



The Cursor



*Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group*

Meeting Location
OLLI, 4210 Roberts Road,
Fairfax, VA



Next Meeting:
February 20, 2010

Presidential Bits

by Geof Goodrum, President WACUG, president@wacug.org



First, a big THANK YOU to Paul Howard for serving as WAC's President for the past six years! As a former two-term President of WAC, I know that managing the minutia of even a small organization like WAC can lead to burn-out and a desire to find something different to do. Paul did an outstanding job bringing more structure into WAC's business practices, including better auditing to conform with the Sarbanes Oxley Act and re-establishing WAC's lapsed status as an IRS registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. At the same time, Paul maintained WAC's website and Internet domain registration, participated just as actively in the National Capital Technology and Computer User's Group (NCTCUG, www.nctcug.org) and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI, www.olligmu.edu), and worked with the OLLI Board to form the OLLI PC User's Group (OPCUG, www.olligmu.org/~opcug/) in partnership with WAC.

I am very happy to report that Paul will continue many of his duties this year in addition to being WAC's Vice President, including website management. In particular, Paul will continue to be the familiar face (and Hawaiian shirt, in season) overseeing the WAC/OPCUG monthly group meetings.

Bill Walsh and Bob Rott will continue serving WAC as Secretary and Treasurer, respectively. During the January Board meeting, the new Officers appointed Jim Brueggeman, Mel Mikosinski, Chuck Roberts, and Neal Grotenstein as at-Large Board members. Over the next few months, Mel will assume my duties as Membership Chairperson and Gabe Goldberg will work with Bill Walsh to assume the duties of WAC Representative to the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG, www.apcug.net).

In addition to the administrative duties as President, I will continue my advocacy of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) through my Cursor articles under the "GNU/Linux Special Interest Group (SIG)."

I encourage all members to suggest meeting topics of interest, and submit articles for The Cursor through our Editor, Chuck Roberts. Now that you've had time to try out your computer-related holiday presents, please submit a review for the benefit of your fellow WAC members. Reviews need only be

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Lloyd's Web Sites for February, 2010

by Lloyd Johnson, WACUG Member

<http://www.wacug.org/> is the URL for the Washington Area Computer User Group. Visit it for past issues of Web Sites with hyperlinks

1. Get a great deal on misspelled Items. The Typo Buddy searches e-bay (and craigslist) for all possible misspelling of your search term. If you are lucky you may discover a mislabeled auction that eludes everyone else – www.typobuddy.com
2. Gift Cards in exchange for used Electronics. Sears, Walmart and Costco – <http://sears.gazelle.com>, <http://walmart.gazelle.com>, <http://costco.gazelle.com>
3. Participate in Project Budburst, date that plants leaf out – www.windows.ucar.edu/citizen_science/budburst
4. On Line Guide to plant selection, site preparation, weed/pest control and more – www.thegardenhelper.com
5. HubbleSite: Out of the Ordinary ... Out of this World – <http://hubblesite.org>. "The Hubble Space Telescope (HST) is a space-based telescope that was launched in 1990 by the space shuttle. From its position 353 miles (569 km) above Earth's surface, the HST has expanded our understanding of star birth, star death, and galaxy evolution, and has helped move black holes from theory to fact. In its first 15 years, the telescope recorded over 700,000 images. Hubble's view is so spectacular because of its location above Earth's atmosphere. Shifting pockets of air distort light from space - that's why stars seem to twinkle when viewed from the ground. Furthermore, the atmosphere blocks some wavelengths of light partially or entirely, making space the only place where it is possible to get a truly clear and comprehensive view of the universe."
6. Hand washing: A Simple Way to Prevent Infection – www.mayoclinic.com/health/hand-washing/HQ00407. At this Mayo Clinic site, learn about the benefits of good hand hygiene, as well as when to wash your hands and how to clean them properly.
7. American Presidents: Life Portraits – www.americanpresidents.org "The American Presidents web site, created for the television series, contains a complete video archive of all American Presidents: Life Portraits programming, plus these additional resources: - Biographical facts; - Key events of each presidency; - Presidential places; - Reference material. Pick a president from the pull-down menu above and explore."
8. USA.gov – www.usa.gov
9. Roget's Thesaurus – <http://thesaurus.reference.com> To use the thesaurus, simply type a word in the gold search box and click the 'Search' button. A list of synonyms and antonyms will be returned." Related site: How to Use a Thesaurus.
10. Cough etiquette. Click on "Watch Video – <http://coughsafe.com>



NCTCUG

Visit our "sister" user group. The National Capital Technology and Computer User's Group meets the first and fourth Wednesday of the month. They meet in Carlin Hall in Arlington at 5711 South 4th Street. Visit their web site for more information, a map and directions:

<http://www.nctcug.org/>

Meetings start at 7:00 PM

**Washington Area User
Group Partners
Working Together For
Our Members**

NCTCUG

WACUG

OPCUG



GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum, WACUG

Linux – The Unsung Hero of Avatar

Like most Sci-Fi fans (and lots of others, too), I saw Avatar in IMAX 3D and thoroughly enjoyed it. However, I was dismayed to see Microsoft cited in the end credits, when WETA Digital (<http://www-ext.wetafx.co.nz/>) was the leading computer generated imagery (CGI) firm behind the production. WETA makes extensive use of Linux-based systems in film development and rendering CGI, having slots 193 through 197 for Hewlett-Packard Linux clusters in November's Top 500 Supercomputer list (www.top500.org). As I have mentioned in the past, Linux has been widely adopted by the film industry. In fact, one of its earliest triumphs was in rendering images for James Cameron's previous blockbuster, Titanic. Follow that with Shrek, Lord of the Rings, and numerous others.

For more information about the role of Linux in movie-making, see www.linuxmovies.org and http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Movie_Making_Manual/Tools_and_Equipment/Linux_in_film_production.

GNU/Linux Distribution Releases

GNU/Linux distributions are complete GNU/Linux operating system and application software collections. Many are freely downloadable or can be ordered on CDs or DVD at low cost.

DistroWatch.com lists the following distribution release announcements for the period December 24, 2009 – February 3, 2010.

Distribution
ArtistX 0.8
BackTrack 4
Berry Linux 1.00
blackPanther OS 10.1
Càtix 1.5, 1.6
Kahel OS 01-01-2010 "Light"
Kahel OS 12-25-2009
Linux Deepin 9.12
MoLinux 5.2
NuTyX 2009.2
Pardus Linux 2009.1
PC/OS 10
PelicanHPC 2.0
Sabayon Linux 5.1 "Gaming"
Sabily 9.10
sidux 2009-04
SimplyMEPIS 8.0.15
Super OS 9.10
SystemRescueCd 1.3.5



See *Linux* page 4

Tiny Core Linux 2.8
Toorox 01.2010
Tuquito 3.1
Ubuntu 8.04.4
VortexBox 1.1
Zorin OS 2.0

Linux Software of the Month

The software described below is down-loadable at the links provided or may be requested on CD, or copied onto a USB flash drive at the WAC meeting. In addition, WAC can provide CD-R and DVD±R media for any down-loadable GNU/Linux operating system distribution (e.g. Fedora, Mandriva, Ubuntu, Debian, Knoppix). Please note that download versions of commercial distributions do not include official technical support nor printed documentation.

Discs are available only by pre-order. Contact Geof Goodrum by e-mail (linux@wacug.org) at least 48 hours before meeting day to order or for more information. Single CD-R discs are available with a \$3 donation; GNU/Linux distributions on multiple CD-Rs or single DVD±R are available with a \$6 donation.

February 2010

Mondo Rescue – v2.2.9.1. <http://www.mondorescue.org/>. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable packages for Fedora, Debian, Ubuntu, OpenSuSE, and Slackware by the Mondo Devteam. Mondo Rescue archives Linux and Linux/Windows systems to tapes, CDs, DVDs, USB devices, or ISO images that may be used to restore some or all of your OS and data in the event of catastrophic data loss, or for cloning a system. The emphasis is on stability and ease of use. Currently, ext2, ext3, ext4, (v)fat, minix, ReiserFS, XFS, and JFS filesystems are supported, as are RAID, DM, Multipath, and LVM.

Mozilla Firefox – v3.6. <http://www.firefox.com/>. Free Mozilla Public License source code and executable installer from the Mozilla Foundation. Firefox 3.6 is a modern, standards-compliant web browser that features tabs, easy customization, security features, single click bookmarking, session save and restore, password manager, and private browsing. New to this version is improved Javascript performance for web applications, Personas that allow users to change Firefox's appearance with a single click, and

protection from out-of-date plug-ins.

x48 – v0.6.3. <http://x48.berlios.de/>. Free GNU General Public License source code and Debian/Ubuntu executable packages by G. Allen Morris III. x48 is an emulator of the HP48 sx or gx handheld calculator. This is a very nice RPN calculator that features programming and graphic plotting. This version adds a 'netbook' option for systems with small screens. HP48 GX and SX model ROM files are required for functionality – owners of actual HP48 calculators can download the appropriate ROM files from the web site.

Xjig Puzzle Manager – v0.9-33. <http://www.xjigmanager.com/>. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable packages for Fedora, Mandriva, Ubuntu (and variants), Debian, and SuSE by Les Hardy. The Xjig Puzzle Manager is a launcher for xjig, the jigsaw puzzle program for Linux-X-windows originally created by Helmut Hoenig. With Xjig Manager you have an easy way to preview and select the puzzle image (PNG, GIF, JPG and BMP supported) and launch Xjig (Xjig 2.5-2 is included). Xjig Manager allows you to preview images, set puzzle width, select piece size, swap mouse buttons, fix rotation angle to 90 degrees, set piece style and distortion, set shadow, set animation speed and more. The 'no shuffle' option is good as a starter for younger children.

Kernel Source – v2.6.32. <http://www.kernel.org/>. Free GNU Public License source code for all platforms by the Linux community.

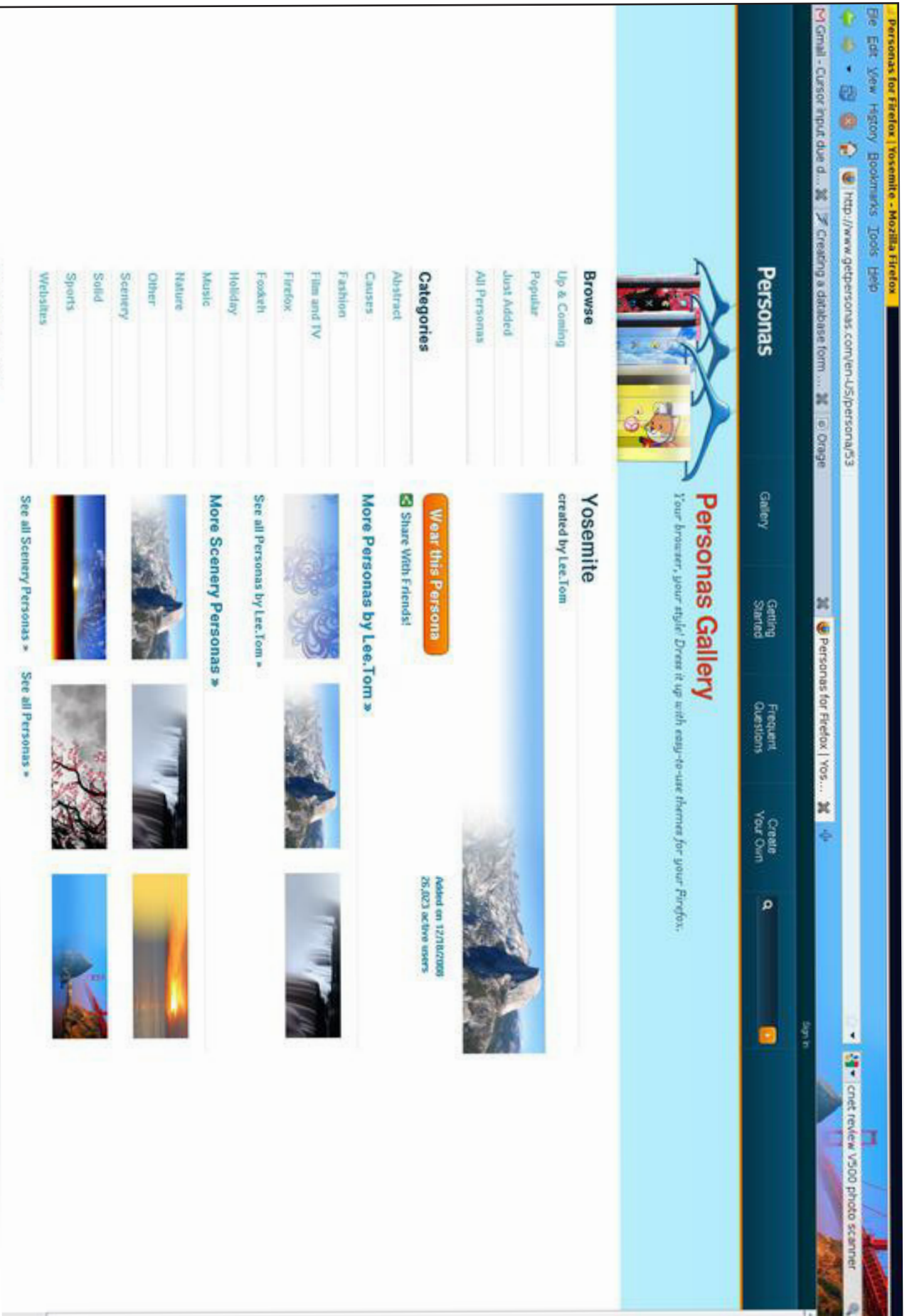
If you are one of the folks that continue to use Internet Explorer, you might want to check out this article – http://www.theregister.co.uk/2010/02/04/ms_browser_bug/

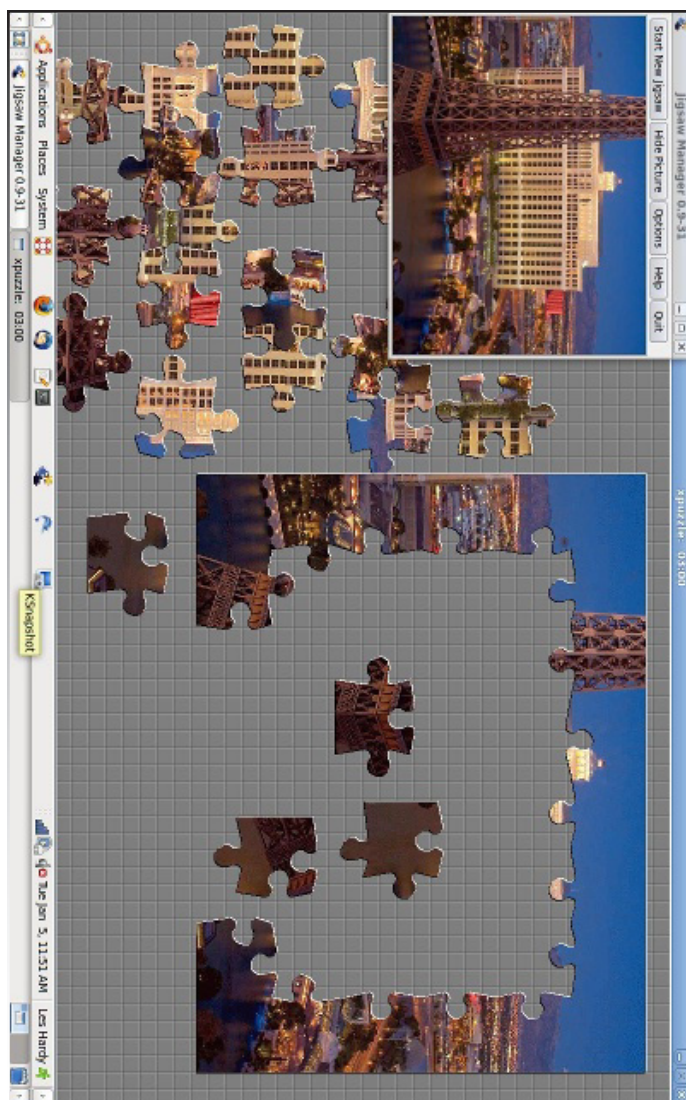
Application images and screenshots follow next page.



Screenshots next two pages

Mozilla Firefox v3.6





Xjig Puzzle Manager



x48 – HP48 sx or gx handheld calculator.

a few paragraphs, describing the product, what you expected from it, and likes and dislikes. I'm sure that Lloyd Johnson would appreciate your suggestions for his monthly web sites column, as well.

Notable at the January meeting was more attention to timekeeping, so each presenter gets their fair share of time. Bill Walsh and Mel Mikosinski will make sure that the meeting sticks to schedule.

After the election at the January meeting, I shared my photos and impressions from the 2010 International Consumer Electronics Show (www.cesweb.org), held the previous week in Las Vegas. While 3D televisions grabbed the headlines, I was less than impressed. While early adopters with cash to spend might buy the first sets this year, I doubt that those who just invested in new HD televisions are going to buy new, top of the line sets and wear special glasses to watch TV at home. Another issue is lack of industry standards for 3D, which will take years to sort out. Other hot trends this year were netbook computers, eBook readers, and smartphone apps to navigate, monitor your car status, and control a flying drone.

Gabe Goldberg shared his favorite web sites, which featured many well-known sites as well as a few hidden gems. From community service opportunities at

www.VolunteerFairfax.org to creating customized news clippings from the BBC, New York Times, and the Washington Post, to finding the best ethnic restaurants in the DC area, you'll find Gabe's complete list on WAC's Recent Meetings page, <http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html>. Gabe also delved into the recesses behind the Google search page to show a wide variety of services that many don't know about.

Speaking of Google, I have been using Google's advertising-supported Gmail e-mail service since last February, and will demonstrate its features at the February 20th meeting. One of the frequently heard concerns about Gmail is privacy, as Google presents advertisements based upon e-mail content. I'll demonstrate this and other aspects of the service to help you decide whether its right for you.

Also in February, Chuck Roberts will take us on a tour of the latest version of Adobe® Photoshop® Elements, a powerful but user friendly application to manage and edit your digital photos.

Also, don't miss the announcement in this issue about special drawings for magazine subscriptions at the March meeting (*See below!*).

See you there!



Disposition of Smart Computing prize subscriptions

Sandhills Publishing Company, publisher of Smart Computing Magazine, provided WAC with four one-year magazine subscriptions. These gift subscriptions can be used for a new subscription or to extend an existing subscription to one of Sandhills' magazines (Smart Computing, Computer Power User, CE Tips, PC Today, Reference Series).

WAC will hold drawings for the subscriptions at the March 20th general meeting. Two drawings will be held for all members with paid memberships current as of March 2010. To encourage new memberships and renewals, an additional two drawings will be held only for new members who joined WAC beginning in January 2010 and existing members who renew their memberships beyond March 2011.

Qualifications for the drawings will be determined by the WAC Membership Chair. A family membership counts as one entry. Members do not need to be present to win. Winners names will be removed from later drawings (i.e., only one subscription win per member).

Membership applications will be accepted at the WAC meeting until 1pm Eastern Time on March 20th, and by US mail postmarked no later than March 13th. Membership forms are available at the WAC desk during meetings and online at <http://www.wacug.org/membership.html>.

MS Office Tips

from Sharon Parq Associates

Sharon Parq Associates has been kind enough to provide new content to The Cursor on a monthly basis. This is their first submission and WACUG is very appreciative of their participation.

Using the IF Worksheet Function

Microsoft Excel provides a wide range of worksheet functions you can use. One of the most versatile worksheet functions is IF. This function allows you to test some condition, and then use a value if the condition is true or a different value if the condition is false. For instance, consider the following example:

=IF(A2<C2,"Too low","")

Notice that IF requires three arguments, each separated by commas. The first argument (in this example, A2<C2) is the conditional test. If the test proves true, then the second argument (in this case, the test string "Too low") is used. If the test proves false, then the third argument (in this case, an empty string) is used. In other words, if the value in cell A2 is lower than the value in cell C2, then this formula returns the string "Too low." Otherwise, it returns an empty string.

You are not limited, of course, to returning strings in an IF function. You can return any value you want, including the values stored in other cells. For example:

=IF(A2<C2,B6-B7,43)

In this case, if A2 is less than C2, then the value derived by subtracting B7 from B6 is returned. If A2 is not less than C2, then the value 43 is returned.

Copyright © 2010 by Sharon Parq Associates, Inc. Reprinted by permission. Thousands of free Microsoft Excel tips can be found online at <http://excel.tips.net> and <http://excelribbon.tips.net>.

Using Shading to Highlight Information

Word provides a way you can shade the information in your document. This shading can be added in conjunction with any border you may specify for the paragraph. Word allows you to precisely control the degree of shading, as well. To add shading to a paragraph, follow these steps:

1. Position the insertion point in the paragraph that you want to shade.

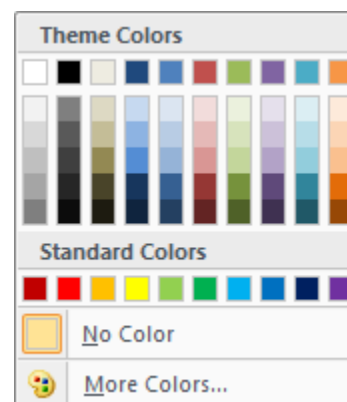
2. Select the Borders and Shading command from the Format menu. You will see the Borders and Shading dialog box.
3. Click on the Shading tab.
4. In Word 97 and Word 2000, use the Shading box to select a degree of shading you want to use for the paragraph. In Word 2002 or Word 2003, using the Style drop-down list to select a percentage of shading to apply.
5. Click on OK.

You can also apply shading to whatever text you select (instead of to an entire paragraph) by simply selecting that text in step 1.

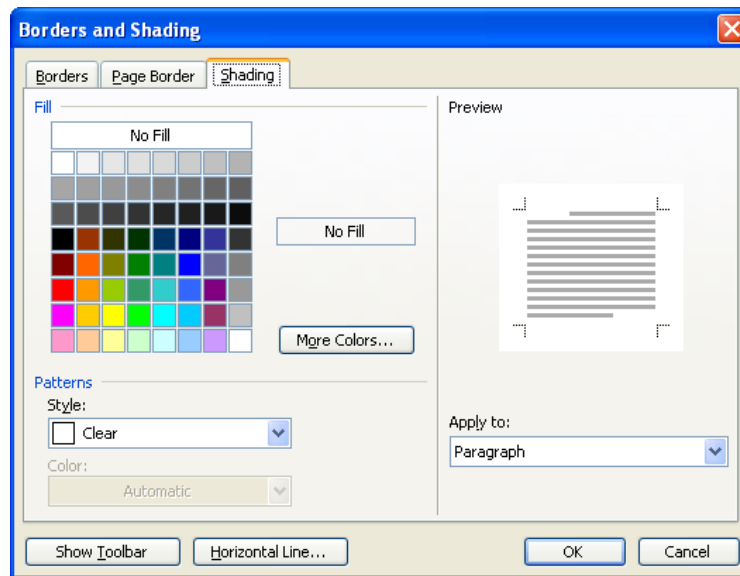
If you are using Word 2007, then you can shade text or an entire paragraph by following these steps:

1. Position the insertion point in the paragraph that you want to shade, or select the text to which the shading should be applied.
2. Make sure that the Home tab is selected for the ribbon.
3. In the Paragraph group, click the down-arrow to the right of the Shading tool. (This tool looks like a tilted paint bucket, spilling paint to the right.) Word displays a shading palette.
4. Select one of the theme colors at the top of the palette. There are ten colors, and each option under the colors represents a different percentage of shading for that color.

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The Shading palette



The Shading tab of the Borders and Shading dialog box

FREE Online Classes and Lectures from Major Universities

By Ira Wilsker

WEBSITE:

<http://www.academicearth.org>

I have been teaching college classes at Lamar Institute of Technology (LIT) now for almost 33 years. In my teaching tenure, there have been a lot of technological changes that have impacted education. One such major change is the availability of online courses that can be taken for college credit or for personal enrichment. Every semester for the past several years, I have taught at least one online course, and LIT, as well as colleges and universities all over the world are now offering online courses. It is now very possible to earn legitimate, accredited undergraduate and graduate college degrees online. There are also many additional courses available online from colleges and universities, as well as other non-traditional sources that offer non-credit training for personal enrichment. One online resource that I recently started to integrate into my classes at LIT is Academic Earth (academicearth.org).

Academic Earth offers free online courses and lectures from the professors of such well known universities as Berkeley, Columbia, Harvard, MIT, Princeton, Stanford, University of Michigan, and Yale. These free courses are not offered for academic credit, but are the actual lectures presented by the faculty of those esteemed institutions, and are available in many subjects. Some of the courses are a semester's worth of lectures sequentially broken down into individual classes, while others are individual lectures on a wide assortment of academic topics. About two dozen subjects are currently available, including Anthropology, AP Test Prep, Architecture, Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Economics, Engineering, Entrepreneurship, Environmental Studies, History, International Relations, Law, Literature, Mathematics, Media Studies, Medicine, Philosophy, Physics, Political Science, Pre-Med, Psychology, and Religious Studies. In reviewing many of these subjects, I found the academic level of the content to be appropriate for most college students (after all, they are college lectures), but some content is more appropriate for graduate or professional school students. A user of this service does not have to be a college student, and while online registration for the website is available, I was able to view the lectures and courses without registering.

Many high school students are participating in “AP” or Advanced Placement classes, where successful completion and examination can earn the student college credits. Academic Earth offers free online AP lectures and courses on several topics including Biology, Calculus (A and B), Chemistry, Computer Science A, Computer Science AB, Physics B, Physics C, and Psychology. With the academic potential provided by these recorded lectures and classes, the AP student may have a better chance of earning those coveted AP credits.

I have always enjoyed chemistry, and was enrolled in AP chemistry in high school. As an undergraduate I took a lot of chemistry courses, and even worked for a while as a substitute chemistry teacher in a local high school. I found the Academic Earth online chemistry lectures intriguing. I started with General Chemistry (www.academicearth.org/courses/general-chemistry), as taught by Dr. Kristie Boering, of Berkeley. Her series of 42 lectures was a complete semester of lectures on the subject, with each lecture lasting about 45 minutes. It was like I was a student back in college, but I was comfortably sitting at home on my computer. This is an excellent way to learn a new subject, or as a refresher.

One of the courses that I teach each semester at LIT is an economics class. I teach both live classroom classes and web based classes in economics. Now that Academic Earth is available, I am going to recommend that my economics students go to academicearth.org/subjects/economics and watch the lectures on relevant topics. The economics course lectures are presented by faculty from Yale, UCLA, Princeton, Berkeley, and the University of Michigan. Some lectures are free-standing individual lectures, while others are in a series of lectures from an entire semester. By watching these lectures and having the ability to “rewind” in order to repeat an item that was not clear the first time, I feel that student mastery of the subject can be increased.

The unheralded strength in the American economy is small businesses. Entrepreneurs create about 70% of all new jobs in our society, and they need all of the help that they can get. My program at LIT teaches courses in small business management every semester, and courses in entrepreneurship are among the most widely taught college classes nationwide, with almost every college teaching some such courses. For those interested in entrepreneurship training either as a practical application to hone skills for an existing small business, or as an academic endeavor, Academic Earth can be a valuable adjunct. By simply going to academicearth.org/subjects/entrepreneurship, the entrepreneur or student can access 129 courses on a variety of small business topics ranging from creativity and innovation, to finance, management, marketing, and product development. With a resource

such as this, the entrepreneur or small business student can freely access a wealth of relevant information. In addition to a purely academic and entrepreneurial use, I could see this area of Academic Earth being utilized as a training resource by Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), business incubators, SCORE chapters, and anyone else interested in learning more about small businesses.

With dozens of courses available in medicine (including pre-med), political science, history, literature, religion, and other subjects, there will likely be some courses of interest for almost everybody.

I personally found Academic Earth to be a most valuable resource for academic pursuits, personal interest, and personal enrichment. As more courses and lectures are added to Academic Earth, it will only become an even more valuable resource.



The 2010 WAC Board of Directors, SIG Leaders and other Volunteers**Directors:**

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The Cursor provides news, commentary and product information to members of the Washington Area Computer User Group.

Send membership inquiries and address changes to: membership@wacug.org

Send article submission and reprint requests to the Editor: cursor@wacug.org

WAC Membership/Renewal Application

Dues are collected on an Annual basis and includes:
downloadable links for WAC's monthly newsletter,
The Cursor, in PDF format

Individual/Corporate/Family Dues: \$25.00
\$5 annual surcharge for delivery of the Cursor by
1st Class mail

Remit payment in person at the WAC Membership
table on meeting day, or by mail to:

Washington Area Computer User Group
30 Fendall Ave.

Alexandria, VA 22304-6300

Make checks payable to WAC. Please do not send
cash by mail. *Thank you for joining WAC!*

Complete if you name and address do not appear
on the reverse side. Include E-mail Address

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State: _____ Zip: _____

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Membership Survey: Help us to help you by completing this survey.
List the computer systems you own / use (in order of preference)

Operating System(s): _____

Modem(s): _____

Printer(s): _____

Other Hardware: _____

Favorite Software: _____

Connection: (circle one) Dial-up or Broadband

Circle Your Interests: Photo Printing Investing Games

Digital Photography Internet Access Education Music

Graphics/Animation Genealogy Video Finance

Programming Language(s) _____

Hardware Upgrades/Repair List others below

Next WAC Meetings: • Feb 20 • Mar 20 • Apr 17 • May 22 • Jun 19

Call (703) 370-7649 for the latest meeting information or Visit our Web Site at:

<http://www.wacug.org>

All Meetings are held at the
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute 4210 Roberts Road,
Fairfax, VA. Call our help
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you need additional infor-
mation.

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February 12, 2010

Downloading and Converting YouTube Videos

By Ira Wilsker

WEBSITES:

<http://www.forinside.com> – Online download and conversion

<http://www.downloadhelper.net> – FireFox Add-on and converter

<http://www.orbitdownloader.com> – Automated downloader

<http://www.download-youtube.com> – Online download

<http://www.videolan.org> – Free universal video player

<http://www.any-video-converter.com/products/for-video-free/>

<http://www.dvdvideosoft.com/free-dvd-video-software.htm>

I frequently get emails from readers of this column and listeners of my radio show regarding problems they are having. While I cannot guarantee an effective answer, I can at least try to help them out, or tell them where they can find a solution. Some of the more interesting, or more common questions I will occasionally post here under the premise that if a few of you are having a similar problem, then many others are having a similar problem.

Last Friday I was forwarded an email that had been bouncing around one of the departments at Lamar University about how to download YouTube videos and convert them to a format that can be used in PowerPoint. Some of the faculty have rightly found that there is some useful content on YouTube that is applicable to academic lectures, and they would like to use this information in class. Fortunately, there are several good solutions.

My personal first choice in downloading YouTube videos and converting them into a format that can play in PowerPoint, or on most video players, is a free add-on for the FireFox browser called DownloadHelper (www.downloadhelper.net). DownloadHelper is extremely popular with FireFox users, having been downloaded and installed about 54 million times! DownloadHelper places a small icon on the bottom edge of the browser window consisting of three colored balls; when the balls become animated, the DownloadHelper menu becomes available

by clicking on the icon. Left clicking on the icon shows the title of the video, and clicking the title downloads the video in YouTube's native FLV format to your computer. Right clicking on the icon opens the menu which allows the user to convert the video into any of many popular formats. Alternatively, clicking on the three-ball icon that appears to the left of the video title at the top of the screen opens a one-click menu that offers all of the options. The one that I use most often is the "Download and Convert" which can download and convert the video in a single action. For compatibility purposes, especially when embedding the video in PowerPoint, I mostly select the WMV (Windows media format), but sometimes choose the QuickTime MOV, or AVI formats. For those who do not have FireFox installed, it is available free at getfirefox.com, and does not interfere with any other browser on the computer.

For those using any browser, there are several free online services that will download YouTube (and other) videos to your computer, and some will also convert them to popular formats for you. Even though its server is frequently busy and located in Brazil, I like Forinside, at www.forinside.com. Forinside is extremely easy to use; all the user needs to do is copy the URL (web address) of the video and paste it into the textbox, and use the pull down menu to select a format. Clicking the download button will start the process. Forinside can convert online videos into any of the 10 most widely used formats, and can download videos and audio from YouTube, MySpace, Google Video, and Mp3Tube. For those who already have videos on their computers that they would like to convert into other formats, Forinside offers that service for free. Simply click on the orange "File" tab, then "Browse" your hard drive for the file you want converted. Use the pull down menu to select any of the 10 formats available, click on "Convert" and Forinside will upload the original video to its server, convert it to the chosen format, and then download it to your computer in the new format. Your original video remains intact on your computer. As stated above, the Forinside server is often very busy.

Another service that can download YouTube videos directly to your computer is Download-YouTube.com. This site is very easy to use from any browser. Simply open the desired YouTube page, and in the address bar of your browser insert the phrase "download-"

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(download hyphen) before the word “YouTube” in the URL, and the user will be directed to the Download-YouTube web page. On the Download-YouTube page either click on the “Click here to download” link, or right click and “Save Link As” or “Save target as” and the file will be downloaded in the native YouTube FLV format.

One of the easiest free YouTube downloaders is Orbit Downloader, available at www.orbitdownloader.com. This download tool has some of the highest editor and user ratings on the popular download sites, and can accelerate downloading of not just YouTube videos, but most general downloads as well. Orbit Downloader integrates seamlessly into Internet Explorer, FireFox, and Opera, and includes a “Get It” button that appears when connecting to YouTube that offers a single click download. YouTube videos will be downloaded in their native FLV format.

There is a free bundle of video software that can download YouTube and other media, convert them to most formats, and even edit video and audio files. The software bundle aptly named “Free Studio” contains 23 video and audio utilities, and is a 30 Meg download available for free download from www.dvdvideosoft.com/free-dvd-video-software.htm. According to the publisher of Free Studio, “With this free software you can convert video and audio files between different formats and to iPod, PSP, iPhone, BlackBerry and other portable devices; burn and rip DVDs and audio CDs; upload and download videos and music to your computer, iPod, PSP, iPhone and BlackBerry; perform basic editing of audio and video files.” This bundle, reviewed and top rated by several of the major download sites, may be a worthwhile bundle to download and install.

If there is a need to convert the YouTube FLV videos, or any other video formats, into a more useful format, such as WMV or MOV, a utility called “Any Video Converter Freeware” may be useful, as it supports dozens of video and audio formats, and can easily convert files between these formats. This software is available for download from www.any-video-converter.com/products/for_video_free, and according to its publisher, has been downloaded over 25 million times. The online service CNet gave Any Video Converter Freeware its highest 5-star editors’ rating. If your only need is to play downloaded

YouTube videos, there is an easy and free solution that does not require any conversion utilities. YouTube’s FLV format can be played on the universal video player (free) VideoLAN - VLC Media Player (www.videolan.org). The VLC media player is one of the most widely used video players in the world, with over 110 million downloads, and has earned a very loyal following. VLC media Player can play almost every available video and audio format without the need for any plug-ins or add-ons, and is available for free, and will run on almost every operating system.

With these utilities and services, downloading YouTube and other videos and converting them into another useful format is simple. I routinely use such downloads in class both as individual videos, and as videos embedded in PowerPoint. There is much that can be done with online videos, and these utilities and services are worthy of a try.



Scumware and Scareware Warning and Removal

By Ira Wilsker

WEBSITES:

<http://www.fbi.gov/pressrel/pressrel09/popup121109.htm>

http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2009-06-09-cybergangs-scareware-hackers_N.htm

<http://www.networkworld.com/news/2009/101909-scareware.html>

<http://blogs.zdnet.com/security/?p=4297>

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123976230407519659.html>

<http://www.malwarebytes.org/mbam-download.php>

<http://www.malwarebytes.org/mbam/database/mbam-rules.exe>

<http://www.emsisoft.com/en/software/free/>

<http://download1.emsisoft.com/a2usb.zip>

<http://www.threatfire.com>

<http://www.microsoft.com/security/malwareremove/default.aspx>

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Many of you have had the experience of having a popup or window open on your computer that tells you that your computer is infected with a substantial quantity of viruses, worms, Trojans, and other forms of spyware. Typically, these warning messages, which may appear to be authentic Windows warnings, instruct the user to “click here” to remove the malware. Upon clicking, another window opens which solicits a fee, typically \$29.95 to \$49.95 (or more) to purchase software to remove the infection. The software being offered has an attractive and professional looking interface, and often carries a name that is intended to inspire confidence, sometimes even being similar to reputable product names that we have heard of before. Trying to close the window often results in the popup reappearing again, almost instantly. If we choose to ignore the warning or close it, it may continue to reappear whenever we click on a webpage, open our own already installed programs or security software, or randomly. These warnings may “scare” us, or become so intrusive that many of us will pay to purchase the recommended software to clean our computers of malware and restore the usability of our machines. By doing so, at a minimum, we just became the victim of a scam that according to the FBI has duped Americans out of an estimated \$150 million.

If it was only money that was lost, the damage would be bad enough, but the infection and hijacking that produced the popups and warnings in the first place may have also destroyed our existing antivirus software, deactivated our firewall, transmitted our vulnerabilities to unknown miscreants, and made our computers vulnerable to continued attacks. Purchasing, downloading, and installing this rogue software may possibly also open us up to even worse attacks such as turning our computers into spam sending zombies that can generate massive income for the zombie master. Other identified hazards of this software may include the installation of keylogging software to steal our usernames, passwords, and credit card information to be sold on illicit websites for criminal purposes including credit card fraud and identity theft. Simply put, your computer may physically be in your home, but for all practical purposes it belongs to some crook somewhere who in reality has control over it for nefarious and pecuniary

reasons.

This may sound like science fiction or the theme of an action movie, but the scenario is a sad reality that has been repeated on millions of personal computers. The victims of this scam may have visited websites, often legitimate websites, that have been victimized themselves by hackers who installed the dangerous code that can infect a computer by simply opening a webpage, causing the malware to be loaded onto the victim computer. In some other cases the infection can occur by clicking on an apparently authentic looking online advertisement, opening an email attachment, or simply doing other online activities. A lot of the victims clicked on links posted on Twitter, YouTube comments, instant messages, links illicitly planted in search engine results, and ads posted on legitimate websites. Many of these “drive-by” infections are explicitly designed to evade antivirus and anti-spyware software, and once on the computer, may destroy the ability of the antivirus and anti-spyware to provide any future protection. The authors of this malware are smart, and if the legitimate security software is indeed neutralized, it will still appear to load and even update, as well as display the program icon in the tray by the clock, giving the user a false sense of security that his computer is still protected. Not just is the computer no longer protected, but some of the malware sends out invitations to other cyber crooks to visit the “buffet” of purloined computers and help themselves to the bounty of goodies that may be available, as well as allow them to install additional spyware and malware on the victimized computer.

Some of this illicit activity is done in a “multi-level marketing” or pyramid model where cyber criminals can pay the master crook for access, and then resell this access to others, who can then sell to others, each paying a fee or commission that is passed up the line to the master crook. This is not some obscure threat or risk that we face, but a very common occurrence. According to the security company F-Secure’s senior researcher Mikko Hypponen, one of these master criminals recently ran a contest offering a \$36,000 Lexus sedan to the top-selling affiliate. According to a report in USA Today, in 2008, “... SecureWorks researcher Stewart infiltrated a Russian group known as the Baka Software gang. He accessed documentation showing one affiliate earned \$146,525 in 10 days by

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spreading promotions for a worthless program, called Antivirus XP 2008, to more than 154,000 people, and closing sales to 2,772 of them. Another record showed five top Baka Software affiliates earning weekly commissions averaging \$107,604.” In another example of the degree of infection, Microsoft reported that its Malicious Software Removal Tool found one specific fake security program on 4.4 million computers! There are hundreds or thousands of these rogue programs currently infesting countless millions of computers. This begs an answer to a rhetorical question; would you really want to give your credit card number and security code to a crook that is probably in Russia? If you fell for this scam, contact your credit card company immediately and tell them what happened; also ask them to chargeback the charges made on your card by the crooks.

If you feel that you have been victimized there are some free utilities that can likely detect and kill the malware. Since much of this malware will not be initially detected by the protective software on our computers, and may in fact neutralize the protection that we do have, simply performing a scan with the security software we already have may provide little or no benefit. It should also be noted that if the user cannot access the websites of the legitimate utilities that can detect and kill the malware, that is a sure symptom that the victim computer is under the control of the cyber crook.

I am now receiving daily emails and phone calls from people describing a similar problem, complete with the typical symptoms of a scumware or scareware infection. I have had very good results with a few free utilities that will likely detect and kill the malware, and remove it from our machines. While there can be no guarantees that they will continue to work well, they do have a proven track record, and so far, have fared well in this “cat and mouse” game where the cyber crooks keep developing something new, and the security companies have to come up with a way to detect and kill the infection.

My first choice is Malwarebytes Anti-Malware, available for download from www.malwarebytes.ORG. I emphasized the “.ORG” because there have been knock-off websites with other upper-level domains designed to explicitly scam people looking for the authentic product. Malwarebytes

has both a free version and a commercial version. As is customary, the paid commercial version has more features and capabilities, but the free version is fine for detecting and removing most malware. Download it (probably from a link redirecting the user to CNet’s Download.com), install it, update it, and perform a scan. A quick scan will detect malware in the most common locations in just a few minutes, but a full scan will be much more thorough, and may take an hour or two to run. If the user cannot directly access the malwarebytes.org website, but is redirected somewhere else or totally blocked, then that is a sure sign that the computer has been hijacked. If this happens, download Malwarebytes to another computer, and copy it to a flash drive or CD, and install it from that media. It may also be a good idea to manually download the latest updated signature files (called “rules”), from www.malwarebytes.org/mbam/database/mbam-rules.exe, as access to the update server may also be blocked on the infected computer. Install the Malwarebytes on the infected computer, and then run the file mbam-rules.exe to update the software. If there is memory resident malware detected, Malwarebytes may direct the user to reboot the computer, and Malwarebytes will then automatically rerun at boot, killing the malware before it can load. Update it and rerun it frequently to help keep your computer clean of malware.

The other utility that I use along with Malwarebytes to detect and kill malware is A-Squared Free, available for download from www.emsisoft.com/en/software/free/. A-Squared Free has a commercial sister product, A-squared Anti-Malware (www.emsisoft.com/en/) with more features and a memory resident component that provides real time protection in addition to the security software already on the computer. Both versions also integrate a full featured virus scanner to detect more than most other scanners. Download one of the versions of A-Squared (the free version is adequate if the user only wants to detect and remove malware and viruses), install it, and update it. Do a quick scan for a quick clean, and a deep scan to detect more potential threats. A-Squared also detects fragments, or pieces of code that may be a threat. Since a detector as sensitive as A-Squared may occasionally detect a file and label it as a threat, but it is really a false-positive, I choose to initially quarantine anything that is found, rather than delete

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it. That way, I can recover any files that may have been misdiagnosed. A-Squared is another product whose website is commonly blocked by malware, in order for the malware to protect itself from removal. If that happens, the A-Squared software can be downloaded to another computer, and copied to a flash drive or CD, and installed from that. An alternative designed explicitly for just such an occurrence is A-Squared Emergency USB Stick Files (download1.emsisoft.com/a2usb.zip). This version, which is kept up to date continuously on the Emsisoft website, is a 67mb download which contains all of the necessary files, is intended to be copied to a flash drive, and installed on the infected computer from that media.

After the computer is cleaned of malware, the user will often notice a marked increase in performance. Do not be complacent, because you may still be victimized even though your computer is likely clean. Since your logons, user names, and passwords may have been compromised, it would be a good idea to change them, and repeat the scanning process on a frequent and regular basis. It may also be necessary to reinstall your security software, as it may have been destroyed by the malware. Consider installing another layer of security that works in addition to your security software, and enhances your protection, making a re-infestation less likely. The paid commercial versions of Malwarebytes or A-Squared Anti-Malware would be good choices, or a freeware product such as Threatfire (www.threatfire.com) would provide enhanced protection in addition to the traditional security software.

