold your laptop computer securely, and with a sufficient amount of cushioning to protect it from the routine hazards of travel. There should be a pouch that is large enough to contain phone and external drive cables, disks, and whatever accessories you need on your trip.

TIP

Always travel with a set of backup operating system disks, hard disk diagnostic disks, and floppy backups for your most important software packages so that you can quickly get up and running in the event of a disk crash.

SCSI Terminator

If your laptop has a SCSI connection port (which is true of all Macintosh models), and you want to hook up an external device to it, you need a SCSI terminator, which is used, in effect, to end the SCSI circuit. You can buy a standard SCSI terminator for \$10 to \$20 at your local computer or business equipment store. Alternatively, you may want to consider the \$39 APS Technologies SCSI Sentry. This is an active terminator that uses digital circuitry to maintain proper current and impedance across the SCSI chain, and reduce problems that sometimes affect a SCSI setup.

Extra Battery and Recharger

If you need to do a long work session on the road, it is probably a good idea to purchase a second battery and a separate recharger that will keep you running when power is low.

Modular Telephone Cord

You can buy a modular telephone cord at your supermarket, if your modem wasn't shipped with one (although they usually are). Just get a simple cable with the standard RJ-11 modular jacks at each end.

Digital Phone Switch

One of the manufacturers of Macintosh PowerBook modems, Global Village, offers a phone switch that provides an interface between a PBX digital phone system and your laptop's modem. It'll work on any Mac or PC.

NOTE Although computer makers generally suggest caution when running your laptop computer and disks through the X-ray devices at an airport security check-in, the chances are almost nonexistent that you would be at risk of damage to your data. If in doubt, insist on a manual inspection. Some laptops, such as the Macintosh PowerBook, can be placed in an idle or sleep mode, rather than shut off, so that they can be quickly activated for the benefit of skeptical airport security personnel. □

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Portable Printer

Even though your travel bag is apt to get crowded with all the accessories you can buy, if you intend to create many documents, you might want to bring along a portable printer. Apple, GCC, Hewlett-Packard, and other manufacturers offer lines of small printers that you can use to process your mission-critical documents during a trip. Don't expect any of these models to be speed demons compared to your desktop printer, but they more than make up for their slower performance in terms of convenience.

TIP

If you don't have a portable printer handy and you want a hard copy printout, fax a document to your hotel's fax machine. But remember, your hotel will usually charge for faxes by the page.

TV/VCR Interface

If you expect to use your laptop to generate a slide show or other presentation, you'll want to have an interface unit, such as the Focus L/TV Portable. These products allow you to attach many portable models directly to a TV or VCR. Before buying such a product, however, make sure your computer can work with such a device.

From Here...

Whether your trip is for business purposes or just to satisfy your wanderlust, you'll want to prepare in advance and make certain your computer has all the tools you need in case trouble arises. You'll also want to be certain you can make your America Online connections quickly and efficiently. Chances are that you want to find other America Online members who are nearby. You can search for other America Online members not only by name, but also by hobby, special interest, occupation, and more. You can travel to just about any major city across the globe and still stay in touch with America Online for the latest news and information to make your trip even more rewarding.

For more background information on some of the topics discussed in this chapter, refer to these chapters:

- In Chapter 7, "America Online's People Connection," you can find tips and tricks about meeting fellow AOL members.
- In Chapter 8, "Using America Online E-Mail," you learn all you ever wanted to know (and maybe more) about how AOL's high-speed e-mail system works.
- In Chapter 9, "Using America Online Message Boards," you receive step-by-step directions on how to navigate through message boards, post messages, and search for responses.
- In Chapter 27, "Secrets of AOL's Travel Department," you can learn tips about planning your trip and getting the best prices for airfare, car rental, and your hotel stay.

Where Do We Begin?

The first five chapters of this book offered hints and tips about getting the most out of AOL, both at home and on the road. Chapters 3 and 4, for example, are filled with tips and tricks about making AOL's software work faster and more efficiently for you. Chapter 5 gives you advice on how to handle your sessions while you're on the road, perhaps with your laptop computer and even a cellular phone at hand.

This chapter assumes that you've established your AOL membership, and you've at least had a chance to log on for an online session or two. You might even be an experienced AOL user. But, I'll tell you one thing: even after several years of membership, I wasn't prepared for the sheer depth of features AOL offered until I sat down to write the Using America Online books. Whether you're a beginner or an experienced online traveler, you'll discover that there's a vast world of entertainment and information just waiting to be discovered on America Online. ■

America Online's channels

AOL's online departments offer convenient gateways to the areas you want to visit.

Contacting other members

Learn simple techniques for sending e-mail and instant messages.

Get the software you want

Learn techniques for transferring files on America Online.

Forum chats

Meet with others and discuss topics online in a forum.

Paper Mail/Faxes

Send paper mail and a fax to someone who doesn't have an online account.

The Internet

Get a brief look at the Internet-related features offered by America Online.

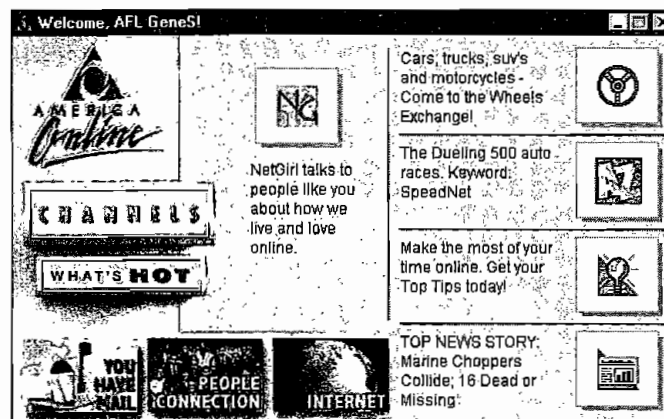
Selecting the Right Channel

Finding the right place to visit on AOL is similar to selecting a channel on your TV set, except you click an icon rather than push a button. Once you've signed on to AOL and learned how to get the most out of its highly flexible software, you'll want to do more than just get your feet wet.

Every time you log on to America Online, you'll see the Welcome screen (see fig. 6.1), also known as In The Spotlight. This screen shows you the major highlights of the service and informs you if you have e-mail waiting.

FIG. 6.1

See the highlights and check your new mail when you first log on to America Online.



TROUBLESHOOTING

Hey, what's wrong with my computer? When I connect to AOL, I see a totally different screen from the one you show in your book. Is it me or is it you? It's both. The screen I'm showing here requires version 3.0 of AOL's Mac or Windows software (or a later version) to display properly. Older versions of AOL software will offer up the basic 14 channels and a different Welcome screen format, because those versions of the software don't support the new artwork styles.

To see exactly what I see when I log on to AOL, you'll want to upgrade to the latest and greatest version of the software. To do that, just use the AOL keyword Upgrade to access the download area. And, so long as you use the Download Now feature to get the file to your computer, you don't have to pay for the update. Such a deal!

This chapter goes a bit deeper, beneath the In The Spotlight window, actually, to the Channels screen and more, where you'll explore the various virtual neighborhoods, known as *departments*, of America Online (see fig. 6.2). The Channels screen is located just beneath

the In The Spotlight window when you first log on to America Online. The fastest way to bring it up front is just to click the shaded CHANNELS rectangle at the left side of your Welcome screen.

FIG. 6.2

AOL's virtual city is divided into channels, reflecting different areas of the online experience.



Each of the online channels or departments shown in figure 6.2 is identified by a major topic of interest. A channel contains a number of forums, folders, services, and other areas related (sometimes loosely) to that topic. You'll learn more about those areas in Part II, "Communicating Online." For now, we'll just scratch the surface.

NOTE If you've closed the Channel menu during your online session, you can bring it up again by simply opening the Go To menu and choosing Channels. 

TIP

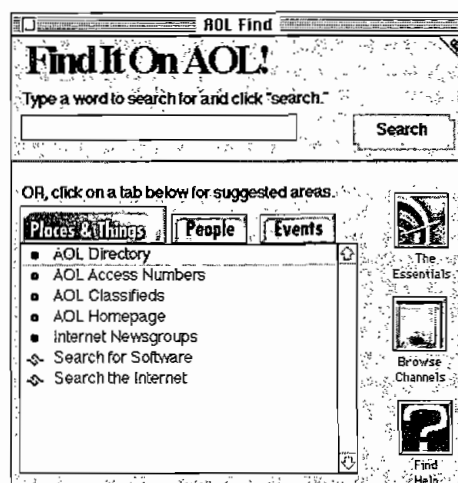
Almost every area of America Online can be reached by pressing $\mathcal{H}$ -K (or Ctrl+K for Windows users) and typing a simple keyword. A list of many of these keywords is included in Appendix E, "America Online Keywords."

Find...

AOL provides a handy search tool to help you find exactly the kind of information or service you want (see fig. 6.3). You can choose from Places and Things, People, or Events online. Just enter the topic that intrigues you in the search screen and AOL's host computer will dig up a list of likely prospects for you.

FIG. 6.3

What do you want to find on AOL? Here's a helpful tool to do it.



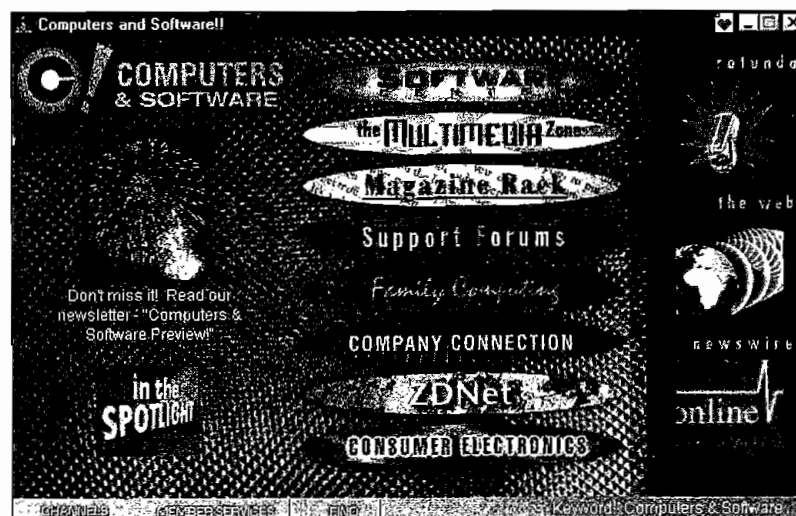
Computers and Software

Keyword: **Computing**

Welcome to my home area on America Online. Because people use their personal computers to connect to America Online, the Computing department is clearly one of the most popular places to visit on America Online (see fig. 6.4). Whether you use an Apple Macintosh or a PC running Windows, DOS, or OS/2, you'll find information, help, and extensive libraries of software for you to download in this area. In addition, many of the major hardware and software manufacturers have fully staffed support areas on America Online, where you can get quick solutions to problems with a specific product, or even advice on how to use that product more effectively. You'll learn more about it in Part V, "Computing Resources Online."

FIG. 6.4

America Online's Computing area is one of the service's most frequently visited online departments.



Digital Cities

Keyword: **Digital City**

This channel is like an online travelogue (see fig. 6.5). Just by clicking the map that identifies a particular region of the U.S., you can bring up a list of the many forums that relate to that area. You'll find, for example, that many of the major cities or their newspapers have set up their own AOL forums to help travelers or even residents learn about the news and lifestyle information. You can even use the search tool to focus on a specific city or state or even a number of the major foreign cities (now that AOL is fast becoming a worldwide online service).

FIG. 6.5

Take an online vacation to many spots in the U.S. and around the world with AOL's Digital Cities channel.



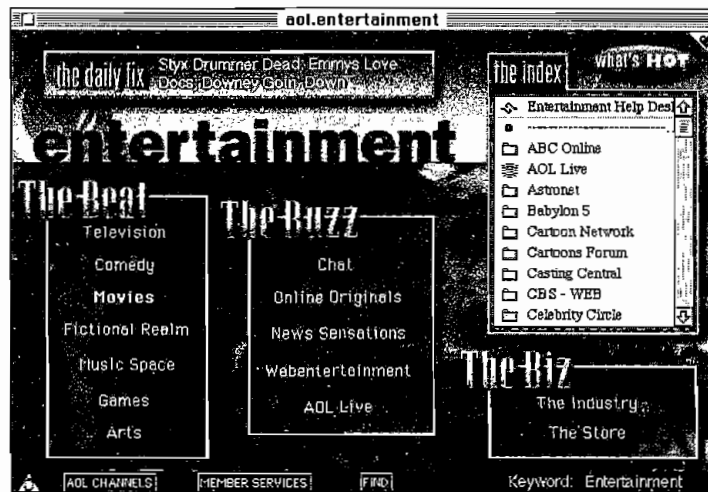
Entertainment

Keyword: **Entertainment**

Movies, television, books, political and humorous cartoons, *Disney Adventures Magazine*, RockLink, the Trivia Forum, and LaPub—these are just a few of the Entertainment department features that draw huge numbers of membership on a regular basis. Almost no other department online has the continuous drawing power of the Entertainment department. Both children and adults frequent Entertainment for its culturally diverse content. Be sure to stop by during your travels across America Online (see fig. 6.6).

FIG. 6.6

This screen will give you a quick glimpse of just some of the services offered in AOL's Entertainment channel.



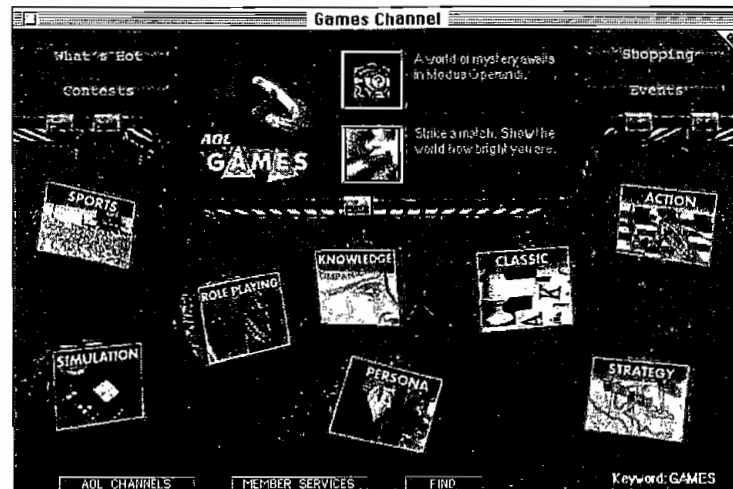
Games

Keyword: **Games**

It may be the latest CD-ROM game, a video game, or one of the thousands of files available for download on AOL. Or, it may be advice on how to solve those clues in your favorite computer game. Whatever the reason, AOL's Games channel (see fig. 6.7) is a place you'll want to visit often for fun and some exciting online adventures.

FIG. 6.7

AOL's Games channel offers information, software, and even the chance to participate in interactive games online.



Health & Fitness

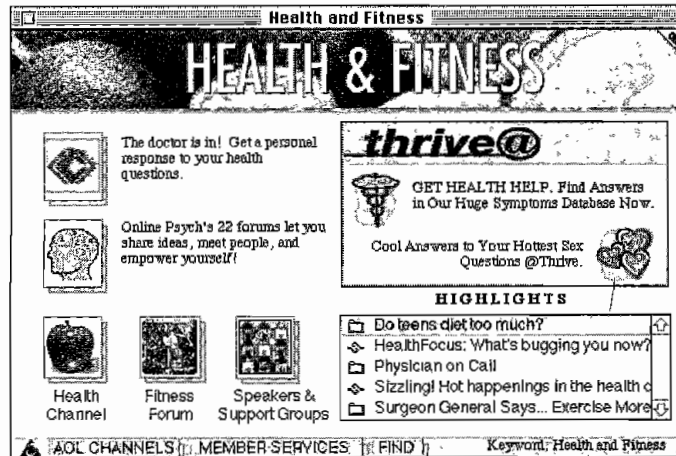
Keyword: **Health and Fitness**

Are you concerned with your health, or whether exercise would be of benefit or not? Well, we all are, and AOL's Health & Fitness channel (fig. 6.8) is a place you'll want to visit.

You'll read news of the latest developments in medical research, and get informed advice on how to live better and longer.

FIG. 6.8

The Health & Fitness channel provides advice, news, and a wide range of common sense information.



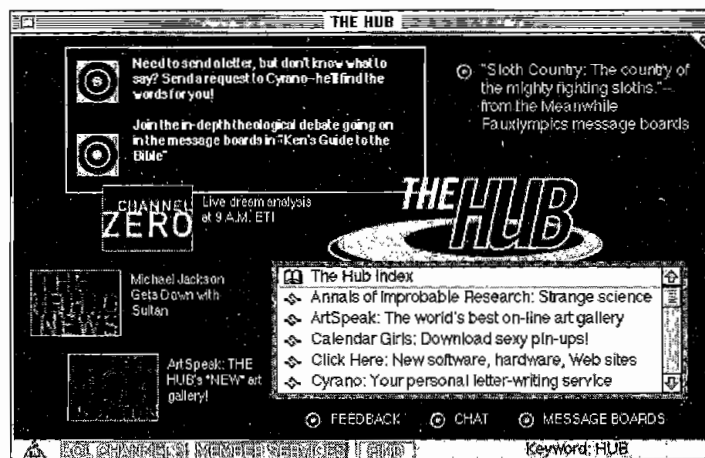
The Hub

Keyword: **Hub**

I'm always a bit at a loss for words to describe this channel, except to say that The Hub (see fig. 6.9) is at the center of the action online. It's a place for entertainment and information, and the best way to find out more about it is for you to pay a visit.

FIG. 6.9

The action begins at AOL's The Hub. Just check it out to see what I mean.



The International Channel

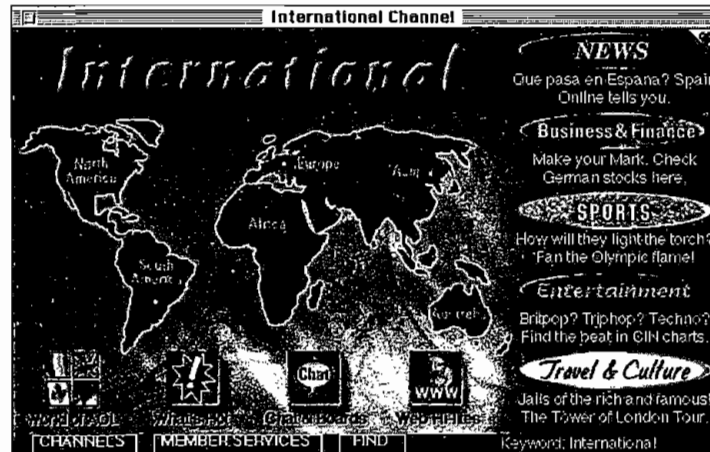
Keyword: **International**

The time has long since passed when America Online was restricted to just "America." Through partnerships with a number of international media companies, AOL has

expanded into Canada, Europe, Japan, and other major world centers. AOL's International channel (see fig. 6.10) allows you to quickly access some of AOL's worldwide features.

FIG. 6.10

AOL's International channel shows you how AOL has rapidly joined the international community.



If you're following this in order on your Channels screen, you'll see I'm skipping the Internet Connection for now. I'll get to it later in this chapter, in the section entitled "Traversing the Superhighway."

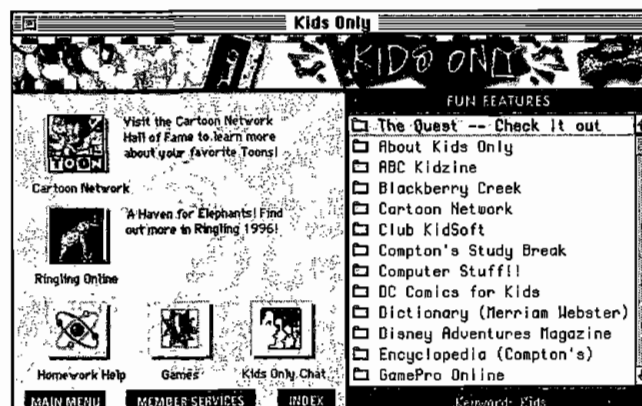
Kids Only

Keyword: **Kids**

I really haven't discussed special places for kids yet on America Online, but I'll remedy that right now. As shown in figure 6.11, young people have lots of special and very friendly places to visit on America Online. *Disney Adventures Magazine* is on-hand with a special forum. There are Kids Chats (online conferences), and also special Kids Only versions of America Online's most popular clubs, such as the Astronomy Club and the Star Trek club. Three chapters in Part IV, "Kids and America Online," are devoted to the subject.

FIG. 6.11

Kids have a special area to call their own on America Online.



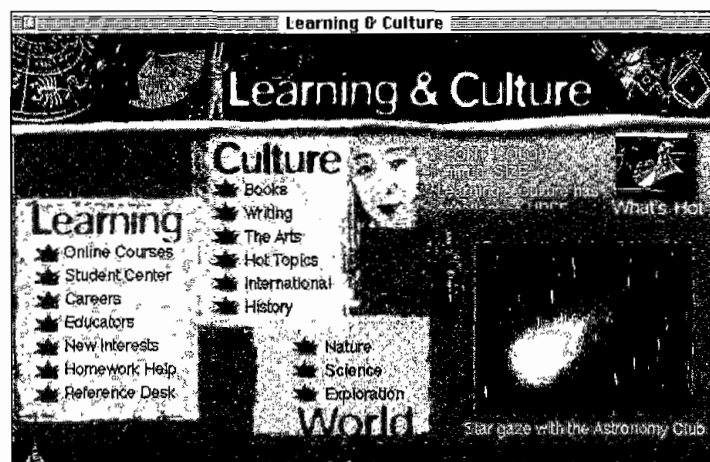
Learning and Culture

Keyword: **Education, Learning**

Do you need help with a homework assignment, or do you want to take some special courses on a particular topic of interest? Well, you can do that and more on America Online's active Learning & Culture channel, shown in figure 6.12. Here, you can pay a virtual visit to the Library of Congress or the Smithsonian, sign up for a correspondence course, or get information about the next round of college board examinations. For more information, refer to Chapter 25, "Learning and Reference."

FIG. 6.12

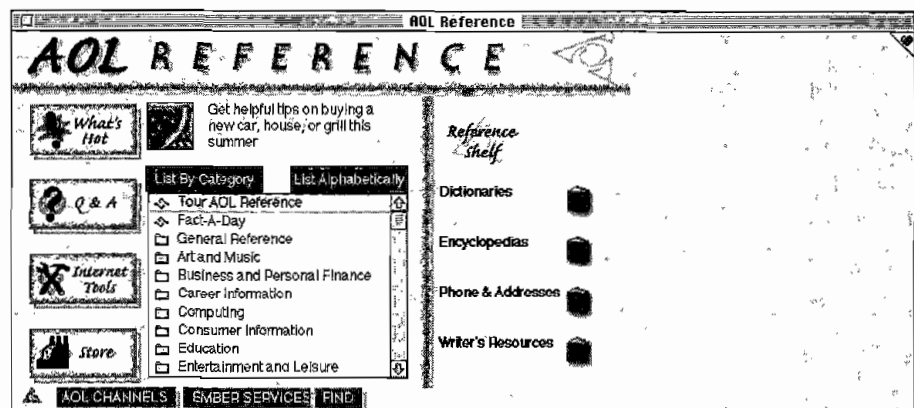
Sign up for a special course or visit a museum during your visit to America Online's Learning & Culture channel.



Because learning and reference are so intertwined, I'll briefly show you the opening screen from AOL's Reference Desk (see fig. 6.13). It's a place where AOL has grouped together many information resources, including databases you can search across the worldwide Internet, and you'll want to use this channel in concert with your online educational pursuits.

FIG. 6.13

Another learning center on AOL is the Reference Desk. The keyword is **Reference**.



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Life, Styles & Interests

Keyword: **Lifestyles**

Want to join an online club, access an online health guide, learn tips about home improvement, charitable work, religion and ethics, and more? Well, AOL's Life, Styles & Interests channel will provide a great repertoire of information for you (see fig. 6.14). You can join an astronomy or cooking club, share information about better health and exercise, all this and more in one convenient online department.

FIG. 6.14

A large range of subjects form the forums that make up AOL's Life, Styles & Interests channel.



Marketplace

Keyword: **Marketplace**

The marketplace is your AOL center for shopping galore! Whether you are looking for America Online goodies, such as T-shirts and coffee mugs, wanting to buy or sell a car, or looking for computer training aids, AOL's Marketplace channel offers you these things and more (see fig. 6.15).

MusicSpace

Keyword: **Music, MusicSpace**

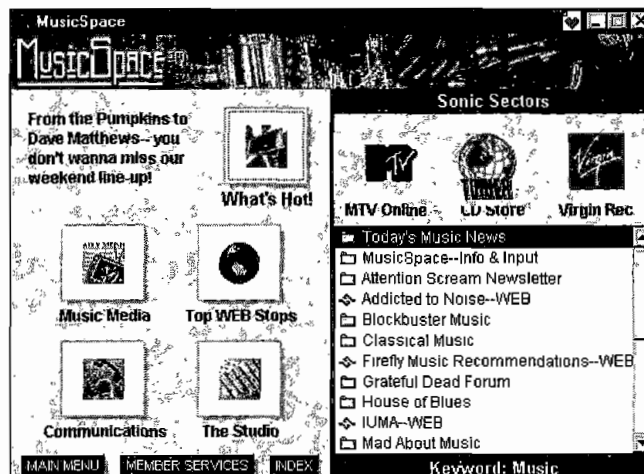
Whether you dig rock and roll, classical, country, or easy listening, AOL's MusicSpace channel (see fig. 6.16) can take you to a wide world of entertainment. It's a place where you can learn what your favorite performers are up to, download sound and video files, and share your views with other AOL members.

FIG. 6.15

Time to go shopping and save some cash right on America Online.

**FIG. 6.16**

The word is music and the place to discover more about it is AOL's MusicSpace channel.



The Newsstand

Keyword: Newsstand

It's hard to imagine what the world was like only 100 or so years ago, when almost any news of the world, or even the country, took days or weeks to reach the eyes and ears of those who were around then. Even 15 years ago, we still waited for the morning newspapers to get more than just a headline service about current events. In this age of the so-called Information Superhighway, we need not wait even that long (see fig. 6.17).

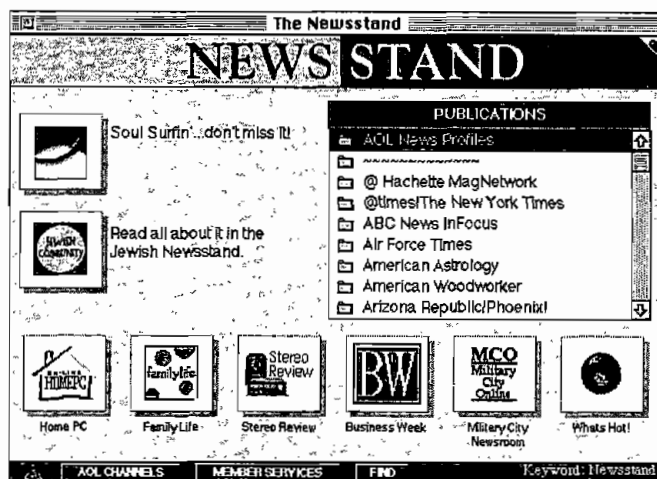
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FIG. 6.17

The corner newsstand was never quite like this.



America Online's Newsstand department offers a vast amount of information about the world today that is as current as it gets. In some cases, such as the *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, *Arizona Republic*, *San Jose Mercury News*, and many other daily, weekly, and monthly publications, the information is on America Online before the papers themselves hit the streets.

NOTE I am not deliberately passing over AOL's People Connection. But because it doesn't have just one main screen to show (other than the Lobby, which I'll describe in the next chapter), I'll just explain that it's AOL's meeting place, where members get together and move on to the next channel. ☐

Personal Finance

Keyword: **Finance**

This department can be considered an extension of Today's News (see fig. 6.18). The Personal Finance department lets you delve more deeply into all aspects of handling your personal finances—from reviewing the day's business news (and how it might affect your income and investment strategies) to seeking out the profile of a company you might want to add to your stock portfolio. A surface glance at the main Personal Finance department window shows you lots of information resources, many of which are covered in Chapter 26, "Online Investment and Tax Information."

Sports

Keyword: **Sports**

When America's national pastime, baseball, disappeared in the summer of 1994 due to a players' strike, the importance of sports in our lives didn't diminish one iota. We simply

talked about the football season instead. America Online's Sports department, shown in figure 6.19, covers the world of sports. It's a repository of the latest sports news, plus discussion groups and regular conferences on your favorite sports. And sometimes you'll be able to converse, through cyberspace, with some of your favorite sports figures, too.

FIG. 6.18

America Online's Personal Finance department has a vast storehouse of business news and advice.

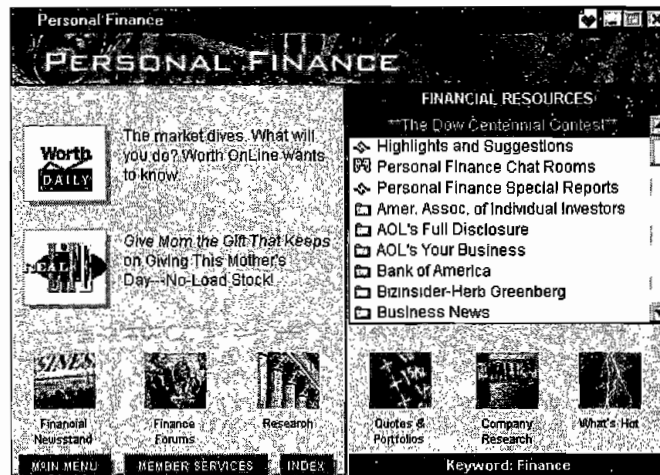
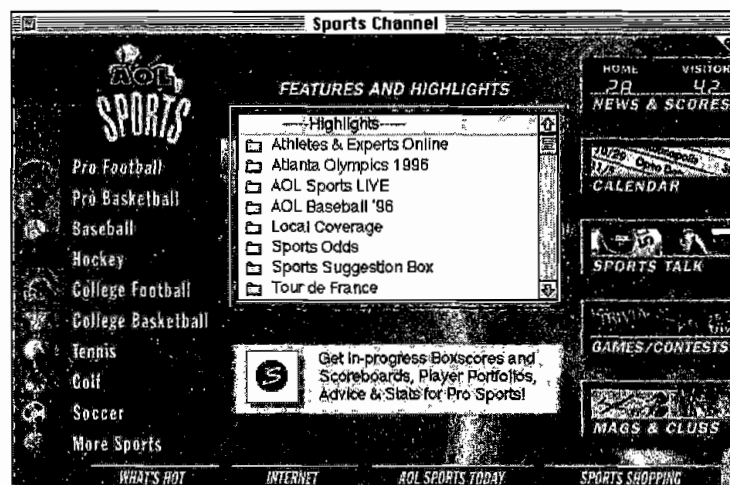


FIG. 6.19

If you open your newspaper to the sports section first, you'll want to make a regular stop to this online area.



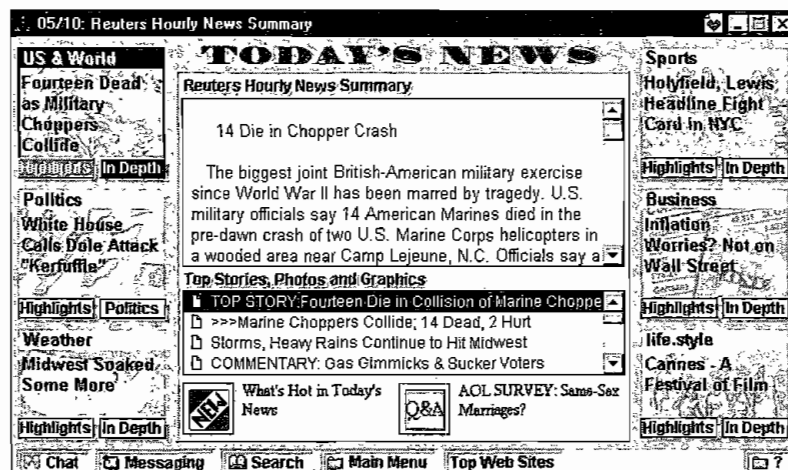
Today's News

Keyword: News

Here's your online daily newspaper. Besides providing the top news of the day, the Today's News department has special sections for stories related to the U.S. and World, Business, Entertainment, Sports, and Weather (see fig. 6.20). You also can use the Search feature, at the bottom of the screen, to locate stories about a particular item of interest. This area is described in more detail in Chapter 23, "The News of the Day."

FIG. 6.20

AOL's Today's News channel is an easy way to stay on top of the ever-changing events around the world.



Style

Keyword: **Style**

When you click this screen, you'll hear the reassuring sound of a camera shutter clicking (that is, of course, if the sounds on your computer are turned on). A visit to AOL's Style channel is a quick way to learn the latest from the fashion world (see fig. 6.21). New clothing, hints and tips about makeup—that's just part of the picture. Because the Olympics in Atlanta topped the news when this chapter was written, there was, of course, an emphasis on Olympic style fashion.

FIG. 6.21

Look your best with a little information from AOL's popular Style channel.



Travel

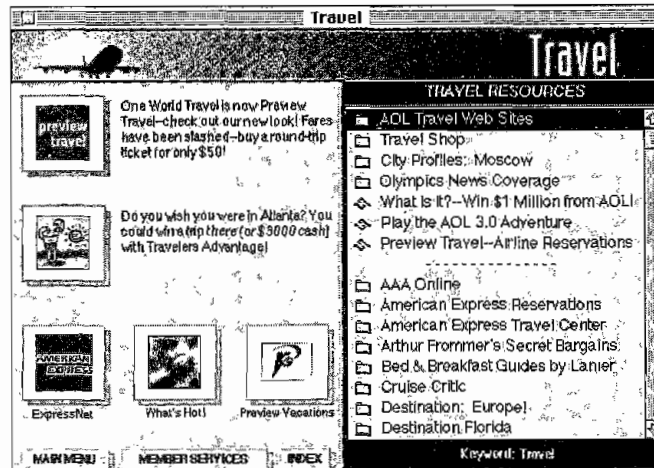
Keyword: **Travel**

As the name implies, travelers gain gratification in the areas that comprise this department (see fig. 6.22). One of the principal services of AOL's Travel channel is travel

reservations. You can book flights on any major airline, reserve rental cars and hotel rooms, or just check schedules and prices during your visit to the Travel channel. You'll also learn about the best places to visit, where to eat, and which places to avoid.

FIG. 6.22

Book a flight or learn about your favorite tourist spot in America Online's Travel department.



...and More

By now, you realize that America Online's channels contain vast areas to explore, and this chapter has highlighted only a few of them.

The Presenting feature, at the end of the AOL Channels menu, will offer you a selected roster of new and special online areas worth checking further.

All of America Online's channels are described in-depth in the remaining chapters; but for now, look around and become comfortable with their general layout. When the time comes to explore your chosen areas of particular interest, the later chapters will guide you through.

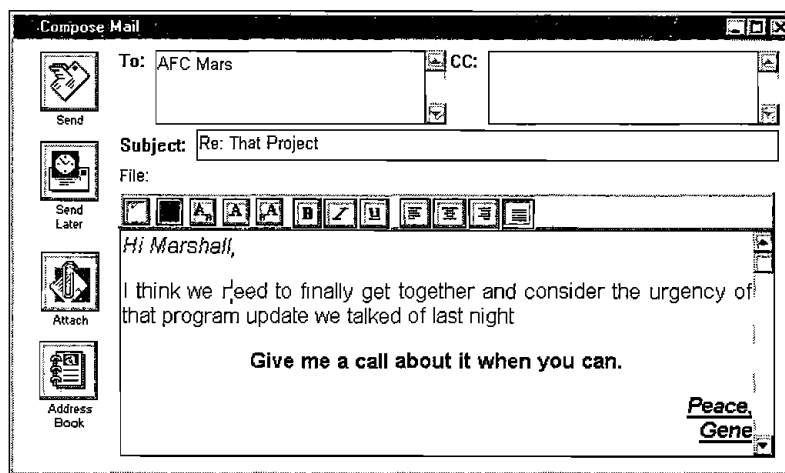
Making E-Mail Work for You

We've been hearing for a few years about the Information Superhighway. A major chunk of this roadway has already been paved by such services as America Online and is already being traveled by you and me. One of the ways to travel this road is by using *e-mail*.

America Online's electronic mail (e-mail) system is by far one of the most solid features the service offers and one of the most widely used (see fig. 6.23). AOL's e-mail system is simple and efficient; it can easily be scheduled to pick up mail waiting for you and deliver your outgoing mail without any intervention from you. You don't even have to lick a stamp or address an envelope.

FIG. 6.23

The America Online e-mail form can also be used to format your message in basic text sizes and styles. This is the Windows version; the Mac edition looks different and includes a built-in spell checker.



You can send e-mail at any time, day or night, and also include *attachments*—files from your computer’s hard disk connected to your outgoing e-mail to be delivered to another AOL member, or even a member of another online service. To send e-mail, simply enter the recipient’s screen name in the To box, type a heading in the Subject line, and type or paste your message in the large message box. Your message can be more than 25,000 characters long (about 400 words).

The people to whom you are sending your e-mail can read your message and retrieve any files you might have attached at their leisure. You and your recipient need not be online at the same time, which saves you the aggravation and effort it would take to prearrange a time when both of you would connect your modems to complete a communication session. Using America Online’s e-mail is explained fully in Chapter 8 “Using America Online E-Mail.”

Sending E-Mail to Other Services

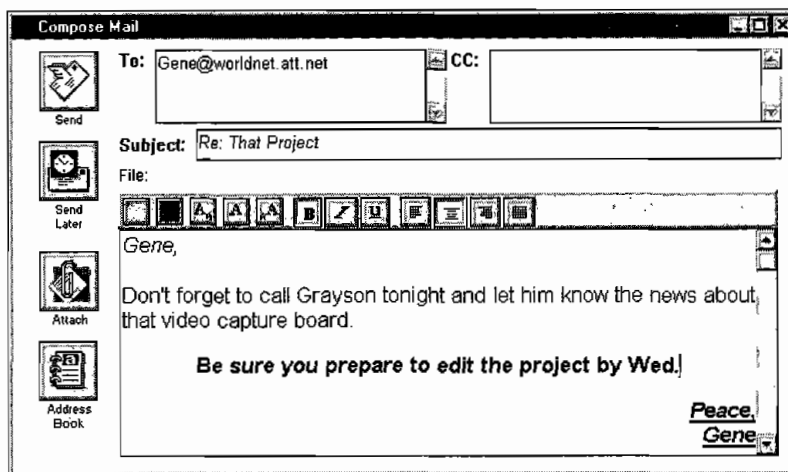
E-mail on America Online doesn’t just have to be sent to members of this service. You can also address your e-mail to members of other online services too, and, in fact, to anyone who has access to the vast, global Internet network. Sending mail through the Internet isn’t much different from sending it to a fellow AOL member. The main difference is the way you address the letter, which follows a very specific convention. For an example of how a typical Internet e-mail letter is set up, see figure 6.24.

The address format is always the same. First you enter the screen name or number of the recipient, and then use the at symbol (@), followed by the domain or address of the service that the recipient is using. In the example in figure 6.24, I’m actually writing a letter to

myself, but it's being sent to me at my account on AT&T's WorldNet service. To learn the ins and outs of Internet e-mail, refer to Chapter 30, "Secrets of Internet E-Mail and Mailing Lists."

FIG. 6.24

Sending Internet e-mail is easy on AOL.



Using Instant Messages for Interactive Meetings

Regular e-mail, as described in the preceding section, is a sort of formal and structured way of communicating messages of short to moderate length to other members, whether they are currently online or not (even if they're on another service with Internet access). It's the electronic equivalent of a letter you would send through the U.S. Postal Service.

Instant messages, or IMs for short, differ from e-mail in several ways and have distinct advantages and disadvantages. When using regular e-mail, you need know only the screen names of your correspondents to be able to send a message to them, and they need only to click a Reply button to respond to you. The messages you exchange in this fashion do not require any knowledge on your part of the other person's activities or presence online. You can pick up mail sent to you at any time, up to a month after it was issued. Exchanging instant mail, however, requires that both you and the other party be online at the same time (see fig. 6.25).

One big advantage of using instant messages is that both sides of the conversation take place in *real time* (while you and the recipient are online), and the topic is more easily followed without the time delays of e-mail.

Another major difference between the two types of messages is that when using e-mail, you can include as many screen names in the addressing boxes as you desire, hundreds

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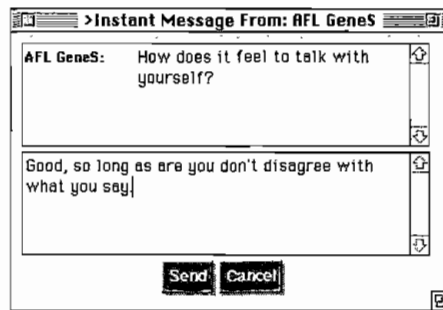
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even! On the other hand, using an instant message is just between two people, and no more. IMs are as private as AOL's e-mail and are a good way to carry on an online conversation to get to know someone better.

FIG. 6.25

AOL's Instant Message window shows a two-way mini-chat.



TIP

To find out whether an online friend or colleague has logged on, just refer to AOL's Buddy List screen (keyword: **Buddy List**).

For more information on e-mail and instant messages, see Chapter 7, "America Online's People Connection," and Chapter 8, "Using America Online E-Mail."

Secrets of Transferring Files on America Online

Let's clear the air about a couple of online terms before going on. *Downloading* is the transfer of programs and files from the host computer to your computer's hard drive or floppy disk. *Uploading* is just the opposite; you send files from your own hard drive to AOL.

There is no doubt about it; you are going to find yourself downloading files sooner or later (probably sooner). Most of you joined America Online in the first place to be able to download files. While exploring the AOL departments, you probably ran across some file libraries, and, perhaps, have already dabbled in downloading.

You can download files from two sources on America Online: the first is from department forums, and the other is from e-mail attachments. The way you set up a download session is slightly different between the two, but once begun, both use the same file transfer method.

Starting the process of uploading is distinctly different, though. Using e-mail is the most straightforward of the two; simply click the Attach button on your new e-mail window and select the file or files you want to send to someone else.

In the Computers & Software forums, and other America Online libraries, you need to first complete a form that requests information about the file you plan to send. You'll learn more about uploading in Chapter 20, "Tips and Tricks on Finding Software."

America Online Forums: Where the Action Is

The central meeting points on America Online are called *forums*. A forum, according to Webster, is a place for discussion of public matters or current issues, or an opportunity for open discussion. This could be no truer anywhere else other than America Online. Forums on America Online cover numerous topics, computer-related and otherwise. There are more than a dozen forums, for example, in the Windows side of AOL's Computing & Software department (see Chapter 19, "Visiting the Computing and Software Forums") and a similar complement of Macintosh forums, many dealing with comparable topics.

One example, for Macintosh users, is a Mac AOL Text Map in the Mac Beginners' Software library that you can open, save, and read. Find that area by using the keyword **Mac Help** (see fig. 6.26), which takes you to a forum designed to help beginning users learn more about their computers and AOL.

FIG. 6.26

The America Online Mac Help forum (and the PC equivalent) shows newcomers the ropes.



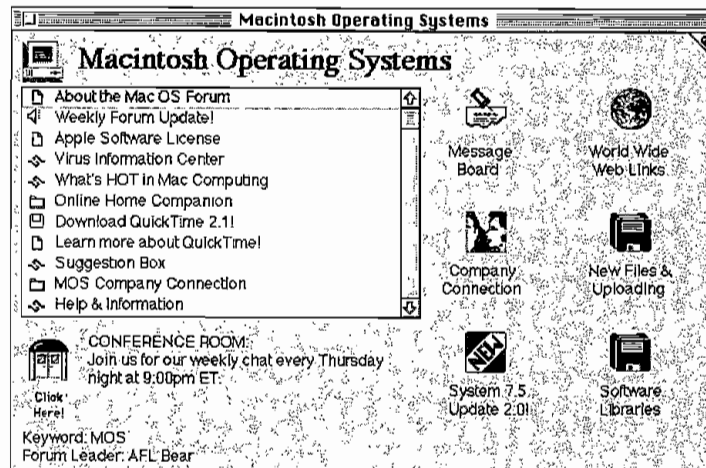
NOTE Macintosh forums are available to users of the Windows version of AOL software, and PC and Windows forums are available to Macintosh users. The special artwork you find in a forum's main window may look different on the opposite platform, sometimes appearing just as a list box. □

While the basic setup is different from one forum to another, there are certain features that you'll find in just about every AOL forum, and a few that might be specific to certain forums. In the next section, I'll dissect a typical forum in AOL's Computers & Software

area. You can use this as a guidepost during your first forum visits. For this little exercise, let's take a look at the Mac Operating Systems forum (see fig. 6.27), which is run by my friend and colleague John Stroud (AFL Bear). John (most of his friends just call him "Bear") worked with me on the first two editions of the original *Using America Online* books.

FIG. 6.27

The Mac OS forum is designed to help you get a handle on dealing with Apple's system software.



Most of the services offered in an AOL forum are clearly labeled. I'll just detail a few of them here; you'll see them in the list box or represented by an icon of one sort or another (those designs may change from forum to forum). It's important to know that not all of the features you see here will be shown or even labeled precisely as they are here.

- *About the Forum.* This is where the Forum Leader writes a few paragraphs describing the scope and mission of the forum and a few of the features visitors will want to check out.
- *Meet the Staff.* This is where the staff of the forum is introduced. You'll often read a biography of the forum's staff. In some forums (such as mine), this information is integrated into the About the Forum text.
- *New Files & Free Uploading.* This is the software library that you use to upload files to the forum's library. Chapter 20, "Tips and Tricks on Finding Software," describes the techniques of uploading software to America Online, and some of the basic requirements. Some forums call this library New Files & Free Uploading to indicate that the very latest files released by the forum staff are presented here.

The following list covers the features that are revealed when you click the forum window icons. The design of these icons might vary somewhat from forum to forum, and they are slightly different on the Macintosh platform, but the purpose is pretty much the same.

- *Help & Information.* If you are a new member of America Online, and you have questions about what to do when you visit a forum, clicking this icon (it's shown as a question mark in the Macintosh forums) will take you to the computing and software Help Desk, a place where you can get friendly advice and a selection of tips and tricks that you'll want to explore further. Some forums may offer this feature in the list box instead.
- *Software Libraries.* Here's the place where many members go first, because seeking out and downloading software is one of the most exciting activities on America Online. You can choose from tens of thousands of Macintosh and Windows software files, covering everything from commercial updates to spreadsheet templates and games. Chapters 20, 21, and 22 offer basic software tips and a listing of the most popular software now available on AOL.
- *Conference Center (or Room).* One of the most popular activities of any forum is the regular chat. Some forums hold them once a week, others hold them daily. These chats give you a chance to meet the forum staff, fellow members, and, sometimes, special experts on a variety of subjects.
- *Message Boards.* This is the part of a forum that is devoted to self-expression, and so it is one of the most popular areas. You can read what other members have to say, the responses from staff, and even ask your own questions or respond to other messages. For a comprehensive look at how you can use a message board to your best advantage, you'll want to read Chapter 9, "Using America Online Message Boards."
- *Company Connection.* Hundreds of major hardware and software manufacturers are represented on America Online. Each forum includes a gateway to firms that offer products related to the forum's mission. So, in the case of the Mac OS forum, the firms listed will offer products and services designed to support or enhance the Mac operating system. Sometimes a company will get its own icon, such as the one for Apple Computer in this forum.

NOTE If you need assistance with a problem that is not handled within a particular computing and software forum, you'll want to visit the regular Company Connection area instead (Keyword: **Industry**), where you can visit all of the firms on AOL that have products devoted to the computing platform you use. ■

Joining an Online Conference

Conferences are hosted not only by forums, but also by other departments of America Online. Different areas' conferences have different flavors—some conference hosts use a formal protocol to determine who speaks at what time; some hosts hold contests where everyone speaks (all right, they really *type*) at almost the same time. Each area's conference room usually has posted rules of conduct for members to read before entering, and you should do just that so that you will act according to local customs. To use a cliché, when in Rome, do as the Romans do.

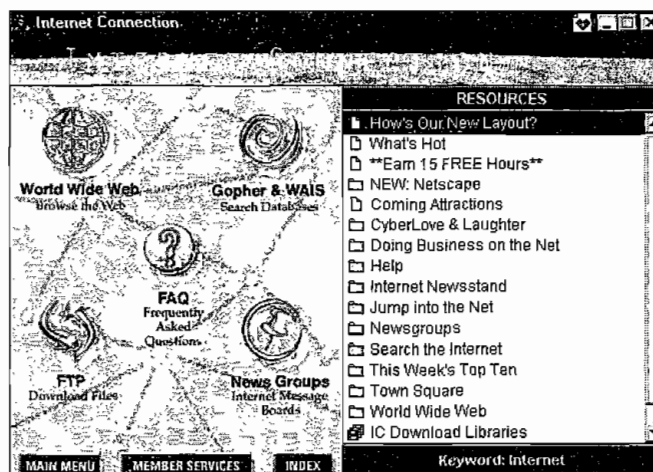
More conference room information is located in Chapter 10, “Chatting Online.”

Traversing the Superhighway

When you log on to America Online, you are not just accessing a single online service. Through AOL's Internet Connection (see fig. 6.28), you also have access to a huge, sprawling network encompassing other services throughout the world. No doubt you've read about the Internet in your daily newspaper, or you've heard or seen stories about it on the broadcast media.

FIG. 6.28

AOL's Internet Connection is the entranceway to the global Information Superhighway.



America Online was one of the first major online services to offer a huge set of Internet-related features. Some of them are summarized here. If your curiosity has been piqued, go right to Part VIII, “Entering the Information Superhighway,” for a full description of AOL's Internet features. Besides telling you how they work, there are suggestions of popular mailing lists, newsgroups, and World Wide Web sites you should visit during your online sessions.

Among the Internet features AOL offers are:

- *TCP/IP access.* If you have direct network access to the Internet, you can log on to AOL at ultra-high speed from anywhere in the world.
- *Internet E-mail.* You can send e-mail directly to other online services and individual Internet subscribers.
- *Internet mailing lists.* Join any of thousands of popular mailing lists on the Internet. These mailing lists are devoted to just about everything from computers to cooking.
- *Gopher and WAIS.* America Online lets you do a comprehensive database search for information and files on any subject throughout the Internet.
- *Internet Newsgroups.* Join exciting, informative discussion groups on your favorite subjects. You can choose from thousands of active newsgroups.
- *File Transfer Protocol (FTP).* Directly from AOL, you can download software directly from the major software and hardware manufacturers, such as Apple and Microsoft, and access a huge storehouse of shareware and other useful files located on computers and services across the world.
- *World Wide Web.* Much of the content of the Internet is in text form, but it's easy to navigate through America Online's friendly, helpful interface. The World Wide Web is the newest Internet feature that combines text, pictures, and even sound into a single, unified presentation. Using hypertext links, you are able to click a topic and jump right to the material related to that subject. (Macintosh users familiar with HyperCard have already had somewhat of a sample of what the World Wide Web looks like.)

In the coming years, America Online will be exploring other Internet services. You can be assured that these services will be tightly integrated into AOL's friendly, easy-to-use software, so you won't have to learn a complex new interface to take advantage of the newest features. A good indicator of what is to come can be found in the monthly letter from the service's outspoken president, Steve Case, in which he offers you his vision for the service and acquaints you with upcoming new services.



TROUBLESHOOTING

How do I stop a text window from scrolling on my screen? The standard Mac Cancel keystrokes (Command-period) will halt the display of text in a text window or a directory listing in a directory window (including the listing of mail you've read or sent). It takes a few seconds for AOL's host computer to get the message, though, and sometimes, if you have a high speed modem connection to America Online, the text or directory information will finish displaying before the display process can be stopped.

From Here...

In this chapter, you've seen a picture of the way America Online is organized and the sorts of services that are offered. These services will undergo changes with time; the Information Superhighway is never stagnant. New areas will be added and older ones will be changed or removed.

The remainder of this book details each of the services that are briefly introduced here using a task-oriented approach. Set a goal for yourself; perhaps you want to learn more about your computer, plan a trip, or buy some merchandise. Then consult the following chapters to learn how to find the area that caters to that interest and use that area's resources most efficiently:

- Chapter 7, "America Online's People Connection," gives you more information about communicating with others online.
- Part III, "A Wealth of Entertainment at Your Fingertips," tells you more about the entertainment-related features offered by America Online.
- Chapter 20, "Tips and Tricks on Finding Software," shows you how to find software for your computer.
- Chapter 25, "Learning and Reference," describes many of the sources for learning and reference that you'll find in your online travels.
- Chapter 27, "Secrets of AOL's Travel Department," helps you out with your travel plans.
- Part VIII, "Entering the Information Superhighway," tells you how to participate in the world's largest computer network.

Communicating Online

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America Online's People Connection

In the hundreds of pages throughout this book, I discuss what you can find in AOL's channels or departments. But AOL is not just about forums and libraries and message boards. For many, the most enjoyable aspect of becoming an America Online member is the ability to meet others with similar interests, whether computer-related or not.

If that's your interest, you'll find that AOL's People Connection is where it's at.

People Connection offers a number of resources to help you meet other online members. You find out about these resources in the following paragraphs. But first, you probably want to learn how to introduce yourself to others. ■

■ Create a profile

Make yourself known to the rest of the online community.

■ Learn about other members

You can easily view other members' online profiles.

■ Find your friends

Learn how to know when your friends are online.

■ Proper online conduct

Follow proper online etiquette while meeting other members.

■ Anyone out there?

Learn how to find other members with similar interests.

■ AOL's most popular hangouts

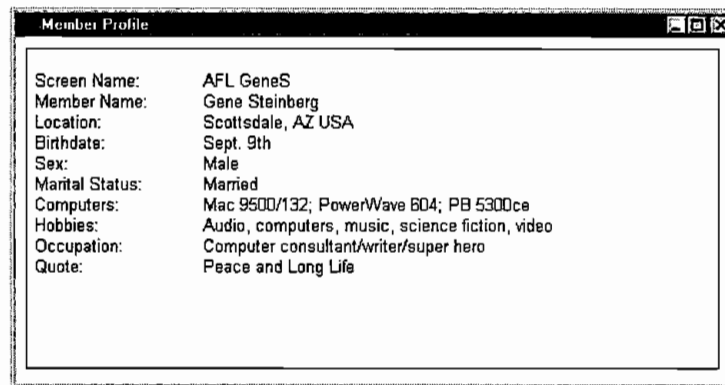
Find the very best online areas where you can meet people.

Creating and Updating Your Online Profile

Every member of America Online has at least one screen name. You can create as many as five screen names to use when the mood strikes you or for use by other members of your family. Every member also can create an online profile for each of those online names, for other members to view (see fig. 7.1). Your first step toward meeting people is complete when you fill out your own online profile.

FIG. 7.1

This sample online profile shows the kind of information you can provide.

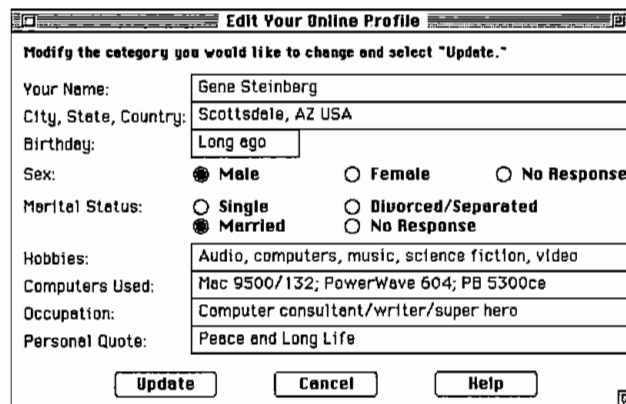


Screen Name:	AFL GeneS
Member Name:	Gene Steinberg
Location:	Scottsdale, AZ USA
Birthdate:	Sept. 9th
Sex:	Male
Marital Status:	Married
Computers:	Mac 9500/132; PowerWave 604; PB 5300ce
Hobbies:	Audio, computers, music, science fiction, video
Occupation:	Computer consultant/writer/super hero
Quote:	Peace and Long Life

Besides the expected information such as your real name, screen name, and location, you can enter personal information about yourself to indicate your interests to others. Hobbies, favorite quotes, your occupation, and the kind of computers you use are some of the entries you might want to provide for your profile. To create or change your profile, open the Members menu of your America Online software and choose Edit Your Online Profile. Figure 7.2 shows a complete list of the data you can enter.

FIG. 7.2

Here's the data-entry screen for your personal online profile.



Modify the category you would like to change and select "Update."

Your Name:	Gene Steinberg
City, State, Country:	Scottsdale, AZ USA
Birthday:	Long ago
Sex:	☒ Male ☐ Female ☐ No Response
Marital Status:	☐ Single ☐ Divorced/Separated ☒ Married ☐ No Response
Hobbies:	Audio, computers, music, science fiction, video
Computers Used:	Mac 9500/132; PowerWave 604; PB 5300ce
Occupation:	Computer consultant/writer/super hero
Personal Quote:	Peace and Long Life

Update Cancel Help

NOTE The first time you create a profile, it defaults to include your full name. For reasons of privacy, you may prefer to delete this information and identify yourself online under only your screen name. □

As you look at the Edit Your Online Profile screen, make a note to yourself about which of the entries you want other people to be able to see when they look up your profile. You might or might not want to reveal certain information, such as your gender, real name, marital status, and so on. Fill in only the information you would not mind telling a stranger. In figure 7.2, for example, my profile states my City, State, Country, but you may prefer to identify a region of the country (say southwest or northeast), rather than provide more specific information about your residence.

If you do not want to reveal your gender, be sure to click on the No Response button on that line. (If your name happens to be Pat, you could sure keep 'em guessing!) Also click on No Response for your marital status if you want that information to remain undisclosed.

TIP

After you learn how to look up other people's profiles, take some time to look through a few other members' entries for ideas.

The remaining four fields give you the chance to tell other people about yourself as a person instead of simply listing statistics. You begin by describing the kind of computer or computers you have, then you list the hobbies you have and the line of work you're in, and then you can quote a saying or motto that appeals to you (or use the opportunity to create one of your own).

After completing your online profile, review it for spelling accuracy. This step might seem fairly obvious, but after you look at a few profiles, you'll know why I mention it.

After you've reviewed your completed profile and are satisfied with it, click the Update button to finish off the job, and you can move on to more exciting online activities.

TIP

When you create an online profile for yourself, feel free to be humorous, but try to be accurate and truthful, as well. Remember, you can change or update your profile any time you want.

If you are not sure about your entries or have second thoughts about revealing some facts about yourself at this moment in time, you might prefer not to complete your online profile. In this case, click the Cancel button. Your profile is not saved, and the information you typed will vanish into cyberspace. If you want more information about the Edit Your Online Profile screen, click the Help button.

CAUTION

Your online profile is subject to America Online's Terms of Service. It is also a reflection of the face you want to put forth to the public. You are expected to refrain from using vulgar language as part of your profile description.

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Secrets of Meeting Other America Online Members

Meeting people on America Online has had some interesting outcomes over the years since the online community was launched. The syndicated television program, *The Jerry Springer Show*, even spotlighted a number of AOLers who had met and married. America Online users often inhabit the various People Connection rooms, such as the Flirt's Nook and Romance Connection, in search of friendship, camaraderie, and, yes, even love.

After you've looked around at the dozens of areas where other people congregate, you'll have a hard time tearing yourself away from America Online and the friends you will soon meet! (Of course, you'll want to watch your online time too, because you can easily forget how long you've been logged on, and how much of a bill you're creating for yourself.)

Are you ready to dive in? Saying hello to people you meet on America Online is certainly a lot easier than opening a conversation with a stranger, because on America Online, with millions of members, you'll find that many have things in common with you, so remaining alone is difficult.

Locating Other America Online Members

You probably realize that you're not alone on America Online, right? But you might ask yourself this question in your first few sessions: Where are all the rest of the people? It's a good question. Being online is not exactly like walking into a restaurant and looking around to see whether you know anyone there. It's more akin to entering an office building—you need to know where the people are and go there before you can meet anyone.

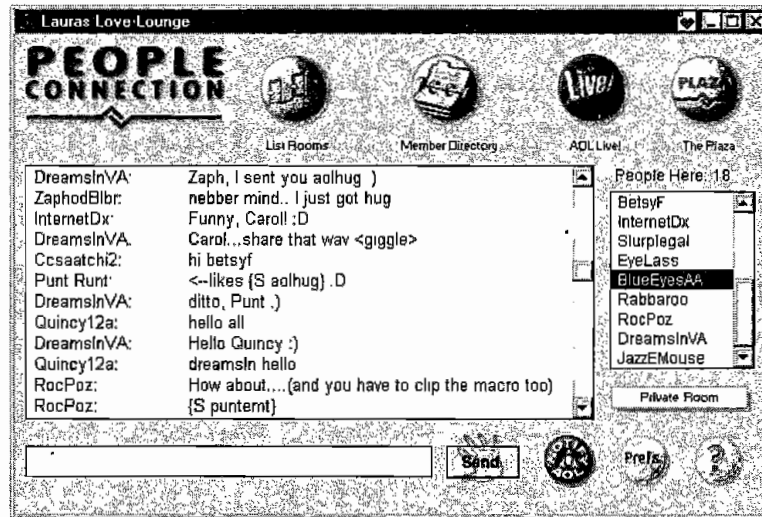
On busy evenings in recent weeks, America Online has had literally thousands of members in interactive areas at one time! But as you stare at the Welcome to AOL screen, you aren't able to see any of these people. They are all behind virtual closed doors, and those doors are soundproof. Your first step to finding other people is to open these doors and look around. By far, the easiest place to find other members is in the People Connection area of America Online. The People Connection department houses most of the noncomputing-related chat rooms where members like to congregate and socialize.

To get there, simply choose People Connection from the Channels menu. You are immediately transported to the foyer of America Online's People Connection, as shown in figure 7.3. These windows represent rooms in which as many as 23 people can gather and get to know one another by exchanging chat. If the Lobby is full when you enter, the room expands to additional rooms, and the room name has a number after it, such as Lobby 23.

The mechanics of chatting involve typing what you want others to see in the small box in the lower portion of the Chat window and sending it by clicking the Send button or by pressing Enter on your keyboard.

FIG. 7.3

America Online's Lobby in the People Connection area is one place you can chat with other members.



If you're like a lot of folks who are new to the online world, don't worry about starting a conversation right away; just hang around the Lobby (online regulars call it *lurking*) and watch what other members type to each other. While you're lurking, chances are that someone will say hello to you. Don't worry about sending a reply if you aren't comfortable; no one will mind.

TIP

When visiting People Connection rooms for the first few times, you might get a better feel for the rooms' atmospheres by just watching for a few minutes or more.

Look at figure 7.3 again. This window contains some items of interest apart from the text you type and the text other people have typed. For one thing, now that you've located some people online, you can find out a little more about them.

Viewing Other Members' Profiles

If you want to view another member's profile, you need to know the member's screen name or be in the same chat room with that member. The Lobby is as good a place as any to start.

Members' screen names are shown at the start of each line as it is displayed in the Chat window of the Lobby. If you wish to know when a member enters the room or leaves, simply click the Prefs button at the lower right of the Chat room window, and click the check boxes to be notified of a member's arrival and departure (it'll show up as an entry in the Chat room window).

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To see who is present, just take a gander at the People Here listing at the right side of the window. You may have to use the scroll bars to see the entire list. The list is updated as people enter and leave, so you can watch it to observe their comings and goings.

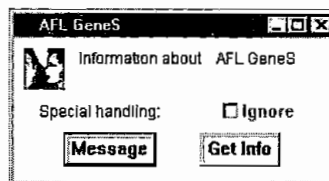
TIP

You can quickly check AOL's membership roster in the People Connection chat room simply by clicking the Member Directory icon at the top of the screen.

Now, you can find out about someone! Just double click a member's name in the People Here list box, which brings up the window shown in figure 7.4. Then click the Get Info button. If the person you selected filled out an online profile, you see it in just a few seconds. If that member has not filled out a profile, you receive a message indicating that there is no profile available for that name. In that case, try using some of the other names in the list until you find someone who has provided profile information. Depending on how much information the selected person provided, you see one or more lines of information in the Profile window.

FIG. 7.4

You can choose to check a member's profile or send an instant message from this window.



The other option shown in figure 7.4, Message, brings up AOL's Instant Message window. You'll learn more about that feature in Chapter 8, "Using America Online E-Mail."

TROUBLESHOOTING

Help! I get annoying messages from someone online whenever I enter a chat room. What do I do? You are entitled to enjoy your online visits in comfort and safety, free of annoyance from such people. The fastest way to deal with this problem is to click the Notify AOL button at the bottom of the chat room screen. It will bring up instructions to help you inform AOL's Community Action Team about the problem.

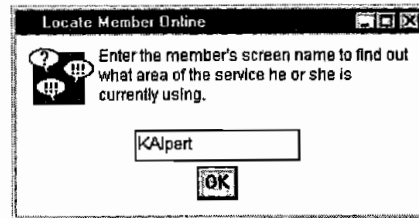
Finding a Member Online

As you become more comfortable using the conference rooms and People Connection rooms of America Online, you will probably begin to recognize some of the regulars. Perhaps you also know someone who uses America Online and want to find out if that person is signed on at the same time as you.

America Online provides a fast, easy method of locating people using the service. Select **Locate a Member Online** from the **Members** menu, or press **Ctrl+F** (Command-F for Mac users), and type the screen name of the person you want to locate (see fig. 7.5).

FIG. 7.5

Enter the member's name in this **Locate a Member Online** window.



If a person you seek is online when you attempt to find him or her, the America Online host computer tells you one of two things: either that the person you want to find is Online, but not in a chat area, or the name of the chat or conference room where the person is currently. If the person is not online, America Online tells you exactly that.

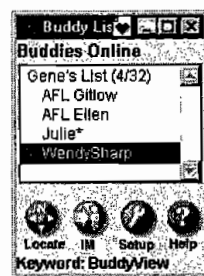
Using AOL's Buddy List

Wouldn't it be nice if you could be notified when a friend or business acquaintance of yours is online? It would be like an online beeping or paging service.

Well, AOL offers just such a feature. It's called a **Buddy List** (see fig. 7.6), and it will automatically notify you whenever someone you know is online, and let them know you're online, too.

FIG. 7.6

AOL's **Buddy List** greets you when you log on with a list of friends who are online.

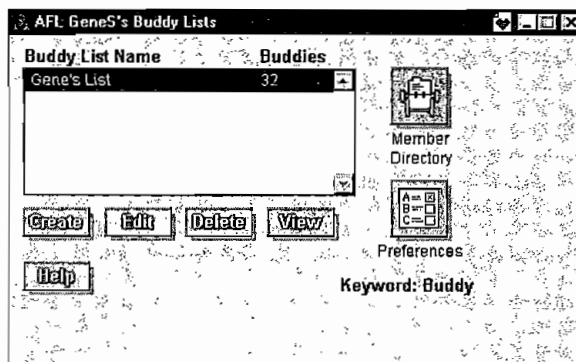


If you want to send a message to your friend, just click the **Send IM** button to open up an **Instant Message** window. Just write up your message and send it on its way. I'll describe **Instant Messages** in more detail in Chapter 8, "Using America Online E-Mail." For now, just consider this feature your way to have a private, one-on-one online conversation with a friend, virtually in real time, as they're online. It's a feature you will want to use often.

Of course, before AOL's handy paging service does its stuff, you've got to set it up. To do that, simply type the keyword **Buddy** to bring up the setup window (see fig. 7.7).

FIG. 7.7

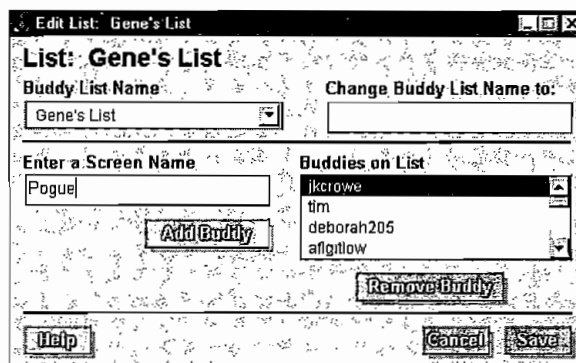
It takes just a few minutes to create or change your own personal Buddy List.



To create your own Buddy List, click the Create button, and enter the screen names of your friends in the setup window (see fig. 7.8).

FIG. 7.8

Enter the names of the online friends, so AOL can notify you of their presence online.



NOTE You do not, of course, have to allow others to know you're online. If there's someone you'd rather not notify when you're online—or you don't want anyone to add you to their Buddy List, simply click the Preferences icon, and choose whether specific members, or any members can include you on their Buddy List. AOL will respect your privacy. Keep in mind that others may prevent you from knowing they're online in the same way. □

You can create a separate listing from different groups of AOL members, and establish a different set of Buddy List preferences for each of those groups or individuals. Once your custom Buddy List is set up, it'll appear the next time you log on to AOL. The same buddy list is not available to all screen names on your account, so you need to create a separate Buddy List for each of your AOL screen names.

A Neighborhood in Cyberspace

Of all the areas online where people congregate, the People Connection's Lobby is far and away the place you find most of the people who want to talk. On a busy evening, you can easily find hundreds of people in the various lobbies of the People Connection.

Entering the Lobby

You might be saying to yourself, “Hey, wait a minute—didn’t you say earlier that only 23 people can gather in a room at one time?” Well, yes, that’s correct, as far as it goes. What happens after the 23rd person enters the Lobby is that a new room is automatically created to hold the 24th person and all the other people soon to follow. That room is called *Lobby 1*, and after it reaches 23 people, other rooms follow it with names like *Lobby 2*, *Lobby 3*, and so on.

The People Connection lobbies are usually bustling, crowded areas. Think Grand Central Station here; people are constantly coming and going. Often they are leaving for other People Connection rooms with specific themes or going to Computing & Software conference rooms to discuss the latest industry news. Private rooms are also available. This is discussed later in this chapter.

As with most public areas in real life, the People Connection rooms have their own etiquette and rules of conduct. First and foremost is TOS, or Terms Of Service. TOS is America Online’s equivalent of real-life laws. You should take some time during your first few sessions to acquaint yourself with TOS. Use the keyword **TOS** to go to AOL’s free help area, and look over the Terms Of Service, which is displayed in separate text files according to category. Spend at least a few minutes reviewing the contents of this area. (After all, it’s free!) By making this effort now, you can feel more comfortable the first times you visit the public area rooms, and you’ll have a greater understanding of how things work in general on America Online. The contents of each Terms Of Service topic can be saved or printed (see Appendix B or C for an explanation as to how to save and print files in the Mac and Windows versions of AOL software).

Briefly, the most important parts of TOS simply state that you are expected to be a good citizen when you visit America Online. You are expected to refrain from using vulgar language and to respect others in the same way you expect them to respect you. For more information about proper online behavior, read Chapter 10, “Chatting Online,” and Chapter 16, “Parental Issues and Internet Access.”

Entering the LaPub Entertainment Connection Room

Lobbies are the places in which you automatically arrive when you select Lobby from the Go To menu. For this reason, they are busy places. America Online’s staff saw the need for regular visitors to have a place online where they could sit back, relax, and enjoy ongoing, pleasant conversation—and have some fun while there. With this idea, LaPub was born (see fig. 7.9). To get to LaPub, type the keyword **LaPub**, or enter through the Online Games Forum or Entertainment Forum.

Part

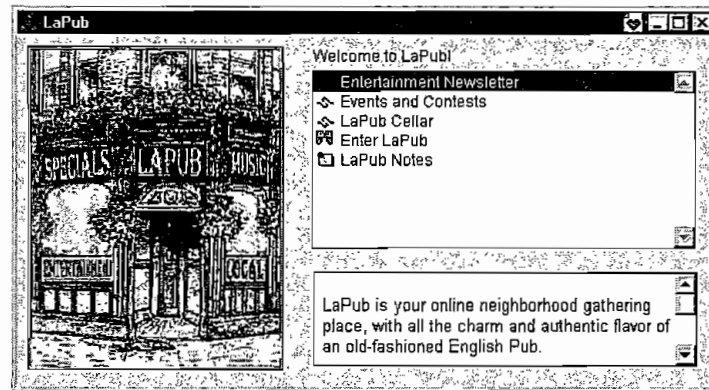
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FIG. 7.9

The LaPub is a pleasant gathering place.

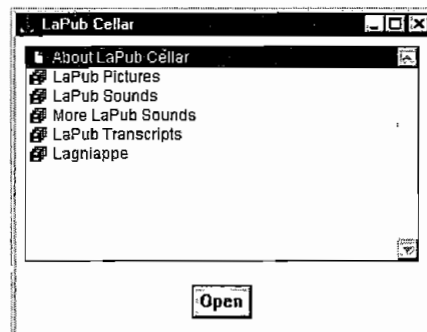


The bar was constructed, the refreshments were ordered and stocked, and the cheerful, highly capable Pub Tenders were rigorously trained. All this preparation was for the sake of creating one of the liveliest of the People Connection areas ever seen online anywhere. The best part is that you don't have to drive anywhere; just sit in your most comfortable chair with the one-eyed monitor of your favorite computer in front of your face. Most likely, you will have at least one free online beverage of your choice offered on your first visit. Accept it, and enjoy!

LaPub offers more than just a place to chat with members and partake of the occasional festivities. Besides the LaPub chat room, you find a special area, the LaPub Cellar, offering files uploaded by other LaPub patrons, including pictures of some of the regulars, sound files, and transcripts of notable LaPub events (see fig. 7.10).

FIG. 7.10

The LaPub Cellar is a collection of marvelous and entertaining files.



The LaPub Pictures library contains all the pictures of your favorite LaPub patrons, PubTends, and PubSubs—that is, if they are not shy. Ever wonder what somebody looked like offline? Check out this library and see whether your favorite friend's picture is available. And don't forget to upload your own picture! You also might want to check out America Online's portrait library, the Gallery, which is discussed a little later in this chapter.

Check out the LaPub Sounds library for the latest in LaPub chat sounds. Install it with your Online Sounds, and watch the fun as some rowdy PubTend tosses a lemon meringue pie at your LaPub neighbor!

TIP

The files you access from this area will generally come with instructions on how to install them.

Remember that fun party last Friday night? Relive the experience by downloading the transcript of LaPub from that night from the files in LaPub Transcripts. LaPub Notes also has a folder available for the discussion of LaPub Cellar. You can use this folder to announce a neat, new file you have just uploaded or to talk about the latest new file in LaPub Cellar. Archived LaPub Notes are also available within this library.

While visiting the LaPub area, be sure to check for upcoming events and contests in LaPub's schedule. You don't want to miss out on their unique happenings!

Visiting Private Chat Rooms

If you are like many of the People Connection's regular visitors, you'll eventually meet someone online with whom you want to communicate further. You want more privacy than the public People Connection rooms are able to offer, while still maintaining the ability to communicate with more than one person in real time. (Instant messages and e-mail are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8, "Using America Online E-Mail.")

Private rooms look and feel exactly like any public chat room, such as the Lobby or forum conference rooms.

The only difference between a public chat room and a private one is that the name of the room does not appear in any of the People Connection room lists. To join another member already in a private room, you must first know the exact name of that room.

The first step to creating this private area is to go to the Lobby in the People Connection. Then click the Private Room button at the bottom right of the Lobby chat window. To enter the room you want, or to create a new one, simply type it in the window shown in figure 7.11. Remember this room name so that you can send it in an instant message or e-mail to those members you want to join you.

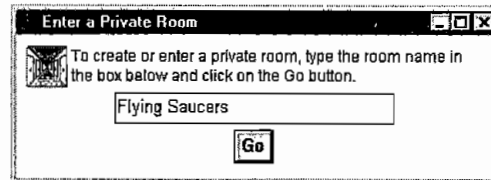
A Few Chat Basics

There are two types of chat rooms on America Online. The first, described above, is a small area where you can have an interactive discussion with a group of fellow AOL members, and all of the things you say are shown in the chat window. The chat rooms in AOL's

Computing & Software area and other parts of AOL are structured similarly, but are larger than those in the Peoples Connection area and will hold several dozen members before a new room is created.

FIG. 7.11

You create or enter a private room by using this screen.



There's yet another kind of chat room on America Online, one that allows hundreds, even thousands of members to gather and attend a meeting that usually involves a special guest, such as a popular show business personality. But it's not a place where a large group exchanges comments with one another. The area is known as Center Stage, and the rooms there are set up as virtual auditoriums, where you sit in a row and can chat only with the others who are sitting in that row. You actually interact with the guests on stage by sending them messages or questions. If you want to know more about online chats and conferences and how to get involved with both, read Chapter 10, "Chatting Online."

Some Additional People Connection Chat Room Features

In addition to the features mentioned above, there are just a few more fancy icons in the Chat Room screen that I'd like to mention here.

- **List Rooms:** Clicking this icon brings up a list of active rooms, any one of which you can enter simply by double clicking the title.
- **AOL Live:** Clicking this icon brings up a listing of online conferences you'll want to check out. You'll learn more about these conferences, some of which feature notables from the world of entertainment, politics and sports, in Chapter 10, "Chatting Online."
- **Plaza:** This is the hub of the People Connection channel (see fig. 7.12). Here you'll see a listing of upcoming special events and be able to enter some of the popular forums for interactive conversations on a host of subjects.

Entering the Gallery

Keyword: Gallery

When you meet someone online, do you ever wonder what the other person really looks like? Well, there's a way to find out. Many members of America Online have made disk

copies of photos of themselves and their families, and can send them to you via e-mail. There's another resource for photos of AOL members, a forum devoted strictly to the service's own photo album.

FIG. 7.12

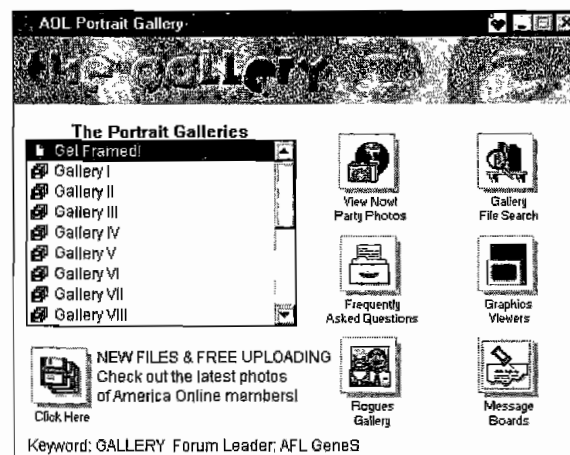
The Plaza is the People Connection's central meeting point, where you can explore all of its features.



It's called The Gallery (or sometimes the AOL Portrait Gallery). The Gallery might turn out to be one of your favorite places online, because there you get to place faces with the screen names of people you meet online (see fig. 7.13).

FIG. 7.13

The AOL Portrait Gallery is one of the most popular forums on AOL.



The Gallery is a collection of photos put in computer-readable form and uploaded for all to see. Thousands of America Online members have already uploaded their portraits or sent their photos to the Gallery's staff to digitize for free. As you get to know some of the regulars online, chances are good that you'll be tempted to find out what they look like, and the Gallery is the place where you may find their photos.

A separate library is also included in the Gallery for family-album types of pictures. You can gather your own clan's photos and send them to the Gallery. You can upload the files directly to the Gallery's New Files and Free Uploading library or submit your photo to be scanned and uploaded by the Gallery's staff. The address to which you should send your photos for scanning is listed in the library information texts.

To make viewing these photos easy for all America Online users, regardless of the type of computer, the Gallery photos are currently provided in *GIF* and *JPEG* formats. These two formats offer high-quality images with a small file size. The small size keeps your download time short and makes it more convenient if you want to see photos of a number of your fellow members. Of the two formats, JPEG gets you a slightly smaller size and better quality, but the Gallery will accept digitized photos in either format.

The very latest versions of America Online's Macintosh and Windows software allow you to actually see a photo gradually appear on your screen while it's being downloaded to your computer, as shown in figure 7.14. To view the photo files after they are downloaded, simply choose Open from the File menu and then select the file you want to see. After the file is opened (or has appeared on your computer's screen right after the download process is over), you'll be able to print it just the same as any other document.

NOTE If a photo has been uploaded with the newest version of AOL's software, you'll be able to see a thumbnail (miniature or preview version) of the photo when you view the file description in the Gallery's libraries. Thumbnails are not available for photos sent using older versions of AOL's Mac and Windows software. □

FIG. 7.14

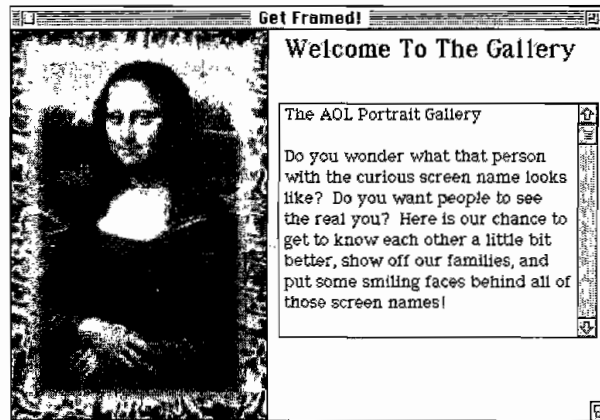
As you download a file from the Gallery, the photo begins to display on your computer's screen. The complete photo is shown when the download is finished.



The handsome young man shown in figure 7.14 is, by the way, my son Grayson, who was just shy of 10 when the photo was taken. If you want to know more about placing your photos in the Gallery, look at the directory window in the Gallery, and double-click the Get Framed! listing (see fig. 7.15).

FIG. 7.15

Read the text here for instructions on submitting a photo to the Gallery; you'll have to scroll through the text window to read it all.



CAUTION

Photos are not accepted in the AOL Portrait Gallery unless they adhere to the Terms Of Service. That means you won't find any nude or explicit photos there that would be against AOL's family character. Remember that this is a member portrait gallery, so it includes both adults and children.

The Get Framed text at the right of the information window can be saved and printed using the appropriate commands from the File menu of your AOL software. It covers the type of photos accepted, the maximum acceptable size of the photo (640x480 pixels), and file-naming conventions. Because photos must be viewable by both Mac and PC users (including many who have yet to upgrade to Windows 95), they should adhere to the standard PC naming convention, consisting of eight letters for the file name, followed by a period and the GIF or JPG extension (depending on which file format the photo is saved in). For example: THEPHOTO.GIF or THEPHOTO.JPG. The information text screen also includes instructions about AOL's free scanning service, which is provided to members who cannot get their own photos scanned.

Besides the regular Gallery libraries, there are some special features of the AOL Portrait Gallery discussed in the following section. These special features are accessed by the icons at the right of the forum window:

- ☐ *View Now!: Party Photos* is a library showing photos of member gatherings. To see a photo, just double-click its name and it will appear on your computer's screen in just a few seconds (see fig. 7.16).

Part

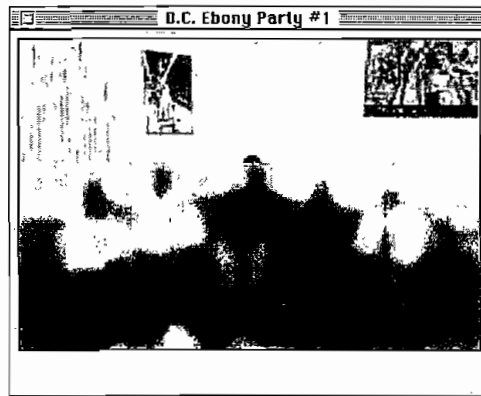
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FIG. 7.16

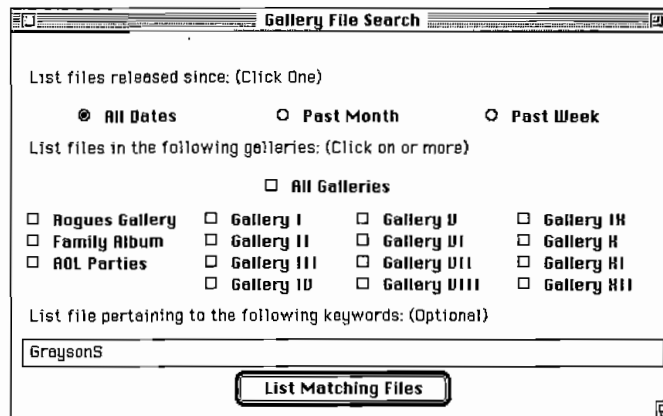
A library of AOL party photos is provided in a special instant download format. The picture shown here will be clear when it's fully downloaded.



- ☐ *Gallery File Search* lets you use AOL's database search feature to examine all of the libraries in this forum to locate the photo you want. Just enter the member's screen name in the list field. If the member's photo is in the forum's libraries, it'll show up in a directory listing in just a few seconds (see fig. 7.17).

FIG. 7.17

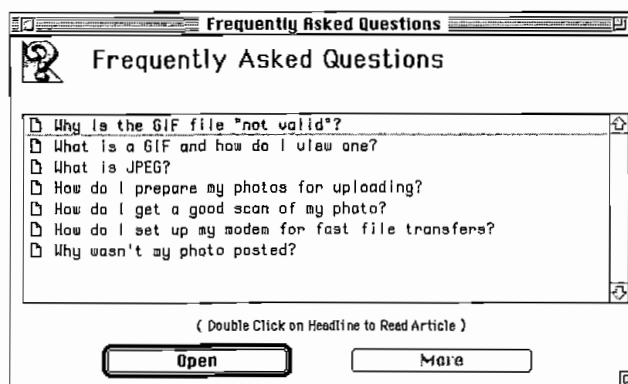
Use this window to search for a photo in The Gallery.



- ☐ *Frequently Asked Questions* provides useful information on techniques for scanning your photo and responds to common questions about viewing the files you've downloaded from the Gallery (see fig. 7.18).

FIG. 7.18

Answers to many of your Gallery-related questions are found here.

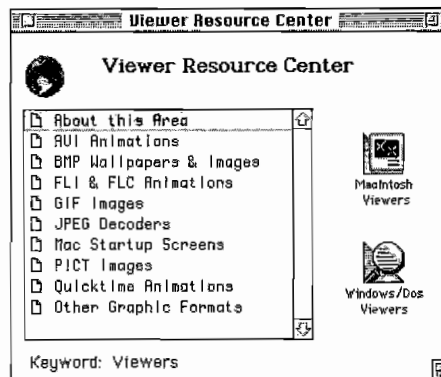


NOTE Many forums on America Online have a selection of FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) that provide helpful introductory material for visitors to these areas. Consider them the online equivalent of the ReadMe files that often ship with new computer software. It's a good idea to read these FAQs when you first enter a new forum, as many of your questions about that forum and how to take advantage of its services are described in these helpful information texts. □

- *Viewer Resource Center* is a second forum within the AOL Portrait Gallery. It's devoted to information on what the various graphics formats are all about, which computer platforms support those formats, and how you can open files saved in these formats. There are also two libraries for Mac and Windows users that contain software, both free and shareware, that you can use not only to view graphics files, but to convert files from one format to another. You can also go to this forum directly via the keyword **Viewers** (see fig. 7.19).

FIG. 7.19

Download photo-viewing programs and easy-to-use image editing software from this library.



- *Rogues Gallery* is devoted to folks like me who hold positions of one sort or another with America Online. Examples include those who run online forums and those who actually work in AOL's own offices.
- *Message Boards* is one of the most exciting parts of AOL Portrait Gallery, other than finding out what a fellow AOL member looks like, of course. Discussions in this forum only begin with Gallery issues and sometimes go far afield, as you'll see when you read the messages.

There is one more library in the Gallery, but you have to scroll through the directory window to find it. It's Family Album, a library devoted strictly to photos of AOL members' families.

Online Abbreviations

When you chat online, the other person cannot, of course, see whether you are smiling, or crying, or frowning. So a nifty shorthand language has been devised in cyberspace so you

can communicate your feelings and reactions to what other online visitors say. Some of these letters and symbols are downright obscure; others are fairly obvious when you see the shortcut, such as LOL, which stands for Laughing Out Loud.

In Chapter 10, "Chatting Online," I've gathered a set of these shortcuts for you to keep on hand as you become accustomed to the online universe. Some of them are quite obscure, and seldom-used (though you encounter them occasionally). But many will soon become familiar to you and, I'm sure, second nature as you begin to experience the rewarding experience of meeting fellow travelers of the online universe.

From Here...

This chapter introduces you to what is really one of the most popular online areas, the People Connection. But the best way to understand how it works is to experience it yourself. Just lurk in the Lobby for a while, or attend a conference or two. The People Connection will soon become a regular part of your AOL sessions.

If you have young children in your household who use America Online, be sure also to read Chapter 16, "Parental Issues and Internet Access," for information about parental controls. This feature lets you assert your parental rights and helps you decide whether your children should use certain features of America Online. You may not want them to visit some types of chat rooms or be able to use instant messages.

You can find other related information in these chapters:

- In Chapter 9, "Using America Online Message Boards," you'll learn how to locate messages, the elements of online etiquette, and how to find responses to your message.
- In Chapter 10, "Chatting Online," you'll learn how to participate in chats, conferences, and one-on-one communication with fellow members.
- In Chapter 19, "Visiting the Computing and Software Forums," you'll learn where to seek support and information about all of your computer-related problems and how AOL can help you enhance your computing experience.
- In Appendix B, "Using Your America Online Macintosh Software," you receive a hands-on tutorial that will help you master your software and unlock many of its secrets.
- In Appendix C, "Using Your America Online Windows Software," you receive full instructions about this particular version of AOL's software.

Using America Online E-Mail

When you sit down to make a list of the things you want to do online, e-mail is often at the very top of the list for many members. When I wrote about America Online's People Connection in the last chapter, I described it as a place where you can meet fellow AOL members—your online neighbors. On any given evening, it is not uncommon to find thousands of members in the various chat rooms of People Connection, Computers & Software conference rooms, and other online gathering places. As for e-mail, although you don't see it, millions of pieces of it fly across cyberspace at all hours of the day and night.

This chapter covers the various areas of America Online designed to let you communicate with members who share similar interests or, in the case of the Debate Forum, even opposing views. ■

AOL's e-mail and instant messages

Learn how to take advantage of AOL's e-mail and instant messaging features.

The e-mail formatting toolbar

Explore how to use text formatting options to make your e-mail sparkle.

AOL's auto session feature

Discover how to run a FlashSession to automate your e-mail, newsgroup reading, and file transfers.

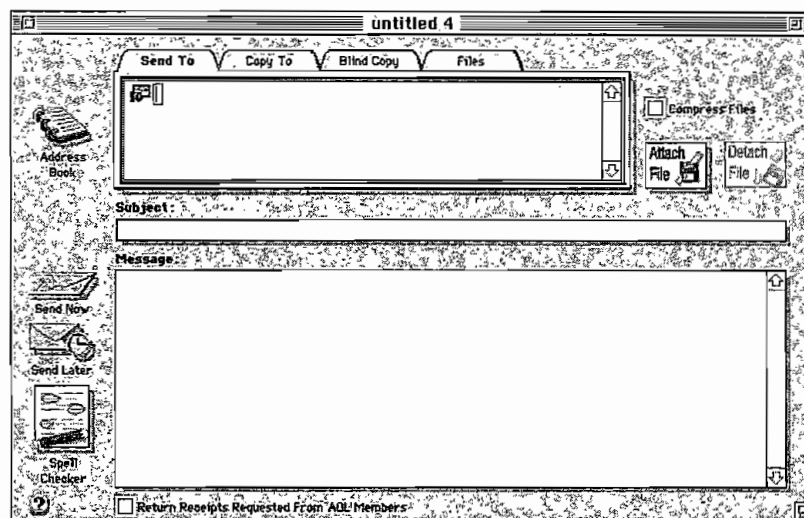
The Right Way to Use Electronic Mail

Of course, not everyone can be online at the same time as their friends for chats, which makes America Online's e-mail feature a very busy item indeed, because we all want to stay in touch with our online friends. The system is one of the best, if not *the* best, in the industry. It has proven to be extremely reliable, simple to use, and, because it can be automated for the shortest possible connect times, you can save substantial online connection charges. What's more, through AOL's Internet Connection, you can write to members of other online services and computer networks throughout the world. See Chapter 30, "Secrets of Internet E-Mail and Mailing Lists," for more information about AOL's Internet Connection.

E-mail begins with a single, simple step: selecting Compose Mail from the Mail menu bar item. Keyboard enthusiasts may simply press ⌘-M (Ctrl+M for Window users) to begin a new mail message. The resulting form is the jumping off point for all your original e-mail (see fig. 8.1 for the Mac version and fig. 8.2 for the Windows edition). Later in this chapter you learn how to reply to e-mail without using a new mail form.

FIG. 8.1

America Online's Macintosh e-mail form includes a convenient spell checker feature.

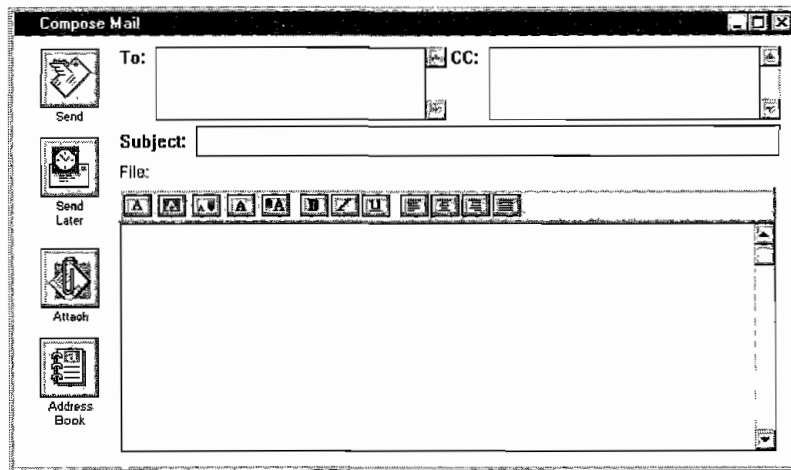


When you first conjure up a new e-mail window, the cursor is automatically positioned within the To field of the form. Most folks begin composing electronic mail by first addressing it. If this does not suit your tastes, simply press the Tab key to move the cursor to any of the other fields contained in the e-mail window, or click the desired field.

America Online is unflaggingly insistent about a few things regarding its e-mail system. You must include at least one address, a subject, and a message. And it does make sense. After all, receiving a blank message is like picking up the telephone and finding no one on the other end.

FIG. 8.2

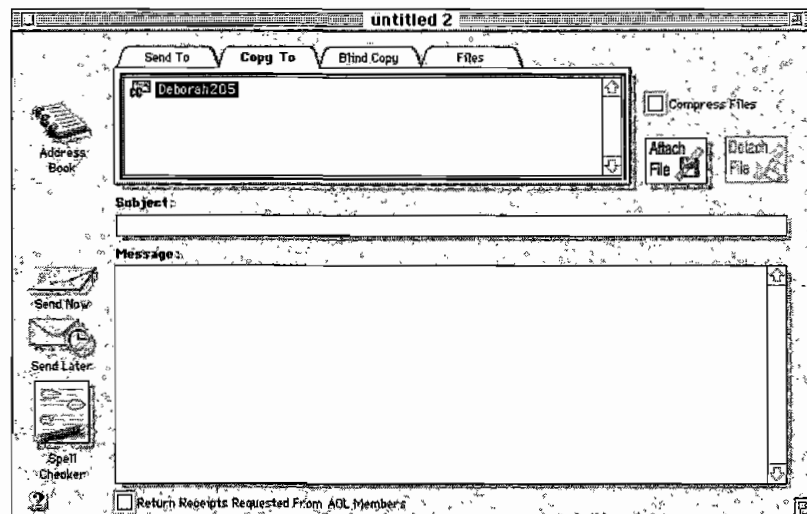
America Online's Windows e-mail form has a handy formatting toolbar to give your e-mail sparkle.



The address fields of the e-mail window can contain literally hundreds of electronic mailing addressees. If you use AOL's Windows software to send a message to more than one person, each person's screen name must be separated by a comma or a return. (On a Mac, be sure to press Return, not Enter; hitting Enter sends the message.) When you use the Return key to separate multiple names, the window list is easier to read than when the names are separated by commas. In the example shown in figure 8.3, which shows the Mac version of AOL's e-mail form, the fields for each e-mail option are separated by tabs. Just click the tab that represents how the recipient is to be handled.

FIG. 8.3

Addressing e-mail to more than one person is simple on AOL. The Mac version of the e-mail form separates e-mail categories with handy tabs.



If you've entered any addresses in your AOL Address Book, you can also click the Address Book icon to select names for the e-mail addresses. See the section "How to Use AOL's Address Book," later in this chapter.

Now that you've decided who's getting the message, move to the Subject field and let the recipient know what your message is about without making them read it to find out. This

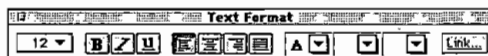
step is both convenient and considered normal e-mail etiquette. After the subject, move the cursor to the message body and compose your message.

Using AOL's E-Mail Styles

A unique feature of America Online e-mail is that you may style your message by using a different type of size, style, and color. The Mac AOL Text Format toolbar displays the attributes you may change within the e-mail message (see fig. 8.4).

FIG. 8.4

Changing e-mail text styles using the Format menu.



On both the Mac and Windows versions of AOL's e-mail form, using the handy toolbar, you can make your format changes right on the e-mail window (reminiscent of the ones you may see in a word processing program).

You can give your e-mail more impact with these features, but don't overdo it; there's a limit to the number of fonts and styles one document can contain, and overly complex styles look gaudy anyway. If you opt to vary the color of different parts of your e-mail, the recipient must have a color computer and a color monitor to see the results properly; otherwise, the colors just appear as varying shades of gray.

NOTE A cool AOL e-mail feature is the ability to insert a hyperlink in your message. This embeds a double-clickable path to an AOL forum or Internet source. It's a terrific way to take your friends directly to an online place you want them to see. To insert a hyperlink on your Mac, simply choose Insert Hyperlink from the Format menu and enter the information in the body of your e-mail message. On the Windows version of AOL software, you can insert a hyperlink simply by highlighting the item in your e-mail message, clicking the right mouse button, and choosing Create Hyperlink from the drop down box. Or, just drag the hyperlink reference from your Favorite Places folder and drop it directly in your e-mail message. □

How to Send E-Mail

After you compose your e-mail, you can send it in a number of ways. When you're logged on to AOL, the fastest way to send your e-mail is to click the Send Now icon on the left side of the e-mail window. The mail is sent immediately, along with any attachments. See "Attaching Files to E-Mail," later in this chapter.

If you compose your outgoing e-mail when you're not connected to AOL, or sign off before composing it, you can choose to use the Send Later feature that saves the outgoing mail on your hard drive. Send your saved mail manually on your next online visit,

or automatically during your next automated mail session. Please note, however, that if you attach a file, you can't move or delete that file until after you send your mail.

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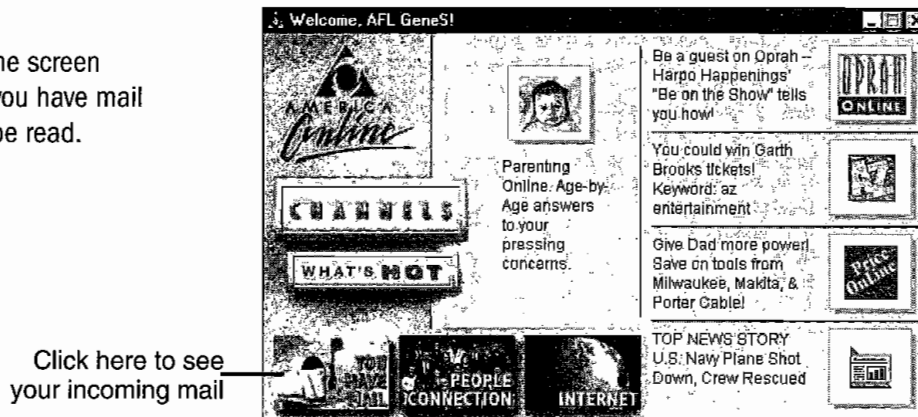
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How to Receive E-Mail

This is the easy part! All you have to do is log on to AOL and, if you have mail, the happy guy that lives inside the AOL program tells you, "You have mail!" (that is, assuming that you have your Mail Sounds turned on in the Member Preference settings; if you're a Windows user you also need a computer with a sound card). A special You Have Mail icon is also displayed on the Welcome screen (see fig. 8.5).

FIG. 8.5

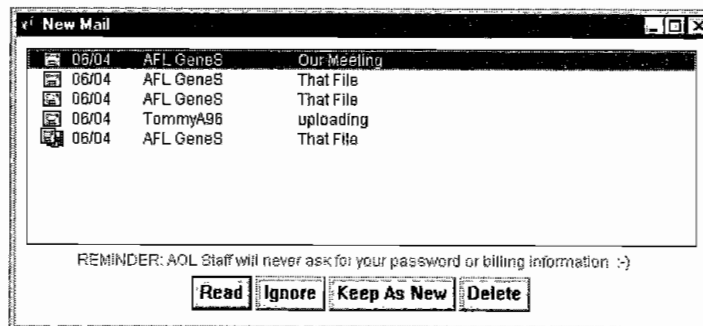
The Welcome screen indicating you have mail waiting to be read.



You can click the You Have Mail icon on the Welcome screen, or you can press ⌘-R (Ctrl+R for Windows users) to view a list of new mail (see fig. 8.6). You can then double-click to open each piece of mail. You may also click the Next arrow icon on the mail form to advance to the next message (see fig. 8.7). The Previous arrow lets you move backward through the mail. The left and right arrow keys on the keyboard are equivalent to clicking the Next and Previous arrows.

FIG. 8.6

Here's a list of e-mail waiting to be read.

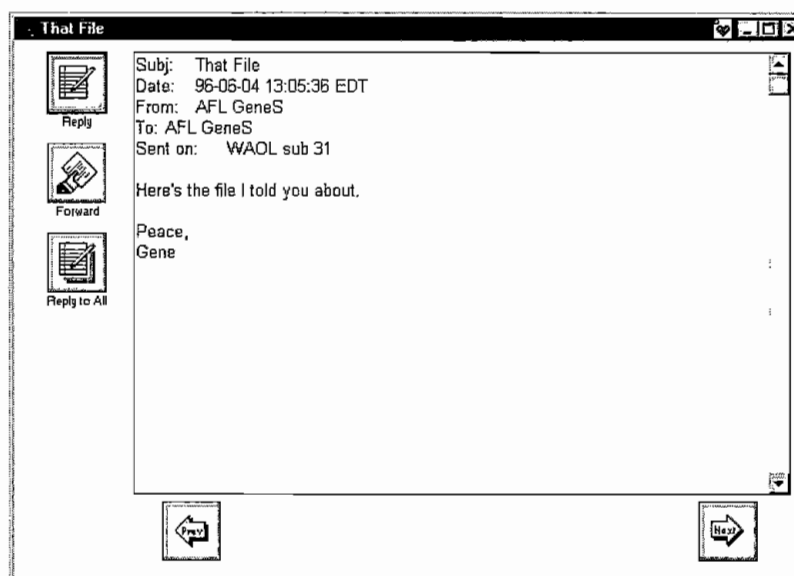


TIP

If you want to send a letter you just received to another online address with your added comments, use the Forward icon.

FIG. 8.7

Here is the Read E-mail form. Note the navigating arrows in the lower corners.



As you read each piece of mail, a check mark is placed in front of the item as it appears in the New Mail window. If you do not read all your mail in one session, the pieces that have the check mark do not show up when you next open the New Mail window. Only those items you have not previously read appear there.

Clicking Ignore is functionally the same as clicking Read, except no Read Mail window opens. Of course, if the person who sent you the e-mail checks the status of the message, he or she will know if you ignored the message. So, you may want to consider the feelings of the person who sent the message before you decide to ignore it.

Clicking the Delete button removes the message from your list of incoming mail, unread. Of course, the person who sends you e-mail will know, in checking the message status, that you have deleted the message.

The Keep As New button allows you to keep the message among your list of waiting mail even after you've read the message. It's useful if you want to use that message as a reminder of an upcoming event or if it contains a specific bit of information you want to review the next time you visit America Online.

Attaching Files to E-Mail

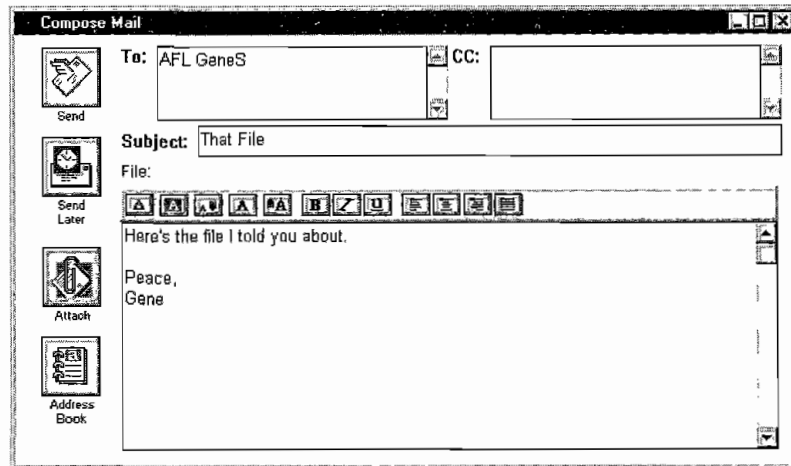
America Online's e-mail system allows you to attach files from your computer (files on your hard drive or from a disk placed in your computer's floppy drive) to a piece of e-mail. When you send your e-mail, you also send the files you attached to it.

To attach a file when composing e-mail, simply click the Attach icon, and use the accompanying dialog box to select the file you want to attach (see figs. 8.8 and 8.9).

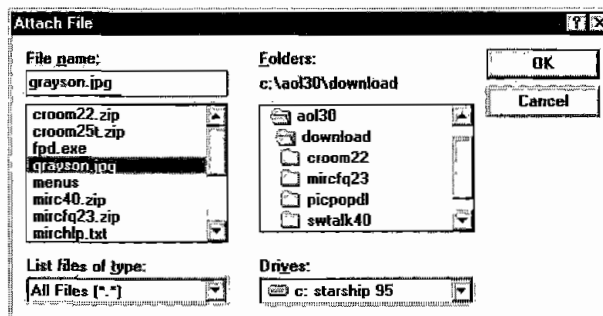
NOTE On the Mac version of AOL's software, you may also choose to compress the file you attach by selecting the Compress Files option before clicking the Attach File button. If you elect to attach more than one file, the AOL software automatically compresses them. ☐

FIG. 8.8

In the AOL Windows e-mail form, the Attach icon is located on the left margin; it's at the right for the Mac version.

**FIG. 8.9**

Selecting files to attach is easy in this dialog box. Note that long file names under Windows 95 will be truncated for the 16-bit version of AOL's software.

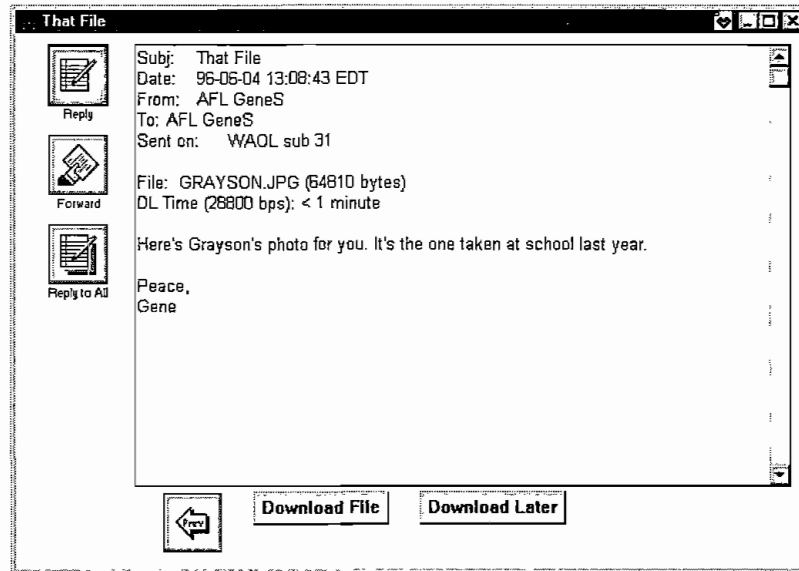


The file you attach must be on a disk drive connected to your computer or a drive you've mounted from your network, and you must attach the file before you send the e-mail. The recipient sees two extra buttons at the bottom of the received e-mail window (at the right on the Mac e-mail window), Download File and Download Later. Clicking the Download File button transfers the file from America Online's host to the recipient's computer. Clicking Download Later marks the file for the Download Manager for transfer at a later time (see fig. 8.10). For additional information on the Download Manager, see Chapter 20, "Tips and Tricks on Finding Software," and Appendixes B and C.

When you send attached files via e-mail, you are charged only for the time needed to send your message and the attachments to the AOL mail processing area. Similarly, the recipient of the attached file is charged for the time needed to transfer the file from AOL's host to his or her computer. Because this costs money on both ends, it is not a good idea to send unnecessarily large files through e-mail.

FIG. 8.10

A Windows e-mail window with the Download File and Download Later icons indicating an attached file.



Use file compression whenever possible and, if you believe other AOL members could make use of the file, consider posting the file to a forum library instead of sending it on e-mail. By posting the file to a forum, you are not charged for the connect time spent sending (uploading) the file to AOL's host. Read Chapter 20 for more information about uploading files to an AOL software library.

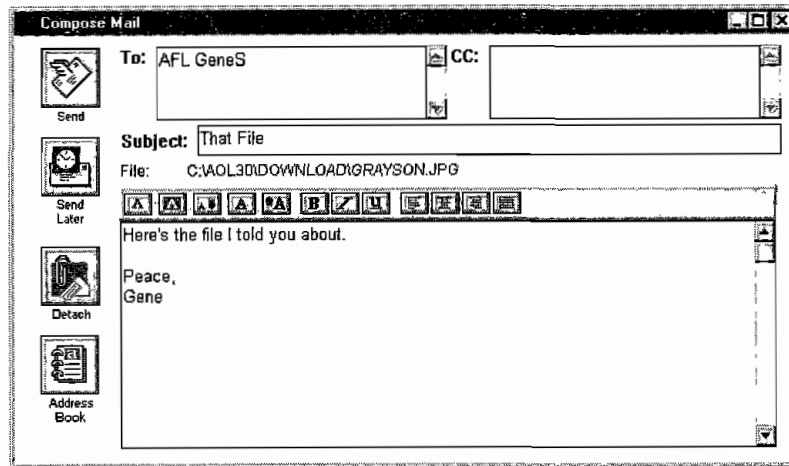
TIP

If you are transferring a GIF or JPEG image file to another AOL member, compression is probably not going to provide much benefit. These formats are already compacted internally and rarely benefit from additional compression. Besides, you probably want both Mac and Windows users to be able to download these files with similar ease, and the compression technique that works on a Mac may not work if the file is downloaded by a Windows computer.

NOTE The Attach File icon changes to Detach after you attach a file to your e-mail. In the event you decide not to send the attached file, but you still want to send the original e-mail message, you can click Detach to break the link between the unsent e-mail and the file (see fig. 8.11 for the Windows e-mail form). At this point you can still attach a different file to your letter before it's sent.

FIG. 8.11

Detaching files is a simple matter of clicking the Detach icon, located where the Attach icon used to be.



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Attaching Files to Internet E-Mail

If the recipient of your e-mail is a member of another service, you can still attach files to your e-mail in most cases. You should not have to do anything special to the file or your e-mail. AOL's e-mail system will convert the files behind-the-scenes to a format that can be read via most Internet-based services. If you are unsure if the process will work or not, send a brief file attachment to the member of the other service as a test—or simply have that person contact the service for information about whether it supports files attached to AOL e-mail.

For the full story about working with AOL's Internet e-mail feature, you'll want to read Chapter 30, "Secrets of Internet E-Mail and Mailing Lists."

Saving for Posterity

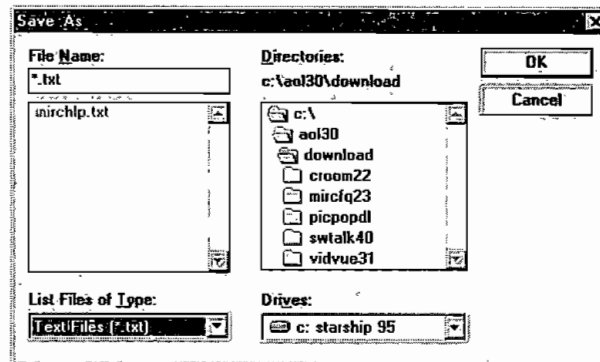
After reading each piece of your e-mail, you have a few options. The first is to simply click the close box of the window, which sends the mail into oblivion. (Well, not quite—you can always find and read mail you've previously viewed, in the Check Mail I've Read menu item, found on the Mail menu.)

Mac Option Only: Mac users have the option of copying mail to their Personal Filing Cabinet, a file stored on their hard drive that can hold tons of saved e-mail, newsgroup messages, information about downloaded files, and other online information. To save to the Personal Filing Cabinet, click the labeled icon on the e-mail you've received. You can retrieve this e-mail item at any time, even if you are offline, in which case it can be accessed through your Offline Mail Drawer.

You can also save your e-mail as an individual file. America Online has two special file types for e-mail—one is the standard e-mail format, the other straight text (see fig. 8.12). By opening the File menu and choosing Save As, you can choose to save your e-mail as one of these types of files or as plain text. Saving your mail as plain text enables you to view or change the contents of the e-mail in any text processor, such as your favorite word processing program.

FIG. 8.12

Here are your handy file Save options for your AOL e-mail.



Printing E-Mail

To print a hard copy of your e-mail, open the File menu and choose Print. This works the same way as in almost every other application that supports printing. Remember, however, that if you changed printers since the last time you printed anything from AOL, you first have to choose Page Setup to verify your printing options.

CAUTION

If you are using a Macintosh and do not have a printer selected in the Chooser after you start your AOL program, you will likely not be able to print a text window; you'll just see a little flicker from the File menu when you choose the Print or Page Setup functions. Should this happen to you, log off America Online, selecting the Quit rather than Sign Off option. Select your printer in the Chooser, launch America Online's software, and then log on again. You should now be able to print normally.

► See "Sending Faxes on America Online," p. 73

How to Use AOL's Address Book

Use your America Online Address Book to store mail addresses that you use regularly so that they are available at the click of a mouse. Use this feature to build a file card system to keep track of your online friends.

Suppose that you have an online friend named James Bond, and you exchange mail with him often. His screen name on America Online might be Bond007. You'll probably find it more convenient to store his name in your Address Book rather than to type it manually each time you compose mail. To add the name to the Address Book, do this:

1. Open the Mail menu and choose Address Book.
2. Click the Create button. A new Address Group entry form appears on-screen (see fig. 8.13).

FIG. 8.13

Here is the AOL Address Group screen name entry form.

TIP

As you meet new friends and associates online, be sure to add their names to your Address Book. That way, you won't lose track of your online contacts.

3. Type the name of your friend in the Group Name field; for example, **James Bond**.
4. Type the screen name of your friend in the Screen Names field; for example, **Bond007**.

Now, the next time you want to send a piece of mail to James, or any other person, simply open a new mail window, click the Address Book icon on the left side of the e-mail form, then click the name of the person to whom you are sending e-mail.

Mac Users Only: The Mac user's Address Book feature looks different from the one shown here, which comes from the Windows version of AOL software. The options in the Mac Address Book are tabbed, labeled Edit Book to add or change entries, and Address Book, which is what you also see when you select it from the e-mail form.

I mentioned earlier in this chapter that you can enter groups of people in the mail window if you want to send a single e-mail to a number of recipients. Well, you can also include group addresses in your AOL Address Book. As an example, suppose you have a group of online associates with whom you correspond regularly, perhaps your staff at work or your favorite Forum Leaders on America Online. Here's how you can create a group of addresses in your Address Book:

1. Open the Mail menu and choose Edit Address Book.
2. Click the Create button. A new address form appears on-screen.

3. Type a name for your group in the Name field; for example, **My Staff**.
4. Type the screen names of all the people you want in that address group into the Accounts field; for example, **SteveC, TimB, Gene**.

Congratulations! You set up a group address and, when you select My Staff from your Address Book, all the names you entered for that group appear on the e-mail address field on your Mail form.

NOTE The next two sections of this chapter have separate sets of instructions about using the FlashSession feature in both AOL's Macintosh and Windows software. Because the techniques are similar, some of the text is the same. Unless you're using both platforms, there's no reason to read both. □

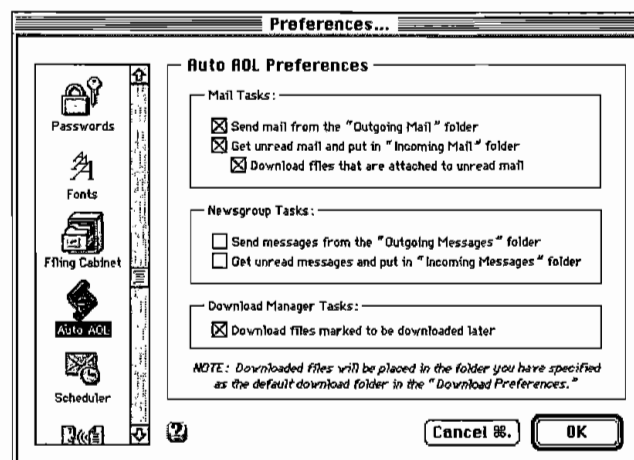
Using FlashSessions with AOL's Macintosh Software

You can set a schedule for your America Online Macintosh software to log on automatically at those times when you're too busy or nowhere near your computer. You can even schedule these sessions for any one or all of the screen names on your account. Here's what you can do in a FlashSession and how to set it up.

First choose Set Up FlashSession from your AOL Mail menu, which brings up the screen shown in figure 8.14.

FIG. 8.14

Your Auto AOL Preferences are used to decide what tasks AOL will perform.



Here are the options you can select. Just click the appropriate check box to activate that task during your FlashSession. The e-mail and files you receive will also be displayed in your Offline Mail Drawer (which is accessed from the Mail menu).

- ☐ **Mail Tasks.** Here you choose whether to send and receive your AOL e-mail and whether to receive files attached to your e-mail.

NOTE If you're on a tight budget, you may prefer to uncheck the option to download attached files, because you would have no control over whether a large file is being sent during your FlashSession. ☐

- ☐ **Newsgroup Tasks.** You can send and receive messages from your selected Internet newsgroups. To activate this function, though, you must first select newsgroups from which to download messages in AOL's Newsgroups area (Keyword: **Newsgroups**). I explain how to do that in Chapter 32, "Joining and Participating in Internet Newsgroups."
- ☐ **Download Manager Tasks.** This feature will result in automatic downloading of any files left in your download queue during your FlashSession. You can see the list of files in the queue at any time by choosing Download Manager from the File menu.

CAUTION

AOL only stores unread e-mail for about five days. This means that if files are attached to that mail, they may become inaccessible. So, you'll want to try to retrieve your e-mail via FlashSessions at shorter intervals, or just tell those who send you e-mail with file attachments when you expect to be available to receive it.

Scheduling FlashSessions

If you want to have your mail automated using America Online's FlashSessions, you are almost there. You've selected the FlashMail options in the previous section, and all that remains is to set up the FlashSession schedule and enter the passwords for the screen names used during these sessions.

The next step involves calling up the Scheduler Preferences (see fig. 8.15), by clicking the Schedule icon at the left of the Preferences window.

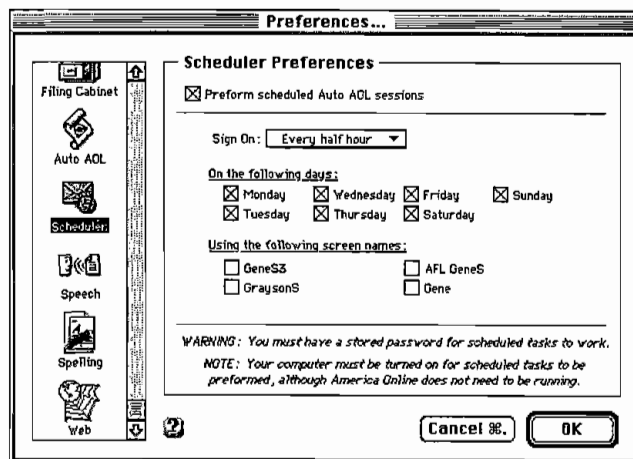
Now you need to follow these steps:

1. Click the Perform scheduled Auto AOL sessions check box to activate your FlashSessions.
2. Click the pop-up menu to the right of the Sign On option to determine how often your sessions will be run (it ranges from every half hour to once per day).
3. Under On the Following Days, click the check box to the left of the days of the week you want your sessions to run.

Part**Ch****8**

FIG. 8.15

Use the FlashSession scheduling window to decide when your automated logons will occur.



4. Under Using the Following Screen Names, choose the names you want to use for your FlashSessions here.
5. Click OK to close this window and to store the settings you made.

CAUTION

In order for your Mac AOL FlashSession to run, your computer must be on at the appointed time. However, AOL's clever Scheduler system will automatically launch the software if it isn't running when your FlashSession is due to begin.

Storing Your Passwords

This feature allows you and your family to enter passwords for your screen names. This is necessary so that you do not have to be present for scheduled FlashSessions. Otherwise, you have to enter your password manually each time you log on to AOL.

CAUTION

When you save a stored password with your America Online software, anyone who has access to your computer can log on to the service with your account, and use online time that is charged to your monthly bill. Before using this option, be certain your computer is not easily accessible to others without your permission. You may want to consider, for example, using a security program to prevent unauthorized access to your computer.

To store your passwords, follow these steps:

1. Click the Passwords icon in AOL's Preferences window.

2. Enter your passwords in the fields next to the screen names shown. Notice as you enter your password that bullets (small round circles) appear rather than the characters you type. This feature prevents others from looking over your shoulder and seeing your password on-screen.
3. Click the Valid only for FlashSessions check box if you want to store the passwords strictly for automated sessions on AOL.
4. Click OK to save your settings.

America Online's internal log-in calendar is now working and connects to the service at the times you scheduled. To turn off automatic connections, select the FlashSessions menu item, click the Schedule FlashSessions icon, deselect the Starting At check box, and click OK.

TIP

Another way to automate your AOL e-mail sessions is with a nifty program from Apple Computer's Claris division, EMailer. You can use this program to run automatic e-mail sessions on all of your AOL screen names and send and receive files from each of them. What's more, if you have accounts on AppleLink, CompuServe, and a number of Internet-based services, you can run your sessions from these services as well, all with EMailer. Because I have a number of online accounts, I have found this program to be an invaluable way to keep tabs on all the e-mail I have to manage.

Scheduling FlashSessions with AOL's Windows Software

FlashSessions are a marvelous way to have AOL do the walking for you, as it were. You can schedule your America Online Windows software to log on automatically at those times when you're too busy or nowhere near your computer. You can use these sessions to send and receive e-mail, and to download attached files and those in your Download Manager queue. And you can use them to handle your Internet newsgroup messages (see Chapter 32, "Joining and Participating in Internet Newsgroups," for more information).

To set your FlashSession preferences, select FlashSessions from the Go To menu. The first time you choose this option, America Online guides you through the process of scheduling your automated session, using a special feature called Walk-Through (see fig. 8.16).

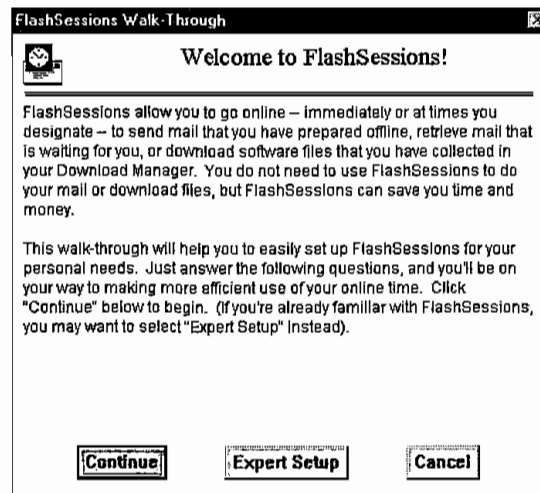
Part

Ch

8

FIG. 8.16

America Online's FlashSessions Walk-Through guides you step-by-step through the process of activating automatic e-mail sessions.



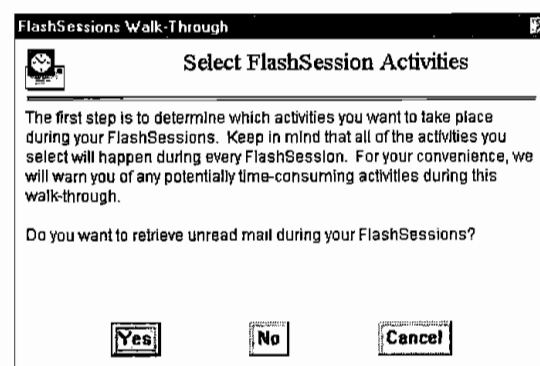
Scheduling FlashSessions Using Walk-Through

The center button at the bottom of your first Walk-Through window gives the option of an Expert Setup. If you are familiar with setting up FlashSessions in the Macintosh version of America Online's software, or you've done it before in the Windows version, you may prefer to use the Expert Setup. You then have the many choices described above in configuring the Mac AOL software for a FlashSession.

If you'd rather go through the process in a more leisurely fashion, click the Continue button to continue your Walk-Through, which brings up the screen shown in figure 8.17. This screen gives you the option of retrieving unread mail during your FlashSessions.

FIG. 8.17

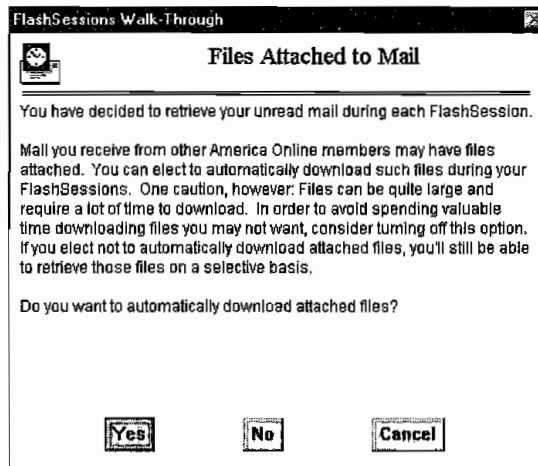
Your first decision in preparing a FlashSession is whether you want to receive your unread mail during these automatic logons.



The next screen, shown in figure 8.18, only appears if you decide to retrieve incoming mail. You are then presented with another choice, whether to download files attached to your e-mail. If you don't accept this option, you are instructing the AOL software not to download files that are attached to incoming e-mail. This can be a real money saver if you ever receive a large file attachment while you are in a hotel room paying exorbitant phone charges for even a local call.

FIG. 8.18

Here you decide whether to automatically download files attached to your e-mail during a FlashSession.



If you select No, you have the capability, for five days after you read the e-mail, to download its attached files manually. Even easier, you can select the Forward icon on the e-mail you receive with the attachment and send it to yourself. Turn on the Automatically Download Attached Files option before the next connection, and the file is downloaded at that time.

CAUTION

AOL only stores unread e-mail for about five days. This means that if files are attached to that mail, they may become inaccessible. So, you'll want to try to retrieve your e-mail via FlashSessions at shorter intervals, or just tell those who send you e-mail with file attachments when you expect to be available to receive it.

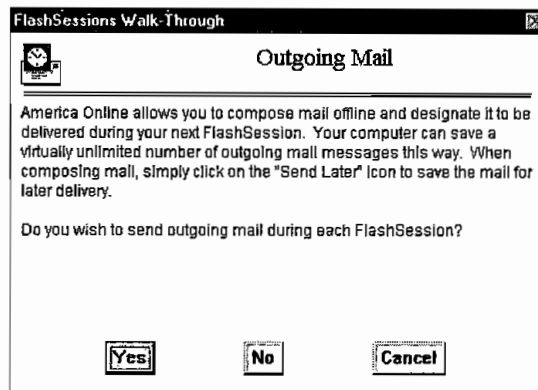
The next e-mail option, shown in figure 8.19, is whether to automatically send your outgoing mail by a FlashSession. This choice is very useful. It allows you to compose all of your e-mail while offline, so you don't incur online charges to your account. When you complete your e-mail, simply click the Send Later icon, and it is added to your queue of Outgoing Mail. The only disadvantage is that you cannot select which mail to send during a particular FlashSession. It's all or nothing. But, you will probably want to click the Yes button for this option.

Download Manager Preferences

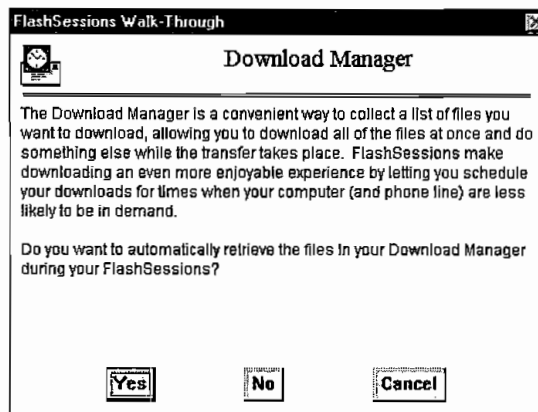
The Download Manager stores a list of files you've selected using the Download Later option. This feature allows you to transfer all the files you want in a single session. The option shown in figure 8.20 allows you to retrieve all your selected files in the Download Manager automatically during a FlashSession. Because you cannot selectively download a single file this way, you may want to think a bit about this option before giving it the okay.

FIG. 8.19

Here you decide whether to automatically send your outgoing e-mail during your FlashSession.

**FIG. 8.20**

If you choose Yes, you'll be able to retrieve all the files selected via AOL's Download Manager during your scheduled FlashSession.



Internet Newsgroup Options

You can also receive and send messages from Internet newsgroups as part of your AOL FlashSession. You have separate options to receive Incoming Newsgroups and to send messages via Outgoing Newsgroups. In order for this feature to work, however, you need to actually specify which newsgroups you want to be included in your FlashSessions. For more information on how to choose those newsgroups, read Chapter 32, "Joining and Participating in Internet Newsgroups."

Saving Passwords

When you get past the Newsgroups option, you'll see another screen, shown in figure 8.21, that allows you and your family members to enter passwords for your screen names. This step is necessary so that you do not have to be present for scheduled FlashSessions. Otherwise, you have to enter your password manually each time you log on to AOL. Remember that if you store your passwords, be sure that no unauthorized persons have access to your machine. As you enter your password, what you type will be entered as asterisks, so someone looking over your shoulder won't see what your password is.

FIG. 8.21

To log on automatically during a FlashSession, you need to enter your password for each account for which you want to schedule your session in this window.

CAUTION

When you save a stored password with your America Online software, anyone who has access to your computer can log on to the service with your account, and use online time that is charged to your monthly bill. Before using this option, be certain your computer is not easily accessible to others without your permission. You may want to consider using a security program to prevent unauthorized access to your computer.

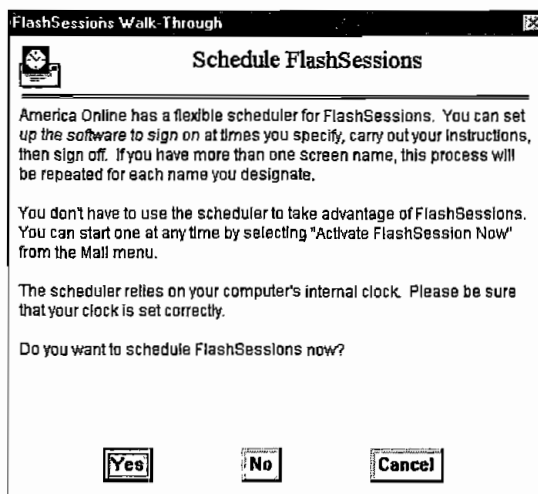
Scheduling FlashSessions

Up until now, you've decided what you want to do when you run a FlashSession on America Online. Now it's time to decide when to run those sessions. There are two ways to have a FlashSession. One is simply to open the Mail menu and choose Activate FlashSession Now, click the check boxes corresponding to the screen names for which you want to run your session, and then click the Go Ahead button. The FlashSession begins on the spot, using the preferences you've selected.

The second choice is to run an unattended FlashSession at regularly scheduled intervals. The next few screens of your FlashSession Walk-Through allow you to plan your FlashSessions in advance. You can change your settings at any time, as your needs change. The first screen, shown in figure 8.22, gives you the option of scheduling your FlashSessions. If you opt to run the sessions manually, click the No button; otherwise, Click the Yes button to continue. You then have three sets of selections to make.

FIG. 8.22

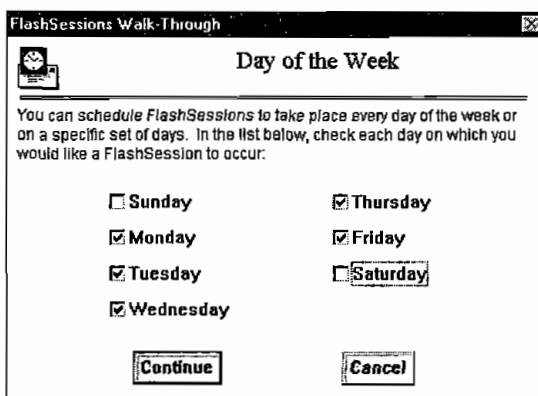
If you want to automate your FlashSessions, click the Yes button. If you want to decide later on, or run the sessions manually, click No.



1. The first option, shown in figure 8.23, lets you choose the days of the week when you want your FlashSessions to take place. If you use your computer at work, you'll probably check only the weekdays, unless, like your cheerful authors and stressed-out editors, your work knows no such boundaries.

FIG. 8.23

Click the boxes corresponding to the days of the week you want to schedule FlashSessions on AOL.

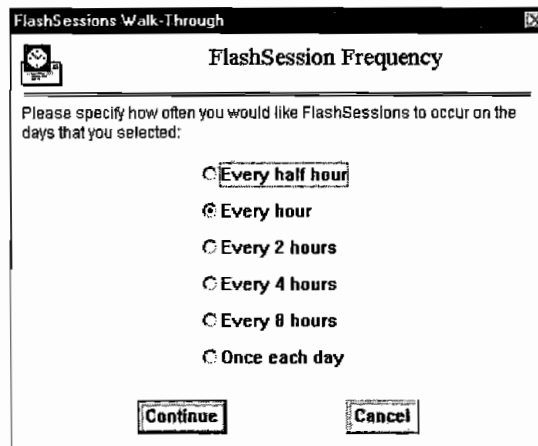


2. Your next choice, shown in figure 8.24, is how often you want to schedule a FlashSession, ranging from every half hour up to just once per day.
3. Finally, you want to decide what time your FlashSession should begin, as I've done in figure 8.25. If your computer is not on during a scheduled FlashSession, you receive no warning message that the session did not run.

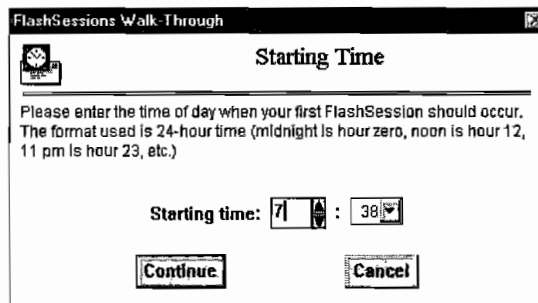
America Online's internal log-in calendar is now working and connects to the service at the times you scheduled. To turn off automatic connections, select FlashSessions from the Mail menu, click the Schedule FlashSessions icon, deselect the Starting At check box, and click OK.

FIG. 8.24

Click the boxes corresponding to the frequency of your FlashSessions.

**FIG. 8.25**

Indicate the starting time for your first FlashSession for each day you've selected.



CAUTION

If a FlashSession that includes attached files for downloading is interrupted for any reason, the status of the download process is reflected in the Download Manager. The next time you log on to AOL, either for a regular session or a FlashSession, you'll be able to resume the download precisely where it left off. Do not delete the partial file created during the original download or move it to a different directory or folder; if you do, you won't be able to resume the download where it left off and you'll have to start the process from the beginning. If your file *upload* is interrupted for any reason, however, you'll always have to start from scratch. And remember, your computer must be turned on for a FlashSession to be run.

Incoming and Outgoing Mailboxes (for Both Mac and Windows Users)

Each piece of e-mail you create for a FlashSession is a separate file. The mail you want to send is placed in the Read Outgoing Mail directory (or folder) which you can choose from the Mail menu (it's called Offline Mail Drawer in the Mac version). You can open

individual letters to review or edit the contents. You can even delete a message, should you not want to send it. After all of your outgoing letters have been sent, the Read Outgoing Mail item is grayed out (a clear indication that it's empty).

TIP

The best time to schedule FlashSessions to download software is early in the morning or late at night. That's when traffic on AOL is lowest, and download times are speedier.

The Read Incoming Mail directory (or folder), also available from the Mail menu, is your personal mailbox (or the Offline Mail Drawer for the Mac version). Each e-mail letter you receive from a FlashSession (or from using the Save to FlashMail option when you open a new e-mail message online) is stored in this mailbox as a separate file. To read a letter, just double-click its listing in your incoming mailbox. You can save and print these letters when you want, or delete them when the amount of e-mail begins to get a little overwhelming. When the entire contents of your incoming mailbox have been deleted, the Read Incoming Mail selection in the Mail menu is grayed out.

The Lowdown on Instant Messaging

The first part of this chapter described how to use e-mail to communicate with other AOL members. Although e-mail messages are sent almost instantaneously to other AOL members, and with some delay through the Internet, the only way they can be read is for the recipient or recipients to log on to the service and open your message (or to run a FlashSession). This section describes the technique used to communicate with fellow AOL neighbors one-on-one, while both of you are online, using Instant Messages.

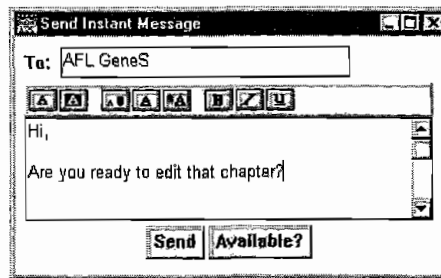
NOTE If you send an instant message and don't get a response immediately, it doesn't mean that the other member is being rude or ignoring you. Sometimes a person is online but not present in front of his or her computer, such as during a FlashSession. At other times, the member may be in the middle of uploading a file and cannot respond to you. If you don't receive an answer, try sending another instant message after a few minutes, or just use e-mail instead. 

To send an instant message while online, select Send Instant Message from the Members Menu or press $\mathcal{H}$ -I (Ctrl+I for Windows users). You see a new window in which to address and compose your message (see fig. 8.26).

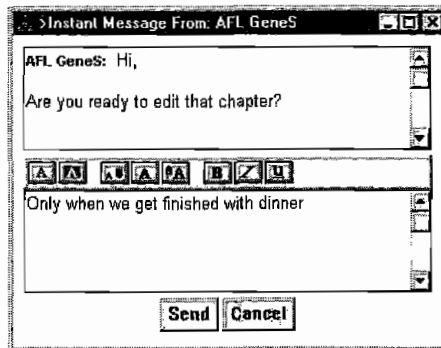
If you receive an instant message, respond to it by clicking the Send button, entering your reply in the lower portion of the Instant Message window, and clicking the Send button (see fig. 8.27).

FIG. 8.26

Here's the originator's Instant Message window.

**FIG. 8.27**

And here's the recipient's Instant Message window.



NOTE If you are using a Macintosh, you can press the Enter key on the numeric keypad rather than click the Send button to send your instant message. You can't use the Return key to send your message because this key starts a new line in your message text. If your keyboard does not have an Enter key, use ⌘-Return. If you are using America Online for Windows, you can press Ctrl+Enter rather than click the Send button. □

You can have a two-way conversation with any AOL member by leaving the Instant Message window open after you send a response. When a new message arrives from your friend, it appears in that window. (If your online sounds are turned on, the arrival of the message follows a pleasant musical tone.) The actual conversation appears in the upper text field, while the responses you type appear in the lower portion of the window. You can hold numerous instant message conversations simultaneously.

NOTE Using instant messages is a simple and unobtrusive process. If you are typing in a different window at the moment an instant message arrives, for example, you can automatically send the incoming instant message behind the top window with your next keystroke, provided you turn off the option to bring instant messages to the front (this option is in your AOL application Preferences, described in Appendixes A and B). □

As with other types of text windows in AOL, you can print or save the Instant Message window's contents by opening the File menu and choosing Print or Save.

NOTE If you send an instant message to someone just when they log off, or they are disconnected from AOL for some reason, the message appears to go through, but you soon see a message in your Network News window (the small information window at the top of the screen) that the message didn't reach its recipient.



TROUBLESHOOTING

Help! My desktop is cluttered with instant message windows. When I hear that little noise about their arrival, I just don't know what to select. Welcome to the club. We've all had that problem. What I try to do is close the instant message windows for conversations I'm no longer involved in. Then I group the rest of the windows in a neat pile at one corner of the screen (on your windows PC you can minimize the windows). All together, this helps keep my desktop relatively free of scattered instant messages (most of the time, anyway).

From Here...

If the '80s were the Information Age, the '90s are the Communication Age. Instant access to people all over the world is a reality, regardless of their location or time zone.

- For more information about e-mail and instant messages, see Chapter 6, "Where Do We Begin?," Appendix B, "Using Your America Online Macintosh Software," and Appendix C, "Using Your America Online Windows Software."
- For information on how to seek out and participate in message boards, read Chapter 9, "Using America Online Message Boards."
- America Online Computing and Software forums and forum conferences are described in-depth in Chapter 19, "Visiting the Computing and Software Forums."

❧

Using America Online Message Boards

How you choose to become active with America Online is entirely up to you. Your online visits can be either passive or active.

The passive technique involves seeking out and reading information on a topic that might interest you, such as the news of the day, or methods to solve common problems with your favorite software. This technique is passive, because you are not actually communicating with anyone else during your online visit.

In Chapters 7 and 8, you learned several ways to actually talk to fellow members, such as sending e-mail, participating in chats, attending conferences (more of which is covered in Chapter 10, "Chatting Online"), and exchanging instant messages with another member. These last items can be considered active. They are especially enjoyable because you get an instant response from your fellow member, and it's surely a terrific way to build a lasting friendship. This chapter deals with a more permanent form of online expression, the use of forum message boards. ■

AOL's message boards

Learn to find the message boards that interest you.

Expressing yourself online

You need to consider certain things before you post your online messages.

Finding the messages you want

Learn the most effective way to use message boards.

Online etiquette

This chapter gives advice about online etiquette.

Finding the Right Message Area

Message boards and e-mail are similar, with one major exception. E-mail contains a message that is designed for a single recipient or a group of recipients. A message board is, pure and simple, a public statement, put on display in an area where any other member of America Online can read and respond to it (sort of the online equivalent of a neighborhood bulletin board). A message board in a particular forum is generally devoted to one subject. For example, in the computing and software forums, messages might be devoted to one aspect of your computing experience, such as handling problems with your computer's operating system, or finding the right multimedia software with which to make a presentation. In a cooking forum, messages might be devoted to the best ways to use a wok for preparing vegetables, or how to make a particular kind of omelet.

One advantage of message boards on America Online is that you don't have to communicate only with members who are online at the same time as you. When you leave a message, you can wait several minutes, hours, or even days before checking back to look for responses. Or you can simply respond to a message posted by someone else.

Chapter 6, "Where Do We Begin?," presents a capsule summary of many of AOL's departments. Throughout the book are chapters that detail the workings of each of those departments and the forums they include. You can use these chapters as a guide to help you choose the forums that seem to match the topics that interest you during your online visits.

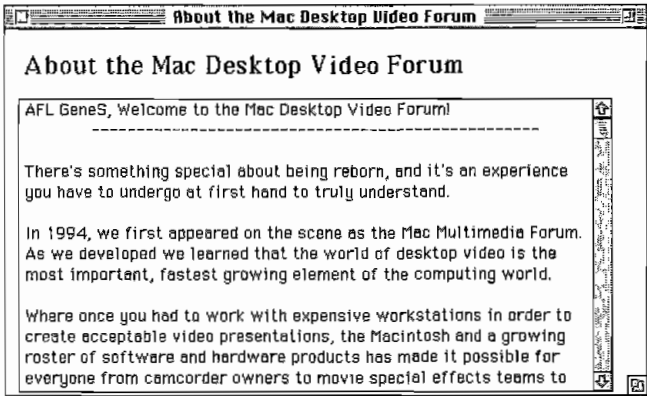
Before posting anything in a forum's message boards, you should take some time to learn about a particular forum and its specific topics of interest. To do this, you need to explore and get a feel for the material discussed. You'll want to read older messages (you learn how to limit your search a bit later in this chapter), so you can see if the comment you want to make has already been voiced by another member, or if the question you want to ask has already been answered. Most forums have a weekly update text that you can read to find out what's new and what's happening in that forum.

For an example, take a look at the forum information from the Macintosh Desktop Video Forum (see fig. 9.1); the keyword is **MVD**. (Of course, because this is my book, I figured I may as well show my own forum.)

TIP

The best thing to keep in mind when getting accustomed to AOL's message boards is to look and read before you post. Be sure your message is appropriate to a particular board, and please don't post the same message over and over again.

FIG. 9.1
This is the author's AOL
forum, Mac Desktop Video.



Finding Forum Messages

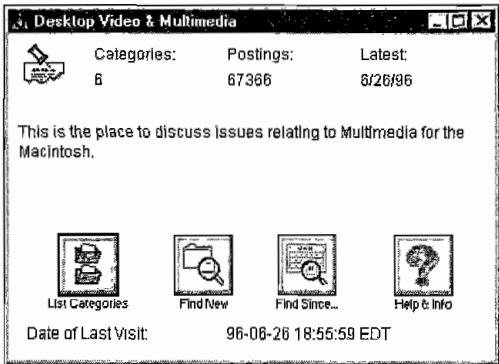
After you find forums that you want to explore further, and after reading the forum update information, look over the message boards to see if there are any discussions in which you want to get involved.

NOTE This section describes the various descriptive icons and labels you find on AOL message boards, and I'm showing a few of them as they'll appear during your AOL visits. Depending on which icon you click, you'll bring up a different range of options to see the messages you want to read. But once you know what the options mean, the sequence in which they appear doesn't make a big difference.



To find messages in a forum that might interest you, click the Message Boards icon, which generally appears on the forum's main screen. This brings up the window shown in figure 9.2, or one very similar to it. The general subject matter of the forum is described briefly in the Message Boards window.

FIG. 9.2
Typically, a brief introduc-
tion describes the purpose
of a message board.



There are four icons at the bottom of this window, three of which take you further along the road to finding messages you want to read:

- **Browse Folders** (or sometimes *List Categories*). This icon opens a list of discussion topics.
- **Find New**. This icon brings up a display of posted messages and topics created since the last time you entered that forum (AOL's host computer keeps a record of your previous visit).

If you are visiting a forum for the first time, choosing this icon can literally produce dozens of topic folders and hundreds of messages. You might be better off using the next option, Find Since.

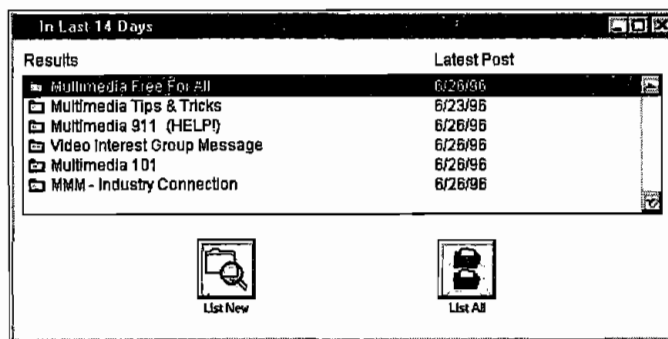
NOTE If you lose your online connection for any reason (such as getting disconnected because of a problem with your telephone line), AOL's host computer will usually still record your visit to a forum message board, even though you never finished reading the contents. You might end up getting a window that indicates that there are no new messages, even though you didn't read them all the first time around. If this happens to you, use the Find Since option and choose the time frame for which you want to find messages. □

- **Find Since**. This icon lets you set the duration of time spent searching for new messages. Its default is 1 day, but when you enter a forum for the first time, you might want to read all messages added in the previous 30 to 60 days, so you can get the flavor of the forum and the kind of messages the board contains.
- **Help & Info**. This icon is your route to the Mac or PC Help Desk; the PC Help Desk is shown by title for Windows users.

For now, click the Find Since icon, enter **14** in the In Last Day(s) box, and click Search. A list of discussion topics posted in the last two weeks will appear, as shown in figure 9.3.

FIG. 9.3

Forum messages are subdivided by topic.

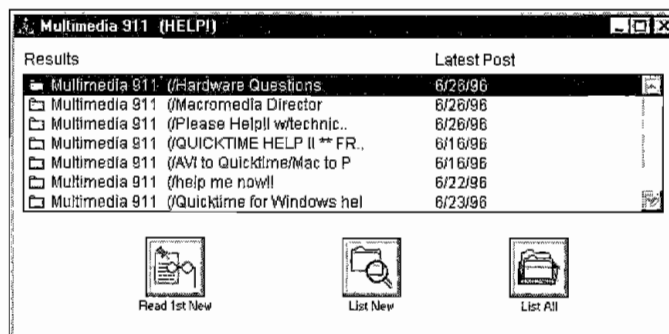


Each forum divides its message boards by titles, which represent a group of general topics that relate to the forum's field of interest. The message board in figure 9.3 has five general topic titles.

To get to the next step in your message-reading process—the actual names of the message boards themselves—click one of these general topics, and then click List New to see the collection of subtopics (see fig. 9.4).

FIG. 9.4

A list of discussion topics in a message board.



There are three icons at the bottom of the window:

- ☐ *Read 1st New.* Select the topic in which you want to read messages, then click here to jump right into the first new message in the folder.

TIP

After you open the first message, use the arrow keys on your keyboard to move to the next or previous message.

- ☐ *List New.* This is the fastest way to check for all the recent postings without wading through a sea of months-old messages.
- ☐ *List All.* This choice brings up a window that lists all the messages posted under this subtopic. You can review this directory and decide which messages to read. Then double-click the message itself to open that message window.

In most message boards, you have a Create Topic option that allows you to make your own folder, name it, and describe the subject matter.

NOTE You'll only get this option if you accessed the message board using List All. ☐

There are actually three types of message boards on America Online. The most common format is the one I've just described, but there are two other methods of organization for message boards. The second, which I'll describe later in this chapter (in the section titled "A Brief Description of Message Threading"), is a message board in which all responses to a single message are grouped together with the initial posting. The third type of message board is threaded too, but organized somewhat differently and, for now, is confined to AOL's Newsgroups area. The Newsgroup variation of a thread message board is detailed fully in Chapter 32, "Joining and Participating in Internet Newsgroups."

NOTE Before you respond to a message, read the other responses first. It's possible that the message has already been answered or your question has already been dealt with by another member. []

Before You Post Your Messages

After you've found a suitable message board in which to post your message, you'll want to prepare your message and then add it to that message board. Before doing so, though, it's a good idea to think carefully about what you're about to say. Although writing a message seems very similar to writing an e-mail letter, there's a very important difference. With e-mail, you are usually creating a personal message, designed for one recipient or a group of recipients, quite often someone you already know. Your language can be conversational and personal in nature. When you get involved in a message board discussion, you have to think about a wider audience.

America Online has millions of members; at the very least, thousands of those members might read your message while it's available. This means you have to consider your comments much more carefully than you might when just communicating among friends. Here are a few thoughts to consider when preparing your message:

- Check your message carefully for spelling errors and poor grammar. Remember, the message reflects on you, and spelling mistakes detract from what you are trying to say.

TIP

To ensure that your messages are properly constructed, you might want to prepare them in a word processor program (which affords you spell checking, and sometimes a thesaurus and grammar checker), or use one of the many shareware text editors available from AOL. You then can use the Cut and Paste option to insert the message into an AOL message form.

- Do not include personal information, such as your address, telephone, or credit card number. Remember, you are revealing this information to a potential audience numbering in the millions. If you are writing a message in an area run by a software publisher, do not include the serial number of your software (which might reveal it to a software pirate). If the publisher wants it, they'll contact you via private e-mail.
- Be sure the topic your message covers is relevant to a forum's message boards. You wouldn't want to discuss your favorite Windows software in a Macintosh forum, or vice versa, or discuss cooking in a forum devoted to home audio systems.

NOTE After a period of time, America Online forum staff members often remove outdated messages or archive them to software libraries. If your message suddenly disappears, this might be the reason. If the message is not considered appropriate to the forum, though, you'll usually get a message from the forum staff about it. □

Posting a message after you write it is a one-click process not unlike sending e-mail. Click the Add Message icon, or Respond in some forums (discussed later in this chapter), enter the subject in the first text entry window, and insert your comment in the second text entry window. By default, the subject of the message to which you're responding appears, preceded by the reference (Re:). You can, however, delete this subject and choose one of your own, if you are not responding to a previous message.

After you write your message, click the Post icon, and the message is added to the topic folder you are viewing. When your message is actually posted, your screen name and the time it was sent will automatically appear at the top of the message.

TIP

As with regular e-mail, it's considered good online etiquette to sign the messages you post in a message board.

CAUTION

Posting a message more than once in a single forum is considered bad online etiquette. Some AOL members might even get upset about having to read the same message over and over again on billable time. When you have something to say, take a moment to choose the topic folder or directory that closely matches what you want to write about. In many forums, you can create your own topic to begin a discussion.

A Brief Description of Message Threading

If you are a frequent visitor to a user group bulletin board system or some of the other online services, you might be familiar with a feature called *message threading*. This is a technique that automatically groups all messages devoted to a single subject, one right after another, rather than having them mixed in with other messages about other subjects.

When you post a message in a threaded message board, you get the option to respond or reply to an individual message, rather than just post a new one. There's an important difference between responding and posting. When you respond to a message, your reply is added to the thread, so readers can read the original message and all the responses it

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brings in one group. If you post a message, it is simply added to the message folder or directory in chronological order without regard to which message you're responding to. Even where message threading is available, you'll want to post a message if you prefer to begin a new topic.

You'll find one form of message threading available in America Online's Newsgroups area (keyword: **Newsgroups**). Because Newsgroups are discussed in much more detail in Chapter 32, "Joining and Participating in Internet Newsgroups," for now it's enough to know that message threading is spreading to different message boards throughout America Online. The ability to keep all of the messages on a single subject together makes browsing through messages much easier, at least when you get used to it.

Here's the setup of a typical threaded message board on America Online (see fig. 9.5). (At first glance, the organization is similar. However, some message board commands have different results when the board is threaded.)

- *Read 1st Response.* This icon brings up the first answer to the message you are reading. If no responses have been made, you see a display window to that effect.
- *List Responses.* This icon provides a list of the responses made to the message you're reading, if any.
- *Read 1st New Response.* This icon takes you to the response added since the last time you checked this message thread.
- *Add Message.* This icon creates a new message on a new topic that doesn't respond to any previous message posted in a particular folder.
- *Post Response.* Click this icon to respond to the message you're reading (see fig. 9.6). The message form is almost the same as the one used in the regular AOL message boards, with one exception, which is described next.

FIG. 9.5

This message is part of a message board where the contents are threaded (by subject), rather than placed simply in the order in which they're posted.

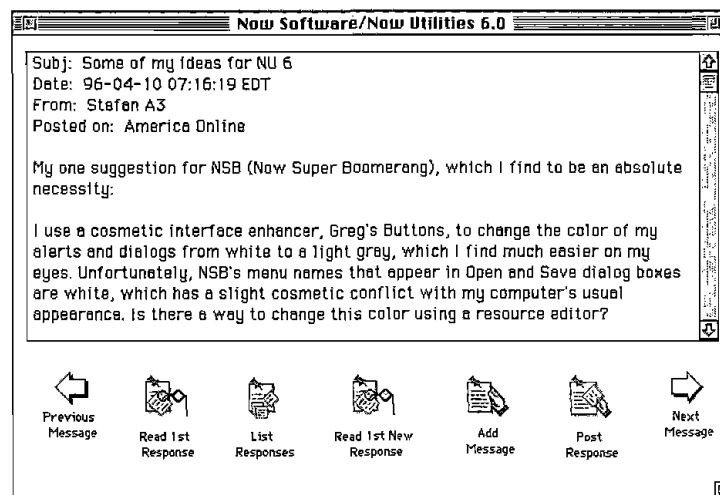


FIG. 9.6

Responding to a message in a threaded board gives you the choice of sending an e-mail copy to the member to whom you're replying.

Post A Reply

Post To: Now Software

Enter Subject: Re: Please answer

Enter Text:

My suggestion is that you replace your *preference* file. That should take care of most of the difficulties you report.

Peace,
Gene Steinberg
Forum Leader, Mac Desktop Video Forum--Keyword: MVD

Post

☒ cc: Via Email

You should consider the threaded message setup described in this chapter to be an interim version. Threaded messaging is available only in some AOL forums. In the future, you can expect to see further updates in the message board area that combine some of the best features of the threading technique with the way it's organized in the Newsgroups area. So take a look at that area at your leisure to get an idea of what the future may bring (perhaps even by the time you read this book).

Common Sense Advice on Online Etiquette

So far this chapter discussed how to locate and use message boards and the mechanics of writing your message. Over the years, a set of unofficial online traditions has been established that cover the organization of messages and good online behavior. Chapter 16, "Parental Issues and Internet Access," describes America Online's Terms of Service, which cover, to some extent, proper use of language in message boards. This section describes some of the rules of the road. They are similar to what is called Internet *netiquette*, which is one of the topics discussed in Chapter 32, "Joining and Participating in Internet Newsgroups." Here are a few tips based on my experiences over the years on America Online and other services:

- Read before you post. Be sure your message is appropriate to a forum, and also review past messages just to be sure your questions or comments haven't already been covered.
- When you respond to a message, consider that you are not just posting a response to a single person, but to an audience that could number in the millions. If you decide you want to restrict your audience to a single person, send that person e-mail instead.

- Show respect and be polite when you post a message. If you disagree with someone's statement, try to stick to the issues, and refrain from personal attack. Such attacks are regarded as *flaming*, and while they might be entertaining on some television talk shows, they are not considered good taste in an America Online message board. In addition, a personal attack can be considered a violation of AOL's Terms of Service.
- When responding to someone else's message, quote the relevant portions of that message at the beginning of your response, or before each part of your response that refers to that message. Don't quote the entire message (it wastes a lot of space). The usual convention is to place a forward sign (>), to signify a quotation mark at the beginning of each line, as shown in the following example. Just remember that this message is just meant as a sample; I happen to have enjoyed just about every Tom Hanks movie I've ever seen:
 - > I really don't understand what the big fuss
 - > over the new Tom Hanks movie is all about.
 - > I thought Philadelphia was a much better
 - > flick.
- Be brief. Cover the points you want to bring up, or ask your question in a clear and direct manner. Although you might be tempted to add a literary flourish if you like to write, remember that those who are reading your message are paying for their online time, as you are, and would prefer that you get right to the point.
- When you click the Post button in a typical America Online message board, the topic of the previous message will automatically be inserted into the subject line, preceded by the abbreviation Re: (see fig. 9.7). If your comments are not intended as a response to the previous message, be sure to change the subject line to one that's appropriate for your own message.

FIG. 9.7

If the subject of your reply doesn't relate to the original message, it's best to clear the Subject: line and start over. (Some forums may not allow the creation of new topics.)

The screenshot shows a window titled "Add A Message". Inside, there are several fields: "Post To:" with the value "Multimedia Free For All/Forum Announcements", "Enter Subject:" with the value "Re:SF Area Videophile Focus G.", and "Enter Text:" which is an empty text area. At the bottom, there is a "Post" button with a mouse cursor icon pointing at it.

- ☐ Express emotions and humor with care. When you speak with someone in person, very often body language and the inflection of your voice reveal whether you are serious or not, or whether you are angry or happy about something. Your words alone must be the mirror of your feelings on America Online. Experienced online users express emotions with smileys :). See Chapter 10, “Chatting Online,” for a list of common smileys and emoticons, and a few that aren’t so common.
- ☐ Watch your language. Four-letter words and other vulgar epithets might be a part of many books and movies (and perhaps the conversational demeanor of many people), but they have no place on America Online, which is a family-oriented service. Also remember that using such language might result in having your message removed by the forum staff, or a Terms of Service complaint being lodged against you by another member.
- ☐ Do not post copyrighted material without the permission of the copyright holder. You can, of course, quote portions of a copyrighted work when commenting on that material. That is considered “fair use,” but try to limit your quotations to no more than a few sentences at most.
- ☐ Do not cross-post. Choose the forum in which you want to post your message, and then select the message topic that seems most appropriate or, if possible, create a topic of your own. But don’t post the same message over and over again. Internet surfers call this *spamming*, and I call it bad manners, because it’s not polite to expect fellow members to read the same thing over and over again.

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Looking for a Response

After you’ve posted your message, no doubt you will be anxious to read an answer of some sort (if you posted a question), or see if anyone else has commented about your message. But posting a message does not guarantee that someone will respond; this is a hard fact, but one that’s generally true. However, a forum with a well-stocked message board tends to get a large number of visitors, so it is very likely other AOL members will, in time, get to read your message. Some might have a response. And if you’ve asked a question directed to specific people, such as the manufacturer’s technical support representatives in a company’s support area, it might take a little while to see a reply—especially if you post on a weekend, when support people are not generally online.

The best thing to do is be patient. The next time you visit America Online, return to the forum’s message area, and use the Find New feature in the forum’s message window to see the messages posted since the last time you logged on.

NOTE If you don't see an immediate response to a question you've posted, you might be tempted to post the same message again, perhaps in a different topic. My advice is don't. Other AOL members who see the latest messages will just end up seeing both messages, and might become annoyed rather than informed, when they read the same thing a second time. 

If you don't see a response to your message or question after a few days, look over AOL's departments and see if there's another forum that might be related to the subject of your message. For example, if you have a problem with a modem, you might seek out the Mac or PC Telecommunications Forums, or the Mac or PC Hardware Forums. Posting one message in each forum isn't against good online practice; in fact, it might be a good idea, because you can reach an additional audience. Not everyone will necessarily visit both forums.

NOTE Until you get used to posting messages and perhaps have a regular list of forums to visit when you log on, you might want to use AOL's memo feature to create a log of the messages you've posted and where you posted them. That will make it easier for you to return to those message boards again when you are looking for responses. 

From Here...

America Online's message boards are fun and informative to read. Participating in these message boards gives you an outlet for self-expression and a chance to get involved in discussions about a variety of issues.

- For more information about e-mail and instant messages, see Chapter 6, "Where Do We Begin?" and Chapter 8, "Using America Online E-Mail."
- For more information about using America Online chat rooms and auditoriums, see Chapter 7, "America Online's People Connection," and Chapter 10, "Chatting Online."
- The America Online Computing & Software forums and forum conferences are described in depth in the four chapters that comprise Part V, "Computing Resources Online," which includes Chapter 19, "Visiting the Computing and Software Forums," Chapter 20, "Tips and Tricks on Finding Software," Chapter 21, "The Best Macintosh Software on AOL," and Chapter 22, "The Best Windows Software on AOL."
- For more information on message threading and using America Online's Internet Center, see Chapter 32, "Joining and Participating in Internet Newsgroups."

Chatting Online

Over the past couple of years, I've attended conferences featuring such diverse personalities as best-selling author Tom Clancy, comedian Milton Berle, *Tonight Show* host Jay Leno, actress Teri Hatcher, star of ABC's *Lois & Clark*, and a number of famous music stars. The best part is, I didn't have to leave my home or office, brave rush-hour traffic and long lines at a ticket counter, or fight the teeming crowds for a good seat. I was able to attend every one of these meetings while seated in front of my desktop or laptop computer, simply by logging on to America Online.

Every night on America Online, literally dozens of virtual rooms and auditoriums are open and active. In them, you'll find thousands of members engaged in online chats or sitting in the audience of huge online auditoriums. And in those auditoriums, you'll have a chance to meet famous movie stars, TV stars, and authors. □

All about online meetings

Learn about finding upcoming chats and conferences.

Get the most from an online conference

Master the ground rules for participating in online chats.

How to behave online

Discover what chat protocol is all about.

Finding a conference of interest

Explore how to use AOL's conference rooms.

Secrets of online slang

Learn what smileys are all about.

The Differences Between Chats and Conferences

You can think of a chat room as the equivalent of a small classroom or meeting room. Capacity is limited to 23 folks in the People Connection before another room is opened automatically. In a forum chat room, the capacity is 48; then, as in People Connection, a new chat room is automatically created.

Because forum conferences are designed to be held in just one room, however, the second room created for an overflow crowd is best suited for hanging out until someone leaves the main room again. It's very much like waiting for an available seat in a restaurant. The setup is quite informal. Many times, you can just make a comment on the proceedings (so long as you don't interrupt the chat) without having to get anyone's attention. When a special guest is present, some forums will invoke something called chat protocol, which is explained shortly.

If you've been an AOL member for a while, you know that some very famous personalities have been invited to participate in online conferences. As you realize, some of these personalities, especially the world-famous rock stars who visit America Online, can draw crowds sometimes numbering in the thousands. A regular chat room just won't cut it for handling that kind of crowd; having hundreds of AOL members vying for the guest's attention by posting questions and comments in a chat window would be chaotic.

All About the Action Center Stage

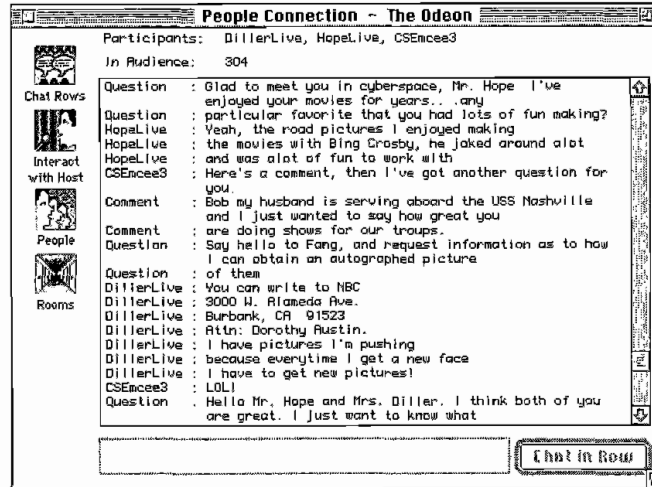
Keyword: **Center Stage**

There is a special kind of online environment that's designed to handle such highly attended events more sensibly. It's structured in such a way that folks have a chance to interact with the special guest, but not at the expense of having hundreds of questions asked all at once. To solve this dilemma, America Online and People Connection came up with a unique interactive concept: the AOL Auditorium (see fig. 10.1). You can compare this conference area to a regular auditorium, complete with rows for the audience and a stage for the guests. There are several auditoriums available at any one time, all of which you can reach through the keyword **Center Stage**.

NOTE America Online's Computing and Software department has another auditorium for large gatherings, known as The Rotunda (keyword: **Rotunda**). The instructions that follow also apply to your visits to the Rotunda (although it is a separate area). More information about the Rotunda and its special schedule is provided in the next section of this chapter. □

FIG. 10.1

The People Connection Auditorium is where hundreds can gather.



Center Stage is America Online's largest gathering place, capable of accommodating thousands of members for fun-filled game shows and special events, spread over several separate auditoriums. You'll learn just how conferences are conducted a little later in this chapter.

TIP

If you're still unsure of the setup in a particular conference room, you'll want to check out the Auditorium Help window that appears at the upper left of your AOL program window when you enter the room.

Entering the Rotunda

Keyword: **Rotunda**

AOL's Rotunda is quite similar to AOL's Center Stage auditoriums, except it's devoted strictly to computing-related topics (see fig. 10.2). Like Center Stage, the Rotunda's virtual auditorium can handle thousands of visitors at any one time. Like other auditoriums, there is a center stage for conference hosts and guests. There are also chat rows, where you can sit during the conference and interact with fellow members.

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Before you make your first visit to the Rotunda, you'll want to learn more about it by reading the Welcome to the Rotunda text (see fig. 10.3). A complete schedule of upcoming Rotunda events is shown in the list of Upcoming Rotunda Events, available from the main Rotunda window.

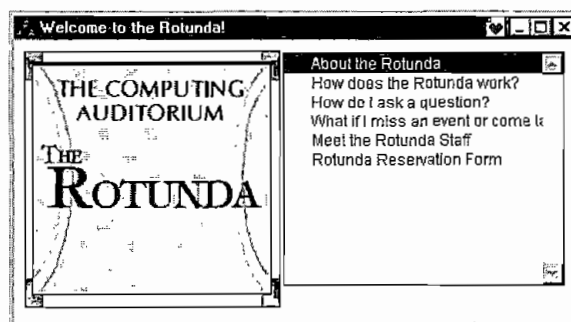
FIG. 10.2

Computer-related topics are discussed in AOL's Rotunda.



FIG. 10.3

Double-click the items in the list box for information on how the Rotunda operates.



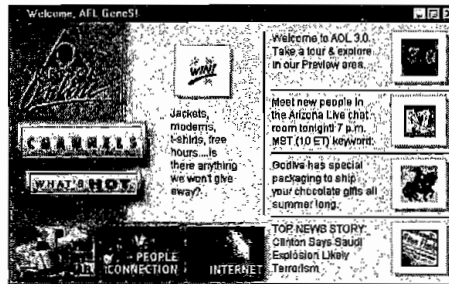
NOTE In case you miss a chat, don't worry. The Rotunda staff logs most every event, and the logs are always posted in the area's software libraries. Because the logs consist of straight, unformatted text (which you can usually open with your AOL software or any word processor), the file sizes are small; you can generally download a log in just a minute or two.

Joining an Online Chat

Before you go to a chat or conference, you'll first want to find out which one you should attend. Forum chats and conferences are sometimes promoted with a special icon in AOL's Welcome window, which you see when you first sign on to the service (see fig. 10.4).

FIG. 10.4

A special icon in the Welcome window announces an active online conference.



In addition, the Computers & Software channel of AOL (see fig. 10.5) has its own custom announcement display, What's Hot (also known as the Computers & Software Spotlight), which is accessed from the main screen of this channel. To return to the regular Computing channel window, simply click the Computers & Software Main button.

FIG. 10.5

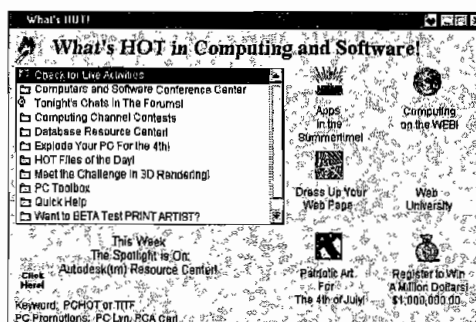
The Computers & Software Spotlight contains announcements of in-progress chats and conferences.



Another place to locate information on online chats may be labeled What's HOT in Computing and Software (see fig. 10.6)—as opposed to the What's Hot icon in the main Computers & Software channel screen. You can find it after you click the Support Forums button which is available in the main directory of the Computers & Software channel and in many forum areas. You'll find listings in the directory window of upcoming chat events that you'll want to check out regularly.

FIG. 10.6

This variation of the What's HOT theme gets you a list of information about computing and software chats.



In addition to these resources, you can visit a particular forum directly to check its upcoming chat schedule. A main forum window (see fig. 10.7 for an example from the PC Graphic Arts forum) will also display the dates for regularly scheduled chats (such as every Friday, etc.).

FIG. 10.7

Computing and software forums show when their regular chats are held.



Center Stage conferences are advertised in the AOL Live window (see fig. 10.8), which you can access via the keyword **Live**. The day's conferences are listed when you click the Today's Live Events icon. The Coming Attractions icon offers a list of upcoming events.

FIG. 10.8

Check AOL Live for a listing of upcoming conferences.



NOTE In case you've missed a Center Stage chat, you'll be able to download conference transcripts and photos of some of the special guests who have appeared in online conferences. The libraries are accessed by clicking the Events button. You'll have the choice of a listing of available transcripts, or a Search tool you can use to find the log of a particular event. □

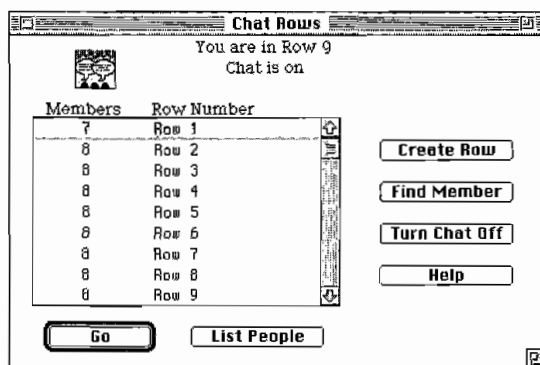
Participating in Online Chats

Once you know what chat or conference you want to attend, the next step is to enter the conference hall by clicking the appropriate icon in a forum, Center Stage, or Rotunda window (refer to fig. 10.8).

When you first enter Center Stage, the service (euphemistically referred to as Online Host) reminds you that only those in the same row as yours can see the text you type to the screen. You can talk simply by entering text in the conference room window, and then clicking the Send button (or pressing the Return or Enter key). If you find that the conversation of members in the same row is distracting from your concentration on the main event (somewhat like being disturbed by folks around you in a movie theater), you can turn off the chat feature. Just click the Chat Rows icon shown in the conference room window; then click the Turn Chat Off button in the window that appears (see fig. 10.9). When the Chat feature is turned off, you can enjoy the event while seeing only text that appears from the stage—text from your hosts, guests, and contestants.

FIG. 10.9

More chat controls for the Center Stage Auditorium are found in the Chat Rows window.



From this window, you also can look for other members who might be online (so you can tell them what a great time you're having on Center Stage), list people in your chat row or any other row, and create a new chat row. If you wish to move to another seat, just select the row you want to enter, and click the Go button. Because chat rows are each limited to eight members, you won't be able to enter a row that's already filled.

You also can highlight selected speakers or contestants. Highlighting causes the conversations of the selected people to appear in bold type in the chat window so that you can follow the conversation more easily. First (if you're a Mac user), click the People icon on the left side of the Center Stage window. Then click the Who's Onstage button. Finally, select the individual on the stage whom you want to highlight, and choose the Hilite button (see fig. 10.10). Windows users will see the same information in the People on Stage directory at the upper right of the conference room window.

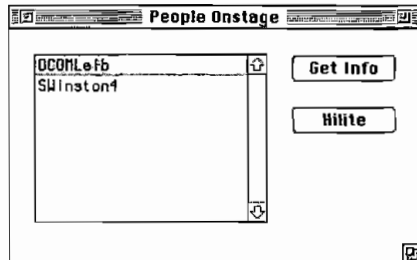
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FIG. 10.10

Select Hilite to highlight on-stage guests in Center Stage.



Of course, the best part of attending an online conference is to ask a question of the special guest and have it answered. To pose your question, click on the Interact with Host icon in the main conference room window, enter your question, and then indicate, by clicking on the appropriate button, whether it's meant to be a question or a comment.

NOTE Because online conferences might be attended by hundreds or thousands of AOL members, quite often there isn't enough time to answer all of your questions. The conference moderator will try to use a representative sample of the questions submitted, but do not expect that your question, however important it is to you, can always get a response. Sometimes, though, guests will respond to unanswered messages via e-mail. It depends on the conference. Show business personalities, for example, often appear using temporary online accounts and will probably not respond to e-mail after the conference is over. □

Instant Messages and Online Chatting

Instant messaging on AOL, as described in previous chapters, is a great way to have a one-on-one conversation with a fellow AOL member. During a forum chat, it's also a way to get information about the subjects dealt with in a chat or to elicit further information from a guest or a forum staff.

If you see someone involved in a chat whom you'd like to know better, you can send an instant message to that person. If you have a problem or a question about a subject other than that being discussed, you can send an instant message about it.

But there are a few things you should consider before you send an instant message:

- Try not to send an instant message to a special guest in a chat. Quite often, that guest will be busy answering questions and won't have time to engage in personal chit-chat with you. It might be better to wait until the chat is over or send the person e-mail.

- ☐ Participants in an online conference in one of AOL's auditoriums are usually unable to receive instant messages while on stage. So don't be disappointed if you don't get a response. Use e-mail instead.

NOTE When you first enter a chat room, quite often you'll receive an instant message from a member of a forum's staff that offers information about the night's chat, and, sometimes, a message as to whether chat protocol is in effect. (You learn what protocol is all about in the next section.) If you get a message of this sort, try not to engage that staff member in an extended instant message chat, because the staff member is probably busy greeting other visitors. [

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Some Insights into Proper Online Etiquette

As with other online areas, AOL's chat and conference rooms have their own conventions of online etiquette. Beyond normal considerations of courtesy and good taste, there are a few things you should be aware of when attending an online chat.

The Rules of the Road

Chapter 16, "Parental Issues and Internet Access," describes important parts of America Online's Terms of Service, the list of regulations that you are expected to follow during your online visits. You should apply those standards when you attend a chat room also. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

TIP

If you're unsure about the topic or setup of a particular chat, don't hesitate to send instant mail to the forum staff about it (it generally has an AFL, PC, or a similar designation in front of its screen names).

- ☐ *Watch your language.* Sometimes chats can become exciting; no doubt you'll find yourself reacting emotionally at times to what someone is saying. Remember, vulgar language in a chat is just as inappropriate as it is in your e-mail, instant messages, and message board discussions.
- ☐ *Don't interrupt.* It's hard to know sometimes when you engage in a regular conversation when to add a remark of your own. It's even more difficult in cyberspace, because you don't always know when others have stopped talking. Here are some things to look out for when reading a chat window or when conversing yourself:

1. Use of ellipses (...) to signify that the statement is not yet finished and more text is to be added.
2. Use of the words "go ahead" or the initials GA to indicate that the member's statement is finished and others can now begin to talk.

- *Avoid irrelevant topics.* Unless the chat is an open session, in which there is no particular subject of discussion, try to confine your conversation to the subject or subjects at hand. If you need to contact the forum staff about another subject, you might wish to send an instant message to see whether e-mail would be a better way to raise a subject.

CAUTION

Deliberately and repeatedly interfering with the flow of dialog in a chat room, even if meant as a joke, can be considered a violation of AOL's Terms of Service. Take the time to watch the flow of conversation in a chat room to see what topics are being discussed.

A chat is meant to be fun and informative. If you pay attention to the ground rules, you can sit back, relax, and enjoy the session, and even participate at the right time.

Using Chat Protocol

When a forum has a large crowd and a special guest, quite often chat protocol will be put into effect. This is not meant to restrict the flow of conversation, but to give everyone a chance to participate without filling the screen with lots of unconnected comments.

The rules of chat protocol are simple:

- Type ? in the chat window if you have a question.
- Type ! in the chat window if you have a comment about the topic being discussed.
- Don't ask your question or make your comment until you are called upon by name by the chat host (even if your name shows up at the beginning of a list of waiting questioners that appears in the chat window).

At the tail end of a chat, protocol will often end to give visitors a chance to hang out and talk informally about whatever is on their minds. You'll usually see a message about free chat time or a similar announcement when the formal part of the session is over.

NOTE If you miss a chat or arrive late, don't worry. Most of the time, the forum or conference staff will post a log of the chat in a few days (just as is done with Center Stage and Rotunda events). Just watch the software libraries for it. 

Using Abbreviations and Shorthand Symbols

Chatting online is, obviously, quite different from talking to a person whom you can see. For one thing, you have no way to convey emotions in the usual manner, by voice inflection or by body language. All of your conversation is conducted via keyboard, with the words that you write, and sometimes it's not very obvious what emotions might be attached to a specific statement. You might mean for something to be serious, sarcastic, or humorous, but the words themselves can sometimes be subject to several meanings. As a result, a series of keyboard abbreviations has been created over the years to convey emotions online.

They're called *smileys* or *emoticons*. This section offers a listing of many of the abbreviations and shorthand symbols you might see while online in AOL's People Connection, in chat rooms, or on message boards. They are a result of the need to show what cannot be shown when online—facial expressions and body language.

Online Abbreviations

Often when chatting, America Online members will shorten long phrases into a few letters so that they can be typed quickly. Here are some of the more common online abbreviations:

Abbreviation	Stands For...
LOL	Laughing Out Loud
ROFL or ROTFL	Rolling On The Floor Laughing
AFK	Away From Keyboard
BAK	Back At Keyboard
BRB	Be Right Back
OIC	Oh, I See
IMO	In My Opinion
IMHO	In My Humble Opinion or In My Honest Opinion
TTFN	Ta-Ta For Now
TTYL	Talk To You Later
NIFOC	Nude In Front Of Computer
GMTA	Great Minds Think Alike
IHTBHWYG	It's Hard To Be Humble When You're Great
<g>	Grin
GA	Go Ahead

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Online Shorthand

Learning online shorthand might take a bit of time, because there are so many possibilities in the list that follows. But you'll find, after you gain online experience, that only a relative few are in common use, and some are encountered infrequently at best (a few I've never encountered in years of online visits). In putting this list together, I've collected a number of sometimes brilliant examples of online shorthand—keyboard symbols that convey human expression. Tilting your head toward the left will help you to see most of the symbols; for example, the characters :) form a sideways smiley face. Here are some common examples:

Shorthand	Symbolizes
[]	A hug, repeated as needed for degrees of enthusiasm, such as [[[[[[[]]]]]]]
:)	Basic smile
:(	Frown
:/	Ho-hum smile
;)	Winking smile
:D	Smile with a big grin
:*	Kiss
8)	Wide-eyed smile
B-)	Wearing sunglasses
[:]	Robot
:>)	Big nose
:<	From an Ivy League school
:%)%	Acne
=:-)	Hosehead
:-)8	Well-dressed
8:-)	Little girl
:~)-}8	Big girl
%-)	Cross-eyed
#-)	Partied all night
:-*	Just ate a sour pickle
:-	Has a cold

Shorthand	Symbolizes
:R	Has the flu
:~)	Tends to drool
;-)	Accidentally shaved off an eyebrow
0-)	Wearing a scuba mask
P-)	Getting fresh
l-)	Falling asleep
.-)	Has one eye
:=)	Has two noses
:D	Talks too much
O:-)	Smiley face with halo; very innocent
:-)	Has mustache
:~)	Has goatee/beard
Q:-)	New graduate
(:)	Australian
M:-)	Saluting (symbol of respect)
8:]	Gorilla
8)	Frog
B)	Frog wearing sunglasses
8P	Bullfrog during mating season
8b	Same as 8P
l)	Salamander
:8)	Pig
3:-o	Cow
:3-<	Dog
pp#	Cow
pq'##'	Bull
}.^	Elephant
+O:-)	The Pope
C=:-)	Gallopig Gourmet
=):-)	Uncle Sam

continues

continued

Shorthand	Symbolizes
=!:-)	Abe Lincoln
4:-)	George Washington
5:-)	Elvis Presley
7:-)	Fred Flintstone
:/7)	Cyrano de Bergerac
>:*)	Bozo the Clown
#:o+=	Betty Boop
>>-O->	General Custer
8(:-)	Walt Disney
>:^(	A headhunter
-=#:-)	Has wizard status
(: (=	Going to be a ghost for Halloween
=:-H	Plays for NFL
(V)=	A Pac-Man champion
M-):X):-M	See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil
C):-O	A barbershop quartet
C):-O	
C):-O	
C):-O	
>:-(	Sick and tired of reading this nonsense
;^?	Punched out for submitting a sexist article
~O	Bored
*-)	Shot for the last posting
~~\8-O	Needs to fix frayed cord on terminal
8-O	Took too many No Doz to work on thesis
L:-)	Just graduated
\$-)	Just won the lottery
:-@	Extremely angry

Shorthand	Symbolizes
:o	Shocked
B-)-[<	Wearing sunglasses and swimming trunks
:-#	Punched in the mouth
R-)	Broken glasses
:-7	Talks out of the side of the mouth
%')	Finished off a fifth for lunch
:-(O)	Yelling
..	Lying down
!:-)	Heavy eyebrows
{:-)	New hairstyle
{:-{)}	New hairstyle, mustache, and beard
(:-)	No hair
:~)	Ugly nose (needs a nose job)
:-E	Major dental problems
C:-)	Large brain capacity
!:-	Excessively rigid
:~)))	Very overweight
._)	Suffers from Lorentz contractions
:-G-	Smokes cigarettes
:-p~	Smokes heavily
\:-)	Wears a French hat
]:-)	Devil
8=:-)	Chef
\$:-)	Yuppie
{{-}}}	Refugee from the '60s
0-)	Cyclops

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From Here...

Participating in a chat or attending a forum conference can be a fun and sometimes exciting experience, especially when you can meet a famous personality while seated in front of your computer, and even have your questions answered by that personality. You'll want to regularly consult AOL's chat schedules to learn about upcoming events. If you are a regular visitor to online forums, you'll find its chat schedule posted in its weekly update.

- For more information about e-mail and instant messages, see Chapter 6, "Where Do We Begin?" and Chapter 8, "Using America Online E-Mail."
- For more information about using America Online chat rooms and auditoriums, see Chapter 7, "America Online's People Connection."
- The America Online Computing & Software forums and forum conferences are described in depth in Part V, "Computing Resources Online."

A Wealth of Entertainment at Your Fingertips

- 11** TV and Movie Information Online 179
- 12** Music, Books, and Art 197
- 13** Playing Games Online 213
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- 15** Pursuing Lifestyles and Interests 241

TV and Movie Information Online

America Online has a large, active channel devoted strictly to entertainment, which is the focus of this chapter and the next four. To get the ball rolling, I'll describe the vast online resources for information about television, radio, and movies. Wherever your interests lie, America Online has a place where you can find the entertainment you seek.

This chapter introduces you to online areas where you can simply relax and have fun. ■

AOL's popular Entertainment channel

Find the latest news from the world of entertainment here.

More online conferences

Meet your favorite celebrities in online conferences

Get photos and movie clips

You can download photos and movie clips from your favorite TV programs and motion pictures

NOTE A quick shortcut to your favorite area is to use a *keyword*. Just press ⌘ -K on the Mac or Ctrl+K in Windows and enter the name of the area you want to visit (the keyword), then click Go. Then you're on your way. The keywords you need to find the features described in this chapter are included.

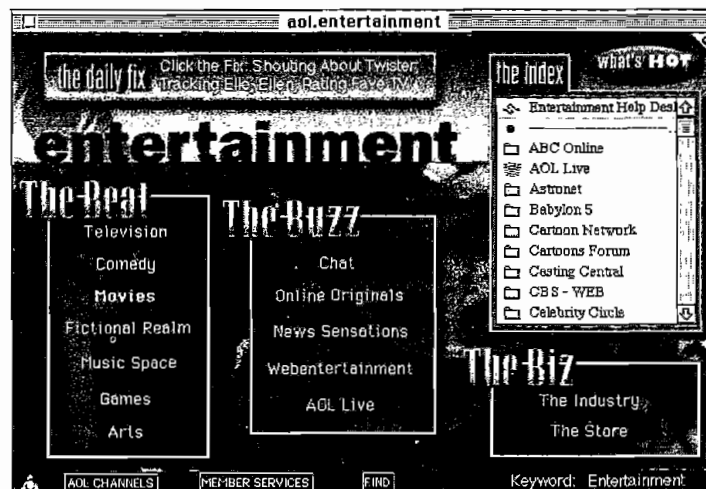
Exploring the Entertainment Channel

Keyword: **Entertainment**

To begin the search for entertainment-related information, look at America Online's Entertainment Forum. To access this area, use the keyword **Entertainment**. The directory window shows just a few of the areas you will visit in this chapter (see fig. 11.1). During your online visits, you'll discover many more locations that provide you not only with information but also with your own opportunity to participate in discussions on a host of related subjects; you can even post your own TV and movie reviews.

FIG. 11.1

The Entertainment channel is America Online's gateway to many information resources for TV, radio, and the movies.



TIP

As explained in Appendixes B and C, you can save and print any text document you see on America Online.

You'll learn about many features in this channel throughout this chapter. New features are added regularly to America Online's resource roster, so you can expect this directory to change often. Special show business events also have their own online forums while the events are current, so some of the special icons you see in figure 11.1 might not be there when you log on.

You can survey the features of the Entertainment department in two ways. There's an alphabetical directory that lists the areas available in the right half of the screen. On the left and at the bottom, there are various topic listings that will quickly transport you to one of your favorite areas. I'll describe some of these offerings here and later on in this chapter.

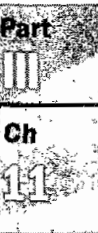
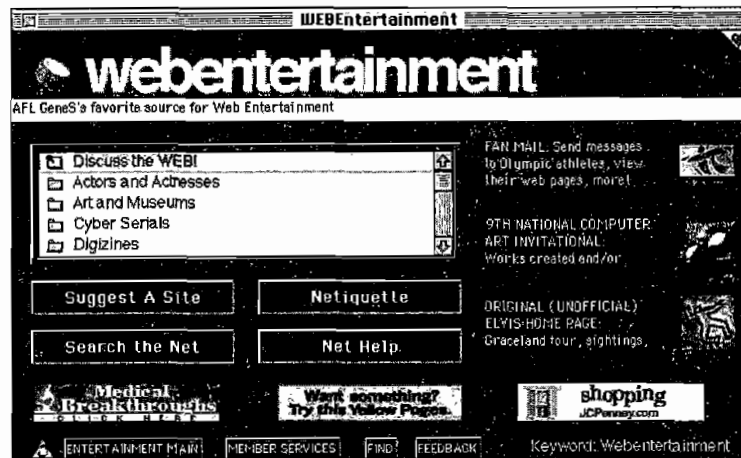
Hot Internet Entertainment Sites

Keyword: **Webentertainment**

AOL offers you seamless access to the most popular entertainment sites on the World Wide Web. Just as you see in figure 11.2, most every AOL channel and many individual forums take you a click or two away from the Internet.

FIG. 11.2

AOL offers you a tasty plate of Internet-based entertainment sources.



Visiting EXTRA Online

Keyword: **Extra**

EXTRA is a TV entertainment-oriented magazine program that is shown six days a week in syndication around the U.S. The producers of the show have established this online forum (see fig. 11.3) so you can learn about future programs and participate in special events.

Let's tour some of the features shown by icons in figure 11.3. The What's Hot Today icon presents information about upcoming shows. You are also invited to participate in an online poll on issues covered in the program, and write to the program's hosts and staff with your concerns. Click the Meeting Hall and Live Chat icons to interact with the show's staff, fellow AOL members, and visiting celebrities. The Superstar Library offers photos

and other files of your favorite stars. Click the Free Newsletter icon and you can add your name to its mailing list for information about upcoming shows and other events that you'll want to know more about.

FIG. 11.3

Here's a forum devoted to a popular TV magazine program.



The buttons at the very bottom of the list, Movie Sites, TV Sites, and Music Sites, will take you to entertainment-related centers on the World Wide Web.

If you are new to an area, you'll want to consult the forum's directory for an item labeled Television Stations & Times for a listing of the local stations that carry the show. And if it hasn't appeared in your area yet, you'll be able to find out when it will be added to a local station's lineup.

A Little Bit about Games Online

Keyword: **Games**

This section serves as a bit of a hint of what is to come. AOL has a number of games-related forums that you can access through the Games channel (see fig. 11.4). Rather than discussing these in detail, the illustration here serves as a brief guide.

► See "Playing Games Online," p. 213

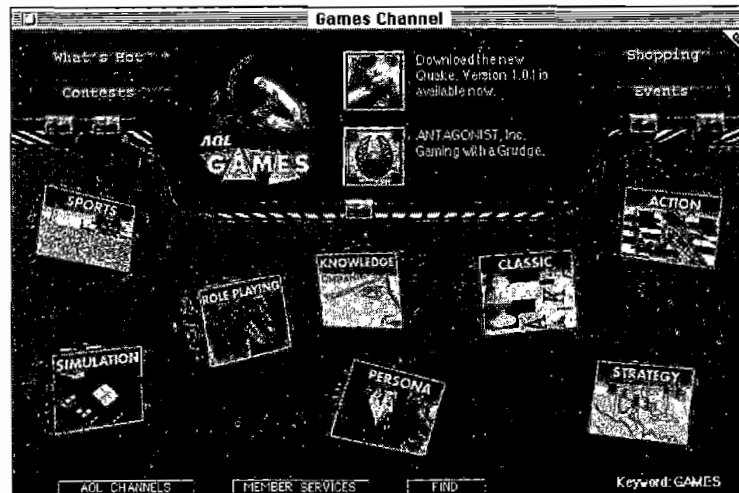
And a Little Bit about Music Resources Online

Keyword: **Music**

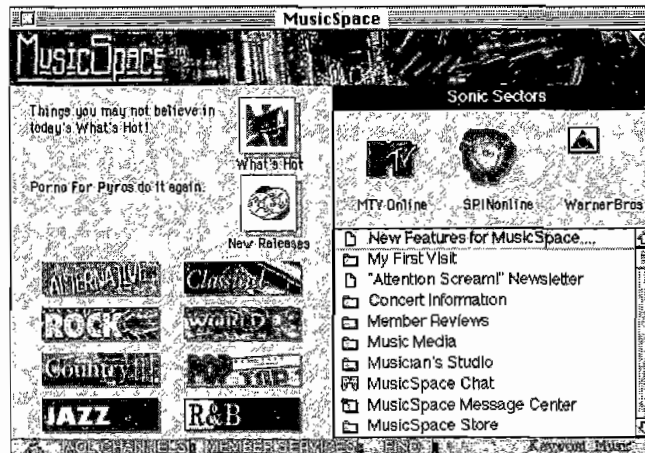
The MusicSpace channel is typical of the way many AOL channels are organized; it represents a gateway to other forums, in this case, AOL's music forums (see fig. 11.5).

FIG. 11.4

Many of America Online's popular games-related forums can be accessed via the Games channel.

**FIG. 11.5**

Many of America Online's music forums can be reached courtesy of MusicSpace.



In the next few pages, you'll read about some of the many music-related areas available on America Online. This is only the beginning, as further exploration will reveal many more places to visit during your online travels.

You can also read about music in Chapter 12, "Music, Books, and Art."

Reading Entertainment News and Information

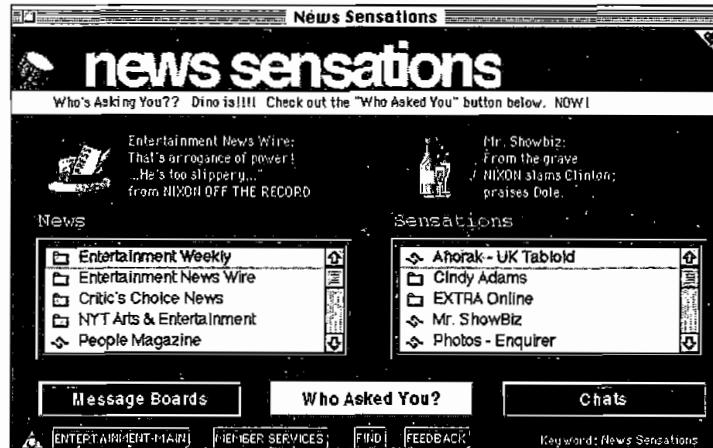
Keywords: News Sensations

Gossip makes the entertainment world go around. Getting information about programs, movies, and personalities to the press helps sell tickets, increase ratings, and so on. AOL's

News Sensations forum (see fig. 11.6) groups many of the online entertainment-related resources in one convenient window, with gateways to several forums.

FIG. 11.6

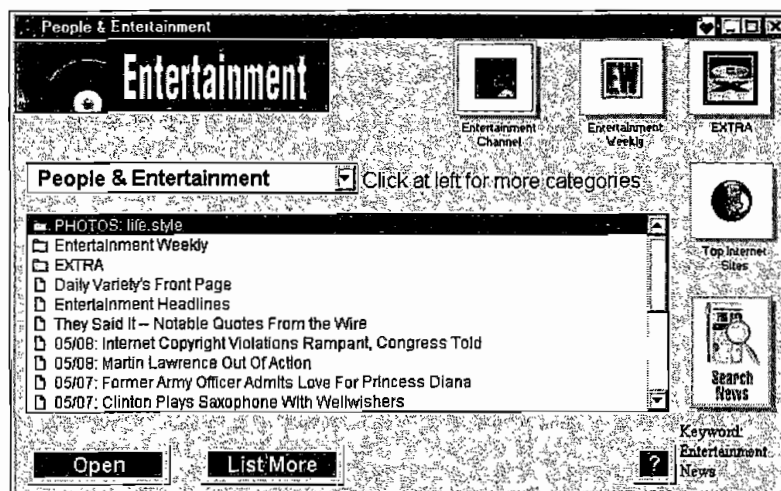
Read the latest entertainment news online.



For the latest entertainment news, double-click Entertainment News Wire from the News list box. This option takes you directly to AOL's People & Entertainment news department (keyword: **Entertainment News**) which groups the latest entertainment events of the day into convenient sections (see fig. 11.7), represented by icons; it's sort of the online equivalent of your daily newspaper. (You can also read Chapter 15, "Pursuing Lifestyles and Interests," and Chapter 23, "The News of the Day.")

FIG. 11.7

Here is AOL's People & Entertainment news wire.



The next stop in the News Sensations window, Critic's Choice News, takes you to AOL's popular critic forums. The remaining icons are handy gateways to other AOL entertainment forums that provide related information. Rather than list any of them here—because

the lineup often changes—I'll just invite you to revisit this area often. The icon showing Top Internet Sites takes you to databases located on the Internet, a sprawling network consisting of thousands of individual computers and services. For more information about these databases, you'll want to read Part VIII, "Entering the Information Superhighway."

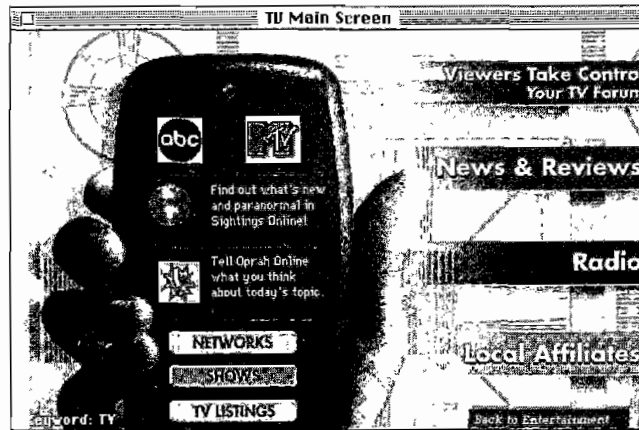
Visiting the Television & Radio Forum Center

Keyword: **TV, Television**

The Television & Radio information area provides a quick link with many of the popular radio TV networks, plus information about upcoming programs (see fig. 11.8). Before you decide what you want to watch or tape, America Online gives you a chance to preview what's coming up on the tube (or on your radio dial).

FIG. 11.8

You'll want to visit AOL's Television & Radio forums often.



Because additional networks are always being added to AOL's roster, the directory window you see in this book is apt to change from time to time, with more and more broadcast entertainment forums being added as months go by. In the bottom of the Television & Radio area is a TV LISTINGS button, where you can check the day's programming schedule. The following sections visit some of the networks.

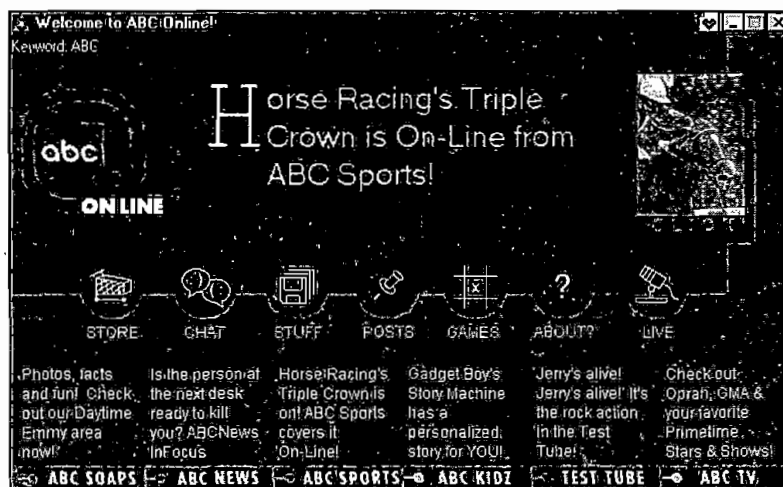
Visiting ABC Online

Keyword: **ABC**

ABC Online is conveniently divided into separate sections for each programming category (see fig. 11.9). There's an icon at the upper right for ABC Sports, for example, and an icon at the bottom left representing ABC's daytime programming (ABC Soaps). ABC News also gets its own icon. The ABC Kidz icon brings up a roster of the network's popular educational offerings. At the right, ABC TV, you'll bring up areas devoted to all your favorite prime time programs on the network.

FIG. 11.9

ABC Online has separate departments dedicated to all its programming categories.



To visit one of ABC Online's departments, just click the appropriate icon. You'll find each area has many things in common. There are full descriptions of the network's programming, a very active message board where fans and forum staff participate, schedules for upcoming shows, and a library of photos of the major stars of various popular shows.

You'll also want to visit ABC's Auditorium to check the conference schedule. Many of the network's popular stars, such as Dean Cain and Terry Hatcher, costars of *Lois and Clark*, have participated in ABC's online meetings, where you have the chance to send questions to your favorite ABC personality. To attend a live event, just click the Live icon for information and a fast entrance to the active conference rooms.

I Want My MTV on AOL

Keyword: **MTV**

MTV is the popular cable TV music network with a rock slant (see fig. 11.10, which you see when you click the illustration in the center of the opening window of this forum). In recent years, its programming has spread far beyond just music videos to include entertainment-related news and interviews.

► See "Music Resources Online," p. 198

Visiting Comedy Central

Keyword: **Comedy Central**

There are a number of cable TV networks that are devoted to just one segment of programming, all of which have forums on AOL. For example, there's Comedy Central where

you can watch sketches, sitcoms, funny movies, and delight in the silly walks and other madcap antics of Monty Python's Flying Circus, or view classic episodes of Saturday Night Live (see fig. 11.11).

FIG. 11.10

MTV's Online forum on AOL.

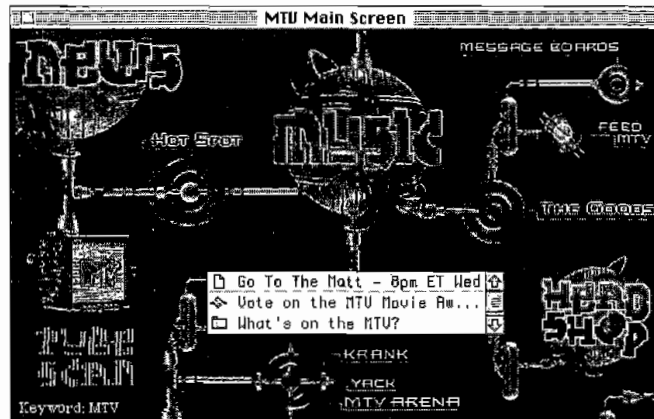
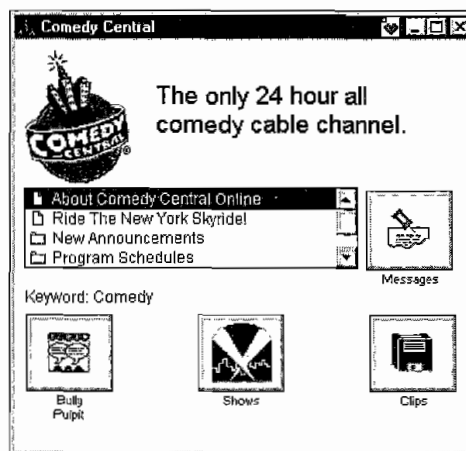


FIG. 11.11

Comedy Central on AOL, where laughter reigns supreme.



You can expect to have a good time on this network's AOL forum too. You can review the network's programming schedule, learn about special shows, or even download multimedia clips from popular shows that you can play on your personal computer. And you can also click Talk To US! (which you find when you scroll through the forum's list box) to interact with the personalities and producers of Comedy Central.

Using E! Entertainment Television

Keyword: E!

Here's another specialized TV network, devoted strictly to the world of entertainment, ranging from radio and television to the movies and the literary world. E! Entertainment

Television (see fig. 11.12) has daily programming on entertainment and features classic movies at night.

FIG. 11.12

E! Entertainment Television covers the world of entertainment on cable TV.



Among the most popular E! programs is Howard Stern's controversial half hour shows, which are culled from his popular syndicated radio program.

Looking over the list of top shows in the Now Showing area, you'll learn more about two of the network's top programs, "The Gossip Show" (featuring your very favorite gossip columns from major newspapers) and "Talk Soup." The Hot Off The Press icon provides a listing of special presentations, the sort you'll find when a new movie comes out or when there's a special show business event, such as the Grammys or Oscars. For a full programming schedule, simply click the It's Show Time! icon.

And don't forget a trip to the Message Boards, Talk To & About E!, where you can voice your views about the network's programming, give your own suggestions, or just participate in discussions of programming and personalities.

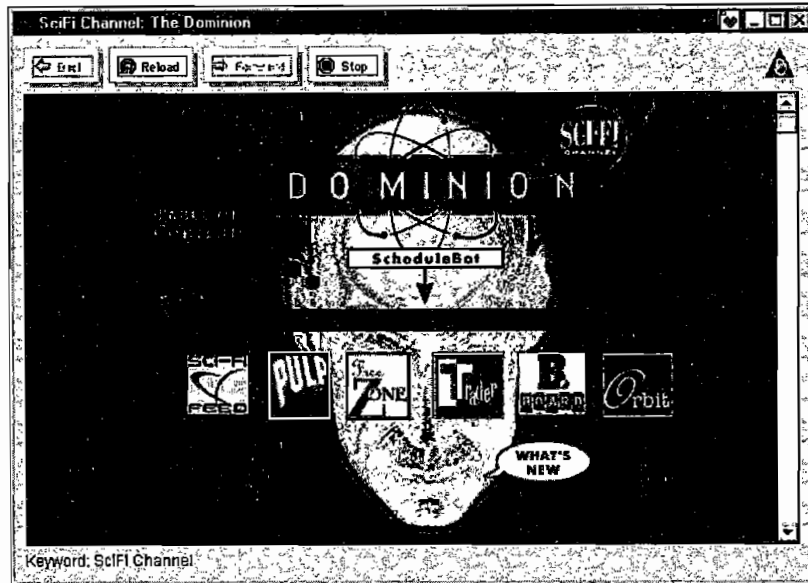
Visiting the SciFi Channel

Keyword: **SciFi Channel**

Years ago, science-fiction fandom consisted of a small number of readers of magazines, devotees of movies, and the rare television show devoted to the subject. How times have changed. The original Star Trek television program of the 1960s, man's landing on the moon, and the epic Star Wars trilogy (to name just a few examples) have really put science fiction on the map. All this brings us to the online forum run by the SciFi Channel where science fiction reigns supreme from morning until night (see fig. 11.13).

FIG. 11.13

The SciFi Channel's forum, also known to fans of the network as The Dominion.



The SciFi Channel, offered on cable in many parts of the U. S., features science-fiction television series and movies. The network's AOL forum provides news about upcoming shows, and lots of in-depth information about specific programs, new books, television shows, and movies. To check the bill of fare, just click the Table of Contents button to access a full directory of the services offered, which include a bulletin board, program schedules, artwork from your favorite shows, and information about upcoming sci-fi shows and movies.

You'll want to consult the Trader for books, clothing, posters, and other memorabilia dealing with your favorite shows.

Now if my local cable carrier would just offer this channel, I'd be a happy camper.

TIP

You can use your AOL software's Download Manager to queue up files you want to download from various libraries. First, select the files you want, using the Download Later feature. When you log off, you can have the files all download in one continuous operation.

Seeing Your Favorite Shows

Many of your favorite TV shows have forums on AOL (see fig. 11.14), which you find listed when you click Television at the left of the Entertainment channel screen shown in figure 11.1. You can reach that online area directly via the keyword **TV Shows** or

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television. Some of the programs represented in this area include *Babylon 5*, *The Computer Man*, *EXTRA* (described earlier in this chapter), *The Geraldo Show*, *Last Call*, *The McLaughlin Group*, *The Nightly Business Report*, *The Ricki Lake Show*, *Sightings*, *Washington Week in Review*, and *The X-Files*. As time goes by, more producers will offer online support for their programs on AOL. You're probably already familiar with program segments that include messages and polls conducted in their America Online forums.

FIG. 11.14

Some of the TV shows offering AOL forums are shown when you scroll through the list box.



Radio Online

Keyword: **Radio**

Among the additional features available in AOL's Entertainment area is one devoted strictly to Radio that takes you to a radio forum (see fig. 11.15); you can reach this area using the keyword **Radio** or choosing Radio from the Entertainment channel's list box. Several popular programs and services are represented here. These include the National Public Radio Outreach program, the American Entertainment Network, and an area developed to ham radio enthusiasts.

FIG. 11.15

AOL's Entertainment's Radio Forum offers forums devoted to popular shows.



The icon labeled Computer Radio Shows offers access to a selection of forums run by the producers of several programs devoted to personal computers. The last icon, Soundbites, is just what the name implies, a library consisting of short sound clips, of both comedic and current events, that will add a touch of humor to your collection of sound files.

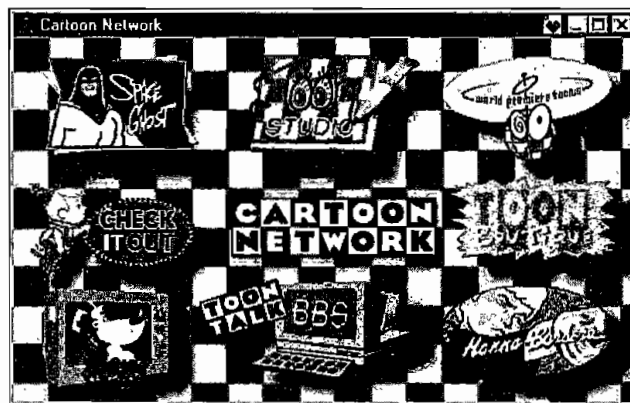
Accessing the Cartoon Network

Keyword: **Cartoon**

A discussion of America Online's entertainment offerings should definitely include the Cartoon Network forum (see fig. 11.16). Cartoon entertainment appeals to the young-at-heart, from children to adults. America Online has a special library of cartoon art in GIF (Graphic Interchange Format) format. See Chapter 7, "America Online's People Connection," for more information on how to create and view GIF files.

FIG. 11.16

America Online didn't forget cartoons.



A number of special libraries in this forum contain professional cartoon artwork that you can download to your computer, view, and print (at least for your personal use).

The Cartoon forum is also a resource for all you online cartoonists to create and post your own artwork so that others can see it. The Toon Talk section is a message area where you can discuss your favorite cartoon characters.

Reading DC Comics Online

Keyword: **DC Comics Online**

Even though the publisher's name might not always be remembered, I'm sure very few of you are unfamiliar with characters such as Superman or Batman. They all got their start

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in DC Comics (see fig. 11.17), and even though these characters have migrated to the movies and television, the original color comic books are still published and read across the world. Thus we come to DC Comics Online, where readers of these magazines can discuss and learn more about their favorite characters.

FIG. 11.17

DC Comics has its own support area on AOL, where you can learn more about your favorite fictional characters.



Besides DC Comics, the publisher, Time-Warner, also has established areas devoted to some of their other publications, such as *Mad* magazine, one of the original sources of illustrated satire. The impact of this magazine on American culture has been profound. *Mad* lampoons popular culture, such as movies, television, and commercials each month. This form of satire has gravitated to the broadcast medium too. For example, the radio shows and recordings from Stan Freberg (in the 1950s), the television antics of Steve Allen (in the 1950s and 1960s), and even *Saturday Night Live* (from the 1970s through the 1990s), in some respects, pay homage to the sort of humor pioneered in *Mad* magazine.

Online Celebrity Fan Clubs

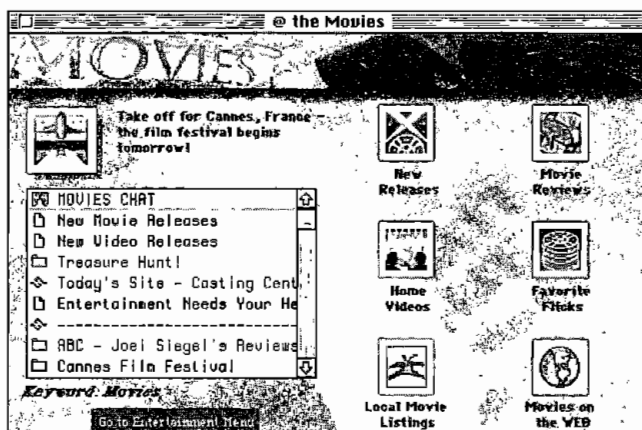
While most of the online areas I've described so far are run by the media centers themselves, such as the networks, movie studios, or the producers of an individual program, still others are more or less developed by fans of particular celebrities or programs.

One such example is the Star Trek Club (keyword: **Trek**) as shown in figure 11.18. This forum includes discussions, a regular newsletter, and just as important, regular chats featuring the stars of your favorite Star Trek program or movie. There's even a folder that will tell you about all the episodes of the various programs and when they were first aired.

If you want to meet your favorite stars, you'll want to consult the listings in AOL's Center Stage for news of online conferences. Oldsmobile's Celebrity Circle is also a popular source of online sessions featuring popular figures from all areas of show business.

FIG. 11.19

Just some of the forums featured in AOL's Movies department.



You'll find a gateway to America Online's Critics' Choice forum via the Movie area's list box. It's a place where you get your chance to be a critic. In this section, I'll concentrate on some of the other online areas shown and as I've said before, this list will grow in time.

Accessing Hollywood Online

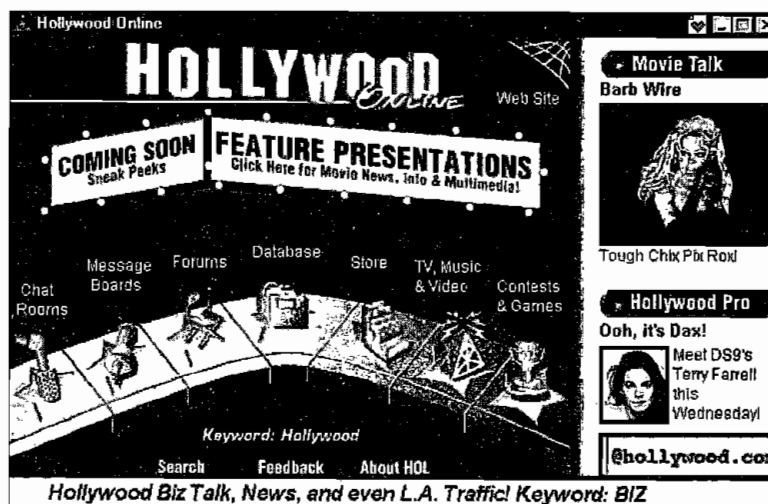
Keyword: **Hollywood**

At any one time, literally dozens of current motion pictures are playing at your local theaters. New flicks are released weekly, and during the summer and Christmas seasons, scores of pictures compete for your attention and your ticket dollars. What to do?

America Online's Hollywood Online area is the resource you can use to learn about these films before they are released (see fig. 11.20). In fact, it's not just a single forum, but a gateway to a number of useful forums.

FIG. 11.20

Hollywood Online is Tinseltown's own forum on America Online.



As you read through the message areas in the various online forums, you'll see many messages from fans of particular shows, with news of the fan clubs they run. Regular viewers of ABC's soap operas are often found in the Backstage Buzz conference room run by ABC Online (who welcomes their participation), and one or more of the stars of the show has been known to make an announced visit.

FIG. 11.18

Where no Star Trek fan has gone before, AOL's Star Trek Club.



Motion Picture Entertainment Resources

The word entertainment, for many people, produces such images as huge dinosaurs roaming the earth, spaceships racing between the stars battling evil-doers of all shapes and sizes, or bold adventurers seeking fame and fortune in untamed, undiscovered lands in exotic portions of the world. And these scenes describe many of the famous action movies that Hollywood has produced throughout the years.

In the next section of this chapter, I'll cover the online services available when you click the Movies icon in the Entertainment department.

Visiting the Movies Forums

Keyword: **Movies**

One of my favorite parts of AOL's Entertainment channel is the Movies section. You can access it via the keyword above, or by choosing Movies at the left side of the Entertainment channel screen. The result is shown in figure 11.19; it will change on occasion as new areas are added to AOL's sprawling online city.

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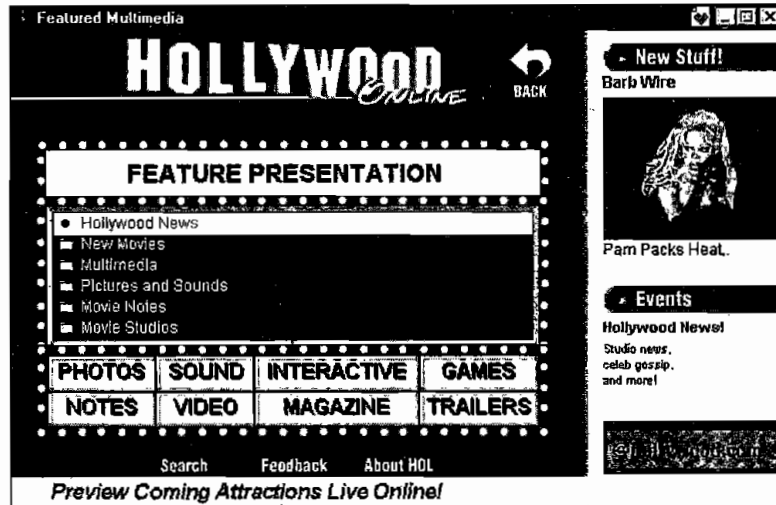
11

The following paragraphs describe some of the features you can access from the seven icons included on the Hollywood Online screen:

- ☐ **FEATURE PRESENTATIONS!** enables you to preview all of the new films before they reach your local screens. When you click this icon, you see the screen shown in figure 11.21.

FIG. 11.21

You can find the latest information about the newest releases from Hollywood's motion picture factory.



- ☐ Pictures and Sounds is your resource library. Here you can download pictures of your favorite stars, and maybe even a sound bite from your favorite picture. If you've never downloaded files before, you'll want to read Chapter 20, "Tips and Tricks on Finding Software," first.
- ☐ Hollywood News is an information resource where you can learn about what's really happening behind the scenes in Tinseltown. There's even an Ask The Stars feature, which allows you to post questions to your favorite stars and, often, get their personal answers. From time to time, motion picture executives and the stars themselves will have online press conferences that you're invited to attend.
- ☐ Store (back at the main Hollywood Online screen shown in fig. 11.20) gives you a chance to order exclusive promotional gifts from the movie studios and participate in special contests. You may win such prizes as movie posters, complimentary movie passes, and other items. This place is one you will want to visit often.
- ☐ Message Boards (also in fig. 11.20) gives you a chance to express what you like and don't like about a movie and about the actors and actresses in that movie. You can also read and respond to messages on these subjects from other America Online members.

- **Multimedia** (available when you click the **FEATURE PRESENTATION** icon) accesses Hollywood Online's software library. Here you find the tools you need to view photos of your favorite stars and to see brief movie clips. Read Chapter 20, "Tips and Tricks on Finding Software," for advice on how to download and use the software you receive from America Online.
- **Movie Notes** (also found after clicking the **FEATURE PRESENTATION** icon) offers you background information about current movie releases. You'll find basic production information that describes the plot of the movie, plus fascinating material about the movie stars themselves. You'll find information, for example, about how a team of special effects artists can create those fantastic and realistic scenes you see in your favorite movie.
- **COMING SOON** brings up a listing about upcoming productions. You'll get a gander at some of the promotional newsletters and photos of the newest summer or winter blockbusters, and special behind-the-scenes information direct from the production centers.

From Here...

For more useful material on entertainment-related subjects, refer to the following chapters:

- In Chapter 12, "Music, Books, and Art," you'll explore additional online entertainment information.
- In Chapter 13, "Playing Games Online," you'll learn where to find tips about your favorite games, and even participate in some of the online gaming forums.
- In Chapter 14, "Sports in Cyberspace," you'll read the latest news from the world of sports and learn how to participate in a virtual sporting event of your own.
- In Chapter 15, "Pursuing Lifestyles and Interests," you'll visit forums dedicated to subjects ranging from cooking to *Star Trek*.
- In Chapter 17, "Games, Entertainment, Teen Chat, and Netiquette," you'll read about the resources available for those ages 5-14, along with information about proper online behavior.
- In Chapter 23, "The News of the Day," you'll open the pages of AOL's virtual newspaper and read its many sections.
- In Chapter 24, "Magazines and Newspapers Online," you'll visit AOL's online newsstand and read the latest issues of many of your favorite magazines. Perhaps you'll discover some that will also soon become your favorites.

Music, Books, and Art

When you look through this chapter and the preceding one, Chapter 11, "TV and Movie Information Online," it's very clear that AOL is fast becoming a culture lover's paradise.

Besides the entertainment resources described in the previous chapter, you can visit areas devoted to such diverse topics as music, games, sports, books, kids' activities, and horoscopes. You find out what America Online has to offer in those areas and how you can find it. Wherever your interests lie, America Online surely has a place where you can find the entertainment information you seek. ■

Visit AOL's MusicSpace

Find the latest music-related news and information.

Express yourself

Become a critic right here on America Online.

Use the online library

Learn about the wonderful world of books.

Entertainment information online

Access a wide range of areas devoted to leisure and the world of show business.

NOTE Your quick shortcut to your favorite area is a keyword. Just press $\text{⌘}+K$ (or $\text{Ctrl}+K$ for Windows), enter the name of the area you want to visit (the keyword), and click OK. Then you're on your way. I've noted the keywords you need to find the features described in this chapter. □

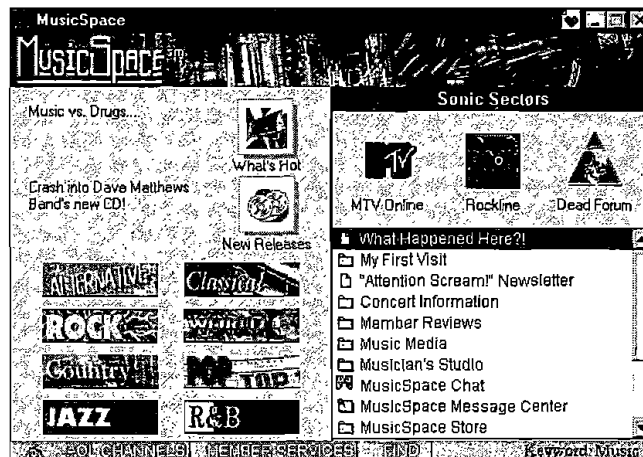
Music Resources Online

Keyword: **Music, MusicSpace**

They come from all corners of the world, the most famous musical stars of our generation, and they choose America Online for special online conferences. In 1994 and early 1995, for example, such rock 'n' roll stars as Mick Jagger and Eddie and Alex Van Halen held court in America Online's huge conference auditoriums.

If you dig rock 'n' roll music, or prefer country, classical, or jazz, you will appreciate that America Online's music-related forums are your resources for information and online discussion about your favorite performers. The keyword **Music** is just a gateway (see fig. 12.1). Clicking the MusicSpace icon in the Entertainment channel window gets the same result. It's a stopping off point where you can visit the special online areas that cater to music lovers of all persuasions.

FIG. 12.1
MusicSpace is the gateway to the world of music on AOL.



In the next few pages, I'll cover just a few of the vast collections of music information areas available to you in MusicSpace. First, we'll take a brief stopover to the World Wide Web, which is identified by Web in the channel's list box (and you'll want to read Part VIII, "Entering the Information Superhighway," for more Internet-related material).

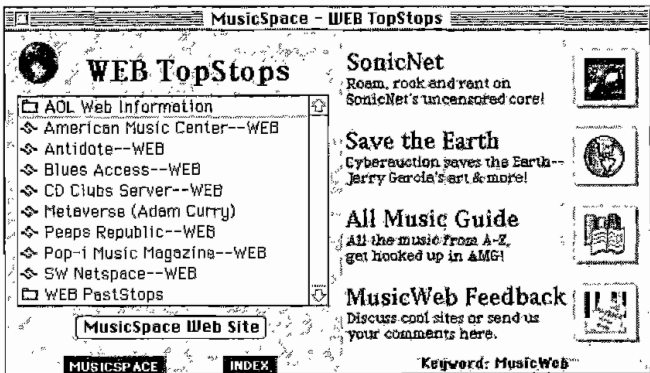
Top Web Sites

Keyword: **MusicWeb**

Virtually every major music production company, music-related publication, and many artists have found a home in the online world. AOL's WEB TopStops provides a fast-access gateway for music resources beyond the confines of the service. The roster shown in figure 12.2 is but a sample of what you'll find during your online travels. You'll also find reference material and information about special events.

FIG. 12.2

Visit AOL's WEB TopStops for music information from across the globe.



Special MusicSpace Events

Keyword: **Scream**

Many of your favorite music artists and industry executives continue to appear at live events on AOL. To find out about the latest conferences, you'll want to sign up to receive a copy of AOL's "Attention Scream" newsletter (see fig. 12.3 for a look at a typical issue). In addition to the latest schedules, you'll learn news about other media events, and you'll be able to exchange information with other AOL members in the Message Center.

Part

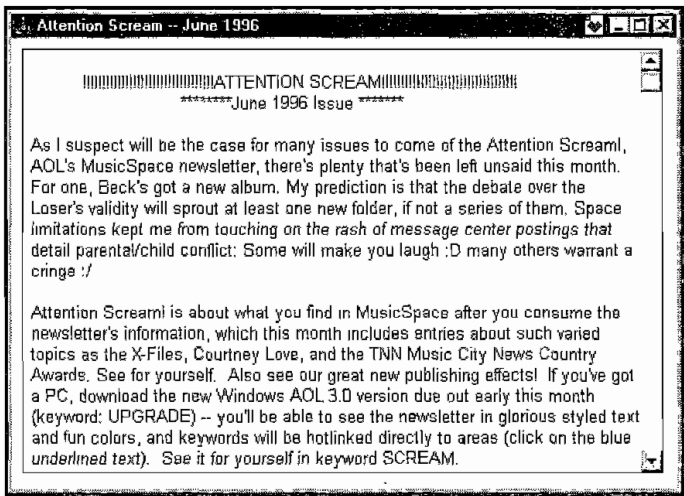
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FIG. 12.3

Here's a typical issue of AOL's special music events newsletter where you can learn about your favorite artists and other cool stuff.



You can view current and recent issues, or just click the Sign Me Up button in the window you access via keyword **Scream** to become a subscriber. Once you order the free newsletter, a copy will show up at regular intervals in your AOL e-mail box.

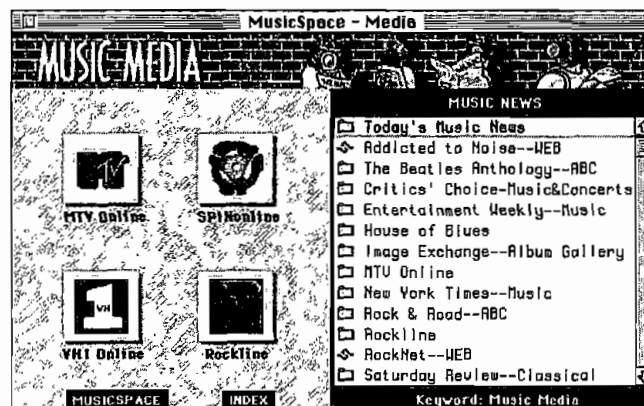
Checking Out Music Media

Keyword: **Music Media**

You can visit forums run by major networks, top publications, and your favorite artists in the Music Media department of the MusicSpace channel (see fig. 12.4). In the next few pages, I'll touch upon a few of the forums that are a part of this area. You can definitely spend many enjoyable hours here exploring the full roster of information resources.

FIG. 12.4

From print to TV (cable and broadcast), read all about the latest music news from AOL's Music Media information center.



Visiting MTV Online

Keyword: **MTV**

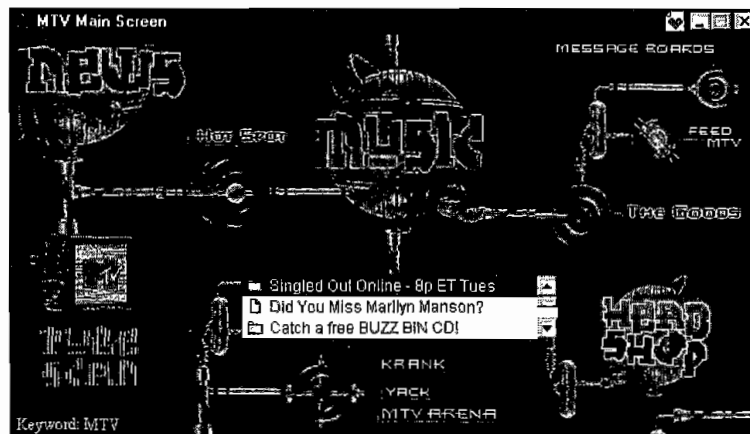
The arrival of MTV fostered a revolution in the way music was programmed on television. Instead of having rock bands lip-sync their popular records on a variety or dance show, they created short movies that either represented the subject matter of their songs, or showed the band in action at a concert. Some of those music videos are major productions that involve elaborate special effects, cost millions to produce, and are directed by major filmmakers.

The MTV forum on AOL mirrors the style and substance of the cable TV network (see fig. 12.5, which you see after you click the MTV globe in the main screen). When you first visit this area, you'll want to look over the News and Hot Spot buttons shown on the main forum directory window at the left. After getting the latest updates, click the Music icon to

read reviews and see a list of concert updates. Head Shop isn't quite what its 1960s-type label implies. The area includes a library of photos and brief videos of some of your favorite stars. Before you visit this library, you may want to check out the MTV Multimedia Tools library also, because it contains a selection of Mac and Windows viewing programs that you may need before you download the available graphics files.

FIG. 12.5

If you want your MTV, here it is, but you have to first click an opening screen to get to this one.



There's a full schedule of upcoming MTV programs in the Tube Scan area. The Message Boards area offers that special flavor of chatter that is typical of MTV.

TIP

You can save and print any text document you see on America Online simply by choosing the appropriate command from the File menu.

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The Road to Rock & Road

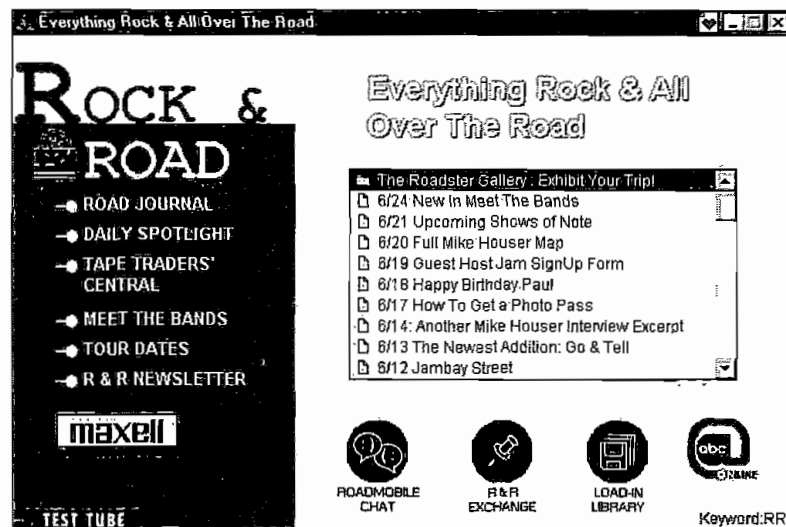
Keyword: **RR**

The Rock & Road forum on AOL (see fig. 12.6) is part of ABC Online. This area is devoted strictly to covering rock bands on the road. The Road Journal (shown in the main directory at the left) offers capsule reports of the activities of popular bands that are giving concerts around the country.

The R&R Newsletter button provides information on how you can subscribe to the forum's newsletter, which will tell you about your favorite acts and upcoming concert dates. The R&R Exchange icon takes you to a very active message board, where you can read concert reviews from fellow AOL members, and offer your own experiences. The Load-In Library offers sights and sounds of popular acts in concert, and you'll want to check out the Chat room and the ever-popular ABC Auditorium for special scheduled conferences (just click the ABC Online icon).

FIG. 12.6

Find out what your favorite band is doing on the road, at Rock & Road.



Reading SPIN Online

Keyword: **Spin**

Whether or not you buy the popular rock magazine, *SPIN*, at your local newsstand, you'll want to take a look at its online forum first (see fig. 12.7). You can see the contents of the latest issue before it reaches your city. But, this section is just the first of eight sections that you'll want to check out.

FIG. 12.7

Here you can read *SPIN* magazine online.



For example, the Digital News Data Feast section offers up a huge helping of news about special online events sponsored by the publishers and editors of *SPIN*. The *SPIN*-mart is not just a place where you can order a subscription to the magazine itself; there are also frequent special offers on new rock CDs and collectibles. The Games & Contests area

gives you the chance to participate in trivia contests and online treasure hunts, and the opportunity to win a valuable prize. After the preliminaries, you'll want to click the This Month's SPIN button to have a look at the latest issue of the magazine, complete with photographs that display rapidly on your computer's monitor.

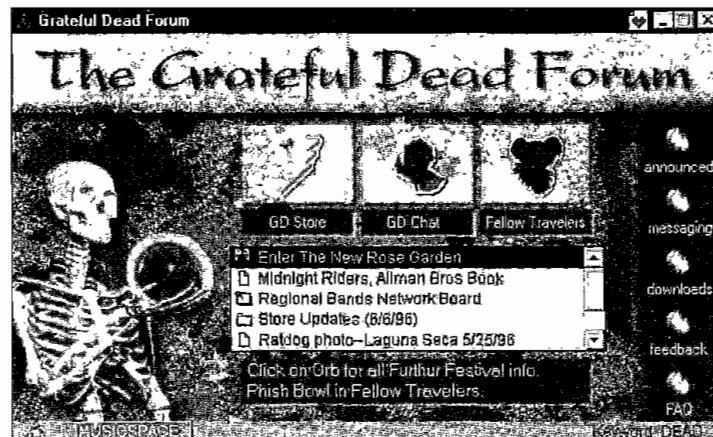
Accessing the Grateful Dead Forum

Keyword: **Grateful Dead**

Prior to the death of its leader, Jerry Garcia, the Grateful Dead had the distinction of being one of the longest surviving rock 'n' roll bands still doing regular performances. Interest in the band after Garcia's untimely passing is still strong, and the surviving band members continue to run their own special area on America Online for the Deadheads to visit, read about the band's music legacy, and even share messages with other fans (see fig. 12.8). You'll be especially interested in the GD Chat room, a place where you can have online chats with other members of the online community.

FIG. 12.8

Even the Grateful Dead has its own special place on America Online.



You can discuss your favorite song with fellow Dead fans in the Grateful Dead Messaging area, and learn the latest about what band members are doing in the Announced area.

Exploring Warner/Reprise Records Online

Keyword: **Warner**

Warner/Reprise Records spans generations of music lovers, with musical choices ranging from gospel to alternative. This forum covers the entire Warner/Reprise artist roster (see fig. 12.9).

Part

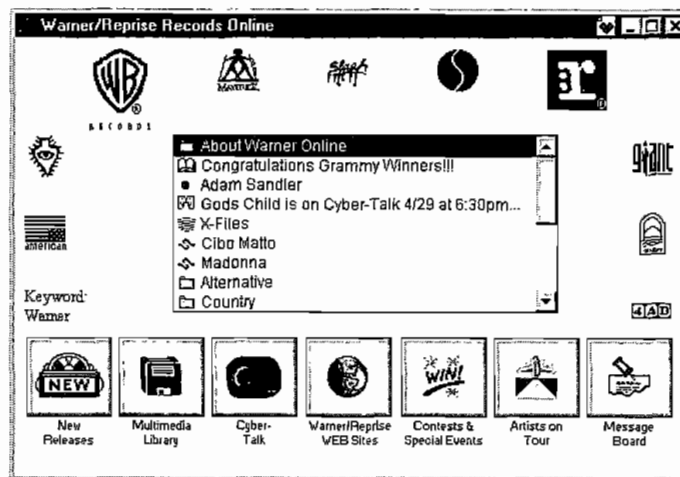


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FIG. 12.9

This screen appears when you visit the Warner/Reprise Records Online forum on America Online.



The Warner/Reprise Records Online forum is very popular on America Online for good reason, because it offers a wide range of features. The following paragraphs describe the areas you can visit simply by clicking the icons you find on the Warner/Reprise Records Online screen.

- New Releases describes the latest recordings from Warner/Reprise's vast roster of entertainers.
- You'll also want to visit the forum's Multimedia Library, where you can download sounds and images of some of your favorite artists and sample their newest recordings. There's even a selection of multimedia software that you may need to view and hear these special files.
- No doubt you've read about the Cyber-Talk area in your daily newspaper. Your favorite musical stars will, from time to time, appear online in this huge auditorium for special interactive conferences that you can attend.
- The Warner/Reprise WEB Sites area takes you on a journey to the company's music-related sites on the Information Superhighway. You'll want to check that area out often.
- Contests & Special Events are held from time to time when a recording artist releases a new recording or is beginning a major concert tour.
- Artists on Tour lists the touring plans of your favorite Warner/Reprise Records artists. Is your favorite entertainer coming to your city? Here's where you find out about it.
- As with many other America Online forums, Message Board is the place to read the views of fellow America Online members, and for you to join in on the discussions yourself.

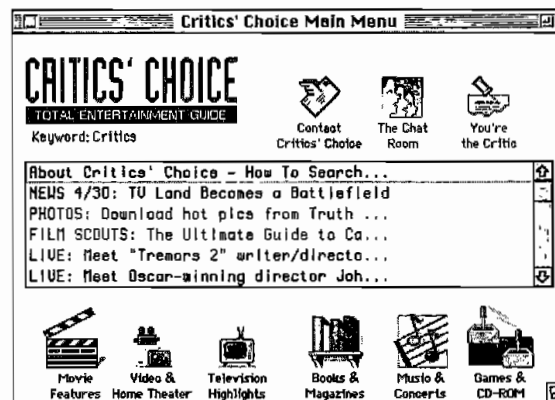
What the Critics Have to Say

Keyword: Critics

Like most of you, before I buy a book, see a movie, or even rent a videotape, I want to know what the reviewers have to say about it. America Online's Critics' Choice is a compendium of thousands of reviews and discussions about the entire spectrum of the world of entertainment (see fig. 12.10).

FIG. 12.10

The Critics' Choice area is where you can read what the critics say, and become one yourself if it suits you.



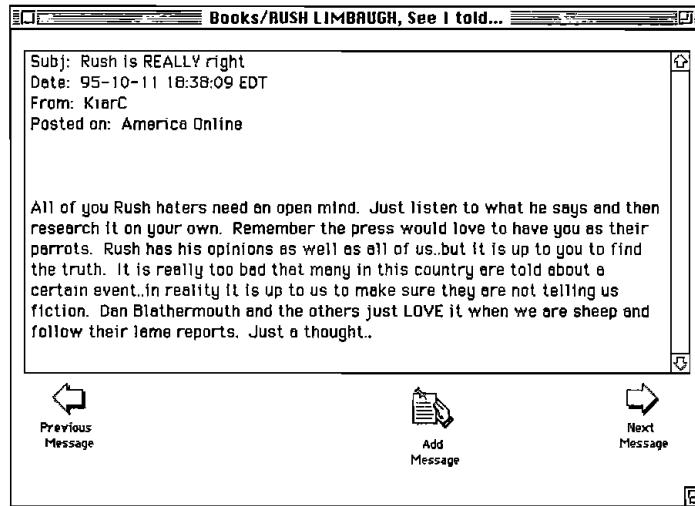
Here you find reviews of your favorite movies, concerts, television shows, books, and even video games. The following paragraphs describe the icons shown on the Critics' Choice screen:

- ☐ Contact Critics' Choice enables you to express your own views to the forum staff.
- ☐ The Chat Room is another one of AOL's exciting interactive chat rooms, where you'll be able to discuss your favorite books or TV shows, and sometimes even meet your favorite author or movie critic for a fun-filled conference.
- ☐ The title, You're The Critic, means what it says. It's your chance to post a message giving your viewpoints about something you've read or seen. In fig. 12.11, an America Online member offers a very personal review about a particular subject.

The icons at the bottom of the Critics' Choice window take you to other entertainment forums on America Online, ranging from movies, video, and TV, to books, music, and games. I covered the areas devoted to AOL's movie and television forums in Chapter 11, "TV and Movie Information Online." By now, you've seen how nearly every forum you visit on America Online provides gateways to other areas that might interest you. It's a journey you will truly enjoy.

FIG. 12.11

Here's your chance to become a critic.



The Wonderful World of Books

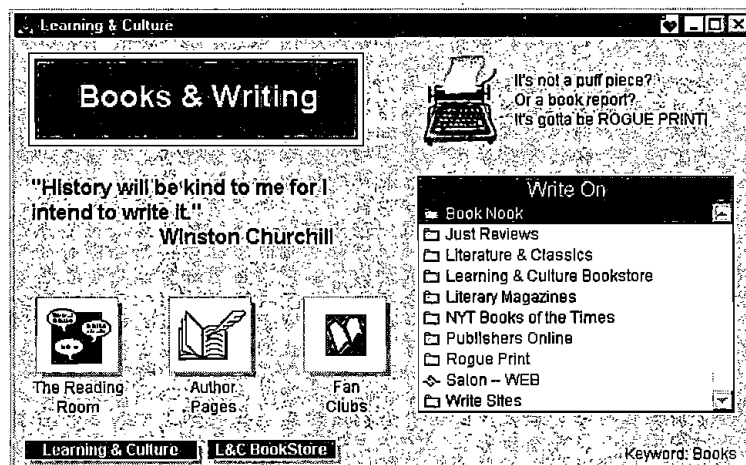
Keyword: **Books**

To many of you, the best entertainment is probably sitting down with a good book in hand. But, the selections at your favorite bookstores have become daunting. Literally thousands of new works are on the shelves, ready for you to make your choice. Where do you begin? Well, let's start with AOL's Books & Writing forum (see fig. 12.12).

Whether you prefer fiction or nonfiction, you want to check the Book Nook first to see how your favorite author's works are faring in the marketplace. From there you can find out more about this area of America Online, check out the best-seller lists, and see what's soon to be released. Just Reviews is the place to post your own book reviews and read about the choices of other members of the online community.

FIG. 12.12

AOL's Books & Writing area provides the latest information about best-selling books and upcoming works.



NOTE You'll notice that an option on Just Reviews screen is Critics' Choice. That topic is discussed in more detail previously in this chapter (see "What the Critics Have to Say"). □

You can order your favorite books online as well, from America Online's Online Bookstore. Chapter 28, "Secrets of Online Shopping," takes you step-by-step through the ordering process (during which I order a certain book some of you are no doubt familiar with).

Graphics and Art Online

America Online is a graphical service, designed to take full advantage of the capabilities of the Macintosh and Windows computing platforms. You can view graphics online, and download photos, sounds, and even short movie clips in many of the online forums. The very latest versions of AOL's Mac and Windows software come complete with graphics viewers that enable you to view photo files in several popular formats. If you're new to America Online, you may want to review Appendixes B and C, which you can consider a brief manual on using this software. You can also refer to Chapter 3, "Getting the Most from AOL's Macintosh Software," and Chapter 4, "Getting the Most from AOL's Windows Software."

Art Workshop

Keyword: **Workshop**

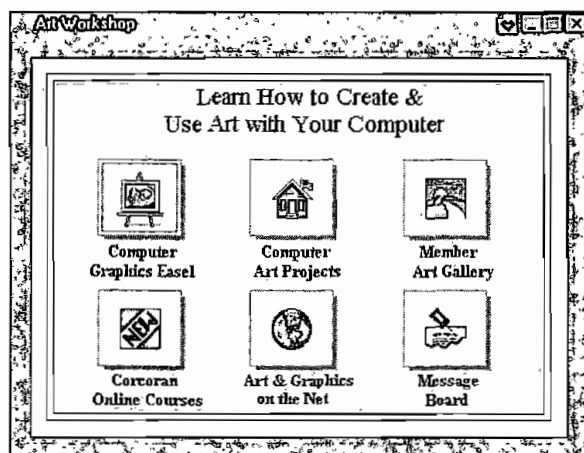
The Art Workshop forum (see fig. 12.13) is part of America Online's Family Computing Online department. It's a place where you can learn about the various types of graphics files available online and learn the best techniques for viewing them on your computer's screen.

Whether you want to know more about viewing and preparing your own GIF photos, or need to understand more about what's involved in handling online graphics files, here's the place you can consult for information. Some of the best graphics files are on display in the library available when you click the Member Art Gallery icon. There is also an online dictionary of frequently used terminology, helpful hints and tips, and advice on how to upload your own graphics files.

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FIG. 12.13

Learn all about online graphics in Art Workshop.



New AOL members can try out their graphics file handling skills in the Computer Graphics Easel area. This particular area, by the way, is free of online charges. So, you can take all the time you need working with files until you are comfortable about doing it for real. And if you need further advice, visit the forum's active message boards. If you are an experienced online traveler, you might just want to provide some advice yourself.

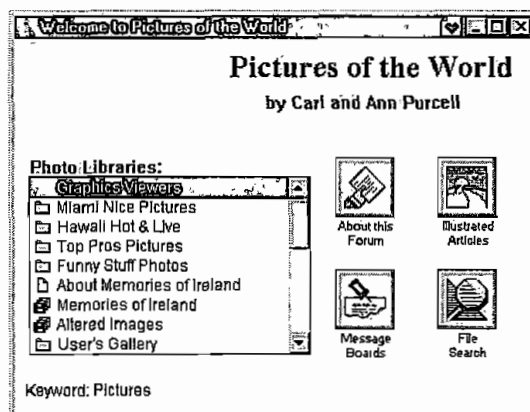
Pictures of the World

Keyword: **Pictures**

Carl and Ann Purcell are experienced travel photographers whose work has appeared in many magazines and newspapers. The Pictures of the World forum is a special library containing some of the best of the Purcells' work (see fig. 12.14).

FIG. 12.14

View photos taken by world travelers from Pictures of the World on AOL.



CAUTION

The photos provided in Pictures of the World and many other online areas are copyrighted. You can download these photos for your own personal use, but distribution and resale of these photos is usually prohibited.

The photos are grouped in easy-to-find categories, or you can use the File Search icon to tap the huge database of available material. You can also download illustrated articles about the authors' travels to fascinating spots around the world. By the way, if travel interests you, read Chapter 27, "Secrets of AOL's Travel Department" for full information about AOL's travel resources. But, even if your travel is done vicariously in the comfort of your home, you'll appreciate the artistic merit of this large photographic library.

TIP

If you're using the latest Macintosh and Windows versions of AOL's software, you'll see photos in several graphics formats appear on your screen as they are being downloaded.

Resources for Leisure and Entertainment

This section concentrates mostly on areas of leisure and entertainment other than movies and TV (because I described them in the previous chapter). As always, exploring the resources available to you on America Online is an ever-changing, exciting process. New forums are being added regularly, older ones change and update to reflect new areas.

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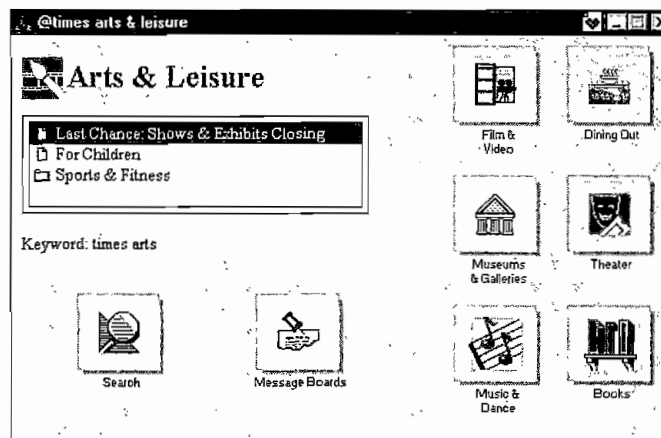
Leisure Guide

Keyword: **Times Leisure, Times Arts**

The huge daily newspaper, *The New York Times*, has a number of support areas on America Online. The one I'm describing here is the *Times*' Arts & Leisure area, which provides full coverage of popular entertainment and leisure spots in the sprawling New York metropolitan area. This area includes suburban Long Island and Westchester, Connecticut, and New Jersey (see fig. 12.15).

FIG. 12.15

The New York Times' Leisure Guide provides news of the hot entertainment spots in the Big Apple and environs.



In addition to reviews of top dining spots, movies, and video, you'll find news about special events at many of New York's famous museums, plus information related to other leisure activities, such as sports and fitness.

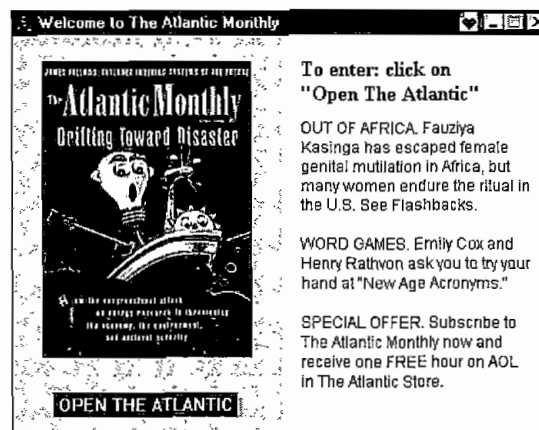
The Atlantic Monthly Magazine

Keyword: **Atlantic**

Several important magazines regularly appear online at the same time they appear in your favorite bookstore. One of these is *The Atlantic Monthly* (see fig. 12.16).

FIG. 12.16

Here you can read *The Atlantic Monthly* on AOL.



When you first go to *The Atlantic Monthly*'s forum, you'll see the magazine's cover, and a few paragraphs describing the content of the current issue. In order to enter the forum, simply click the button labeled OPEN THE ATLANTIC.

Founded in 1857, *The Atlantic Monthly* is a journal of literature, entertainment, and opinion. Highlights of the latest issue appear online, including features, letters to the editor, and many of the articles that appear in the printed edition.

The Message Board is your chance to communicate with editors, writers, and other online members. As with any magazine of opinion, the discussions can become very active indeed. The Atlantic Auditorium hosts special gatherings involving both editors and writers.

Saturday Review Online

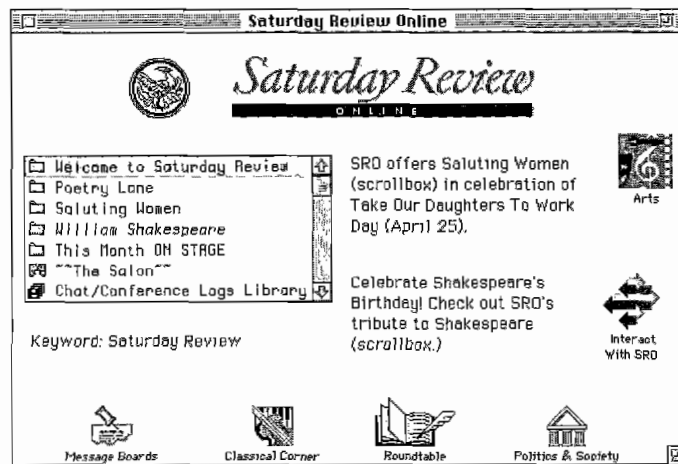
Keyword: **Saturday Review**

Many of you probably remember the *Saturday Review* as a magazine of arts and culture that existed for many years and folded in 1986. During its over half a century of existence, this journal covered such subjects as politics, science, business, literature, and even the world of entertainment.

So, what is a magazine that no longer exists doing on America Online? Well, unlike the other online magazines we've discussed so far in this chapter, *Saturday Review Online* doesn't exist as a printed publication. It's strictly an electronic magazine brought to you by the publishers of *OMNI* and *Compute* (see fig. 12.17).

FIG. 12.17

The *Saturday Review*, reborn as an electronic magazine on America Online.



In the tradition of the magazine originally edited by Norman Cousins, this twenty-first century counterpart contains articles of both fact and fiction. It reviews current events in detail from the perspective of many noted writers. As with other online publications, you can participate in its active message boards to share your views with writers and editors. Reading this revived publication is a unique experience indeed.

From Here...

As with other areas on America Online, you don't have to restrict yourself to searching one area for the information you want. For more useful facts on entertainment-related subjects, refer to these chapters:

- In Chapter 11, "TV and Movie Information Online," you can review a full slate of entertainment resources online.
- In Chapter 13, "Playing Games Online," you'll learn where to find tips about your favorite games, and even participate in some of the online gaming forums.
- In Chapter 14, "Sports in Cyberspace," you read the latest news from the world of sports and learn how to participate in a virtual sporting event of your own.
- In Chapter 15, "Pursuing Lifestyles and Interests," you'll visit forums dedicated to subjects ranging from cooking to *Star Trek*.
- In Chapter 24, "Magazines and Newspapers Online," you'll visit AOL's online newsstand and read the latest issues of many of your favorite magazines, and perhaps discover some that will soon become your favorites.

Playing Games Online

You'll find a huge amount of entertainment-related resources on America Online. That's why I've devoted several chapters in this book to the subject. Chapter 11, for example, covers movie and television forums, and Chapter 12 covers areas devoted to music, books, and art. This chapter concentrates on gaming, the online kind, and the resources available to help you get better performance from the game software you already have. ■

■ Play games online

Visit the AOL Games Channel to find a complete gaming center.

■ Participate in online games

Discover tips and tricks to get the most from your video games.

■ Match wits with other members

You can participate in trivia games online.

Visiting the AOL Games Channel

Keyword: **Games**

Just about any visit to entertainment-related areas of America Online essentially begins in the Games Channel, where you will find a huge number of options for fun and frolic online (see fig. 13.1).

FIG. 13.1

AOL's Games Channel,
where the action begins.



Games represent, among other things, one of the most popular categories of software sales. They appeal to the young and the young at heart. A computer game enables you to turn your Mac or PC into an outer-space battleground, a deep, dark dungeon, or even a maze. You can pit yourself against evil creatures, machines, or even other human players in a quest to right wrongs, locate a secret castle, or save the world from destruction.

Games Across Cyberspace

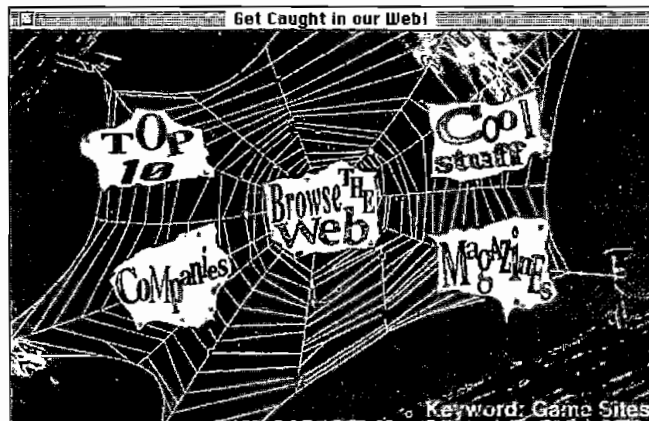
Keyword: **Game Sites**

It's no secret that the Internet has become the online place to be, and if games are your bag, AOL offers a selection of resources not just in its own online channels, but across the wild World Wide Web (see fig. 13.2). You'll get direct access to Internet-based games' resources, and you can access them as easily as one of AOL's own forums.

When you click an interesting gaming site, you'll find the information appears within a few seconds in AOL's own World Wide Web browser. The roster changes often, so you'll want to add the ones you like to your list of Favorite Sites, so you can quickly revisit them again and again.

FIG. 13.2

Use AOL to access games information resources across the world.



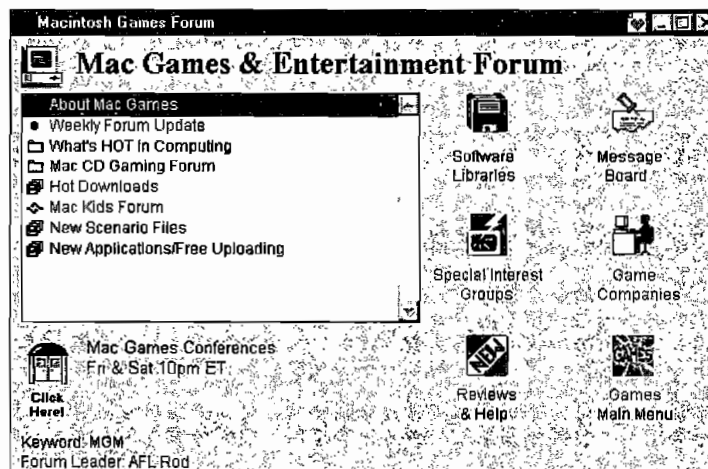
Visiting the Macintosh and PC Games' Forums

Keywords: MGM, PC Games

The Macintosh and PC computing forums are discussed in Chapter 19, "Visiting the Computing and Software Forums," but the games' forums deserve a special place here, because they are a resource that any fan of computer games will want to visit often. Figures 13.3 and 13.4 show the games forum screens.

FIG. 13.3

The Macintosh Games forum is for Mac games enthusiasts.

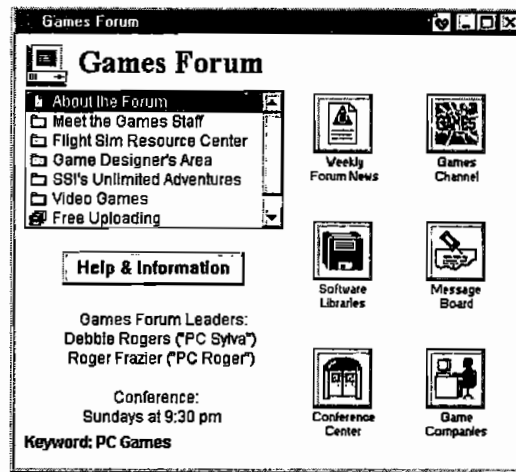


As with other computing forums on America Online, these special areas enable you to get advice from other America Online members about their experiences and recommendations on different game software.

The software libraries in these games forums contain demonstration versions of many popular commercial games that you might want to try. You also can find a large number of freeware and shareware games (some award-winning) that can entertain you and your children for hours.

FIG. 13.4

The PC Games Forum is for DOS and Windows users.



To find out more about all the computing and software forums, read Chapter 19. For now, feel free to explore the software libraries in the Mac and PC games' forums. Check the file descriptions and download the software you want to try. You'll also want to read Chapter 21, "The Best Macintosh Software on AOL," and Chapter 22, "The Best Windows Software on AOL."

NOTE If you happen to find a game only available for a PC, and you're using a Mac, don't despair. There may be a solution. There are now programs and add-on cards that let you run DOS and Windows 95 without having to buy a second computer. Insignia Solutions SoftWindows software products will emulate a Windows 3.1 or Windows 95 environment right on your Mac's screen, as will expansion cards from Apple and other manufacturers. You'll want to check the compatibility information on the product fliers themselves, though, to be sure your Mac can handle one of these PC computing solutions. ☐

Accessing the Online Gaming Forums

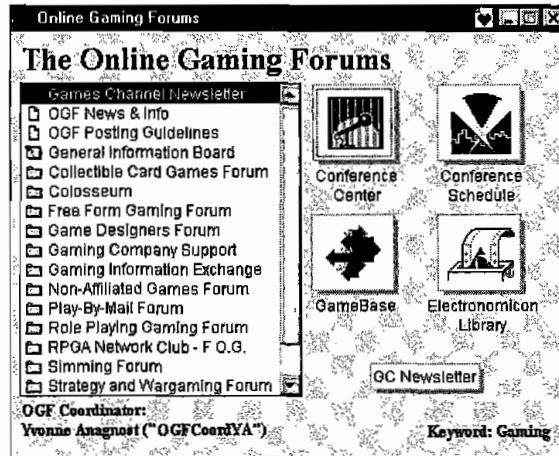
Keyword: **Gaming**

Whether you are interested in a casual game of checkers or are involved in a heavy-duty game of strategy, America Online's Online Gaming Forums area is a place you will want to learn about and visit often.

As you can see from the forum's main directory window in figure 13.5, this forum serves as an entrance to a number of areas that deal with gaming. The following sections discuss just a few of them.

FIG. 13.5

The Online Gaming Forums screen is your first stop for information on all sorts of games.



Entering the Gaming Forum Conference Center The Online Gaming Forums area holds regular conferences. Along with online members and forum staff, you can attend conferences, participate in chats, and attend debates and panel discussions that feature experts on the subject. To enter the conference center, click the Conference Center icon in the Online Gaming Forums main window. The screen shown in figure 13.6 appears.

FIG. 13.6

Regular online conferences are held for gaming enthusiasts.



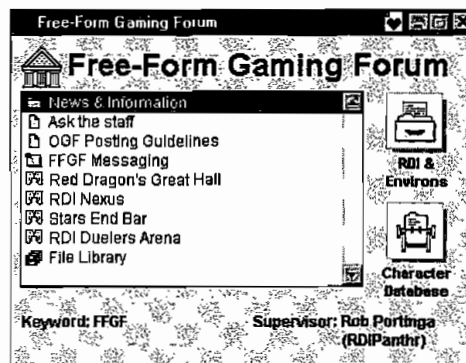
You can also participate in the General Information Board area (shown in the directory listing on the left of the Online Gaming Forums screen) to exchange views with other America Online members. The conference schedule is updated often, so do stop by regularly. If you missed a conference, simply download the log from the Conference Archives library. As with all conference logs, you can view and print them with your America Online software, by choosing Open or Print from the File menu.

In addition, there's a separate area for each game category that you'll want to visit regularly, depending on the sort of games you like. You can access an area by double-clicking the appropriate item in the forum directory listing on the left of the forum window. Here's a description, and a few illustrations, of some of the areas:

- **Free-Form Gaming Forum.** This forum, shown in figure 13.7, is devoted to games in which the rules are devised by the players on the spot, without resorting to any but the most basic guidelines. You have a chance to let your imagination and those of your fellow players run wild, as long as you stay within AOL's Terms of Service. You'll find a message board where you can exchange ideas with your fellow players before and after your games. This forum can also be accessed via the keyword: **FFGF**.

FIG. 13.7

AOL's Free-Form Gaming Forum let's you explore a wide range of online game activities.



- **Game Designers Forum.** This forum is strictly for those who design non-computer games. It's a place that's designed to be a meeting ground for experienced professional designers and those of you who are looking to enter into this industry. Beginners will have a chance to interact with skilled pros, and also to chat with representatives of some of the game manufacturers.
- **Gaming Company Support.** Here's a forum in which the major game manufacturers provide direct support for their products. So, if you have a problem with games or strategy, here's a place where you can have your problems solved. Learn professional-caliber secrets that will help improve your play and give you more opportunities to become a winner at your favorite gaming activity.
- **Gaming Information Exchange.** This forum has two prime goals. First, it is an active discussion and debate on gaming topics. It's a place for game designers and players. And the real fun part is that this forum is also a place where you can sell and exchange your own games with fellow users. This gives you a chance to trade off the game that you no longer are interested in playing for one you would like to try.

CAUTION

The Gaming Information Exchange is a place where you can learn about product offerings available from other AOL members. As with any such transaction, you should make sure you understand what you are getting and what you are paying or exchanging for it before you send your game or payment. If a monetary transaction is involved, try to use a credit card or ask for COD (Cash On Delivery) service. America Online and the forum staff are not responsible for the transactions you make in this forum, so check everything carefully before you make your deal.

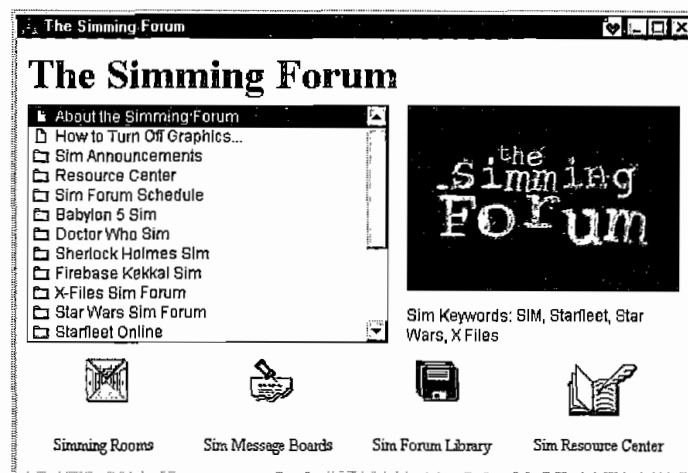
- ☐ **Play-by-Mail Forum.** In days gone by, it was common for folks to play checkers or chess and other games by mail. You'd send a letter containing your play to another player, and then wait a week or two for the other player's response. Well, the method of communication has changed, but the techniques of skill and strategy haven't. This forum lets you use electronic mail and the message boards to communicate with your fellow players. But, as with the games that employed stamps and letters, they may take several months to finish.
- ☐ **Role Playing Gaming Forum.** Here's another forum that allows you to give free play to your own imagination. Here you can become involved in an online play, a game that might involve mighty sword fights, games where you can use your own strength and agility (virtual strength anyway) to defeat evil-doers, and games where you can pilot your starship across the galaxy. Before you decide what role to play, you will want to visit the forum, examine the messages and learn as much as you can about the way the games are run. The forum staff would also be happy to assist you further in creating a viable role for yourself in these fun-filled activities.
- ☐ **The Simming Forum.** This forum, pictured in figure 13.8, is devoted to your favorite science-fiction, fantasy, horror, and mystery themes. The games are in character with the free-form style games described earlier. You have a reasonable amount of freedom to dream up your own characters and work with fellow members on setting up the rules of play.

Examples of the sort of themes supported in this forum are shown in the forum's directory screen. The Starfleet Online area is based on the same sort of fantasy universe described in such TV programs and movies as *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*. The *X-Files* Sim Forum is devoted to those who are fans of the popular Fox TV program.

- ☐ **Strategy and Wargaming Forum.** A game of strategy covers a host of categories such as, chess, card games, war games, and other activities that depend more on your skills and those of your opponent than on pure luck. This forum provides discussion and activity. You'll also find AOL's Chess Forum here, which has message boards for discussion and for activity.

FIG. 13.8

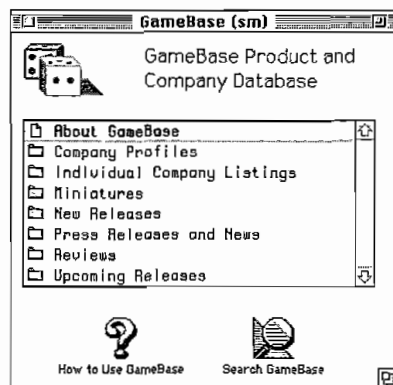
Let your dreams come true in The Simming Forum.



Exploring the GameBase Database GameBase is a resource for information about the manufacturers of games, new product information, and reviews from both experts and members alike. You can search GameBase for information about your favorite products or a new product you want to know more about. Click the GameBase icon in the Online Gaming Forums main window to access GameBase and display the screen shown in figure 13.9.

FIG. 13.9

The GameBase resource in America Online's Gaming Forum provides you with all kinds of gaming information.



Getting More Gaming Information Returning to the main Online Gaming Forums window, you can click the Electromicon Library icon to download an electronic magazine on games.

If you have a problem or question about a specific product, you can click the Gaming Company Support option on the left side of the main Online Gaming Forums window for assistance.

Exploring the Electronomicon Archives

Electronomicon is an electronic newsletter prepared by the staff of the Online Games Forum. Each issue is posted in the Electronomicon Library as soon as it's published. It is an interesting compendium of general gaming news, advice, and forum happenings. The newsletter consists of a text file that you can view and print in almost any text-processing program.

Sources for Computer Game Secrets

Perhaps the most fun of playing a game is the excitement of discovery, of learning tips or tricks that will help you play more effectively, or even defeating that long time opponent after a spirited battle of wits. This section describes a few forums where you can learn some of those previously untold secrets.

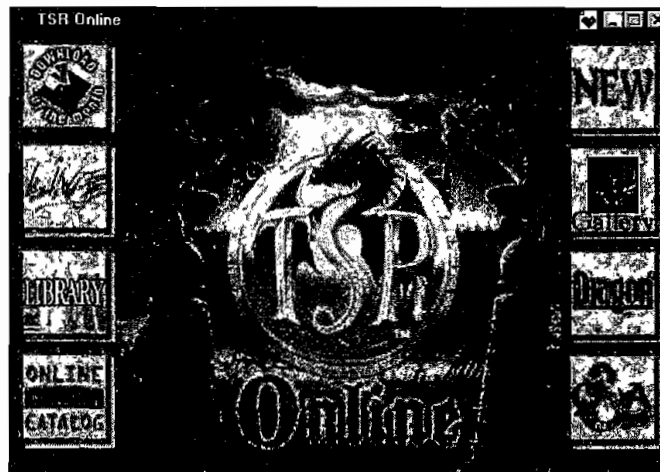
Visiting TSR Online

Keyword: **TSR**

TSR is a manufacturer of games, books, and magazines. Its forum on AOL is devoted to the company's vast product line that has been developed over more than a 20-year period (see fig. 13.10). An example is the popular Dungeons and Dragons series.

FIG. 13.10

Here's TSR's support forum on AOL.



Besides getting support for TSR's popular novels, games, and magazines, you can place orders for your favorite products directly from its catalog. TSR has games designed for the popular video game formats, and for your personal computer. Among its popular magazines is *Amazing Stories*, the popular newsstand publication that is renowned as the oldest existing science-fiction magazine.

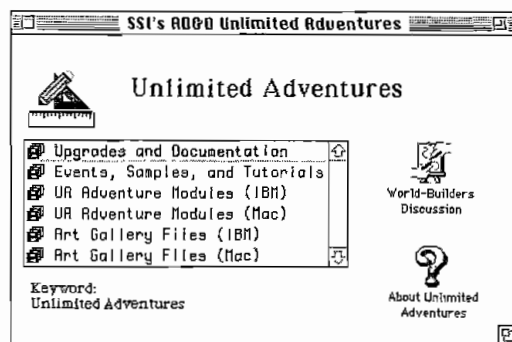
Participating in Unlimited Adventures

Keywords: **Unlimited Adventures**

Unlimited Adventures online comes to AOL courtesy of Strategic Simulations, Inc. (see fig. 13.11). It's a product that lets you actually make your own games, using a suite of artwork and design tools. The forum is designed to help people of all skill levels, from beginners to experts, develop their own fun-filled games.

FIG. 13.11

Build your own games in the Unlimited Adventures forum.



You'll find software libraries with game tools for both Mac and PC users. There is also a library of tutorial information (events, samples, and tutorials) that helps you on the road to building your own games. You'll also want to join in the World-Builders Discussion boards, where you can ask questions and receive helpful answers from the forum staff and fellow members.

Flying Virtual Airlines

Keyword: **Virtual Airlines**

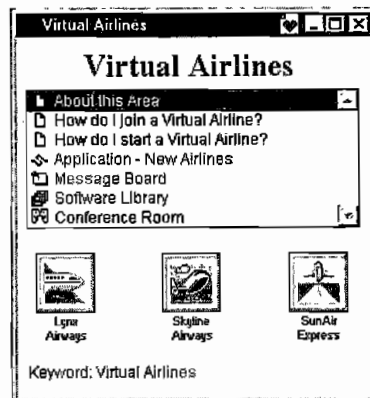
Most of us will never fly, except as a passenger (though AOL's membership does include many commercial and private pilots). But through the Virtual Airlines forum, you can actually have the chance to join an airline that exists solely in cyberspace (see fig. 13.12). This forum, dedicated to users of Microsoft's Flight Simulator software for Mac and Windows, gives you full reign to use your skills to reach many popular destinations in your flights.

Each of the virtual airlines has its own set of rules and regulations as to the number of hours you must spend on the flight simulator before you can sign up and participate. In addition, you actually have the opportunity to start your own virtual airline, but it takes quite a bit of work, and the application must be carefully evaluated before the forum staff decides whether to grant your application. But, it is something to think about if you are

very skilled at flight simulation games. In the meantime, while you ponder whether to join an airline or try to begin your own, you can view this forum's message board to learn about the experiences of other members and get a few tips to help make your trips into cyberspace more fun.

FIG. 13.12

This forum will provide information on flying an airline in cyberspace on AOL.



Visiting the Video Games Forum

Keyword: **Video Games**

Video games play a large part in the world of entertainment; this realm includes such home systems as Genesis, SNES, Jaguar, Sony Playstation, and 3DO. This forum, the Video Games Forum, is dedicated to such games (see fig. 13.13). This forum is also devoted to such arcade games as Primal Rage and Cruisin' USA!

FIG. 13.13

AOL's Video Games Forum will offer news, tips, and tricks on the latest games.



One place you'll want to visit is represented by the Plug In icon, which takes you to the message boards, where you can interact with fellow AOL members and forum experts about your favorite game. You'll also want to read messages about games you are thinking about trying, so you can learn some tips and get some ideas about strategy.

If you're in search of helpful hints about your favorite game, you'll want to check out the Hints, Pics, and Sounds libraries (at the bottom of the forum's list box). These are libraries of text files that contain all sorts of advice to help get you over the rough spots and make your games more fun. They also include screen pictures showing the newest games and software, and audio clips that provide some highlights that replay some of your favorite moments in some of these games. You'll also want to participate in the Talk'n Games area, where you can meet fellow game enthusiasts.

AOL's Video Games Forum also includes areas devoted to company support for popular games and a library of game reviews. You can download gaming strategy guides and read the regular online newsletters from the noted game master, Dr. Gamewiz. Because games are prominently discussed in a number of Internet newsgroups, AOL has provided a direct gateway to the service's Internet Connection. For more Internet-related material, see Part VIII, "Entering the Information Superhighway."

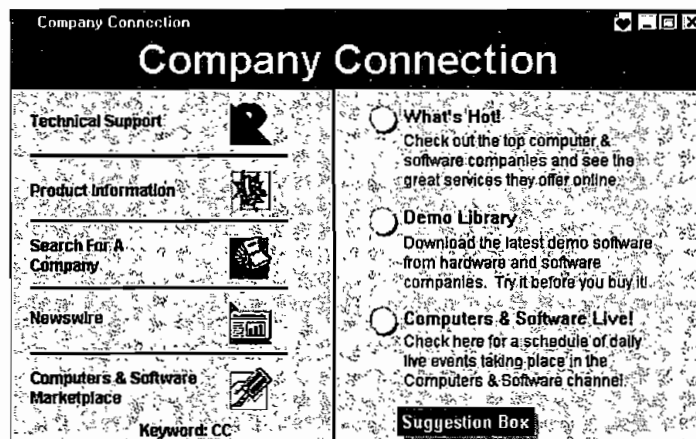
Getting Support from the Publishers

Keyword: CC

Many of the best known publishers of computer games have support areas on America Online that are accessible through the popular manufacturer support areas in AOL's Company Connection (see fig. 13.14). There is a separate support area for Mac and Windows users, but many of the publishers represented are the same because their products are available in both computing platforms.

FIG. 13.14

Visit AOL's Company Connection area for assistance direct from the publishers of your favorite gaming software.



For more information on using AOL's Company Connection support areas, you'll want to read Chapter 19, "Visiting the Computing and Software Forums." But, here's some quick advice now on what to do if you have a problem with your computer game. First, see if the

publisher has a list of common questions and answers about possible problems with the program. Then read the messages to see if other AOL members have had problems similar to yours. You might find your questions have already been answered.

If the questions haven't been dealt with yet, try to provide as much detail as possible, including the name of the company's product and revision number. It also helps to provide in your question the kind of computer you have, the version of the operating system you are using, and a short description of other software with which you are working. This helps the publisher's support representatives compare your report to others they've already received.

CAUTION

When you post a message asking for assistance in a company support board on America Online, do not include your address and telephone number. If the publisher needs that information, they'll contact you via regular e-mail. Remember, putting this information in a message board makes it available to millions of AOL members.

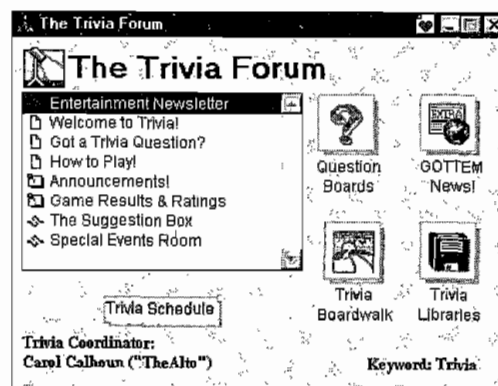
Accessing The Trivia Forum

Keyword: **Trivia**

Okay, I admit it. I am far removed from being a chess master (or even from playing a decent game of checkers). My abilities at computer games are laughable, for the most part. But, I do know my trivia. If trivia is one of your favorite pastimes, too, The Trivia Forum might turn out to be one of your favorite online places (see fig. 13.15).

FIG. 13.15

AOL's popular Trivia Forum lets you match wits against fellow members.



Regardless of the subject you are an expert in, whether it's *Star Trek*, radio shows of the 1940s, or famous historical figures, The Trivia Forum is where you can interact with other trivia enthusiasts. (In Chapter 9, "Using America Online Message Boards," you learn how

to participate in a message area.) The Trivia Forum has a regular schedule of nightly games in America Online's People Connection (also see Chapter 7, "America Online's People Connection").

Besides the interactive trivia games, you can participate in the forum's message area, post your own trivia questions, or answer those from other users. Click the Trivia Schedule button at the bottom of the forum screen to see a roster of regular games you might want to join as well. Figures 13.16 and 13.17 show a typical question and the response (but, you all knew the answer, right?).

FIG. 13.16

Before you look at the answer, can you guess the name of the classic movie in which the first TV "Superman" appeared?

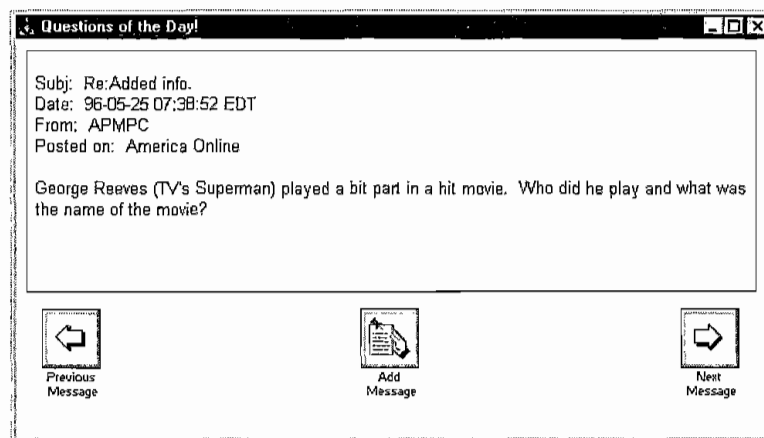
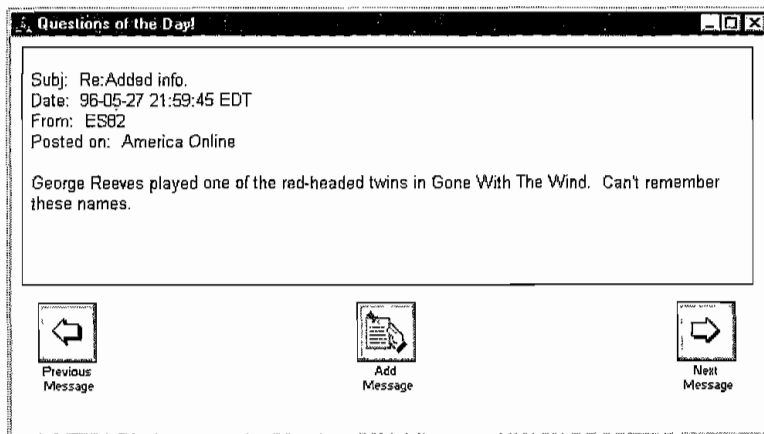


FIG. 13.17

OK, we have the answer, at least part of it. Now what was the name of the character George Reeves played?



You will also want to visit GOTTEM News! (the icon in the top right of the forum window). GOTTEM is the forum's popular newsletter, available for downloading in text file form. It includes all sorts of information about trivia games, photos of forum staff and fellow AOL members, and some really interesting information you'll want to consult to expand your store of trivial information.

From Here...

As with other areas on America Online, you don't have to restrict yourself to a single forum for information related to games. Chapter 17, "Games, Entertainment, Teen Chat, and Netiquette," is a special chapter that describes the game-related features for AOL members ages 5 through 14. You'll also want to look at the following chapters:

- In Chapter 15, "Pursuing Lifestyles and Interests," you'll explore hobbies, special interests, and forums run by charitable organizations.
- In Chapter 19, "Visiting the Computing and Software Forums," you'll find resources where you can learn how to solve problems with your personal computer, use it more effectively, and locate useful software.
- In Chapter 21, "The Best Macintosh Software on AOL," you'll see special recommendations of the best Mac software on AOL, direct from the computing and software forum leaders.
- In Chapter 22, "The Best Windows Software on AOL," you'll read the recommendations provided by the Windows computing and software forum leaders.

Sports in Cyberspace

Sporting news isn't always confined to a section in the middle of your daily newspaper. It's not uncommon for news from the world of sports to fill the front pages, too. This was especially true as a result of the baseball strike that abruptly cut the 1994 season short, and lingered on through part of 1995. And, let's not forget the impact of the Super Bowl or world championship boxing match, or when an athlete gets into some kind of legal trouble.

But, for the sake of this chapter, let's consider sports to be less of a serious news item and more of something to be enjoyed, or something you might want to participate in yourself. ■

AOL's Sports Channel

Find the latest news from the world of sports.

Behind the scenes information

Review background information and exclusive inside reports about special sporting events.

Play games online

Participate in special sports trivia games and other fun events.

Visiting AOL's Sports Forums

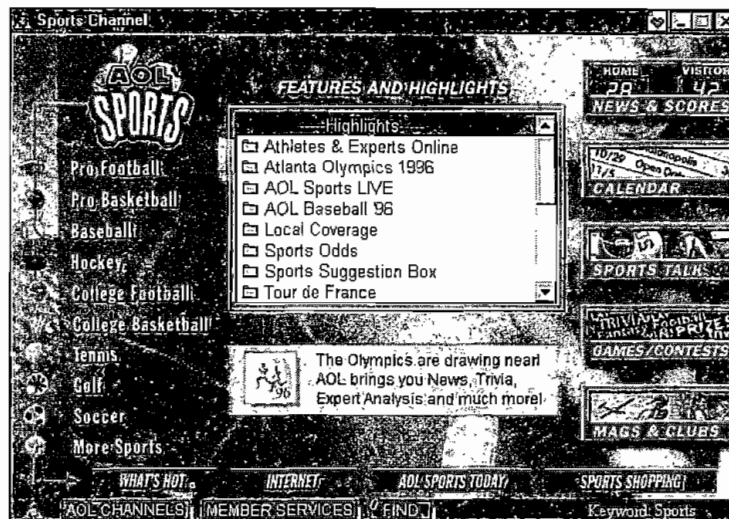
Keyword: **Sports**

If you played Little League sports when you were a child, have children interested in sporting activities, watch sports events regularly on television, or have been known to attend a game or two, you might want to visit America Online's virtual sports page. To do so, choose the Sports channel icon from AOL's main menu window to display the Sports screen shown in figure 14.1.

NOTE When you first enter AOL's Sports channel you may see a window labeled Today in Sports, which highlights the latest happenings in this area. □

FIG. 14.1

Whatever your favorite sport, you'll find information about it on America Online.



The major sports and highlights of special events are listed in the directory window at the center of the screen. At the left are small icons that represent popular sporting activities (the list may change somewhat from time to time). What follows is a description of some of the features shown in figure 14.1.

Top Web Sites

When you take the giant leap from AOL's own Sports channel to the worldwide Internet, you'll find that AOL reaches out to the Internet behind the scenes, so you only have to concern yourself with the sort of information source you're looking for. And, the roster of Internet-based sporting information resources is huge and growing daily (see fig. 14.2, which appears when you click the Internet button).

FIG. 14.2

Sporting information from Internet-based resources is just a click away from America Online's friendly interface.



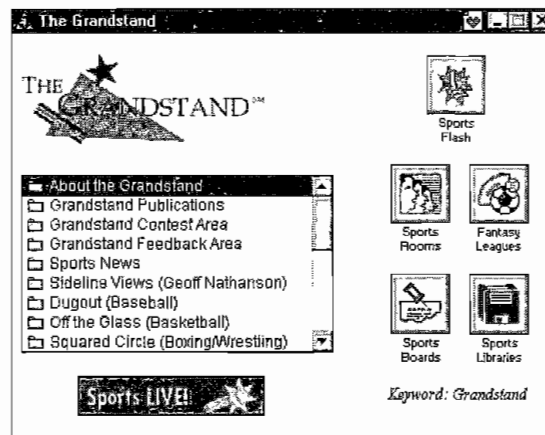
Taking a Seat in The Grandstand

Keyword: **Grandstand**

The Grandstand (see fig. 14.3) is where all you sports lovers can discuss the latest news about your favorite games, report on how your favorite teams fared the night before, and participate in online conferences with other fans. It is the entrance to America Online's sports stadium. But, the biggest attraction of this forum is the participation of sports fans, a place where you can get involved and post your own messages about the happenings on or off the field, or the court, or the rink, and so on.

FIG. 14.3

Take your seat in The Grandstand to enjoy your favorite sport.



The following paragraphs describe some of the most popular features available through The Grandstand. And remember, as with other AOL forums, this lineup is apt to change and grow with time:

- Sports Flash offers announcements about the long list of regular online conferences on every sport under the sun. As you can see in figure 14.4 (which you'll see when you click any topic shown in the Sports Flash directory), America Online even conducts an online wrestling match (you'll see the bill of fare change regularly)!

FIG. 14.4

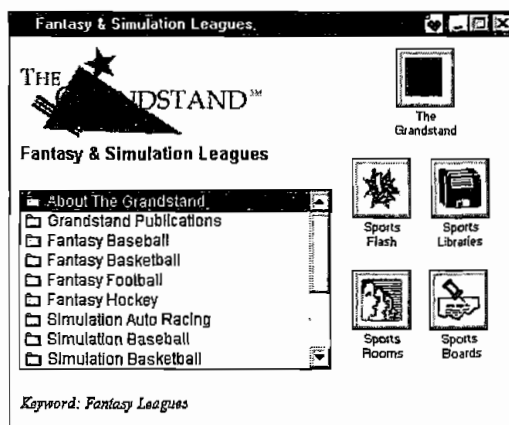
Sports Flash announces upcoming meetings for sports lovers.



- The Sports Rooms icon is your admission ticket to The Grandstand's nightly online conferences. After viewing the schedule, you can pop in to the active conference room of your choice.
- Fantasy Leagues are what the title implies. Participate in your own sports league in cyberspace in the forum shown in figure 14.5. There's a league for your favorite sport. You can have a wrestling match without ever breaking a sweat, and participate in an auto race without ever having to drive a car around a track.

FIG. 14.5

From baseball to auto racing, let your imagination be your guide.



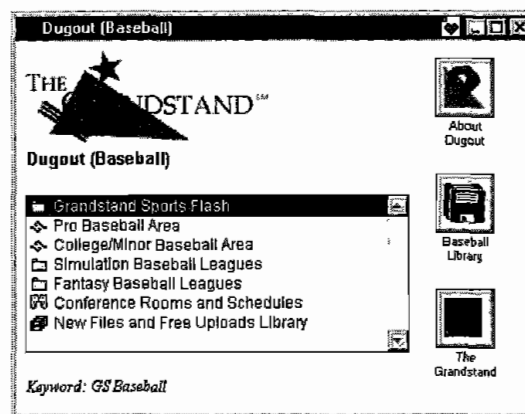
NOTE Participation in The Grandstand's Fantasy Leagues area is an extra cost item. For information on the charges, which are modest, please check the information text in the various Fantasy Leagues forum areas as to how you can join and participate in the various games. □

- ❑ The Sports Libraries icon accesses a huge collection of software, ranging from shareware sports games and utilities to files about your favorite teams. Read Chapter 6, “Where Do We Begin?” for information about finding and downloading files from America Online. Files are available for both Mac and PC users. For all the newest sports-related software, you’ll want to visit the Sports Libraries area first.
- ❑ Sports Boards are much like the message areas in other America Online forums. You can share your opinions with other online members, forum staff, and occasional experts on the latest information from the world of sports.

At the left side of the main Grandstand screen is a list of special sports-related forums that you might want to explore (see fig. 14.6 for an example). Each forum has its own schedule of conferences, active message boards, and software libraries. Just double-click the forum that interests you.

FIG. 14.6

All the popular sports have their own forums on America Online.



Getting the Latest Sports News

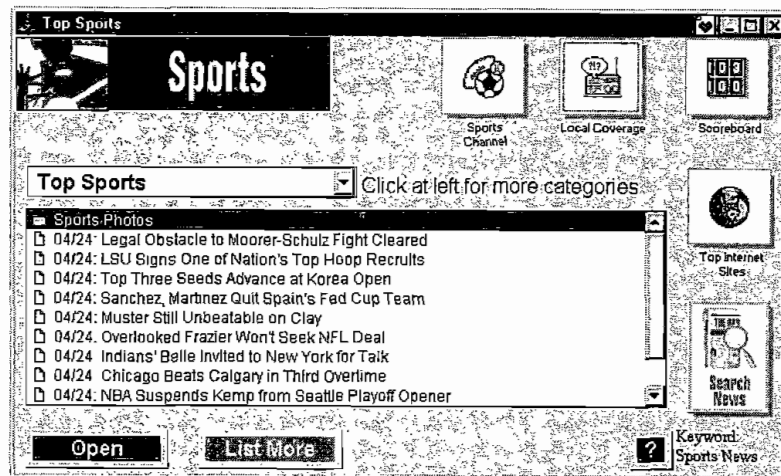
Keyword: Sports News

You can conveniently get all the top sports news of the day (see fig. 14.7), from the latest doings of your favorite teams, stories about that new multi-million dollar contract your favorite athlete has signed, and other hot news from the major wire services and top sports journalists.

As with other information text on America Online, just double-click an article to read it. You can also save or print the text for later review, using the appropriate commands from the File menu.

FIG. 14.7

AOL's sports pages offer a world of information about the activities of your favorite teams and their prospects for the future.



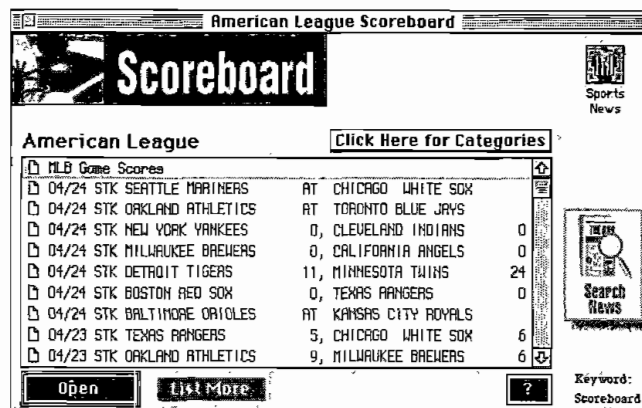
Checking the Scoreboard

Keyword: **Scoreboard**

After you get past the front pages of your online sports page, you'll want to check out the statistics. The Scoreboard icon takes you to an area that presents the results of the previous day's major sports events, plus selected local games (see fig. 14.8). Remember, when the List More button at the bottom of the screen isn't grayed out, there are many more stories for you to scroll through.

FIG. 14.8

How did your favorite team fare in its last game? Here's where you can read the results.



You can also review the Standings, Results, and Schedules report (which will sometimes be available in the list box or the pop-up menu) for a capsule summary of how well your team is doing in their particular league, and to examine all of the scores in one place. In addition, you'll see a brief schedule of the next day's games.

Now, let's continue our journey across AOL's sports department.

Special Sporting Events

Whenever special sporting events occur, such as a World Series, Super Bowl, or a similar happening, you can be reasonably sure that a forum on America Online will be created to support this activity. When the event is out of season, these forums will no longer be active (at least until the following season). Here's an example of the sport that took over the headlines when I wrote this book.

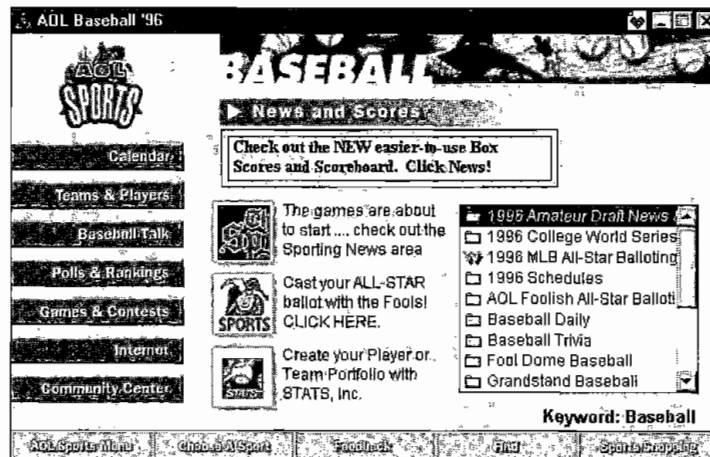
A Visit to AOL's Baseball Forum

Keyword: **Baseball**

Just click the little baseball icon, and AOL's own Sports department will take over, offering you all the important news you want to read concerning your favorite baseball team (see fig. 14.9), and how it is doing in its division.

FIG. 14.9

From scores, to schedules, to trivia, it's all there in AOL's Baseball center.



The latest statistics of your home team and your favorite players are just a click away. If you want to pit your sports expertise against that of the experts, or just fellow AOL members, double-click the Baseball Trivia title in the list box. A spirited discussion is always in progress in the Baseball Messages area; you'll probably want to jump in right away and contribute your viewpoints.

The Excitement of Pro Wrestling

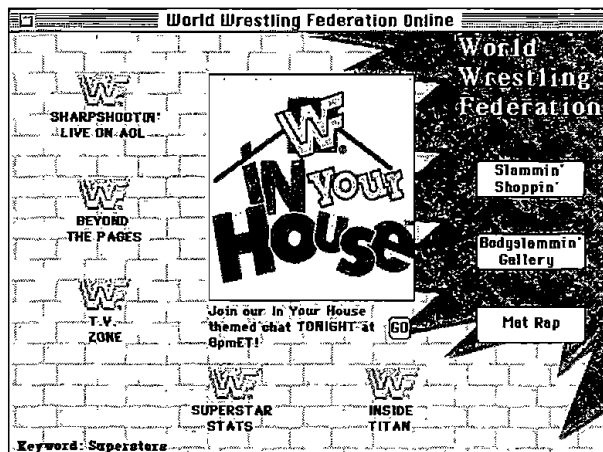
Keyword: **Superstars**

Direct from the World Wrestling Federation, you can find news about one of the most controversial sports of all (see fig. 14.10). I won't get into the issue of whether all that

mayhem you see on television is real or just an act, but whatever your feelings about it, AOL's Pro Wrestling forum is a way to bring all that action to your computer.

FIG. 14.10

Just what are your favorite wrestling stars up to? AOL's Pro Wrestling area has the story.

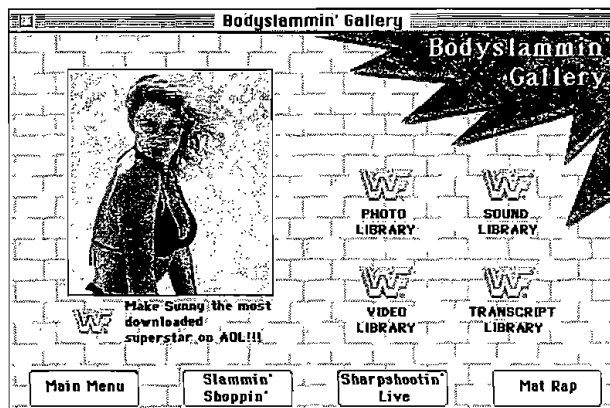


One of the highlights of a wrestling match is the posturing and arguing by your favorite stars. You'll be able to meet some of them in regular online conferences in AOL's Center Stage area.

If you want to approach your online interest from a multimedia point of view, click the Bodyslammin' Gallery button, which brings up the screen shown in figure 14.11. Here you'll be able to access a library of photos, videos, transcripts, and sounds covering the top matches from your favorite stars.

FIG. 14.11

Access a huge multimedia library of wrestling photos, videos, and sounds.



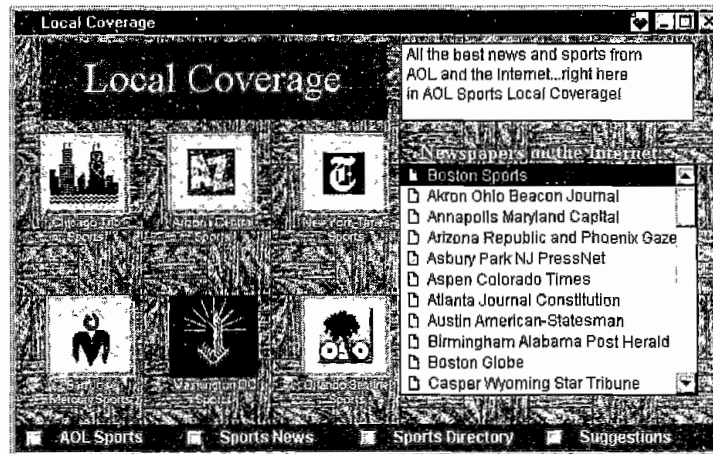
Reviewing Local Coverage

To check out the latest local sports news, simply use the AOL keyword **Sports News**, then click the Local Coverage button to access still another online sports resource (see fig. 14.12).

Three of the online daily newspapers are represented here, so by clicking the appropriate icon, you can read the sports pages of the *Arizona Republic*, *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, *Orlando Sentinel*, *San Jose Mercury News*, plus a huge array of Internet-based newspapers.

FIG. 14.12

Here's a list of additional sports news forums on AOL.



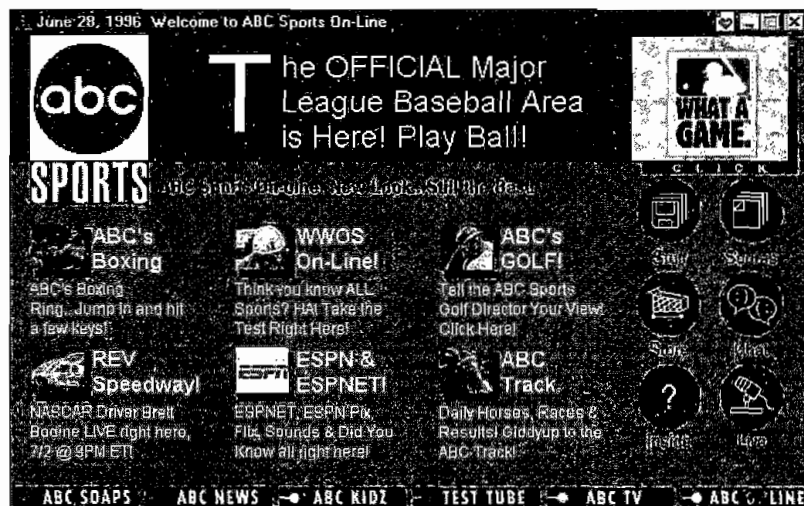
Visiting ABC Sports

Keyword: ABC Sports

ABC television has a large online forum, with many interesting features. At times it almost seems as if it's an online service unto itself. The ABC Online area was described briefly in Chapter 11, "TV and Movie Information Online." For now, I'll delve deeper into the ABC Sports area, where you can read and also participate in a number of fascinating activities (see fig. 14.13).

FIG. 14.13

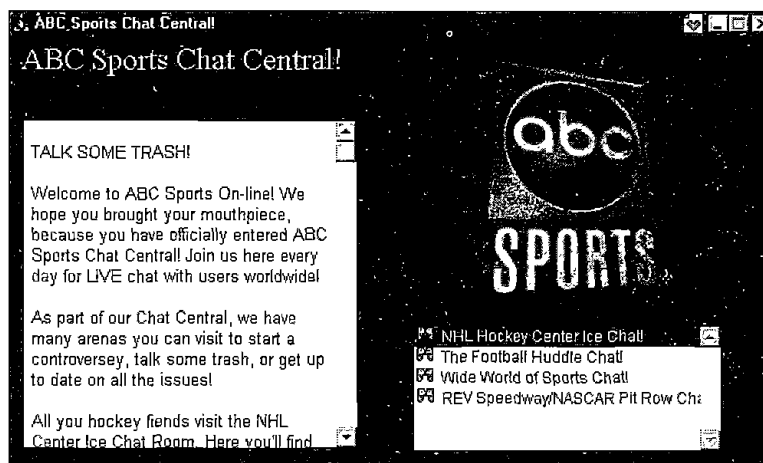
Here's a sports forum run by ABC Sports.



There are a number of icons shown here. Stuff offers pictures and sounds from major sporting events that you can download and play on your personal computer. Chat (short for ABC Sports Chat Central!) gives you a chance to join the fun and share your viewpoints of the arcane details of specific games and athletes (see fig. 14.14).

FIG. 14.14

Here's where you can join in the fun; you can talk about your favorite sport events and athletes with other fans.



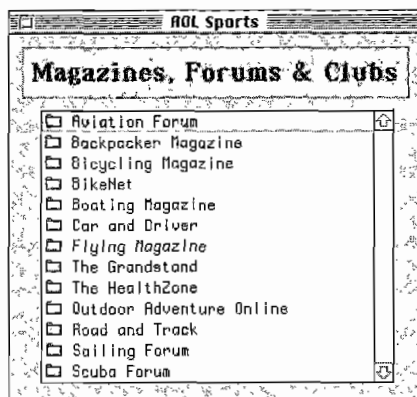
There are more interesting places to go from the ABC Sports forum. These include Inside ABC Sports, offering you schedules and background information about the network's sports programming. As you explore the forum, you'll discover where you can contact ABC Sports personalities and also participate in active sports-related discussions with fellow AOL members. The Store icon takes you to ABC's own specialty shop, where you can learn more about a line of exclusive merchandise. You also have a gateway direct to the ABC Auditorium where you can attend special events featuring network figures and noted personalities. And, if you want to visit the main ABC forums, you can click the icons at the bottom of the screen.

Resources for Sports and Recreation

Now that we've explored some of the news and special event offerings in AOL's various sporting forums, let's tour just one more area, which appears at the right of the main Sports Channel screen shown in fig. 14.1. It's the one labeled Mags & Clubs. America Online has a number of forums run by some of the major publishers or catering to a specific range of interests (see fig. 14.15). You'll want to visit many of the areas shown here during your online visits. As AOL continues to grow, you'll find additional sporting and lifestyle publishers and organizations listed as well.

FIG. 14.15

A list of magazines and clubs dedicated to various sporting pursuits.



From Here...

As with other areas on America Online, you don't have to restrict yourself to searching one area for the information you want. For more useful information on sports-related subjects, refer to these chapters:

- ☐ In Chapter 11, "TV and Movie Information Online," you'll read about additional entertainment-related resources on AOL.
- ☐ In Chapter 13, "Playing Games Online," you'll read about AOL's online gaming resources, and visit areas run by the major game software manufacturers.
- ☐ In Chapter 15, "Pursuing Lifestyles and Interests," you'll be able to explore the sporting world even further.
- ☐ In Chapter 23, "The News of the Day," you'll discover some of the many resources devoted to the top stories of the day on most any subject under the sun.
- ☐ In Chapter 24, "Magazines and Newspapers Online," you'll pay a visit to AOL's virtual newsstand and choose from a wealth of fascinating reading material.

Pursuing Lifestyles and Interests

Would you like to explore the stars, upgrade your stereo, look up your family history, or debate with other AOL members about everything from computing platforms to the news of the day? Well, America Online offers all these opportunities and much more in the Life, Styles & Interests channel.

Figure 15.1 shows the Life, Styles & Interests main window, which you can find by typing the keyword **clubs** or **LSI**. As you can see, the features you can call up from this point on are numerous, diverse, and intriguing.

When I sat down to write this chapter, I spent many, many hours exploring all the areas on America Online that cover lifestyles, hobbies, and special interests. Some of these places were discussed in Chapter 11, "TV and Movie Information Online," and Chapter 12, "Music, Books, and Art." You learn even more in this chapter, and you'll finish your little tour of lifestyle information resources in Chapter 24, "Magazines and Newspapers Online." ■

■ AOL's Life, Styles & Interests area

Find the latest information on health-care issues.

■ Important happenings in cities around the world

Learn what to see and do in various parts of the world.

■ Finding members who share your interests

Interact with other members about hobbies ranging from cooking to science fiction.

■ AOL's discussion areas

Discuss the important issues of the day with other members.

FIG. 15.1

You'll find a diverse array of features in AOL's Life, Styles & Interests channel.



I soon realized that my survey could only scratch the surface. There were hundreds of resources to check, and many more are being added to AOL each week. So, this chapter just touches on the highlights of America Online's Life and Style areas; the rest is left for you to explore at your leisure.

To make it easier to find an area that caters to a specific interest, the forums in this area of America Online are grouped by category. What you see in the channel's screen will change from time to time. Let's explore the highlights.

TIP

If you can't find the specific forum that interests you on America Online, try locating it with a keyword. Most keywords either contain the name of an area or its subject, so if you don't know which keyword is correct, don't hesitate to try a few out. Suppose, for example, that you want to learn more about upgrading your stereo. Type the keyword **Stereo** and guess what? It takes you directly to the Stereo Review magazine forum on America Online.

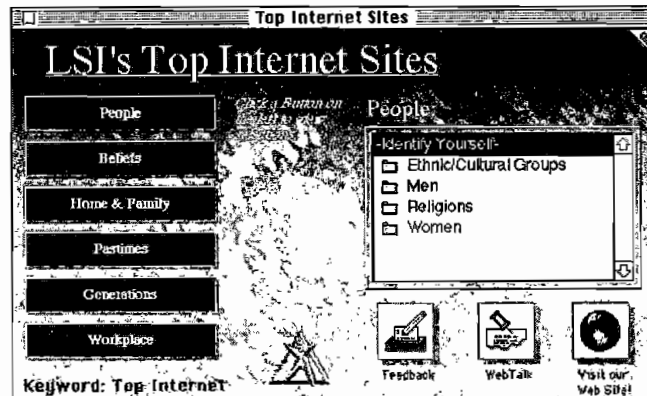
Looking At Internet Resources

As with other online areas, the Life, Styles & Interests channel can take you to the Internet with just a click or two of the mouse. All you need to do is double-click the item in the list box labeled Top Internet Sites, which I've shown in figure 15.2. You can also reach this area via the keyword **Top Internet**.

The bill of fare will vary as well, but you'll be able to choose the categories that interest you, and the particular group setting that applies to you (Men, Women, and so on). From there you'll see a listing of popular World Wide Web resources that are bound to be worth further exploration.

FIG. 15.2

You can select a listing of easy-access Internet-based resources simply by clicking the appropriate subjects and the group that applies to you.

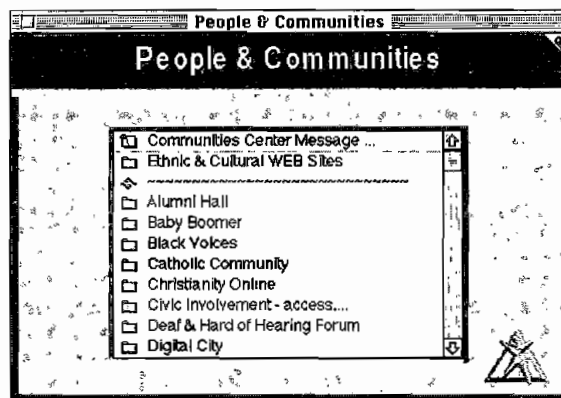


Visiting People & Communities

Among the various categories of special interest shown in figure 15.1 is the icon labeled People & Communities. Many subjects are listed when you click the People & Communities icon (see fig. 15.3). The purposes of many of these organizations are obvious from their titles (and no doubt some will be changed or added as AOL continues to upgrade its services). The following sections cover just a few of them.

FIG. 15.3

Just a sample of the offerings in AOL's People & Communities forum.



Exploring the Baby Boomers Forum

Keyword: **Baby Boomers**

I suppose it's redundant to explain what a baby boomer is, except to say that those of us who fit into this category share a unique range of experiences ranging from the advent of television to the Korean War, Vietnam, the Kennedy assassination, and more pleasant things such as Elvis Presley and the Beatles.

The focus of AOL's Baby Boomers forum is strictly interaction. You can share your experiences of a host of subjects with others who were born in the same frenetic generation.

Figure 15.4 shows the Baby Boomers directory of services.

FIG. 15.4

The baby boomers generation has its own hangout on America Online.



Entering the National Multiple Sclerosis Society Forum

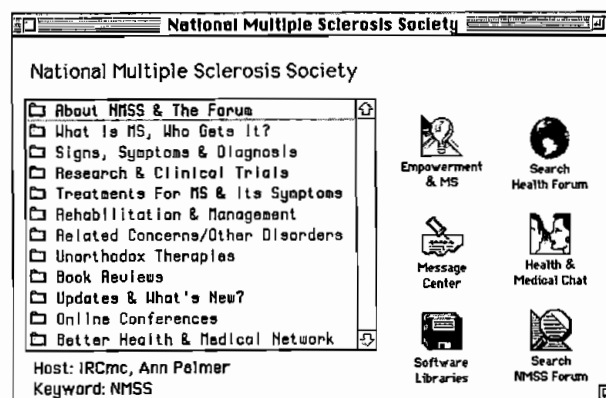
Keyword: NMSS

Multiple sclerosis has gotten serious attention in recent years with news that actress Annette Funicello (the original *Mickey Mouse Club* mouseketeer who starred in a string of beach movies in the 1960s) suffered from the disease.

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society has set up this forum on America Online to provide information about the disease, including updates on research for a cure. As you can see in figure 15.5, a host of information is available for you to read. You also can find a Message Center and a Health & Medical Chat room where you can interact with other members, including health-care professionals.

FIG. 15.5

NMSS is another area on America Online that provides health information.



Other areas on America Online are devoted to health interests too, such as the United Cerebral Palsy Association's forum, which is discussed a bit later in this chapter.

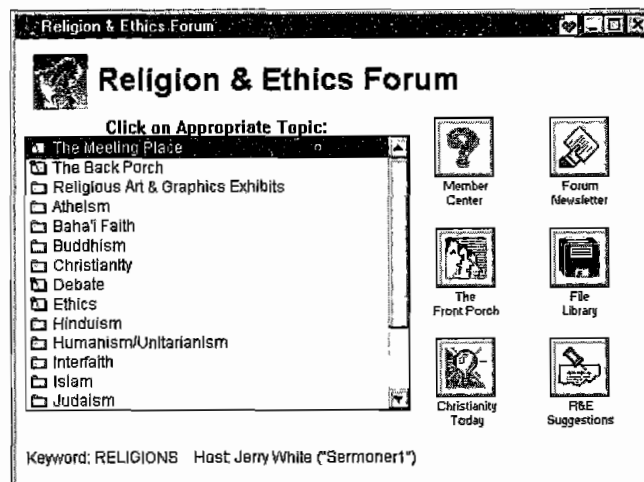
Joining the Religion & Ethics Forum

Keyword: **Religions**

It doesn't matter what your religion is, or even if you favor a so-called New Age philosophy. AOL's Religion & Ethics Forum (see fig. 15.6) covers a full range of beliefs and information services. For example, you can debate with other online members in the forum's various message boards.

FIG. 15.6

The Religion & Ethics Forum is a special place to reflect on your religious beliefs.



The File Library includes a collection of software that has a religious orientation. Included are educational games, Bible search programs, and more. You also can search the contents of the Bible for specific references and passages in a searchable database.

The Front Porch room is a special locale for impromptu chats or for regularly scheduled meetings on a host of fascinating subjects. The Back Porch takes a different approach to discussions; it's another of this forum's popular message areas.

Still another online resource covering religion is AOL's Religion and Beliefs forum, which offers separate areas devoted to Christianity, Judaism, World Beliefs (such as Buddhism and Islamic/Muslim faiths) and Spiritual Mosaic (covering Alternative Healing, Paganism, and other faiths).