

SECOND EDITION

THE OFFICIAL

# AMERICA ONLINE<sup>®</sup>

for MACINTOSH MEMBERSHIP KIT & TOUR GUIDE

NEW! VERSION 2.5



Everything You Need To Begin  
Enjoying The Nation's Most  
Exciting Online Service

WITH DISK!

**TOM LICHTY**


Foreword by America  
Online founder Steve Case

20  
Hours Online  
**FREE!**  
For New Members

VENTANA PRESS

Google v. TLI Communications  
IPR2015-00283 Ex. 2004





**The Official America Online®  
for Macintosh™  
Membership Kit & Tour Guide  
SECOND EDITION**





**The Official America Online®  
for Macintosh™  
Membership Kit & Tour Guide**

**SECOND EDITION**

**Version 2.5**

**Tom Lichty**



**VENTANA  
PRESS**



**The Official America Online® for Macintosh Membership Kit & Tour Guide**  
Copyright © 1994 by Tom Lichty

All rights reserved. This book may not be duplicated in any way without the express written consent of the publisher, except in the form of brief excerpts or quotations for the purposes of review. The information contained herein is for the personal use of the reader, and may not be incorporated in any commercial programs, other books, databases or any kind of software without written consent of the publisher or author. Making copies of this book, or any portion for any purpose other than your own, is a violation of United States copyright laws.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Lichty, Tom

The official America Online for Macintosh membership kit & tour  
guide / Tom Lichty. -- 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Rev. ed. of: The official America Online membership kit & tour  
guide. c1992.

Includes index.

ISBN 1-56604-127-9

1. America Online (Videotex system) 2. Macintosh (Computer)

I. Lichty, Tom. Official America Online membership kit & tour guide.

II. Title.

QA76.57.A43L523 1994

004.69--dc20

94-1492

CIP

Book design: Marcia Webb

Cover design: IMAGE Communications; adaptation: John Nedwidek

Index service: Dianne Bertsch, Answers Plus

Technical review: Tim Barwick, Ed Ferguson, Kelly Richmond, Marshall Rens: America Online

Editorial staff: Angela Anderson, Laura Bader, Eric Edstam, Tracye Giles, Pam Richardson

Production staff: Patrick Berry, Cheri Collins, John Cotterman, Dan Koeller, Dawne Sherman,

Marcia Webb, Mike Webster

Proofreaders: Eric Edstam, Sharla Green

Second Edition

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Printed in the United States of America

Ventana Press, Inc.

P.O. Box 2468

Chapel Hill, NC 27515

919/942-0220

FAX 919/942-1140

**Limits of Liability and Disclaimer of Warranty**

The author and publisher of this book have used their best efforts in preparing the book and the programs contained in it. These efforts include the development, research and testing of the theories and programs to determine their effectiveness. The author and publisher make no warranty of any kind, expressed or implied, with regard to these programs or the documentation contained in this book.

The author and publisher shall not be liable in the event of incidental or consequential damages in connection with, or arising out of, the furnishing, performance or use of the programs, associated instructions and/or claims of productivity gains.

## About the Author

Tom Lichty is Senior Consultant and Instructor for the University of Oregon Portland Center, and author of six computer books, including *Desktop Publishing With Word for Windows, Mac, Word & Excel Desktop Companion* and *The Official America Online for Windows Membership Kit & Tour Guide*, all published by Ventana Press. An enthusiastic member of the online community, he may be reached at MajorTom on America Online, or [majortom@aol.com](mailto:majortom@aol.com) on the Internet.



## **Trademarks**

Trademarked names appear throughout this book. Rather than list the names and entities that own the trademarks or insert a trademark symbol with each mention of the trademarked name, the publisher states that it is using the names only for editorial purposes and to the benefit of the trademark owner with no intention of infringing upon that trademark.

## Acknowledgments

Oh sure, I want to acknowledge people like Laura Bader, Tim Barwick, Patrick Berry, John Cotterman, Mary Daffron, Ed Ferguson, George Louie, Luis Montiel, Marshall Rens, Pam Richardson, Kathy Ryan, Matt Triplett, Matt Wagner, Jennifer Watson, and Elizabeth and Joe Woodman: they're the heart and soul of this book's production and editorial teams and without their assistance there would be no book.

But most of all I want to acknowledge the thousands of readers (nearly 5000 at last count) who have written to me with comments and suggestions for improvements to the first edition. I read every message, and many of the suggestions are woven into this book's manuscript. Thus, this book is truly a community project. We all have reason to be proud of that.

*Tom Lichty  
Gresham, Oregon*





# Contents



	<b>Foreword .....</b>	<b>xix</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Starting the Tour .....</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>What Is America Online? .....</b>	<b>2</b>
	It's a Telecommunications Service • It's One Big Thunder-Lizard Computer • It's Software Installed in Your Computer • It's a Resource • It's a Community	
	<b>How to Use This Book .....</b>	<b>16</b>
	How to Use This Book as Documentation • How to Use This Book as a Book	
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Making the Connection .....</b>	<b>25</b>
	<b>Things You'll Need .....</b>	<b>26</b>
	The Computer • The Telephone Line • The Membership Kit The Modem • The Money • The Screen Name • The Password	
	<b>Installing the Software .....</b>	<b>32</b>
	<b>The Initial Online Session .....</b>	<b>37</b>
	Configuring the Telephone Connection • Selecting Your Local Access Numbers • The Temporary Registration Number & Password • Your Name & Address • Providing Your Billing Information • Choosing a Screen Name & Password • A Letter From the President	
	<b>Where to Go From Here .....</b>	<b>46</b>





**Chapter 3**

**Online Help & the Members ..... 49**

**Getting Help ..... 49**

Off-Line Help • Online Help

**Guides ..... 67**

**Members ..... 69**

The Member Directory • Member Profiles



**Chapter 4**

**Electronic Mail ..... 75**

**What Exactly Is Electronic Mail? ..... 75**

**Why Use E-mail? ..... 77**

**A Circular Exercise ..... 77**

**The Mail Menu ..... 81**

Composing Your Mail • Alternative Mail Sources • Checking Mail  
 You've Sent • Buttons in the Mail You've Sent Window  
 • Reading New Mail • Buttons in the New Mail Window • Printing &  
 Saving Mail • Forwarding Mail • Replying to Mail • Checking Mail  
 You've Read • The Address Book

**Gorilla Food ..... 98**

Mail-Filing Strategies • Formatting Messages • Internet Mail

**Attaching Files to Messages ..... 111**

E-mail Alternatives



**Chapter 5 Computing ..... 123**

- The Beginners Forum ..... 124**
- Industry Connection ..... 128**
- The Forums ..... 131**
  - The Music & Sound Forum • The Utilities Forum
  - The Graphic Arts Forum • The Online Graphics Viewer
- Downloading Files ..... 140**
  - What Is Downloading? • A Downloading Session
  - File Compression & Decompression
- Uploading Files ..... 159**
  - The Uploading Process • Concluding the Uploading Process



**Chapter 6 Today's News ..... 165**

- Top Stories ..... 165**
- Saving Articles ..... 166**
  - Printing Articles • Searching the News • U.S. & World News
  - Business • Market News • Top Business • Entertainment
  - Sports • Weather



<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>The Newsstand .....</b>	<b>183</b>
	Macworld Online .....	183
	TIME Online .....	186
	@times .....	189
	Chicago Online .....	191



<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>Sports .....</b>	<b>193</b>
	The News .....	193
	The Message Boards .....	194
	The Grandstand .....	197



<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Entertainment .....</b>	<b>201</b>
	What's Hot .....	201
	Critics' Choice .....	202
	Hollywood Online .....	206
	Book Bestsellers .....	208
	Cartoons .....	210
	Columnists & Features Online .....	211
	The Grateful Dead Forum .....	216
	The Trivia Club .....	217





**Chapter 10 Personal Finance ..... 219**

- Your Personal Stock Portfolio ..... 219**  
 Quotes & Portfolios
- Morningstar Mutual Funds ..... 228**
- The Decision Point Forum ..... 230**
- Real Estate Online ..... 232**



**Chapter 11 Travel ..... 235**

- The EAASY SABRE Gateway ..... 236**  
 Finding a Flight • Finding the Cost • Booking the Reservations
- The Travel Forum ..... 241**
- Travelers' Corner ..... 243**
- AutoVantage ..... 245**
- Pictures of the World ..... 248**



**Chapter 12 People Connection ..... 251**

- The Lobby ..... 252**  
 Entering the Lobby • Guides
- Exploring Other Public Rooms ..... 256**  
 The Event Rooms Guide • The Event Rooms Schedule  
 • Finding Other Rooms • The New Member Lounge
- Private Rooms ..... 266**





<b>Chat Room Technique</b> .....	<b>267</b>
Cut & Paste • Getting Information About People in a Room	
• Sending an Instant Message • Highlighting & Ignoring Members	
• Chat Room Sounds	
<b>Instant Messages</b> .....	<b>271</b>
<b>Center Stage &amp; Rotunda</b> .....	<b>275</b>



## **Chapter 13 Clubs & Interests** ..... **279**

<b>Clubs Defined</b> .....	<b>281</b>
Reference Materials	
<b>Searching Online Databases</b> .....	<b>284</b>
<b>Message Boards</b> .....	<b>290</b>
Reading Messages • Browsing, Finding & Reading Messages	
• Posting Messages • Threaded Boards	
<b>Libraries</b> .....	<b>306</b>
<b>Multitasking</b> .....	<b>308</b>
<b>SeniorNet Online</b> .....	<b>310</b>



## **Chapter 14 The Internet Connection** ..... **315**

<b>A Superset of AOL</b> .....	<b>317</b>
<b>Military Paranoia</b> .....	<b>318</b>
<b>Academic Anarchy</b> .....	<b>320</b>
<b>Internet Addresses</b> .....	<b>322</b>
International Top-Level Domains • US Top-Level Domains	
• Domain Names & Computer Names • User Names	
<b>Mailing Lists</b> .....	<b>325</b>



**Newsgroups** ..... 327  
 Newsgroup Help • Netiquette

**WAIS Databases & Gopher** ..... 337  
 Gopher • WAIS • Conducting a WAIS Search



**Chapter 15 Kids Only** ..... 345

**The Boards** ..... 347

**The Libraries** ..... 348

**Hatrack River** ..... 349

**The Tree House** ..... 351

**TIME Online** ..... 351

**A Word to Parents** ..... 352  
 TOS • Instant Messages • Online Time • Parental Control



**Chapter 16 Education** ..... 355

**Education for Everyone** ..... 356  
 National Geographic Online • The Library of Congress Online  
 • The Electronic University Network • Smithsonian Online

**Learning & Reference for the Student** ..... 364  
 Princeton Review/Student Access • The Academic Assistance Center  
 • College Board Online

**Learning & Reference for the Teacher** ..... 371  
 Teachers' Information Network • CNN NEWSROOM Online  
 • NEA & ASCD Online

**Learning & Reference for the Parent** ..... 376

**The Broadcast Media** ..... 377  
 National Public Radio Outreach Online • C-SPAN Online

**Just Desserts** ..... 379





<b>Chapter 17</b>	<b>Reference Desk</b> .....	<b>383</b>
	<b>Compton's Encyclopedia</b> .....	<b>383</b>
	<b>Reference Help</b> .....	<b>386</b>
	The Academic Research Service • AskERIC Online • Teacher Pager	
	<b>File Search</b> .....	<b>390</b>
	<b>Online Databases</b> .....	<b>394</b>
	AOL Local Access Numbers • BBS Search	



<b>Chapter 18</b>	<b>The Marketplace</b> .....	<b>397</b>
	<b>Classifieds Online</b> .....	<b>397</b>
	<b>Shoppers' Advantage</b> .....	<b>399</b>



<b>Chapter 19</b>	<b>FlashSessions &amp; the Download Manager</b> .....	<b>403</b>
	<b>What Are FlashSessions?</b> .....	<b>404</b>
	<b>Futility Revisited</b> .....	<b>404</b>
	<b>Scheduling FlashSessions</b> .....	<b>410</b>
	FlashSession Setup • Attended FlashSessions • Delayed FlashSessions	
	<b>Reading Flashmail</b> .....	<b>420</b>
	Reading Incoming Mail • Reading Outgoing Mail	
	<b>The Download Manager</b> .....	<b>423</b>
	Selecting Files for Downloading • Running the Download Manager	



**Chapter 20 Ten Best.....431**

**Ten Best Tips ..... 432**

**Ten Best Downloads ..... 436**

**Ten Most-Frequently Asked Questions of  
    Customer Relations ..... 439**

**Ten Best Ways to Make Friends Online ..... 443**

**Ten Best Smileys ..... 445**

**Everybody Out of the Bus! ..... 446**

**Appendix A Keywords ..... 447**

**Appendix B Command Keys..... 477**

**Appendix C Modems, Localities & CCL Files .....479**

**Appendix D On the Road ..... 489**

**Appendix E Preferences .....493**

**Glossary ..... 501**

**Bibliography ..... 525**

**Index ..... 527**





# Starting the Tour

## CHAPTER 1



I'll never forget my first visit to the San Diego Zoo. I took the whole family. The cabby who drove us there told us to take the tour bus immediately upon arrival. After that, he reasoned, we would have an idea of how the zoo was organized and know what exhibits we would want to visit. We took his advice and hopped on the bus first thing.

The San Diego Zoo's buses are of the double-decker variety, and we sat on the top deck, baronially surveying the fauna below. The tour guide—wise San Diegan that he was—sat down below, out of the sun and away from the family of miscreants who shared the top deck with us, littering it with profanity, malcontent children and various artificially sweetened beverages. We never saw the tour guide, but we heard him. In anticipation of the Odious Family Robinson, the zoo had installed a megaphonelike loudspeaker on the top deck that immersed us in tsunamis of sound capable of drowning out not only the complaints of small children, but the bellows of elephants and screeches of orangutans alike. We left the tour at the first stop, wondering if our insurance covered auditory prosthetics.

With that preamble, allow me to welcome you to *The Official America Online Tour Guide*. I have good news: You won't encounter any orangutans, megaphones or tickets on this tour. You won't even see a bus. No signs will warn you to keep your hands and feet inside, and artificially sweetened beverages are permitted.

---

Frontispiece graphic: "Fantasy AOL Spheres," by Gwydian (Mike Wiseman). Use the keywords File Search and then the criterion AOLSPHER.GIF.



You can take this tour without ever leaving home or fraternizing with miscreants; and though I'm a tour guide, I'm here for your singular employ. I will endeavor to inform, entertain and enlighten—forever vigilant and always *sotto voce*. When the tour has concluded, you're welcome to explore on your own, secure in your familiarity with the territory and the attractions therein.

Best of all, the territory we're about to explore is every bit as diverse and wondrous as the San Diego Zoo. It's always at your fingertips, and about the most threatening creature you'll find here is a mouse.

## What Is America Online?

This question isn't as easy as it seems. A term like "America Online" doesn't give many clues as to its composition. We can safely deduce its country of origin (it's in America, all right: Vienna, Virginia, to be exact—just outside Washington, DC; see Figure 1-1). But what's this "online" business? The word's not even in the dictionary.

Figure 1-1:  
America Online  
nestles snugly in  
this office  
building in the  
Virginia forests  
just outside  
Washington, DC.







You can define America Online in many ways. It is, after all, a great many things. It offers abundant resources: the latest news, weather reports, stock quotes, movie and book reviews, databases to research things as diverse as wine or hardware prices, online discussions of everything from politics to system software—even a service for reserving airline tickets, rental cars and hotel rooms.

America Online (AOL) is also an electronic mail (e-mail) service. You can use AOL to exchange e-mail with nearly anyone who uses e-mail, regardless of whether they are a fellow AOL member. If they don't use e-mail, you can use AOL to send them a fax. If they don't use fax, you can use AOL to send them printed mail via the US Postal Service.

America Online is an Internet gateway. The Internet is a vast superset of AOL itself, incorporating thousands of other communications systems from around the world similar to AOL. The extent of a thousand AOLs is almost incomprehensible, but that's what the Internet is, and AOL offers an elegant way of getting there.

America Online is also a community. In Chapter 9, "Entertainment," I compare AOL to the small Oregon town where I live. People are friendly here. They say hello when they pass you on the street, they invite you to their house for a chat, and they go out of their way to be of assistance. AOL does all these things: Instant Messages allow people who are online at the same time to say hello and hold "passing on the street" conversations; Chat Rooms are electronic "rooms"—public or private—where groups of members hold real-time conversations about subjects of their choosing; and Members Helping Members is a message board where members help one another with questions regarding AOL.

But how does all this communication take place? I can recall when I bought my first CD player. It offered more features than a 1973 Cadillac, and it sounded like the Boston Symphony on the bridge of my nose.

At first I was enamored with its technology. CDs were new to me. The player's booming bass and crisp treble commanded my respect; its aurora borealis of indicator lights illuminated my curiosity, and its scores of controls rivaled those of the Starship Enterprise. In the end, however, it's the music I enjoy. Mozart, Haydn, Vivaldi—these are my companions, and I treasure their company the most.

America Online is much the same. At first, ignoring the technology is difficult, but AOL is people—and in the end, you will treasure their company the most.





I am going to pursue the definition of AOL much as one might pursue any new technological acquisition. Over the next few pages, we'll allow its technology to dazzle us, but in the end it will be the community—the people who await us on AOL—who are the true reward.

### **It's a Telecommunications Service**

Now there's a polysyllabic mouthful: "telecommunications." As the term is used here, telecommunications refers to two-way communications via telephone lines. A phone call, in other words, is a form of telecommunicating. Telephone lines are good for things other than phone calls. Fax machines use telephone lines to transfer documents; video phones use them to transmit pictures; and *modems* use them to transfer computer data (more about modems in the next chapter). I'm not talking about expensive, dedicated telephone lines here—I'm talking about the very same telephone lines that are already in our homes and offices.

Now we're getting somewhere. If you have a computer and I have a computer and we each have modems, we can use our existing telephone lines to connect our computers to one another. Once connected this way, our computers can exchange data: text, graphics, sounds, animation—even other computer programs.

Of course, you have to be at your computer and I have to be at mine—at the same time—and we have to know how to make our computers talk to one another, and we have to check for errors encountered in the transmission, and I'm just me and you're just you, and there's only so much computer data two people can exchange with one another before the whole thing gets to be pretty dull.

What we need is a *service* that will store our data so that we don't have to be at our computers at the same time. Instead of calling your computer, I have my computer call the service and store my data and messages there. When you're ready for that data, you can instruct your computer to call the service and retrieve the data at your convenience.

As long as we're imagining a service, we might imagine it to automate all the electronic technicalities as well. If we imagine it right, the service can mediate communications between the two computers, check for errors (and fix them when they're encountered) and even dial the telephone.



And who's to say that you and I should have the service all to ourselves? We can let everyone else with a computer in on it as well, regardless of the type of computer they own. Carried to its extreme, this scenario might result in hundreds of thousands—millions, actually—of people utilizing the service, exchanging and storing thousands of computer files. Most of this data can be public rather than private, so the exchange becomes multilateral.

Which is precisely what telecommunications services—and AOL—are: a vast network of “members,” each of whom uses a computer, a modem and a telephone line to connect with a common destination—to “go online.” Members can exchange public and private files; they can send and receive e-mail; and members who are online at the same time can “chat” in real time—they can even play online games with one another.

And what does this service cost? The economies of scale allow expenses to be distributed among the members. Moreover, even though AOL is near Washington, DC, few members pay for long-distance calls. America Online has local telephone numbers in more than 800 cities in the contiguous United States. Even if you live in the sticks, chances are you can find a local number you can call, or one that's a “short” long-distance call away.

### **It's One Big Thunder-Lizard Computer**

Another way of defining AOL is by describing its hardware. Coordinating thousands of simultaneous phone calls and storing tens of thousands of files requires one Thunder Lizard of a computer complex. No little Stegosaurus will do. We're talking Brontosaurus here, a beastie who relocates continents whenever he gets the urge to sneeze. Forget prefixes like kilo and mega. Think giga and terra. When they turn on the power to this thing, lights dim all along the Eastern seaboard.

### **Open Architecture**

I hate to disappoint you, but America Online isn't a single Brontosaurus-sized mainframe; it is, in fact, a number of refrigerator-sized computers, each having more in common with the adaptable Velociraptor than a leviathan as benign as the Brontosaurus.





Figure 1-2: A few of the many systems that comprise the heartbeat of America Online. A number of manufacturer's products are represented here, each selected on the basis of its suitability to a specific task. The homogenization factor is open architecture, which allows all of these diverse systems to work in concert.



By employing a technique called open architecture, AOL is able to utilize hardware, software and communications systems from a variety of manufacturers, each optimized for a specific task. America Online's open architecture permits it to use the most powerful hardware running the fastest software. The open communication architecture runs on the fastest local area and the most powerful wide area networks. The open architecture is AOL's key to the scalability it needs to keep up with its meteoric growth and the unpredictable mutations of the telecommunications industry.

### Common Carriers

If you wanted to send a package to a friend across the country, you could probably hop in your car and drive it there yourself. Compared to the alternatives, driving across the country would be a perilous journey and would cost a fortune.

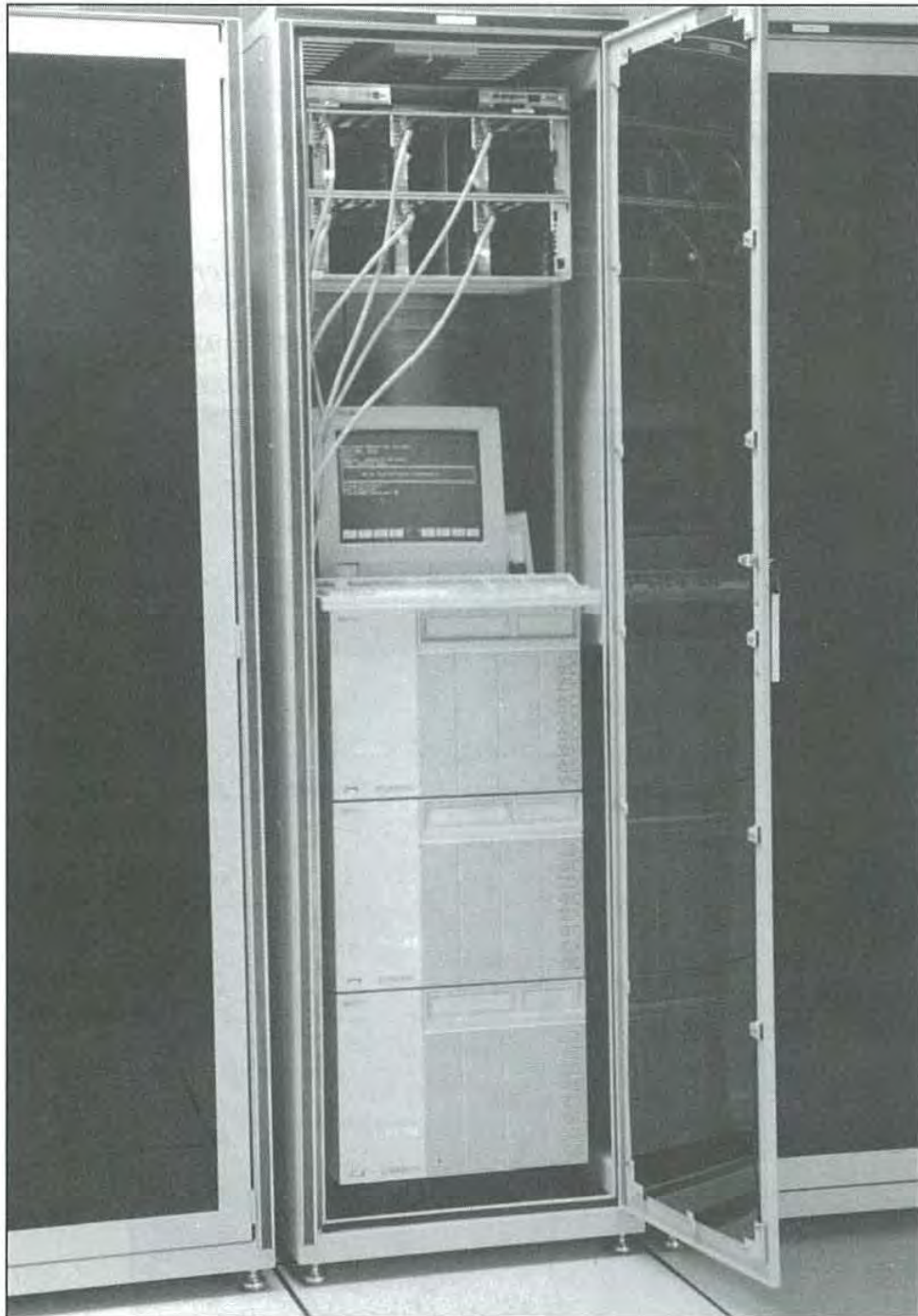
More likely, you'd hire a *common carrier*—a service such as United Parcel Service or Federal Express—to deliver the package for you. For a fraction of what it would cost you to do the job yourself, common carriers can do it more reliably, less expensively and much more conveniently.

For much the same reason, AOL hires common carriers to deliver goods to its members. And typical of AOL, it hires multiple common



carriers to ensure reliability. SprintNet, a service of US Sprint, is the common carrier AOL most often uses in the United States. (Figure 1-3 shows SprintNet equipment at AOL.) Datapac, a subsidiary of Bell Canada, serves Canadian members. These common carriers offer *nodes*—local telephone numbers—in most cities in North America. They charge AOL for phone calls (placed or received) just as Federal Express would charge you to deliver a package.

Figure 1-3:  
High-speed  
telecommunications  
equipment in use  
at America Online  
Headquarters.







Again, the economies of scale operate to our advantage. Thousands of clients, of which AOL is only one, use these long-distance providers. Chances are when you're not using one of your local nodes, some corporate computer is phoning data to a parent mainframe in New Jersey or Chicago. The cost of this service is so insignificant that it's covered by your membership. No matter how many hours you're online per month, AOL never charges extra for the call. Indeed, the only connect charges are to those few members who have to make a long-distance call to reach a node.

### It's Software Installed in Your Computer

Conceptualizing AOL as nodes and mainframe computers isn't very comforting. America Online is much more parochial than that. For many of us, AOL is software in our Macs—software that arrived on that little disk provided in *The Official America Online Membership Kit*. (Figure 1-4 shows the AOL logo.)

Figure 1-4:  
America Online's  
logo appears  
whenever you  
run the software  
installed on  
your Mac.





That's more like it. The software you use on your Mac to sign on to AOL more accurately represents the personality of the service than anything we've discussed so far. It makes noises, it's resplendent with windows and icons, and it automates those tasks and procedures that formerly were responsible for excluding most semi-normal people from using an online service.

Here's what I mean. Nearly every telecommunications program assumes you know how to set certain arcane but necessary attributes and protocols such as data bits, stop bits, parity or flow. Frankly, although I've used telecommunications software for years and though I have adjusted my data bits and parity, I have no idea what they are, and I have always been kind of nervous about shooting in the dark like that. America Online, on the other hand, uses its own custom software at both ends of the line. After you install the software on your Mac (a simple process I describe in the next chapter), all the technicalities are coordinated by the AOL host computer and your Mac. They simply talk things over and make adjustments as required. This is as it should be. People shouldn't be asked to do these things; that's why we have machines. America Online's software simply has no controls for setting data bits, stop bits, parity or flow (see Figure 1-5). It's all taken care of for you.

Figure 1-5:  
America Online's  
software never  
asks you to set (or  
even think about)  
data bits, stop  
bits, parity or flow.





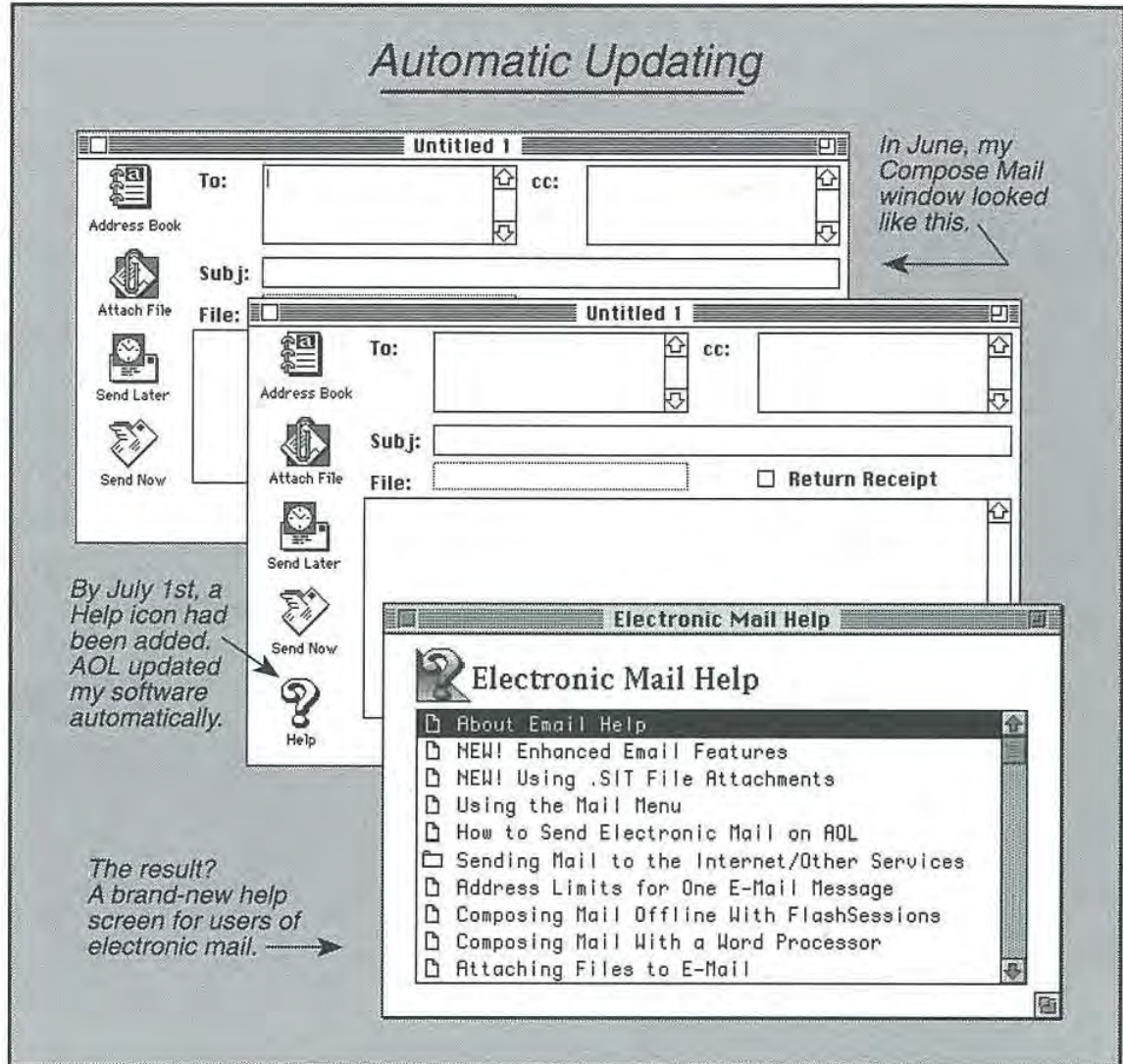
Amazingly, the software is self-configuring. Whenever you sign on, a behind-the-scenes dialog transpires between your Mac and the AOL host computer. In effect, your Mac says, "Hey! Do you have any new features I should know about?" If new features are available, your Mac requests them from the host and adds them to its version of the local software (the copy of AOL that resides on your hard drive). This capability is significant: At any point, AOL can add features to the service and incorporate them immediately. No new software releases have to be sent out. No interminable decimal places have to be added to the version number. That convenience means the AOL staff can add features whenever they please. No disk duplication and mass mailings are required. Upgrade costs to you are nonexistent, and they hardly amount to anything at AOL either. America Online's staff operates in an environment that encourages, rather than stifles, improvement. Perhaps best of all, you don't have to lift a finger to take advantage of whatever changes or additions AOL makes to its service. Just sign on as usual, and you immediately have the most recent version available. (See Figure 1-6.)

Note: I'm discussing minor upgrades here. Major upgrades—from version 1 to version 2 for example—are handled with disk duplication and mass mailings. Minor upgrades are usually handled as described above; often members aren't even aware of them when they occur.





Figure 1-6: In July 1992, midway through the first edition of this book, America Online added a help icon to the Compose Mail window. The update took place automatically and online. No disks were sent out. No costs were incurred. America Online simply got better.



We're getting closer to the mark. The phrase "user-friendly" is properly used to describe this service. America Online's Mac software is real Mac software: familiar, predictable and comfortable. The File menu says Open, Save, Close and Quit. Its windows have title bars and close boxes. It even takes advantage of all those esoteric Mac commands you've come to know, such as Copy, Cut and Paste.

Another unique aspect of the AOL for Mac software is its interface and communication strategy. Though it's highly graphical, none of those graphical elements are transferred to your Mac online. Transferring graphics online takes time—much more than transferring text, for instance—which could make the service as sluggish as a hound in July. Instead, all of AOL's graphical components are stored on your hard disk. Only text is transferred. This capability makes AOL much faster than other graphically oriented services and saves you money in connect-time charges.



Here's the point: AOL is an advanced and aggressive telecommunications service that grows daily and contains the features necessary to accommodate that growth. The software features I described previously reflect a progressive attitude, and that attitude is a better way of defining AOL.

### **It's a Resource**

News, sports, weather—sure you can get them on radio and television, but not necessarily when you need or want them. You can get them in a newspaper, too; but it's going to cost the environment a tree or two, the pictures are fuzzy, and about all you can do with a newspaper you've read is throw it away (consult the Environmental Club—clubs are described in Chapter 13, "Clubs & Interests"—for recycling information). America Online offers the news, sports and weather as well, available at your convenience and without sacrificing any trees. It's in electronic form, too; so you can file it, search it and include it in documents of your own.

This past winter, I kept tabs on China's nuclear testing in Today's News (discussed in Chapter 6), tracked the meager investments in my portfolio (discussed in Chapter 10, "Personal Finance") and monitored the progress of the Israeli/Palestinian peace accord while browsing the Newsstand (discussed in Chapter 7). I researched the purchase of a new hard disk for my computer in the Marketplace (discussed in Chapter 17) and actually bought that hard disk using Comp-U-Store. I booked both airplane and auto rentals for a trip to New Mexico using EAASY SABRE (discussed in Chapter 11, "Travel"). I constantly search the online video reviews before I rent a tape (the Entertainment Department is discussed in Chapter 9), and I check Wine & Dine Online (Chapter 13, "Clubs & Interests") for recommendations before I hazard the racks of wines at the shop down the street. Past issues of *MacWorld*, *National Geographic* and *Smithsonian*, and even *CNN*, are online for my review, as is *Comptons Encyclopedia* and the Gray Lady: the *New York Times*. I recently sold my old car after consulting AutoVantage (described in Chapter 17). As a professional member of the desktop publishing community, I constantly collect graphics (AOL has thousands of files online—described in Chapter 5, "Computing"; also see Figure 1-7), fonts (see Figure 1-8) and utilities, and the Desktop Publishing Forum is one of my favorite haunts.





Figure 1-7: Just a few of the thousands of graphics available in America Online's file libraries. ("Lise2," by David Palermo; "Dragonfly," from the Graphics Forum; and "High Tech Laurel & Hardy," by Lou Moccia.)

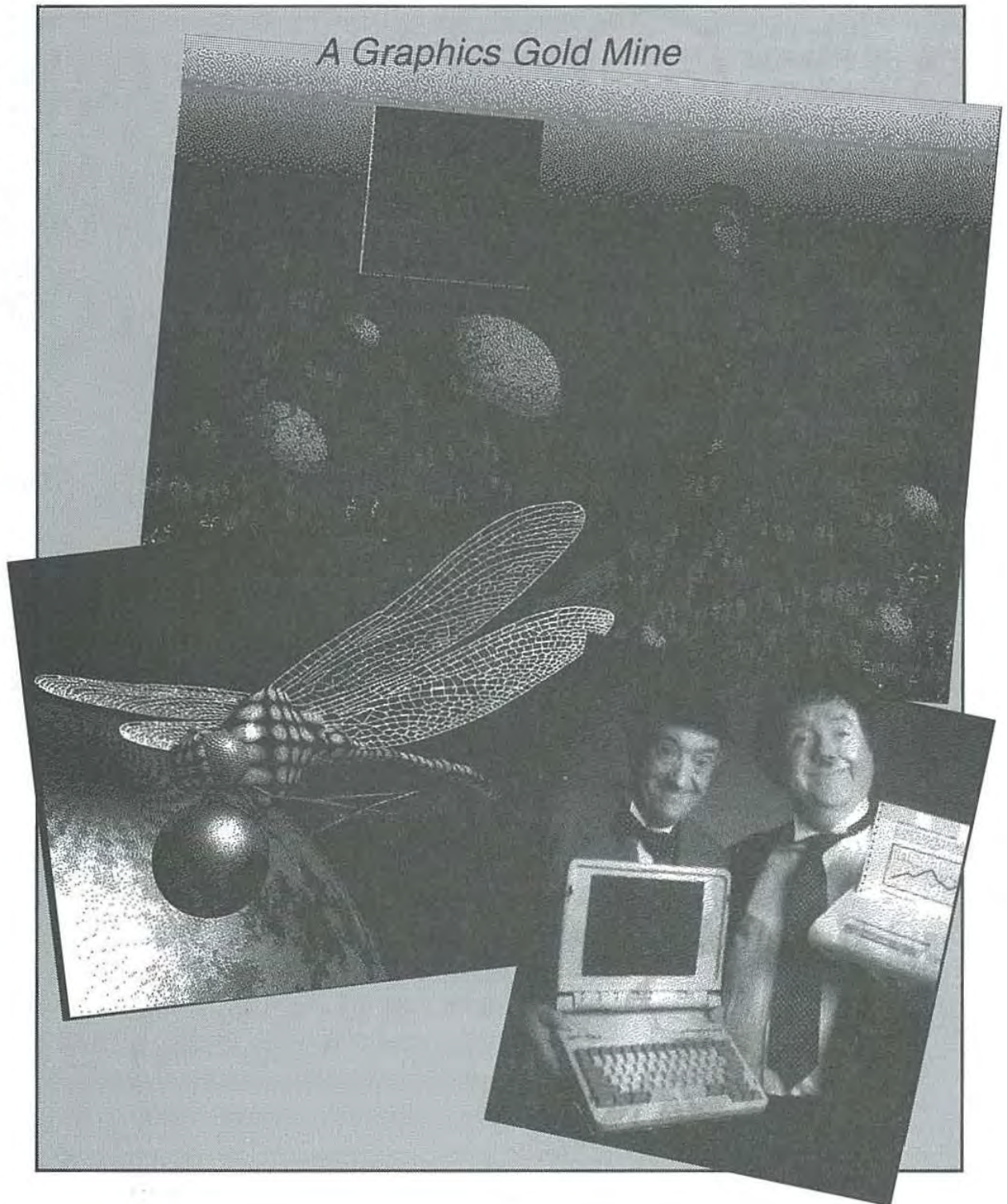
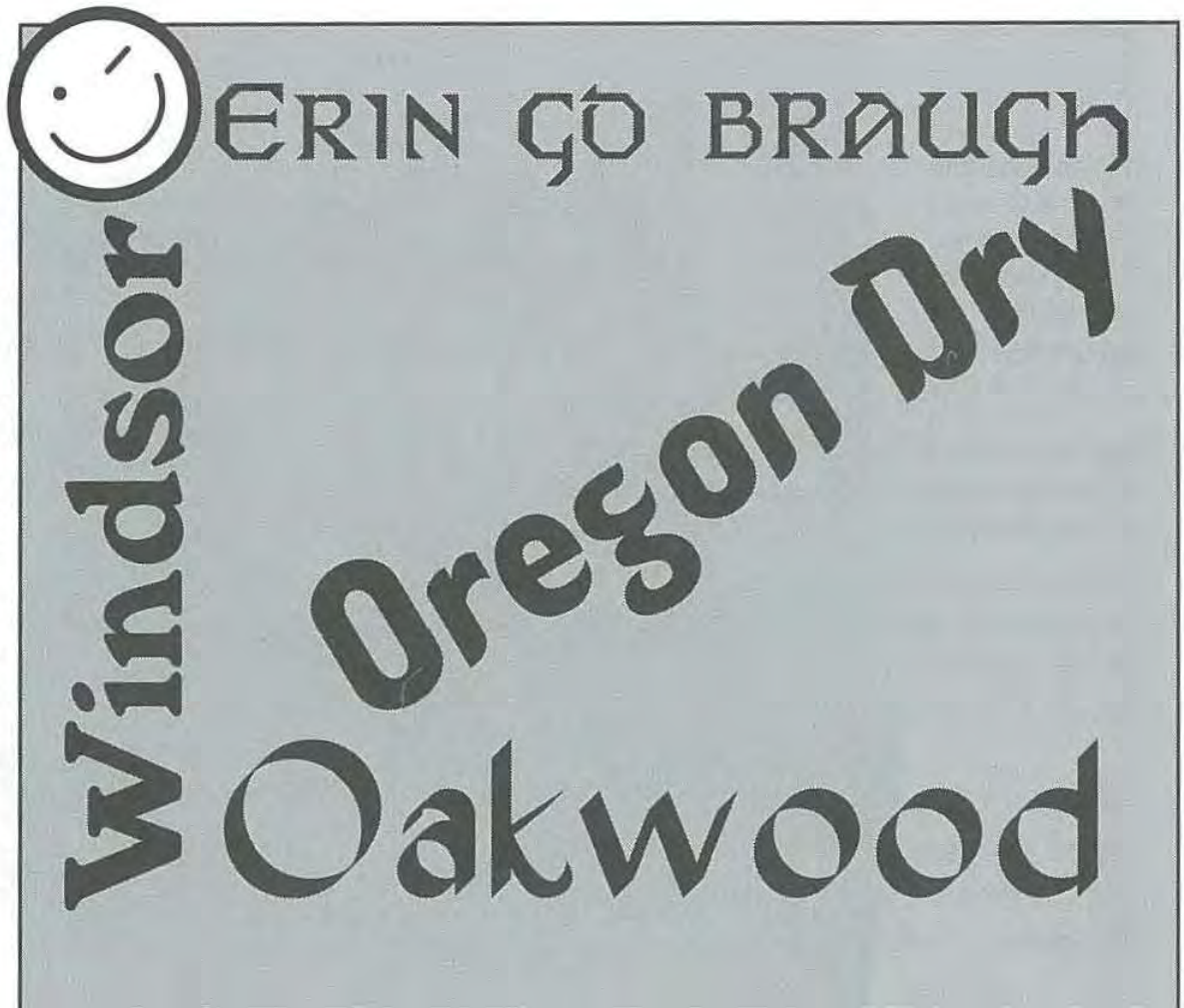






Figure 1-8: A quintet of fonts, all downloaded from the Desktop Publishing Forum. At top, *Eire* is by Paul Glomski; *Oregon Dry* is by Pat Snyder; Jim Pearson's *Oakwood ProFont* is particularly elegant; Brian Hendrix's *Windsor* is a traditional, Old World font; and Jonathan Macagba's *Smiley Face* is great for illuminating e-mail. Most are shareware and cost about \$5 each.



In other words, you could describe AOL as a resource of almost infinite potential. You don't have to drive anywhere to use it; it's continuously maintained and updated; and it's all electronic—available for any use you can imagine. Many members find the resource potential alone ample justification for signing on to AOL, but to limit your participation this way would be a disservice to AOL and to yourself. Above all, AOL is people: friends, associates, consultants—even lovers. It's a resource all right, but it's also a community, and therein lies its greatest value.

### **It's a Community**


I've taken the easy way out. Yes, AOL is a telecommunications service. Yes, it's the host computer. Yes, it's software in your Mac; and yes, it's a resource. But that's like saying that Christmas is just another day of the year. There's much more to it than that. Christmas is reverence and good things; but for many of us, Christmas means people: family,





friends and community. What really defines AOL is its people, as well. America Online is a *community*. My dictionary defines community as, "A social group sharing common characteristics or interests," and that is the best definition I can imagine for AOL.

As members, we have common interests, we all have computers, and we love to share. *That's* what AOL is all about. After a few weeks, the novelty of interconnection and graphical images wears off. After a few weeks, we stop wondering about the host computer and data bits. After a few weeks, we all discover the true soul of AOL, and that soul is its people.



### Steve Case

I have never asked AOL President Steve Case where he lives. It would surprise and disappoint me to learn that he doesn't live in the suburbs: Steve Case is a character study of the suburban next-door neighbor. He's a clean-cut, casual guy. He wears rumpled chinos, cotton sportshirts and no tie. He looks as if he's about to mow the lawn. He took me to lunch at the Ringmaster's Pub in the Barnum and Bailey building next door. (America Online's building is next door to the world headquarters of the Ringling Brothers Circus.) We had iced tea and sandwiches. That's Steve's idea of a business lunch.

Steve's personality is reflected everywhere at AOL. I've never seen a necktie or a closed office door during my visits there. More important, the people in the AOL offices reflect the spirit of community. They never use titles. No one wears ID badges, not even guests. Everyone calls everyone else by his or her first name. Conferences happen in hallways.

Steve's eyes sparkle when the conversation turns to community. He sends e-mail to every new member and hopes for a reply. He's the president of the company, yet he spends as much time conversing with members as he does with his staff. Everyone calls him Steve.

With Steve Case steering the ship, AOL remains, foremost, a community. All corporate decisions are based on that concept; every change benefits the community. That's the way Steve wants it to be. If he could have his way, he'd have us all out to Virginia for a barbecue on the green. You'd know who he was the moment you got there: he'd be the one turning burgers on the grill. You couldn't ask for a better neighbor.

When I first signed on to write this book, community was the last thing on my mind. I have been a telecommunicator for years. I thought I'd seen it all. Now, however, I spend as much of my online time corresponding with friends—new friends in every part of the coun-



try—as I do conducting research. In Chapter 4, I admit to getting despondent if I don't hear the familiar mail notification when the In the Spotlight screen comes up. Throughout this book, I'll offer little tips on how to make friends online; follow these tips, and you'll become as much a part of this community as I am.

You really couldn't do much better.

## How to Use This Book

*The America Online Tour Guide* serves two purposes: (1) It's the official documentation for the use of America Online; and (2) it's a guidebook for the explorer. As documentation, the book should be thoroughly indexed, strictly organized and pithy. As a guide, the book should offer entertainment, insight and advice. These goals are somewhat disparate, but not necessarily incompatible.

Fortunately, the people at AOL have an altruistic attitude toward the documentation for their service. *The America Online Membership Kit & Tour Guide* is a book, not a manual. I'm an independent author, not a staff technical writer. And AOL chose a traditional publisher—Ventana Press—to produce and distribute this book; it's not an AOL production. I therefore have the autonomy and elbow room to explore the subject with you independently, thoroughly and candidly. The people at AOL are to be commended for their courage in choosing this path. It could be perilous. Confidence in their product, however, emboldens them, and rightfully so.

## How to Use This Book as Documentation

As you no doubt already know, documentation can be dull. Few people take a software manual to the hammock for a lazy afternoon of reading. The universe of technical documentation is far from the universe AOL inhabits. America Online is diverse, abstract and personable—hardly documentation material. Nonetheless, I've included a number of organizational and reference tools to serve the documentation need.

## Finding Answers

I want you to be able to turn to *The America Online Tour Guide* whenever you have a question about AOL. I want you to be able to find the answer to your question with a minimum of effort, no matter how many different places the subject may appear in the book. Pursuant to that, a number of tools are at your disposal:





- ▲ The *table of contents* lists titles, section heads and subheads for every chapter. When you need information on a specific subject, turn first to the table of contents. Nine times out of ten, it will be all you need.
- ▲ A thorough *index* appears at the end of the book, with references to subjects, procedures and departments. If the subject you're after doesn't appear in the table of contents, turn to the index.
- ▲ A listing of primary *keywords* is the first appendix item. Keywords are the interstate highway system at AOL. If you want to get somewhere in a hurry, use a keyword. As you discover places that appeal to you, grab your yellow pen and highlight the keyword corresponding to that location. Eventually, you'll commit a number of keywords to memory (or place them on your Go To menu, a process described in Chapter 13, "Clubs & Interests"), and the keyword appendix will have served its purpose.
- ▲ A *listing of Command-key combinations* follows the keywords list. Few people memorize every Command-key combination for every program they use, but most people memorize some. If you're an occasional (or frequent) user of Command keys (or if you'd like to learn a few shortcuts that will cut down on mouse use), refer to Appendix B of the book.
- ▲ A *glossary* of terms used in the book follows the appendices. The glossary is especially thorough in its inclusion of telecommunications terminology. I may never define "parity" in the text—with AOL, you never have to bother with it—but I want you to be able to find out what it means if you're curious.

### Departmental Listings

Starting with Chapter 5, each chapter explores a department available online at AOL. If Entertainment is your game (forgive the pun), read Chapter 9. If you're interested in the Computing Department, read Chapter 5. America Online is infinitely too large and diverse to explore these departments thoroughly. Instead, I've attempted to capture the personality of each department with glimpses into a few areas of particular interest. Wherever possible, I offer insight into the department's features: where to find the really good stuff.



### **Subject Listings**

Departments are also vehicles for exploring specific subject areas. In Chapter 13, I introduce the concept of the forum; in Chapter 5, we explore the subject of downloading. These subjects can be complex, and to document them without some relief could be as dry as white bread. Instead, I've made a sandwich of each technical subject, flavoring the presentation with the diversity of a department. This approach, I hope, will make for more effective documentation: If you're enjoying yourself, you'll learn more about the subject. Associating subjects with departments also provides a context that's practical rather than theoretical; learning by doing is always more effective than listening to a lecture.

### **A Documentation Strategy**

My personal strategy for the use of software documentation is to first spend a half-hour browsing. With no specific need and in no particular order, I just thumb through the manual, trying to get a feeling for its contents and organization. I look for organizational signposts (chapter titles, icons, sidebars, heads and subheads); I peek at the index; I read a paragraph or two from sections that strike my fancy. This kind of random orientation buoys my confidence and orients my perspective.

If you're a new member and haven't yet installed the software or signed on, read Chapter 2, "Making the Connection," next. It's a "hand-holder," documenting every step of the installation and initial sign-on process. The chapter includes a suggested initial online session.

From then on—perhaps once a week—pick a department and tour it with me at your own pace. While we're there, we'll explore a procedural subject as well as the department itself. Each chapter should take about an hour. When we're finished, you will not only be familiar with the department, you'll learn about a feature that will make your online experience more productive and fun.

### **How to Use This Book as a Book**

I would be flattered if you would read this book for the pleasure of it. As I spend time on AOL, I'm struck by its diversity. Last night I spent an hour contemplating the universe on the Online Home Companion (my favorite forum—forums are described in Chapter 13). This afternoon I visited the Lobby for some companionship. Tonight I plan to attend a Rotunda event (which we explore in Chapter 12, "People

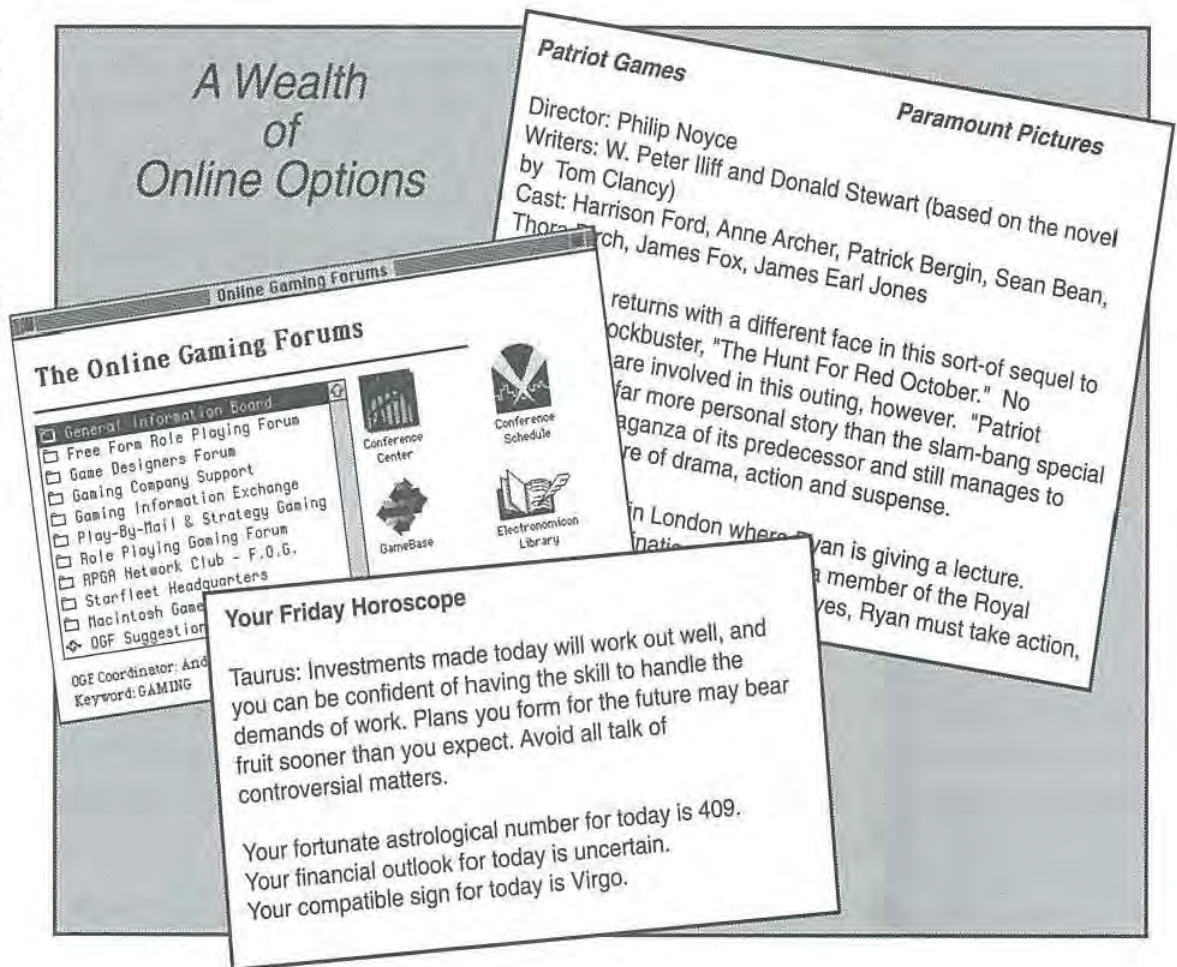


Connection"). Online visits are often unstructured. Your rhythm is syncopated and your interests wander.

I have tried to organize this Tour Guide in much the same fashion. I have liberally splashed gobbets of material throughout the book, often with no other intention in mind than to relieve the page of textual tedium. I want your thoughts to wander; I want to pique your curiosity; I want to delight and provoke and intrigue you (see Figure 1-9). That's what AOL does: it discourages linearity and encourages randomness. It demands your regard and rewards your return.

I hope this book does the same.

Figure 1-9: A video review, the title screen for the Online Gaming Forum and a daily horoscope. These examples are just a tiny slice of the spectrum of opportunity that awaits you on America Online.







## Moving On

Are you comfortable? Our journey is about to begin. Reach into that pocket in the seat in front of you and pull out the program. Here's where we're about to go:

- ▲ Chapter 2, "Making the Connection," walks you through the setup and initial sign-on process. Just as it relieves you from worrying about the complexities of most of the other technical aspects of telecommunications, AOL automates most of the process of getting started as well, so Chapter 2 isn't too technical. You'll be up and running in no time.
- ▲ Chapter 3, "Online Help & the Members," serves as an introduction to the AOL software—especially all of its offers of help. We'll pull down menus and peek at dialog boxes. We'll do most of this work off line, but you'll need your Mac (and a modem) handy. Eventually we'll sign on, visit the Lobby and get to know an online guide. Guides are usually there, waiting to help. We'll examine the members' directory and see if we can make a friend.
- ▲ Chapter 4 will teach you everything you need to know to master AOL's e-mail feature. We'll put some names into our Address Book, send (and receive) some mail, and attach a file to be uploaded to a friend.
- ▲ Chapter 5 goes for the heart: the Computing Department. We'll visit the Mac Operating System Forum, look over *MacWorld* magazine, catch up on the latest computing news and opinion, and solicit some assistance from a software vendor. Along the way, we'll explore the process of downloading files. We'll download a few for ourselves, decompress those that require it and perhaps upload a file in return.
- ▲ Chapter 6, "Today's News," reveals AOL's new news feature, including not only news, but business, entertainment, sports and weather. You can search them to find the stories of interest to you, and they're all updated on a continuing basis. We'll keep a log of our visit for review later, when we're off line and rested.



- ▲ Chapter 7 discusses the Newsstand. America Online features alliances with a number of contemporary magazines and newspapers, including *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Bicycling*, *Car & Driver*, *Consumer Reports*, *Chicago Tribune*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Road & Track*, *Popular Photography*, *WIRED* and dozens of others. The Newsstand is where you'll find them all. You can search these articles too (including back issues), talk with the editors, and in many cases download the graphics that accompany the stories.
- ▲ Chapter 8 is dedicated to sports fans. In addition to baseball, basketball, football, hockey, tennis and golf, there are even games you can play yourself.
- ▲ Chapter 9, "Entertainment," is simply for the fun of it. We'll read a few movie reviews, peek at a cartoon or two, have a (virtual) beer at LaPub and play a game or two.
- ▲ Chapter 10 explores AOL's extensive Personal Finance Department. There we'll start our portfolio of investments (cash optional), consult Morningstar and Hoover's financial profiles, and consult Real Estate Online.
- ▲ Chapter 11 offers a break from the workaday world, as we visit the Travel Department. We'll consult the experts (and fellow travelers) before we plan our dream vacation, then we'll book our reservations and set up correspondence with other members before we leave.
- ▲ Chapter 12 explores People Connection. We'll wipe the sweat from our palms, walk into the Lobby and say hello. We'll check out a few of AOL's Chat Rooms and see who we can find there. Perhaps we'll visit the Center Stage and participate in a game show.
- ▲ Chapter 13, "Clubs & Interests," explores AOL's clubs. Perhaps we'll try Wine & Dine Online, the Environmental and Star Trek Forums, and BikeNet. We'll learn about forums, read a few messages and post one of our own.



- ▲ Chapter 14 introduces the Internet and AOL's "Internet Connection." In the telecommunications industry, AOL is to Walla Walla what the Internet is to the universe. Over 30 million people visit the Internet every day, downloading files, exchanging mail, and acquiring data. America Online is your key to this universe, *if* you know enough to keep from getting stuck in orbit. This chapter is your official Internet primer.
- ▲ Chapter 15 reveals one of the newest departments: "Kids Only." Prominent among the offerings is KOOL (Kids Only OnLine), but Disney is here, and KIDSNET, and games, and TIME for Kids.
- ▲ Chapter 16 is devoted to education. *Comptons Encyclopedia* is here, of course, but so is the Online Campus. Perhaps we'll enroll in a class, or enroll in a correspondence course through the International Correspondence Schools. We'll make a special visit to the Library of Congress as well.
- ▲ Chapter 17 introduces The Marketplace, where you can buy or sell anything from computers to cars. And *Consumer Reports* magazine—past issues and present—ensures an informed decision.
- ▲ The Reference Desk is the subject of Chapter 18. The Career Center is here, along with Barron's Booknotes, the Bible and the CNN Newsroom.
- ▲ Chapter 19 explores FlashSessions and the Download Manager. This chapter covers the heavyweight stuff, but it's also some of the best telecommunications software ever offered. Even if you never use it, you've got to read this chapter just to appreciate two of the high-end features AOL offers.
- ▲ Chapter 20 offers my ten best ten-best lists—the ten best tips for using AOL, the ten most frequently asked questions of the AOL customer support team, the ten best files for downloading—that kind of thing. You'll be among the online illuminati after you've finished this chapter.





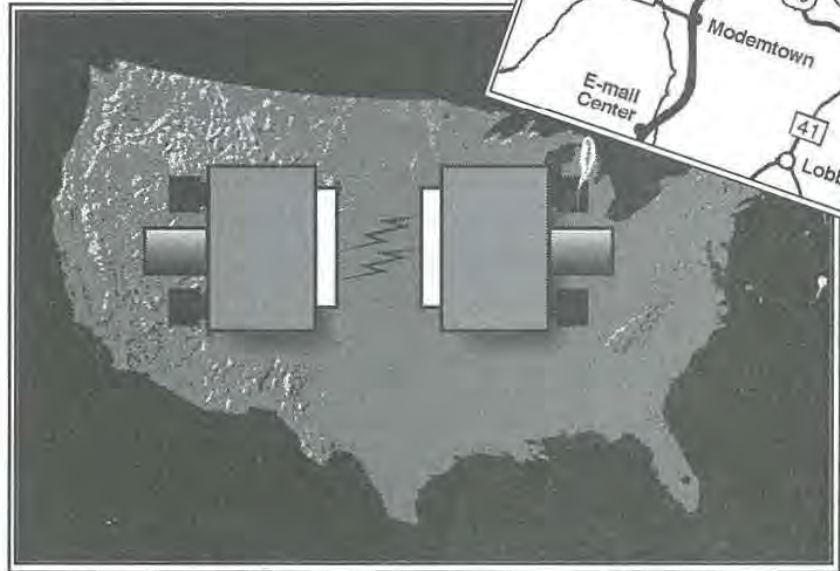
▲ Five appendices conclude the book. A keyword listing offers warp-speed navigation through the AOL universe. The Command-key reference helps you Get It Done Fast; the “Modems, Localities & CCL Files” appendix is for the digitheads among us; an on-the-road reference serves those who take AOL to remote locations; and the “Preferences” appendix shows you how to configure AOL just the way you want. At the end of the book, an extensive glossary defines all those cryptic terms that have become requisite adjuncts to the telecommunications lexicon.

You’d better fasten your seat belt. Sometimes the ride gets a little bumpy, and when I get to talking, I forget to steer—hand gestures and all that, you know. Don’t worry: I haven’t lost a passenger yet. Have your camera ready, you have lots of stuff to see. And relax. Smile a bit. You’re five years old again and Christmas morning is only a turn of the page away....



# Making the Connection

## CHAPTER 2



If you have never used America Online—if you have never even installed the software—this chapter’s for you. It’s written for the agnostic, the novice—those who hold disks in their sweaty palms and wonder if they are stalwart enough to connect their Macs to the outside world.

For most of us, computers are autonomous and independent. The only external device we’ve ever encountered is a printer. Our dialog with the computer has always been a singular one—isolated and solitary. We might personify our Macs. We might give them names and even voices, and we might think of their error messages and dialog boxes as communication, but we know better.

Computers don’t think. Computers don’t respond with imagination or indignation or intelligence. There are no threats to us here. Connecting to AOL will put human intelligence at the other end of the line. America Online isn’t just a computer in Virginia; it’s people, and people online expect a dialog. People respond, with innovation and humor. This is not the isolation we have come to expect of our computers.

So far, our ordered universe has been predictable and familiar. Why mess with it?

---

Frontispiece terrain map by Gail P. Thelin and Richard J. Pike, published by the US Geological Survey. Superimposed are the connector icons from the AOL sign-on screen. The terrain map (without the connectors) is available in the libraries of the Macintosh Graphics forum. Use the keywords File Search, and search using the criterion USGA. GIF files such as this (and how to view them) are discussed in Chapter 5, “Computing.”





Because there's more to life, that's why. Think of your first car, your first love, your first child. Each was shrouded in anxiety, and each was resplendent with reward. We're talking about discovery here, and while the AOL opportunity might not rank with love and birth, it's an opportunity one should not deny.

Before you read any further, I want you to understand that this chapter describes the process of installing the AOL software and making the first connection with AOL itself. If you already have an established AOL account, then you probably won't need to read much of this chapter. Feel free to skim it or skip ahead to another part of the tour—I'll catch up with you soon enough.

## Things You'll Need

Let's take inventory here. There are a few things you need before you can connect with America Online. No doubt you already have them, but let's be sure.

### The Computer

You need a Mac, of course. Almost any Macintosh will do—a Mac Plus or better. That's one of the benefits of telecommunications: nearly any computer is adequate. I bought my first Macintosh in 1984. It's a bandaged relic, but I still use it to sign on to AOL and for that purpose it has power to spare.

You will need at least 700k of available random-access memory (RAM) and a hard disk with at least 3mb of free space, but that's about it. If computers were cars, AOL would run on a Yugo.

### The Telephone Line

You need access to a telephone line. Your standard residential phone line is fine. A multiline business telephone might be more of a challenge. What's really important is that your telephone plug into a modular telephone jack (called an *RJ-11 jack*, if you care about that sort of thing). It's the one with the square hole measuring about a quarter-inch on a side.

Whenever you're online, your telephone is out of commission for voice calls. It's as if someone is on the phone and you want to use an extension, except that you'll *never* want to eavesdrop on an AOL ses-



sion. The screeching sound that modems make when communicating with each other is about as pleasant as fingernails on a blackboard—and about as intelligible.

### Call Waiting

Call Waiting—a feature offered by most telephone companies today—allows you to receive notice of an incoming call while you're on the phone. This plays havoc with telecommunications signals. If you have Call Waiting, you'll need to disable it whenever you're online. It's discussed in Chapter 20, "Ten Best." Look in the index under "Call Waiting."

### The Membership Kit

America Online membership kits come in a number of forms, but they all have some things in common: they include a disk, a temporary account number and a temporary password. *The Official America Online Membership Kit & Tour Guide* includes a disk, account number and password in a little plastic pouch affixed to the inside back cover. Find all of this stuff, and set it by your Mac. Keep this book nearby as well.

It's a good idea to make a copy of the AOL disk right now. It's not copy-protected: standard Macintosh disk-copying routines work just fine. Your Macintosh manual contains the necessary instructions for copying a floppy, if you don't already know how. Put the original AOL disk away somewhere safe. You never know when you might need it again.

### The Modem

A modem (short for *modulator/demodulator*) is a device that converts computer data into audible tones that the telephone system can transmit. Modems are required at both ends of the line: the AOL host computer has one too.

Modems are rated according to their data transmission speed. If you're shopping for a modem, get one rated at 9600 bps (bits per second—see the sidebar) or faster. Modem prices are quite reasonable nowadays—even 14.4-kbps modems are generally less than \$150. Modems rated at 9600 bps are fast and capable of extracting every bit of performance AOL has to offer. Modems rated at 14.4 kbps are capable





of extracting all of the performance AOL has promised for the foreseeable future. If you can afford it, get a 14.4-kbps modem. You'll regret it if you buy anything slower.

### Baud Rates

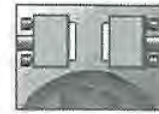
The term *baud rate* refers to the signaling rate, or the number of times per second the signal changes. You might hear this term confused with *bits per second* (bps), which isn't entirely accurate. By using modern electronic wizardry, today's modems can transmit two, three or four bits with each change of signal, increasing the speed of data transfer considerably. Since it takes eight bits to make a byte, a rate of 9600 bps means that anywhere between 1200 and 4800 bytes per second can be transferred. A *byte* is the amount of data required to describe a single character of text. In other words, a baud rate of 9600 should transmit at least 1200 characters—about 15 lines of text—per second.

Alas, the world is an imperfect place—especially the world of phone lines. If static or interference of any kind occurs on the line, data transmission is garbled. And even one misplaced bit can destroy the integrity of an entire file. To address the problem, AOL validates the integrity of received data. In plain English, this means that the host computer sends a packet of information (a couple of seconds' worth) to your Mac, then waits for the Mac to say, "I got that!" before it sends the next packet. Validation like this means things run a little slower than they would without validation, but it's necessary. We're probably down to a minimum of 1000 characters per second once we factor in the time it takes to accommodate data validation.

Then there's noise. You've heard it: static on the line. If you think it interferes with voice communication, it's murder on data. Often your Mac says, "That packet was no good—send it again," and the host computer complies. The reliability of any particular telephone connection is capricious. Some are better than others. Noise, however, is a definite factor, and packets have to be re-sent once in a while. Now we're probably down to a minimum of 900 characters per second on a good telephone line on a good day—a little over 11 lines of text per second at 9600 bps.

In other words, a 9600-bps modem isn't four times faster than a 2400-bps model, and a 2400-bps modem isn't twice as fast as one rated at 1200 bps. On the other hand, a 2400-bps modem doesn't cost twice as much as a 1200-bps model, and a 9600-bps screamer doesn't cost four times as much as a 2400-bps pedestrian model. What I'm trying to say is that in terms of baud per buck, 9600 is your best buy.





I prefer modems with speakers and lights. A speaker lets you hear the phone being dialed and the modem at the other end answering—very reassuring stuff. At that point—when the connection is established—most modem speakers become silent so you don't have to listen to the screeching sound of two computers talking to each other.

As I said earlier, lights are nice. My modem has nine of them. I don't understand most of them, but they look important, and the one marked "RD" (receiving data) is worth watching when you are downloading a file (I discuss downloading in Chapter 5, "Computing"). It should stay on almost continuously. If, during a download, your "RD" light is off more often than it's on, you've got a noisy phone line or the system is extremely busy. Whatever the cause, it's best to halt the download (AOL always leaves a Cancel button on the screen for that purpose) and resume it another time. That's why I advise buying a modem with lights: if you don't have them, how can you tell what's going on?

A number of Macs now offer internal modems: modems inside the Mac itself. If you have an internal modem, you won't tie up the modem connection on the back of your Mac (leaving it available for some other purpose) but you won't have any lights to watch either. Life is full of compromises.

If your modem is the external variety, it will need power of some kind. Some external modems use batteries, but most use AC power and plug into the wall. Be sure a socket is available.

Most important, be sure you have the proper cables. For an external modem, you need two: one to connect the modem to the Mac and another to connect the modem to the phone jack. The modem-to-phone-jack cable bundled with many modems rarely exceeds six feet. If the distance between your modem and your phone jack exceeds that distance, you can buy an extension cable at a phone, electronics or hardware store. Extension cables are standard equipment and are inexpensive. Check your modem's manual to see if your modem requires a hardware-handshaking cable. If it does, it's essential that you use one, as it will provide for a more reliable connection at 9600 baud.

Few external modems include a Mac-to-modem cable. You will probably have to purchase one if you're buying an external modem.

You will also need the continued use of your phone, and will need to make some provision for that. It's less complicated if the modem has a jack for your phone. In that case, you can plug the modem into the phone jack, then plug the phone into the modem. The jacks on the back of the modem should be marked for this.





If your modem is internal, or if your external modem only has a single jack, and you want to continue using your phone as well as your modem, you might also want to invest in a modular splitter, which plugs into the phone jack on your wall, making two jacks out of one. You plug your phone into one of the splitter's jacks and your modem into the other. Plugging both devices into the same jack won't interfere with everyday telephone communications; incoming calls will continue to go to your phone, just as they did before. You should be able to find a splitter at a phone, electronics or hardware store for less than \$3.

If all this sounds like a lot of wires to keep track of and you have trouble plugging in a toaster, don't worry. Most modems come with good instructions, and the components are such that you can't connect anything backward. Just follow the instructions and you'll be all right.

### **The Money**

Before you sign on to AOL for the first time, there's something else you'll need: money. America Online wants to know how you plan to pay the balance on your account each month. Cash won't do. Instead, you can provide a credit card number: Visa, MasterCard, American Express or Discover Card are all acceptable. So are bank debit cards. Or have your checkbook handy: AOL can directly access your checking account if you provide it with the necessary numbers.

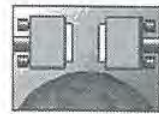
### **The Screen Name**

We're almost ready, but right now I want you to get all other thoughts out of your mind and decide what you want to call yourself. Every AOL member has a unique screen name. Screen names are how AOL tells us apart. You must have one and it has to be different from anybody else's.

A screen name must be three to ten characters in length—letters or numbers. Hundreds of thousands of people use AOL, and they all have screen names of ten or fewer characters. Ten isn't many characters; chances are the screen name you want most is taken. Have a number of alternates ready ahead of time, and prepare yourself for disappointment. Hardly anyone ever gets his or her first choice.

There's no going back, by the way. Once AOL accepts your initial screen name, it's yours as long as you remain a member. Though your account can have as many as five screen names (to accommodate other





people in your family or your alter egos), your initial screen name is the one AOL uses to establish your identity. For this reason, your initial screen name can't be changed. Be prepared with a zinger (and a half-dozen alternates), or AOL will assign you something like TomLi5437, and you'll forever be known by that name. People have a hard time relating to a name like that.

### MajorTom

I worked my way through college as a traffic reporter for an Oregon radio station. I was both reporter and pilot. It was a great job: perfect hours for a student, easy work and unlimited access to a flashy plane. It didn't pay much, but somehow that wasn't important—not in the halcyon days of bachelorhood.

I hate to date myself, but David Bowie was an ascending force on the music scene in those days. Impertinent, perhaps—a little too androgynous and scandalous for the conservative element of the Nixon era—but definitely a hit-maker. Our station played Bowie. On my first day, the morning-show disk jockey switched on his microphone and hailed "Ground Control to Major Tom"—a line from Bowie's *Space Oddity*—to get my attention. The name stuck. I was known as Major Tom from then on.

When the time came for me to pick my AOL screen name, it suggested TomLi5437 and I balked. How about just plain Tom? I asked. It's in use, said the host computer. I tried four others and AOL continued to remind me of my lack of imagination. In desperation I tried MajorTom, and the AOL accepted it. Once an initial screen name is accepted, there's no going back. I'm MajorTom on AOL now, and I will be forever more.

### The Password

Oh yes, you need a password. Without a password, anyone knowing your screen name can log on using your name and have a field day on your nickel. Passwords must be from four to eight characters in length, and any combination of letters or numbers is acceptable. You're asked for your password every time you sign on, so choose something easy for you to remember—something that's not a finger-twister to type. It should be different from your screen name, phone number, social security number, address or real name—something no one else would ever guess, even if they know you well.





### A Case for Elaborate Passwords

In his book *The Cuckoo's Egg*, Cliff Stoll describes computer hackers' methods for breaking passwords. Since most computers already have a dictionary on disk—all spelling checkers use dictionaries—the hackers simply program their computers to try every word in the dictionary as a password. It sounds laborious, but computers don't mind. (Cliff Stoll and *The Cuckoo's Egg* are mentioned again in Chapter 4, "Electronic Mail." Look in the bibliography for the specifics on his book.)

In other words, I'm making a case for elaborate passwords here. Don't make it personal, don't use your social security number, don't write it down, and select something that's not in a dictionary. That'll foil the rascals.

## Installing the Software

Finally, we're ready to get our hands dirty. Installing the AOL software is a straightforward process: an installation program does all the work for you.

- ▲ Again, be sure you have at least 3mb of space available on your hard disk. Use the Finder to disclose your free disk space—your Mac manual will tell you how.
- ▲ Assuming you made a copy of the AOL disk, insert that copy into your floppy disk drive. (The original AOL disk works just as well, but making—and using—a copy is just standard paranoid procedure.) A window opens on your desktop and the installation program's icon is visible there.
- ▲ When you double-click the Install icon. A greeting screen appears, identifying the Installer program (see Figure 2-1).
- ▲ Installation options are disclosed via the Custom button pictured in Figure 2-1. Few installations require the use of these options.

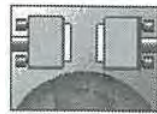
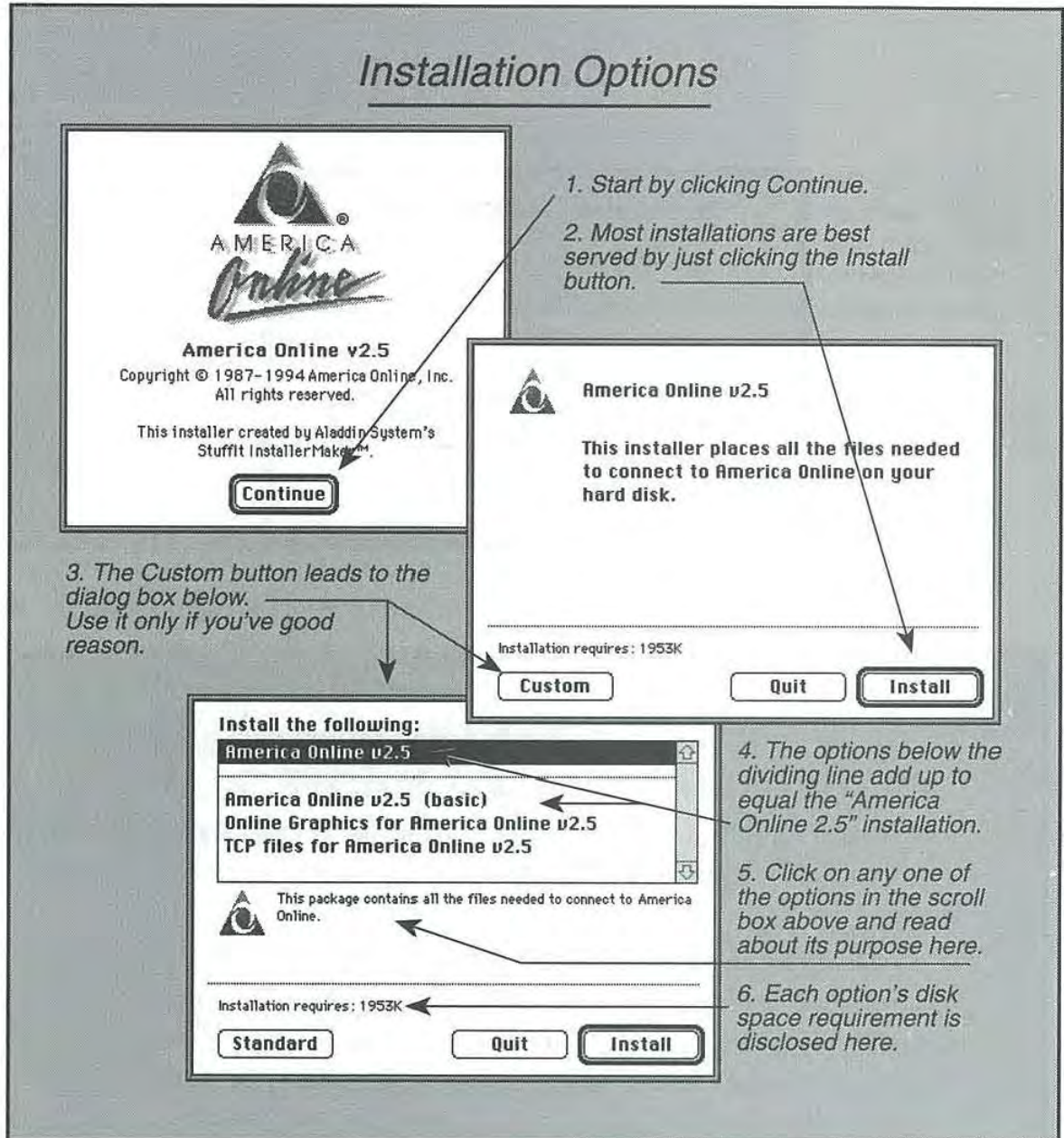
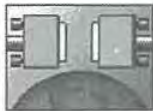


Figure 2-1: The Installer greeting screen appears as soon as the program is running.







- ▲ The Installer then produces the window pictured in Figure 2-2. It asks you where you want to place AOL's folder.

Figure 2-2: The Installer wants to know which disk will be used to install America Online. Be sure you don't try to install the program on the floppy disk!



### IBM

Readers with eagle's eyes will note that the hard disk on my Macintosh is named "IBM." There's a good reason for this: my hard disk *is* an IBM. When I first received my Mac and popped open the case (not a recommended method for getting to know a Mac, but often educational), the striped-blue "IBM" logo was the first thing I saw. (It's hard to miss in that context.)

As it turns out, IBM makes hard disks and Apple doesn't. IBM is on Apple's list of suppliers and Apple buys hard disks from any supplier who offers the right price at the right time. Apparently, IBM's price was right when my Mac was constructed and it has been a mixed-breed computer ever since. It's kind of embarrassing, but it's mine and I'm not about to hide it. The moral of the story: open the case only if you're prepared for the consequences.

- ▲ Remember that you're about to install a folder, not a file. You needn't have a folder already prepared for AOL: it makes its own.
- ▲ Once you click the Install button, the Installer does its work. This takes a couple of minutes. As it's working, a "thermometer" keeps you abreast of the Installer's progress (see the upper window in Figure 2-3). The Installer concludes with an announcement of its success (bottom window of Figure 2-3).



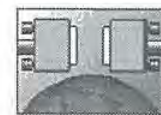
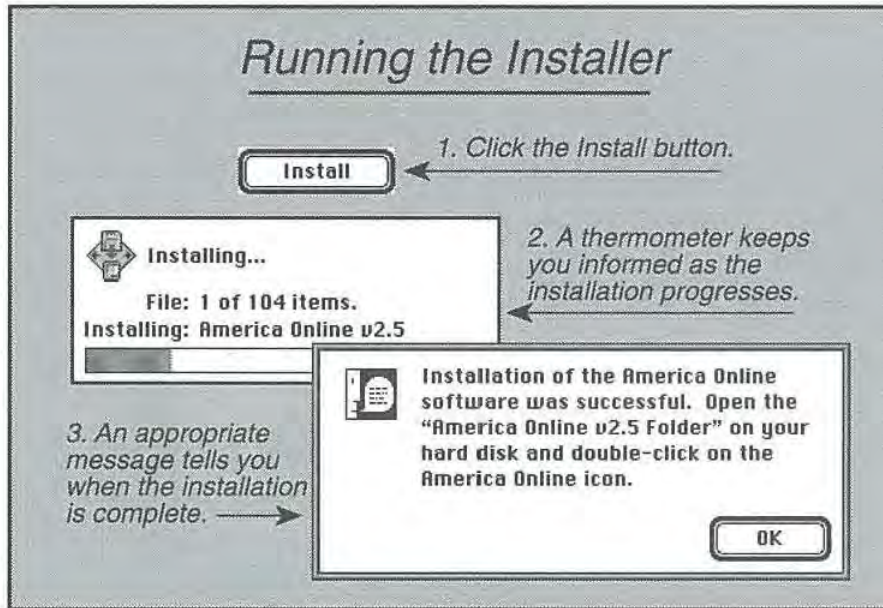


Figure 2-3: The installation process is automatic: all you have to do is watch.



- ▲ After you click the OK button pictured in Figure 2-3, take a moment to explore your hard disk. The Installer has created a new folder where you told it to, containing the AOL application and four folders (see Figure 2-4). Note that the folder and its contents equal nearly 3mb, even though the floppy disk from which it came holds much less than that. The secret is file compression. Using a product called StuffIt (described in Chapter 5, “Computing”), the AOL folder’s components were compressed (stuffed) before they were placed on the floppy disk; the compressed files were copied to your hard disk; then the Installer unstuffed them. It’s all very logical, I suppose, but it’s still magic to me.

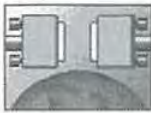
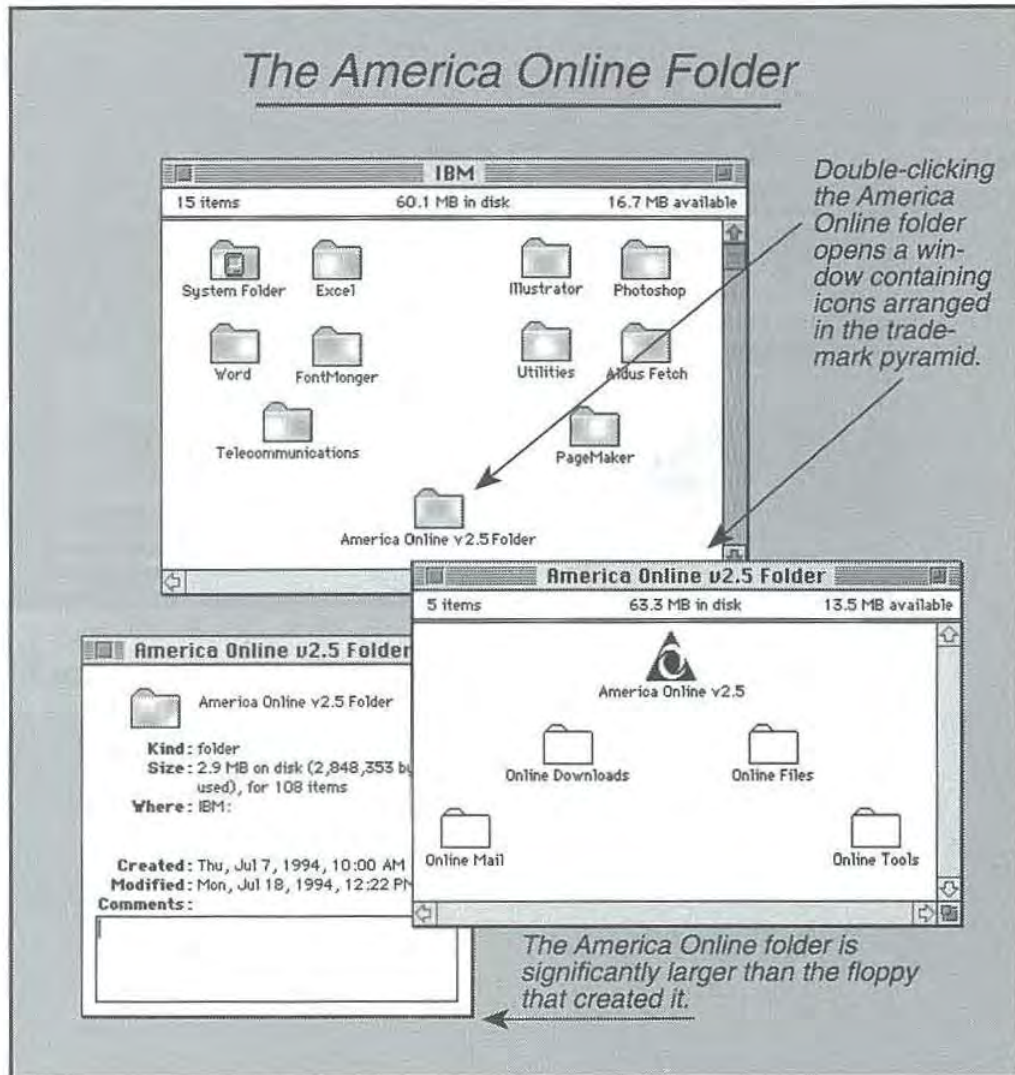


Figure 2-4: The Installer places a folder on your hard disk containing the America Online software and all of the necessary folders.



### The Pyramid

Look again at the America Online v.2.5 window pictured in Figure 2-4. Note how the icons are arranged. Since the AOL logo is a pyramid, the programmers arranged the folder icons in a pyramid shape as well. Little details like this crop up everywhere at AOL; some are functional, some are fanciful like the pyramid. They're part of the fun, but they're also an indication of the care and vigilance that go into the product. In the end, we the members are the beneficiaries.

There, you've done it. You've installed the software and you're ready to sign on. Eject the floppy disk, put it in a safe place and let's get on with it.





## The Initial Online Session

The initial online session takes about 15 minutes. Be sure you have the time and uninterrupted access to the phone before you begin. You needn't worry about money: though you'll be online for a while, the setup process is accomplished on AOL's dime, not yours. You needn't worry about indelibility either: plenty of Cancel buttons are offered during the initial session. If you get cold feet, you can always hang up and start over.

## Configuring the Telephone Connection

Before it can successfully make the connection, AOL needs to know a number of things about your telephone. It needs to know whether you have Touch Tone or rotary dialing, whether it needs to dial a 9 (or something else) to reach an outside line and whether a 1 should be dialed before the 800 number. Canadian members will need to supply additional information. Your modem should be connected to the phone line and to your Mac by now, and everything should be turned on.

Don't let me scare you. Most of this stuff happens automatically. All you will have to do is watch.

- ▲ You can resize and relocate the AOL window for a neater desktop if you wish—it's just like any other window. Double-click the AOL icon to launch the AOL software. A welcome screen greets you as soon as the software loads (see Figure 2-5).

Figure 2-5: This In the Spotlight screen greets you when you first run the America Online software.





### Upgrading

If you're already an AOL member and you've been using an earlier version of AOL's software on your machine, you should now click the Upgrade button shown in Figure 2-5. The Installer will ask you for the location of your old AOL application and use information it finds there—access numbers, address books, preferences, screen names and mail files—to customize the new edition. The remainder of the installation process described here will be skipped.

- ▲ A second screen greets you when you click the Continue button shown in Figure 2-5. (This screen is shown in Figure 2-6.) Carefully read the list of assumptions presented here. If they describe your situation accurately, click the Continue button. If they don't, click the Change Options button. Change Options accommodates dial phones, modem connections to the Macintosh printer port, and members calling from Canadian exchanges.

Figure 2-6: If the assumptions aren't correct, click the Change Options button.

First, we will automatically dial a toll-free number to reach America Online. During this free call you will choose a number in your area that you will use regularly to sign on to America Online.

You probably... -use a touch-tone phone  
 -have your modem connected to your Macintosh's modem port  
 -don't need to dial a '9' for an 'outside' call  
 -don't need to disable call waiting during calls to America Online  
 -are calling from the continental United States

If this is correct, click 'Continue.' If any one of the above does not apply, click 'Change Options.'

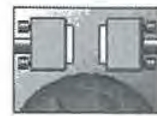
Cancel

Change Options

Continue

- ▲ When you click Figure 2-6's Continue button, the Installer checks your modem's speed and port, then asks you one more time if you're ready to sign on. Be sure no one is using your phone line, that you have your registration certificate (with its temporary registration number and password), and that your credit card or checking account number is nearby, then click Continue.





- ▲ Now the Installer dials an 800 number to temporarily connect to AOL and find a local access number for you. You will be able to monitor the call's progress by watching the window pictured in Figure 2-7. Once you see the message that says "Connected at XXXX baud" (the baud rate is determined by the speed of your modem) you can be sure that your Mac and modem are communicating properly. You can be sure that your modem and the telephone system are connected as well. If the AOL software finds anything amiss prior to this point, it notifies you and suggests solutions.

Figure 2-7: This window appears as America Online dials its toll-free number during the initial connection.



### Isolating Connection Errors

Though they rarely do, things can go wrong during the connect process. The problem could be at your end (e.g., the modem or the phone lines), or it could be at AOL's end. You can be sure the problem is at your end if you don't hear a dial tone (assuming your modem has a speaker) before your modem begins dialing.

If your connection fails during the initial connect process, don't panic. The software will eventually hang up and display a message with a Change Configuration button. Click that button and select your modem's brand name and model from the Modem Type pop-up scroll box you'll see on your screen, then try the connection again.

The solution described in the previous paragraph solves about 90 percent of the connection problems. If yours persists, wait a few minutes and try again. If it fails a third time, call AOL Customer Service at 800-827-6364.



## Selecting Your Local Access Numbers

Now you're connected to the AOL host computer and it's anxious to say hello. Its singular interest right now is to find some local access numbers for you. To do that, it needs to know where you are. It finds that out by requesting your local area code (see Figure 2-8).

Figure 2-8: Using your area code, America Online attempts to select two local numbers for access to the service.

### Selecting Your Local Access Number

**Welcome to America Online!**

Great! You're connected to our special 800 number! Now you're ready to choose your local access telephone numbers.

You will see a list of telephone numbers that will give you access to America Online.

First, type YOUR AREA CODE in the box below. Then press RETURN.

503

Continue

**Choose Local Access Telephone Number -- First Choice**

City	Number
CORVALLIS	OR 2400 (503) 754-0559
ESCUE	OR 2400 (503) 240-6100

**Choose Local Access Telephone Number -- Second Choice**

Select a second access number just in case the first number is busy or unavailable.

City	Number
BEND	OR 2400 (503) 389-0146
BOISE	ID 2400 (208) 345-5951
CORVALLIS	OR 2400 (503) 757-6341
LONGVIEW	WA 2400 (206) 423-9072
MEDFORD	OR 2400 (503) 772-0831
PORTLAND	OR 2400 (503) 222-2151
PULLMAN	
SALEM	
SPRINGFIELD	
BOISE	
CORVALLIS	

**Confirm Your Access Number Choices**

Your America Online access numbers are listed below exactly as they will be dialed.

First Choice:

Second Choice:

If you need to make any changes (Example: delete the area code or add a 1) to the numbers shown above, Tab to or click on the appropriate field, make your changes, and then press RETURN to save these numbers. Your machine will then redial America Online using the numbers above. You will then complete the registration process.

Continue

1. AOL uses your local telephone number to search its database of local access numbers for those in your area.

2. AOL's first choice may not be the best.

3. Specify a second choice if you can.

4. You are asked to confirm the choices before the process continues.

Use the arrow keys to select an access number that's best for you.

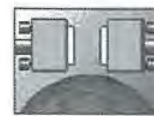
Then press RETURN to confirm and go to the next screen.

If you can't find a local number, click on the "Can't Find a Local Number" button.

Use the arrow keys to select an access number that's second best for you.

Then press RETURN to confirm and go to the next screen.





- ▲ Using your area code, AOL consults its database of local access numbers and produces a list of those nearest you (see the second window in Figure 2-8). Look over the list carefully. The phone number at the top of the list isn't necessarily the one closest to you. Also, note the baud rates listed in the third column. Be sure the number you pick represents the baud rate you intend to use.
- ▲ If there isn't a local number listed for your area, you might have to pay long-distance charges to your telephone company in order to connect to AOL. (You'll know this is true if you have to dial a 1 before your access number in order to complete the call.) If you believe that a local number is warranted for your area, complete the initial sign-on process described in this chapter, sign on, use the keyword: Access (I'll discuss keywords in Appendix A), and follow the online directions for petitioning for a local access number.
- ▲ It's nice to have a secondary number as well. A secondary number (if available) is just that: a second number (the proper term is *node*—see the Glossary) for your modem to call if the first one is busy (which happens rarely) or bogged down with a lot of traffic (which happens more frequently). Interestingly, dozens of modems can use the same node at the same time by splitting the time available on that node into tiny packets. This is all very perplexing to those of us who think of phone numbers as being capable of handling one conversation at a time, but it's nonetheless true. There is a limit, however, and when it's reached, AOL tries the second number. The third window in Figure 2-8 illustrates the screen used to select this alternate.



### Slow Down!

If your first-choice access number is rated at 9600 baud, make your second choice something slower. The number of high-speed incoming lines at AOL is limited, and when they're all in use, the AOL host computer will instruct your software to hang up and try the alternate number. If the alternate is also rated at 9600 baud you'll have the same problem. Select a 2400-baud alternate. At least you'll get online.

- ▲ Finally, AOL presents the screen confirming your selections pictured at the bottom of Figure 2-8.



## The Temporary Certificate Number & Password

Assuming you've clicked on Figure 2-8's Continue button, your Mac will disconnect from the 800 number and dial your primary local access number. Once the connection is reestablished, AOL presents the screen shown in Figure 2-9. This is where you must enter the certificate number and password printed on your certificate. These are the temporary equivalents of the permanent screen name and password you'll soon establish. Enter the words and numbers carefully; they're usually nonsensical and difficult to type without error.

Figure 2-9: Enter your temporary certificate number and password here. Be sure to type them exactly as they appear on your certificate or label.

**Welcome to America Online!**

**New Members:**

Please locate the Registration Certificate that was included in your software kit, and in the space below type the number and password EXACTLY AS IT APPEARS on the printed certificate.

**Current Members:**

If you already have an America Online account and are simply installing a new version of the software, type your existing screen name in the first field and your password in the second. This will update your account information automatically.

Note: Use the TAB key to move from one field to another.

**Certificate Number:**

**Certificate Password:**

## Your Name & Address

When you click on the Continue button shown in Figure 2-9, AOL provides directions for using an online form like that shown in Figure 2-10. If you're not familiar with Mac conventions, you'll want to read the directions carefully. If you've used Mac software before—even a little bit—you already know this stuff. It's traditional Mac protocol. Hint: Use the Tab key to move from field to field.

Once you've read the form usage instructions, click on the Continue button and AOL will ask you for some personal information (see Figure 2-10).



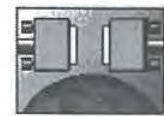



Figure 2-10: Provide your name, phone number(s) and address. Be sure to use the telephone number format shown in the illustration.



**Please be sure to enter ALL of the following information**

**First Name:**       **Last Name:**

**Address:**

**City:**

**State:**       **Daytime Phone:**

**Zip Code:**       **Evening Phone:**

Note: Please enter phone numbers area code first, for example, 703-555-1212, and enter state with no periods, for example, VA for Virginia.

America Online uses this information to communicate with you off-line. Though AOL never bills members directly (we'll discuss money in a moment), and though this information is privileged and never seen by other members (member profiles—which is what other members see—are discussed in the next chapter), AOL does, occasionally, need to contact you off-line, and they use this information to do so. They might want to send you a disk containing an upgrade to the software, or perhaps you've ordered something from them (this book, for example) that needs to be mailed. That's what this information is for.

### Your Phone Number

Your phone number becomes an important part of your record at America Online, not because anyone at AOL intends to call you, but because AOL's Customer Service Department uses this number to identify you whenever you call. Should you ever find the need to call, the first question Customer Service will ask is, What's your phone number? It's unique, after all, so Customer Service uses it to look up your records. It's an efficient method, but only if you provide the number accurately during your initial sign-on.




## Providing Your Billing Information

Let's be up front about it: America Online is a business run for profit. In other words, AOL needs to be paid for the service it provides. It offers a number of ways to accomplish this. Your VISA, MasterCard or Discover Card are the preferred methods of payment. If you don't have one of these (or if you prefer an alternate method), AOL accepts American Express cards and bank debit cards as well. AOL can also arrange to automatically debit your checking account. (There's a fee for this—more than a credit card costs you—so it should be your last choice.)

When you click on Figure 2-10's Continue button, another screen appears, identifying AOL's connect-time rates. Read it carefully (you need to know what you're buying and what it's costing you, after all), then move on (see Figure 2-11).


Figure 2-11: All major credit cards are welcome, and the Other Billing Options button leads to forms accepting American Express and bank debit cards. Or, if you wish, AOL will debit your checking account directly.

### Entering Credit-Card Information

 **Choose a billing method.**

To ensure that we have the correct billing information on file for charges incurred beyond your trial time, please enter the following information.

America Online accepts Visa, MasterCard, Discover, and American Express. If you do not have a credit card or prefer not to use one, select the "Other" option.

 **Enter your MASTERCARD information:**

Card Number:     Expiration Date:

Input as indicated here:  
 Card Number: 0123-4567-8901-2345    Expiration Date: 09-91

If the cardholder's name is not the same as the one used to create this America Online account, please enter the following information.

First Name:     Last Name:

*1. Choose the type of credit card you prefer to use. You may access the American Express, debit card and checking-account forms by clicking on the Other Billing Options button.*

*2. Forms for VISA, Discover Card, American Express and bank debit cards look similar to this one.*



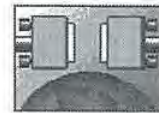


Figure 2-11 is an example of the billing information screen for MasterCard information, but the forms for VISA and Discover are about the same.

## Choosing a Screen Name & Password

When you click the Continue button shown in Figure 2-11, AOL provides a series of screens discussing the significance of screen names, concluding with the screen name input form, pictured at the top of Figure 2-12. Do you see the screen name it picked for me? This is an incentive to have your own alternates at hand.

Figure 2-12:  
Conclude the registration process by entering your screen name and password.

### Entering a Screen Name & Password

**Choosing a screen name**

We suggest that you use the following name. If it is acceptable, just press the ACCEPT button, if not, you may enter another name of your choice:

When choosing a screen name, keep these guidelines in mind:

- \* The name must be at least 3 characters, and can be up to 10 characters.
- \* Names must begin with a letter, which will be capitalized, then any combination of letters, numbers, and/or spaces can be used, and will appear just as you enter them.
- \* Remember, if you choose a name that another member is already using, then a number will be added to the end of your name to distinguish you from that member.

E.g. "Steve C", "SCase", "Ski Racer", "JohnDoe123"

**Choosing a password**

Now it's time for you to select a password.

Each time you sign on, you will be asked for a password to ensure that no one else is able to use your account. You should choose a password that will be easy for you to remember, but not for others to guess. For example, don't use an obvious choice like your first name. Your password must be at least 4 but no more than 8 characters, and can be any combination of numbers and letters.

Since the password will not appear when you type, please verify by typing it twice in the boxes provided.

Don't let AOL get away with a screen name like this. Use the Select Alternate button to provide something that's more memorable.

Choose a password that's easy for you to remember and hard for others to guess. Enter it carefully (you won't see what you're typing), twice.



Note that your password doesn't appear on your screen as you type it. Substituting asterisks for the letters of your password is a standard security precaution. You never know who's looking over your shoulder. America Online asks you to enter your password twice, to be sure you didn't mistype it the first time.

### **A Letter From the President**

Now that you've successfully finished setting up and signing on, you enter the AOL service itself. No doubt the first thing that will happen is you'll receive an announcement that you have mail. To read the letter, choose Read New Mail from the Mail menu, or press Command-R. The New Mail window appears, with mail from AOL President Steve Case. Click the Read button and read what he has to say.

### **Where to Go From Here**

Once you're online, you have the entire AOL universe to explore. The thought is both enticing and overwhelming. Here's what I suggest: spend a half-hour wandering around right after you read Steve's letter. You have quite a bit of free connect time coming; don't worry about money. You'll find a button marked Discover AOL on the main screen shown in Figure 2-13. Click that button, then explore a few of the areas offered in the Discover America Online window. The America Online Highlights are always interesting; the Best of America Online may turn up some areas to which you'll return; and What's Hot This Month is always topical.



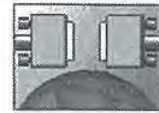
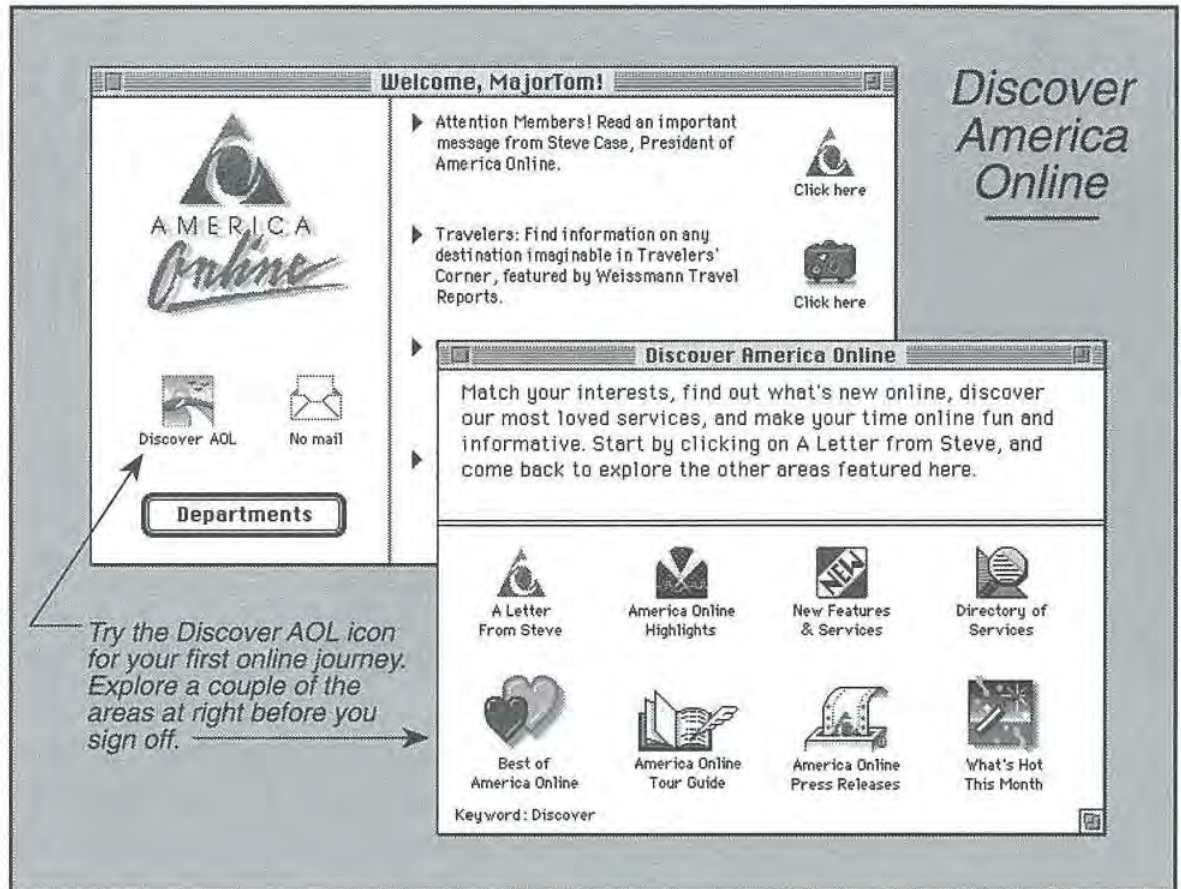


Figure 2-13: The Discover America Online feature is an excellent way to begin your online journey.



During this initial session, don't try to absorb the entire contents of AOL. Rather, wander aimlessly, getting a feeling for the nature of the AOL universe. Note how Mac-like it is. Everything is predictable and familiar—at least to a Macintosh user.

After a half-hour or so, you might want to sign off by choosing Sign Off from the Go To menu. Once the dust settles, turn to the chapter in this book that describes an area of particular interest to you. Read that chapter, then sign back on and explore that area. See if you can find the things I described in the chapter. Spend another half-hour at this.

Now you're on your own. Explore another department if you wish, or turn to Chapter 4, "Electronic Mail," and learn how to send mail to somebody. You'll probably get a response in a few days. People at AOL are very friendly. It really is a community.



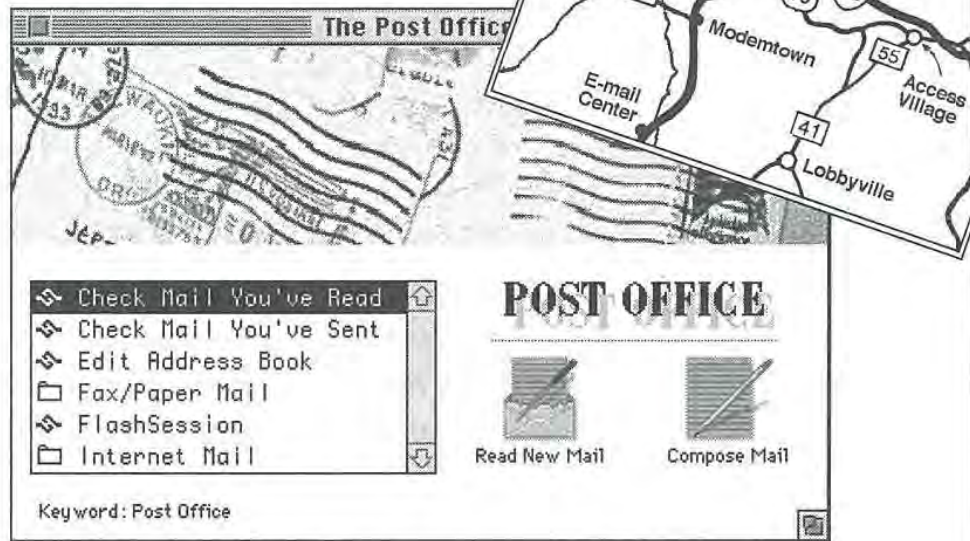
## Moving On

Speaking of the people online, that's one of the subjects covered in the next chapter, "Online Help & the Members." When you have the time (I know how enticing AOL can be—you might never return to this book now that you're online), read on. We have many more things to talk about.



# Electronic Mail

## CHAPTER 4



People my age remember the days when the phrase “the mail” meant only one thing. If you wanted to mail something, you handed it to the postman, you dropped it in a mailbox or you took it to the post office. There was no UPS, no fax, no FedEx, no e-mail and no Internet. There was only “the mail”—the US Postal Service—and a first-class postage stamp cost 3 cents.

The fast-moving information age we live in today requires alternatives such as package delivery, overnight letters, facsimile, voice mail and e-mail. Each has its place. Each offers something the others do not. Electronic mail offers immediacy, convenience, multiple addressing and automated record-keeping. Moreover, it’s cheap—perhaps the least expensive of the bunch—and ecologically responsible. E-mail has all the makings of a darling, and it is just now entering its prime.

### What Exactly is Electronic Mail?

Electronic mail (e-mail for short) is simply mail prepared on a computer and sent to someone else who has access to a computer. There are lots of private e-mail networks—computers wired together and configured to send and receive mail. America Online is one of these. Many of these networks (including AOL) are connected to the Internet (the Internet is discussed in Chapter 14, “The Internet Connection;” Internet mail is discussed later in this chapter), and you can send mail to (and receive mail from) the people across these networks.

---

The frontispiece is of the AOL Post Office greeting screen. Most of the e-mail commands and resources can be accessed via this screen, or via the Mail menu. Use the keyword: PostOffice.



Most e-mail systems share a number of common characteristics:

- ▲ Messages are composed of pure ASCII text. Fancy formatting, graphics and special characters aren't accommodated within messages. AOL for the Macintosh is one of the rare exceptions; a matter I'll discuss later in this chapter.
- ▲ Because they're usually simple text, messages can be sent between dissimilar computers. You can communicate with people using PCs, Amigas, mainframes—even terminals (there are thousands on the Internet), which aren't really computers at all.
- ▲ The addressee must be known to the mail system.

Additional features are offered by some e-mail systems, including AOL.

- ▲ Messages can be replied to or forwarded to anyone, including people connected to networks outside of AOL. This includes commercial services such as Prodigy and CompuServe.
- ▲ Files can be attached to messages. In most cases, files are specific to a particular computer or operating system, so the receiving computer must be compatible with the sending computer in order to open the file. On the other hand, files can contain anything: graphics, formatted text, even sound and animation.
- ▲ Messages can be addressed to multiple recipients. "Carbon copies" can be sent to people other than the addressee, and "blind" carbon copies (copies sent without the other addressees' knowledge) can be specified as well.
- ▲ Messages need not be composed while you're online. Likewise, received messages need not be read while you're online. Any incoming message can be filed for later retrieval and read offline at your convenience. If you choose to reply, you can compose your reply offline as well. You need to sign on only to send and receive mail, a process that rarely consumes more than a couple of minutes online.





## Why Use E-mail?

Nothing matches the convenience, immediacy and ecology of electronic mail. Composing a message amounts to nothing more than typing it; mailing a message is accomplished with a single click of the mouse; and AOL files a copy for you, automatically, on the host computers in Virginia. Archaic inconveniences such as envelopes and stamps are never required, and fax funny paper—an ecological disaster if ever there was one—never enters the picture. Indeed, paper of any kind is rarely used when mail is sent electronically.

America Online's e-mail service is an outstanding example of this communication medium. It does all the things e-mail should do and adds enough features to make a mail carrier want to resign. You can compose mail off-line, send (and receive) it when you're away from your computer, address it to multiple recipients, send carbon copies (and blind carbon copies), attach files (to mail addressed to other AOL members), reply to mail received and forward mail to others at AOL or on the Internet. Mail can also be faxed or, if the recipient is really in the dark ages, even sent via the US Mail.

America Online obediently holds your mail until you're ready to read it, announces its availability every time you sign on and never sends you junk mail.

Perhaps best of all, about all you'll ever pay for this service is a nickel—maybe a dime if you're really pedantic. America Online doesn't charge extra for e-mail, even that sent to or received from the Internet. It's not exactly a return to the 3-cent stamp, but it's close.

## A Circular Exercise

Before we get to the details, here's a little exercise just to show you how e-mail works. This exercise is somewhat futile: sending mail to yourself is a little like narcissism—a little less vainglorious perhaps, but no less futile. Nevertheless, do it just this once. Nobody's looking.

- ▲ With America Online up and running, sign on. Leave the Welcome screen showing and choose Compose Mail from the Mail menu. An Untitled Mail window will appear (see Figure 4-1).



Figure 4-1: This window appears whenever you're about to compose some mail. AOL has already identified you as the sender; it's now waiting for you to identify the recipient.

- ▲ The insertion point is now flashing in the To text box, where you insert the screen name of the recipient. Type in your screen name. This is the futile part of the exercise—sending mail to yourself—but the rewards are immediate, and there will be no guessing as to whether the mail ever made it to the addressee.

### **No Accounting for Case**

America Online screen names are not case-sensitive. MajorTom works no better than majortom. This is really comforting: I used to be obsessed with such details, worrying that imperfectly addressed mail would end up in electronic limbo somewhere. My anxieties were needless (as most are). Even if you misspell a screen name, AOL will notify you that there's no match for the address you've typed. There's no "dead mail" room at AOL.

- ▲ In the subject text box, enter the word "Test" (without the quotes).
- ▲ Type something into the message text box. This is the narcissistic part. Don't overdo it. People will talk.
- ▲ Click the Send button.





Instantly, a voice announces “You’ve got mail!” There’s a particular comfort in that. Mail moves around the AOL circuit quite literally at the speed of light. You’ll never wonder again if your mail will get to its destination by next Thursday. It gets there the instant you send it.

Note also that two things have happened: (1) The mail icon on the Welcome screen has changed, and (2) a tiny mailbox now flashes in the upper right corner of your screen (Figure 4-2).

Figure 4-2: You’ve got mail! You get two doses of visual indication and one aural prompt every time mail is waiting for you at America Online.



*In the upper-right corner of your screen, a tiny mailbox flashes.*

*And in the Welcome window, a hand holds up a wad of envelopes for you to open.*



- ▲ By now, the Untitled window has closed and you’re back at the Welcome screen. Click the “You have mail” icon.
- ▲ The New Mail window appears (see Figure 4-3). This window is a little redundant when you only have one piece of mail waiting, but soon you’ll be a Popular Person and dozens of entries will appear here every time you sign on.

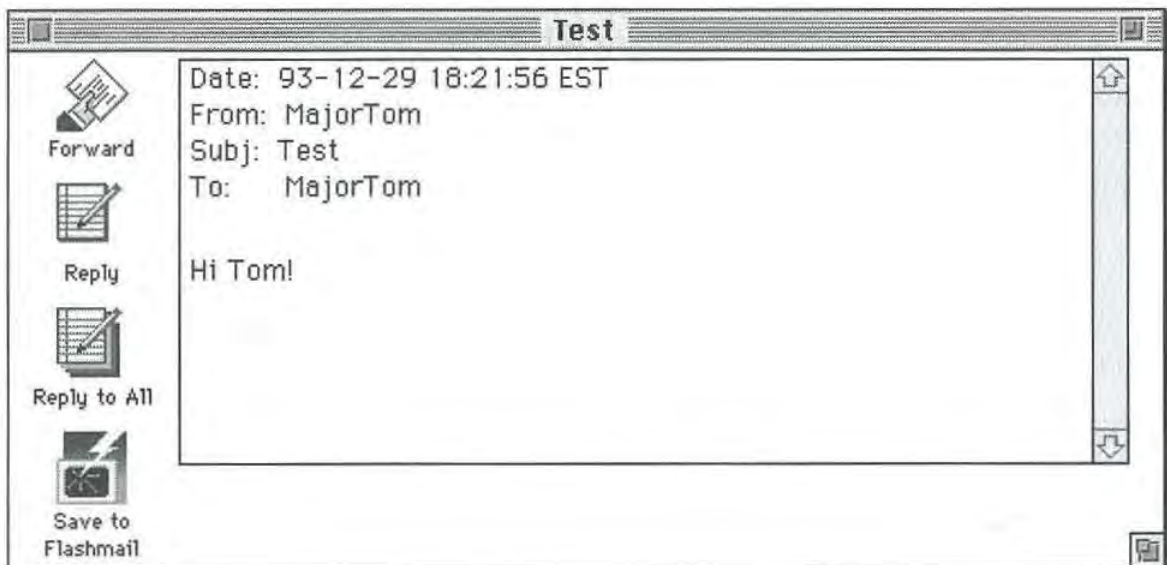


Figure 4-3: The New Mail window appears whenever you elect to read incoming mail.



- ▲ Double-click the entry, which represents the mail you sent a moment ago.
- ▲ The message window appears, with your message therein (see Figure 4-4).

Figure 4-4: The mail is received. Note that you can forward, reply to or save this mail by simply clicking the appropriate icon.





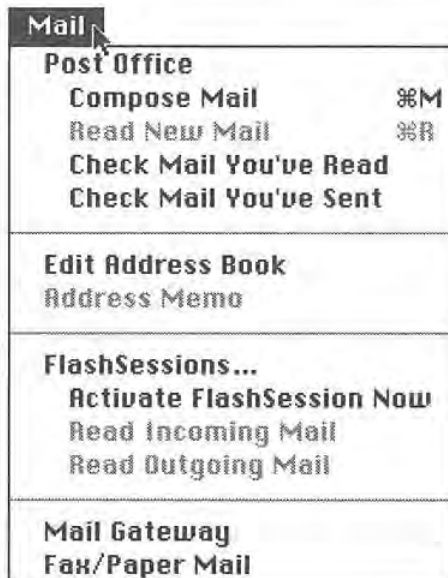


It's probably best for you to toss this mail now, before anyone sees what you've been up to. To throw it away, click its close box (or choose Close from the File menu). I just wanted you to see how simple, fast and easy the process really is. That's the whole idea—above all, e-mail should be convenient, global and inexpensive, and AOL certainly makes it so.

## The Mail Menu

Nearly all day-to-day mail activities are performed using the Mail menu. (Some prefer AOL's Post Office screen—see the frontispiece—but we'll discuss the Mail menu here.) The single exception is the FlashSession, which we'll discuss in Chapter 19, "FlashSessions & the Download Manager." FlashSessions aren't for everybody, however: indeed, most seminormal people conduct all of their mail activities using the Mail menu (Figure 4-5) exclusively.

Figure 4-5: The mail menu handles most of your daily e-mail activities.



## Composing Your Mail

The first option on the Mail menu is Compose Mail, which you choose whenever you want to send mail to someone. This option is available whether you're online or off; you can compose mail off-line and send it later—a feature I'll discuss in a moment.



When the Compose Mail command is issued, AOL responds with an Untitled Mail Form (review Figure 4-1). Note the position of the insertion point in Figure 4-1. It's located within the To field of the window. America Online, in other words, is waiting for you to provide the recipient's screen name. Type it in. (If you don't remember the screen name, you can use your Address Book, which I'll discuss later in this chapter.)

You can send mail to multiple addresses if you wish. Simply include multiple screen names in the To field, separated by a comma and a space. You can place multiple names there (I have never discovered the maximum, but it must be large: Note that the field is actually a scroll box). If you want to send mail to Steve Case and Tom Lichty, type "Steve Case, MajorTom" (without the quotes) in this box.

Press the Tab key and the cursor jumps to the CC (carbon copy) field. Here you can place the addresses of those people who are to receive "carbon copies" of your mail. Carbon copies (actually, they're called courtesy copies now—carbon paper being a thing of the past) are really no different than originals. Whether a member receives an original or a copy is more a matter of protocol than anything else. Note: Use only screen names in the To and CC fields. Do not put members' real names here.



### Blind Carbon Copies

As is the case with the traditional "cc:" at the bottom of a business letter, the addressee is aware of all carbon copies. This is a traditional business courtesy.

On the other hand, you might want to send a copy of a message to another person without the addressee (or addressees) knowing you have done so. This is known as a "blind" carbon copy. To address a blind carbon copy, place the recipient's address in the CC field, enclosing it in parentheses. The parentheses are the trick. No one but the recipient of the blind carbon copy will know what you've done. The ethics of this feature are yours to ponder; its use, after all, is voluntary.

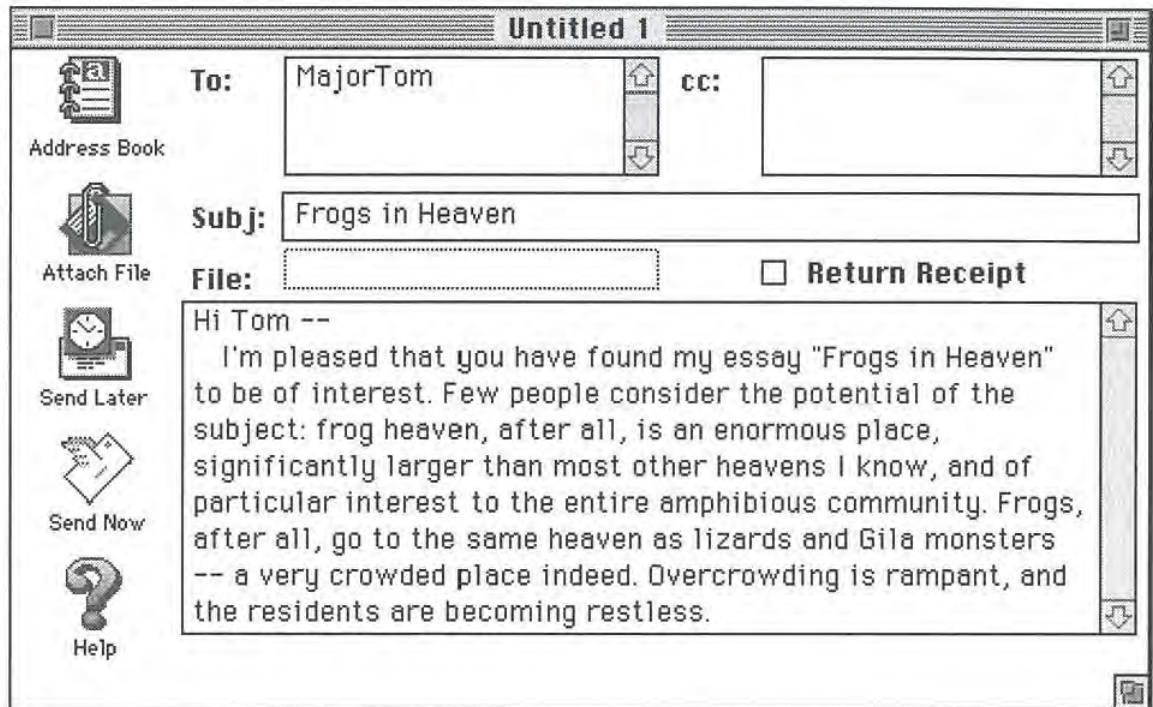
Press the Tab key to move the insertion point to the Subject field, and enter a descriptive word or two. Note: The Subject field must be filled in—AOL won't take the message without it.

▲ Press the Tab key again. The insertion point moves to the message text area. Type your message there (see Figure 4-6).





Figure 4-6: The completed message is ready to send. Click the Send Now icon (if you're online) or the Send Later icon (if you're not).



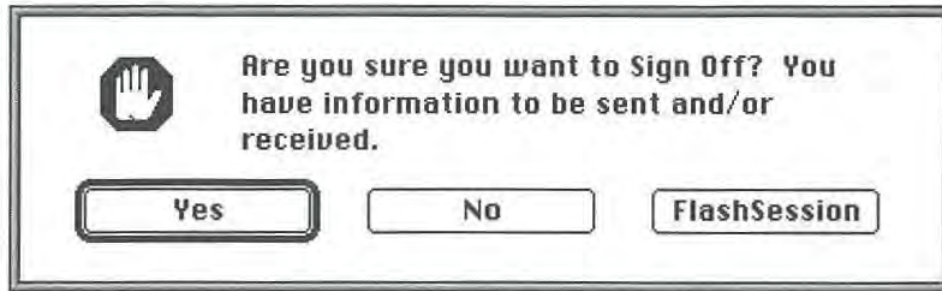
It's subtle, but note that the Send Now icon in Figure 4-6 is dimmed: this message is being prepared off-line (see sidebar).

### Preparing Mail Off-line

Consider preparing mail when you're off-line and the meter isn't running. You can linger over it that way, perfecting every word. When you complete a message, click the Send Later icon. The next time you sign on, AOL will note that you have mail waiting to be sent. To send it, choose Read Outgoing Mail from the Mail menu, then click the Send All button. If you neglect to send it while you're online, AOL will remind you of your forgetfulness when you attempt to sign off (Figure 4-7). Your mail will get sent, in other words, unless you positively don't want it to.



Figure 4-7:  
America Online  
always reminds  
you to send mail,  
even if you forget.



### Alternative Mail Sources

Occasionally, you might want to send a text file as mail. Perhaps it's a file you created with AOL's New Memo command (File menu), or a text file from a word processor, or one that you captured online. Regardless of the source, you can send a text file as mail (rather than as a file) by choosing Address Memo from the Mail menu.

When you do, AOL furnishes the Compose Mail window (again, review Figure 4-1) and places a copy of your text file in the message area for you. All you have to do is supply the name of the recipient and send the mail on its way.

The Address Memo command is especially useful for those who prefer to use a word processor to compose messages. Word processors feature spelling checkers and productivity tools that AOL's Compose Mail utility doesn't offer. If you prefer to use your word processor, be sure to save the word processing document as text only, then use the Address Memo command to send it as mail.





### A Pain in the Neck

Because there's no eye contact or voice intonation in e-mail messages, sometimes it's necessary to punctuate your conversation with textual "smileys," as they're called. Smileys clarify the sender's intention when it might otherwise be misinterpreted. The phrase, "Just as I thought, Billy Joe: There are no forks in your family tree," could be interpreted as slander. Follow it with a smiley, however, and most members will understand your attempt at depraved humor: "Just as I thought, Billy Joe: there are no forks in your family tree. ;-)"

The semicolon-hyphen-close parenthesis combination at the end of the sentence above is a wink. Turn your head 90 degrees counterclockwise and you'll see a little "smiley face" with its right eye winking. It's a pain in the neck, but it's better than making enemies.

Below are some of the more common smileys. Some people use them more than others, but most everybody does occasionally.

:-) Smile

;-) Wink

:-D Laughing out loud (also abbreviated LOL).

:-( Frown

:-/ Chagrin

{} Hug (usually plural: {{{{}}}} Why hug just once?)

These are the smileys I see most often online. There are scores of others. I've seen :# (lips are sealed), :-& (tongue tied), :-[ (pout), :-\* (kiss) and :-0 (yell). But my favorite is :-p (sticking out tongue). See Chapter 20, "Ten Best," for more smileys.

All of this is a little like those inane yellow smiley faces that punctuated the '70s, but it's justified here. Misinterpretation of text is easy; smileys help clarify the meaning. Go ahead: Smile at someone today. :-)

### Checking Mail You've Sent

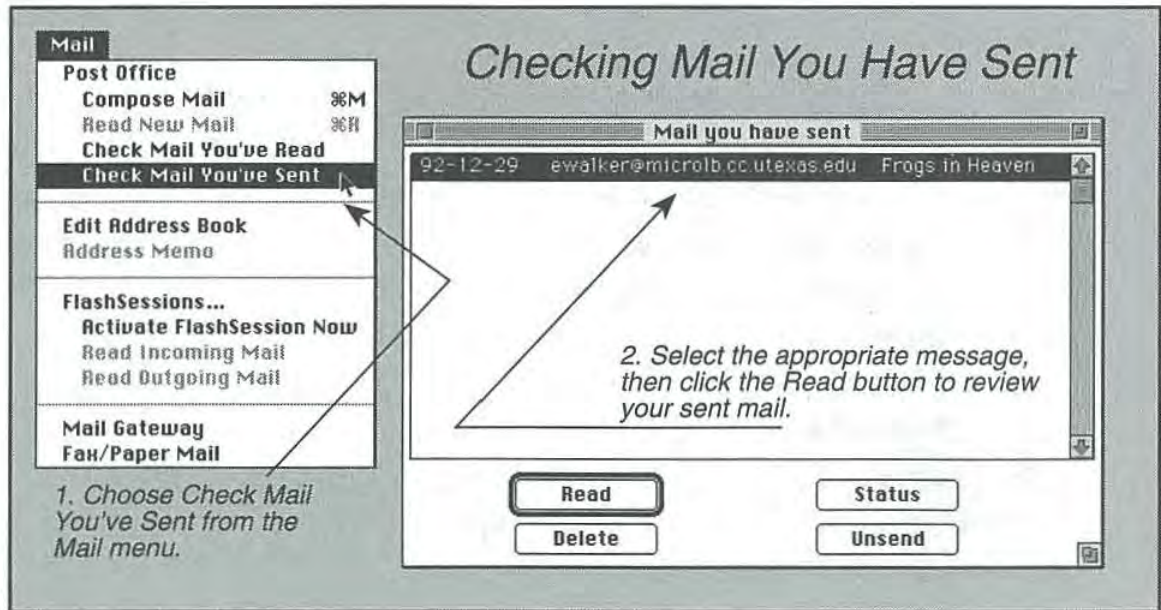
Occasionally you might want to review mail you've sent to others: "What exactly did I say to Billy Joe that caused him to visit the Tallahatchee Bridge last night?"

Even if you don't file your mail (a subject addressed later in this chapter), AOL retains everything you send for at least one week. You can review any sent mail by choosing Check Mail You've Sent from the Mail menu. America Online responds by displaying a listing of all the mail you've sent recently. Choose the mail you want to know about from that list, and click the Read button to review what you've sent (see Figure 4-8).





Figure 4-8: You can reread any mail you've sent by using the Check Mail You've Sent command.



### Online Only

The Check Mail You've Sent and the Check Mail You've Read commands are only available when you're online. This mail is stored on AOL's machines, not yours; you have to be online to access data stored there.

As you're reading your sent mail, you can select and copy it, then paste it into other documents (see the Copy & Paste sidebar if you're not familiar with this process). This works especially well for reminder notices, clarifications and nagging. It could save you some typing as well: You might need to send a message that's a near-duplicate of one you sent four days ago. Rather than retyping text from the old message, reopen it using Check Mail You've Sent under the Mail menu, copy the sections you need, and paste them into a new message window.





### Copy & Paste

If you're not yet familiar with your Mac, here's a brief lesson in copying and pasting: Select mail messages by clicking somewhere within them and choosing **Select All** from the **Edit** menu. To copy the selection, choose **Copy** from the **Edit** menu. This puts the selected text on the Mac's Clipboard—its internal memory—where it's ready for use elsewhere. To paste text into another document, **Open** that document (**File** menu), click the mouse at the location where you want the text to go, then choose **Paste** from the **Edit** menu.

### Buttons in the Mail You've Sent Window

A number of buttons appear across the bottom of the Outgoing Mail window pictured in Figure 4-8; each serves a specific purpose.

#### The Read Button

Select a piece of mail from the list, then click the **Read** button to read that message. This function was discussed a few pages back.

#### The Status Button

The **Status** button tells you when the recipient (or recipients, if the mail was sent to more than one address) read the message. This is a great way to see if someone has read a message you've sent. This only applies to mail sent to another AOL member, however: if the mail was sent to an Internet address (Chapter 14, "The Internet Connection," discusses the Internet), there's no way for AOL to know if the mail was read. The **Status** button will return "Not applicable" under these conditions.

#### The Unsend Button

The **Unsend** button allows you to retrieve mail you have sent from the mailboxes of all recipients, as well as from your **Mail You Have Sent** list. To unsend a piece of mail, highlight the mail you wish to unsend and click the **Unsend** button. Certain conditions, however, will disable this feature:

- ▲ If any addressee has an Internet mail address.
- ▲ If any recipient has read that piece of mail (except you, even if you were on the addressee list).



- ▲▲ If any recipient was a fax or US Mail address.
- ▲▲ If you close the Outgoing Mail window with an unsent message showing, it will be permanently deleted from the AOL archives: It won't show up on your Outgoing Mail list when you check it again. If you want to modify or save an unsent message, double-click it while it's still showing, then either modify it (and resend it if you wish) or copy and paste it into some other document. Then you can Unsend it.

### **The Delete Button**

This button simply removes the selected piece of mail from your Outgoing Mail list. It does not affect the message's destiny: AOL will still deliver it. It's really a feature for people who get lots of mail and prefer to keep their "Check Mail You've Read" lists short.

### **Reading New Mail**

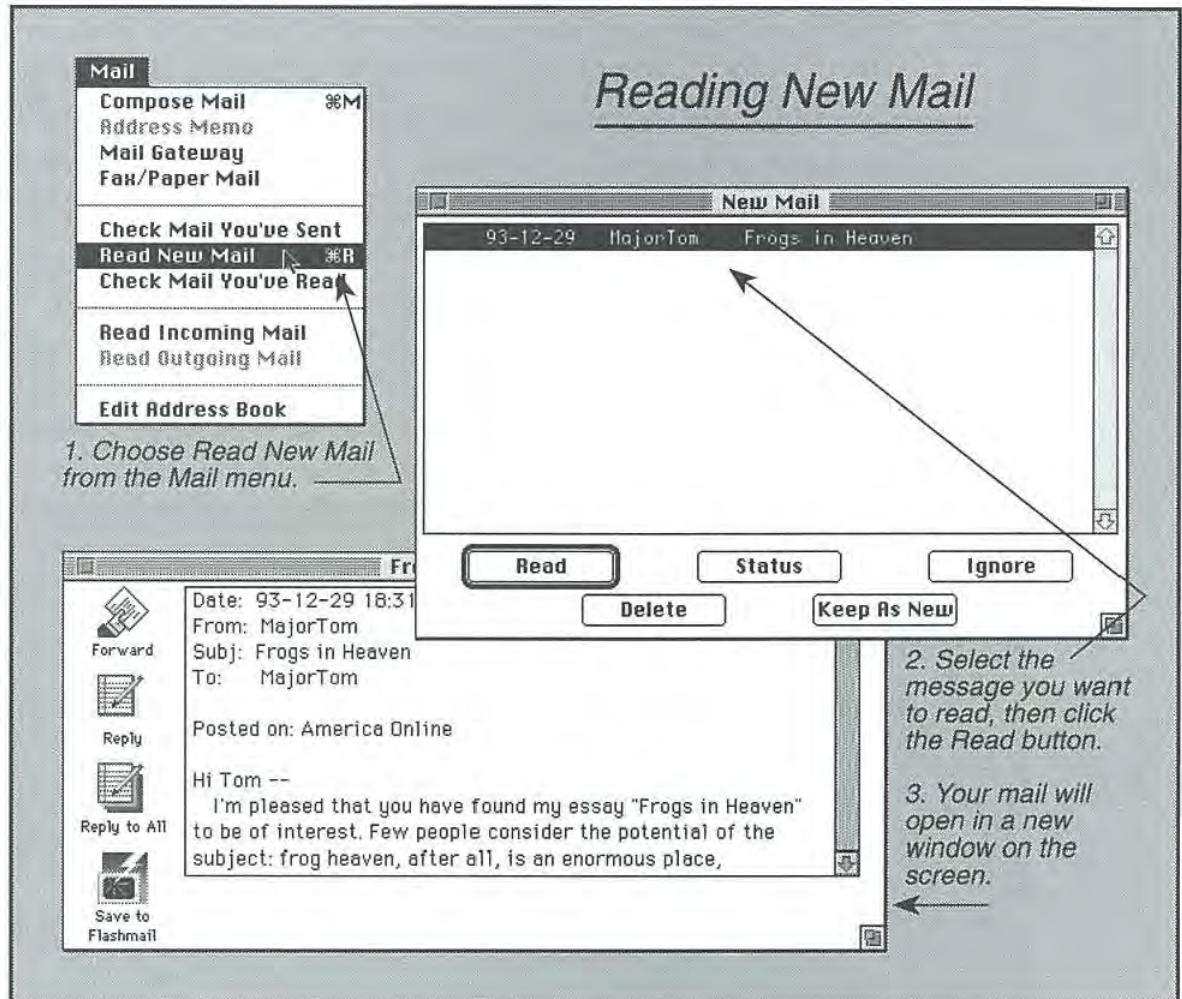
The second option on the Mail menu—Read New Mail—refers to mail you've just received. I don't use this menu item. To me, mail is like Christmas morning: I can't wait to get to it. Immediately after hearing that I have mail, I click the You Have Mail icon (pictured in Figure 4-2) and start unwrapping my presents.

Nevertheless, there are those who don't share my enthusiasm. That, I suppose, is why AOL provides this menu option. When it's chosen, America Online presents the New Mail window (Figure 4-9).





Figure 4-9: Reading new mail can be accomplished with the You Have Mail button in the Welcome window, by pressing Command-R, or by choosing Read New Mail from the Mail menu.



Though Figure 4-9 shows only one unread piece of mail, a number of pieces might appear here. If more than one shows up, they'll appear in the order in which they were received at AOL. The oldest mail will be at the top, the most recent at the bottom. In other words, to read your mail in chronological order from oldest to most recent, read your messages from top to bottom.

## Buttons in the New Mail Window

A number of buttons appears across the bottom of the New Mail window pictured in Figure 4-9. They can be confusing at first, so a discussion of their use is in order.

### Read

This button displays the selected piece of mail on the screen for reading. It's the default button: Double-clicking an entry on the list does the same thing.



**Ignore**

This option will move a piece of mail directly into your Mail You Have Read list without your having to read the mail, in effect “ignoring” that piece of mail. If the sender issues a Status check, he or she will see the word “Ignored” beside your screen name. Be sure that’s what you want the addressee to see if you use this command.

**Status**

This is the same as the Status button in the Mail You Have Sent window mentioned earlier. In this context, it tells you when (and if) other recipient(s) of a particular piece of mail have read (or ignored) it. Again, this button will return “Not applicable” if the mail was delivered to an Internet address.

**Keep as New**

Clicking this button will return the selected piece of mail to your New Mail list after you’ve read it. The mail is, however, still considered read as far as other members’ Status checks are concerned. In other words, if someone checks the status of a piece of mail that you read then kept as new, they will see the time you read the mail, regardless of whether you kept it as new or not.

**Delete**

This feature allows you to permanently remove a piece of mail from your New Mail mailbox. It will not appear on the Mail You Have Read list either (I’ll discuss the Check Mail You’ve Read command in a moment). Status checks performed by other members on deleted mail say “Deleted.” Compare this button with the Ignore button mentioned earlier.

**Printing & Saving Mail**

You can print or save any piece of mail that occupies the front-most (active) window by choosing the appropriate command from the File menu. If you choose Print, AOL will display the standard Macintosh Print dialog box. Click the OK button to print.

If you choose Save (or Save As—in this context they’re the same command), AOL responds with the traditional Macintosh Save As dialog box. Click the Save Mail as Text box, give your mail a name and put it wherever you please. It will be saved as a standard text file and





you will be able to open it with not only AOL's software, but any word processor (or text editor).

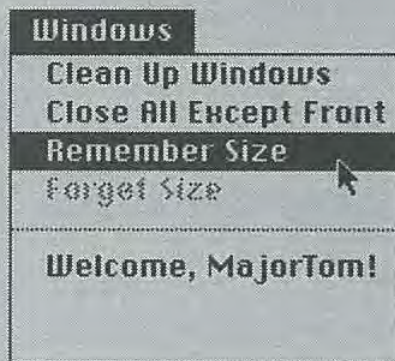
Alternatively, you can select and copy any mail appearing on your screen. Now you can open any text file on your disk (or start a new one via the New Memo command under the File menu) and paste your mail into that file.

You can also paste copied AOL text into other Macintosh applications' files if you wish. There are a number of ways to file mail, and I'll describe some of them in the Gorilla Food section of this chapter.

### Remember Size

Those of you more fortunate than I might find the placement of AOL's windows to be restricting. My tired old Mac Plus has a tiny, 9-inch screen. To my benefit, the defaults for size and placement of AOL's windows have been determined with 9-inch Mac screens in mind. In other words, if you have a larger screen, a few of AOL's windows may congregate in the upper left corner. If that is your predicament, you'll be happy to discover the Remember Size command under the Window menu (see Figure 4-10).

Figure 4-10: The Remember Size command lets you permanently relocate (and resize) windows to suit your screen.



If you have a large-screen Mac and want to permanently relocate a window, simply situate the window to your satisfaction, then choose Remember Size from the Windows menu. From that moment on, the window will pop back into your preferred position and size, every time it's used.

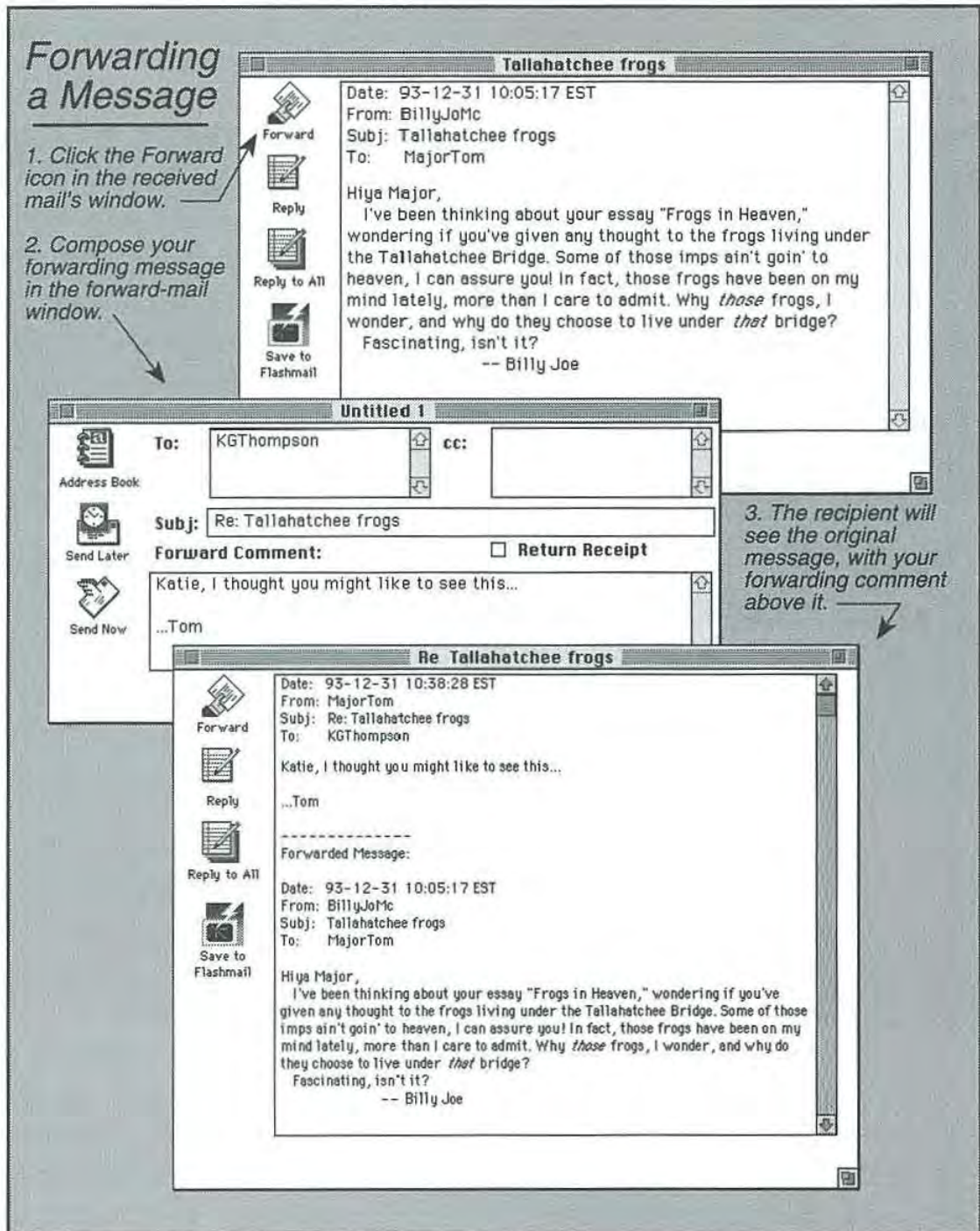




## Forwarding Mail

Once you have read your mail, you can forward it, reply to it or throw it out. Each of these options is accomplished with a click of the mouse. To forward a piece of mail, simply click the Forward icon pictured in Figure 4-9. America Online will respond with the slightly modified Compose Mail window that appears at the top of Figure 4-11.

Figure 4-11:  
Forwarding mail is as easy as clicking an icon, identifying the recipient and typing your comments.





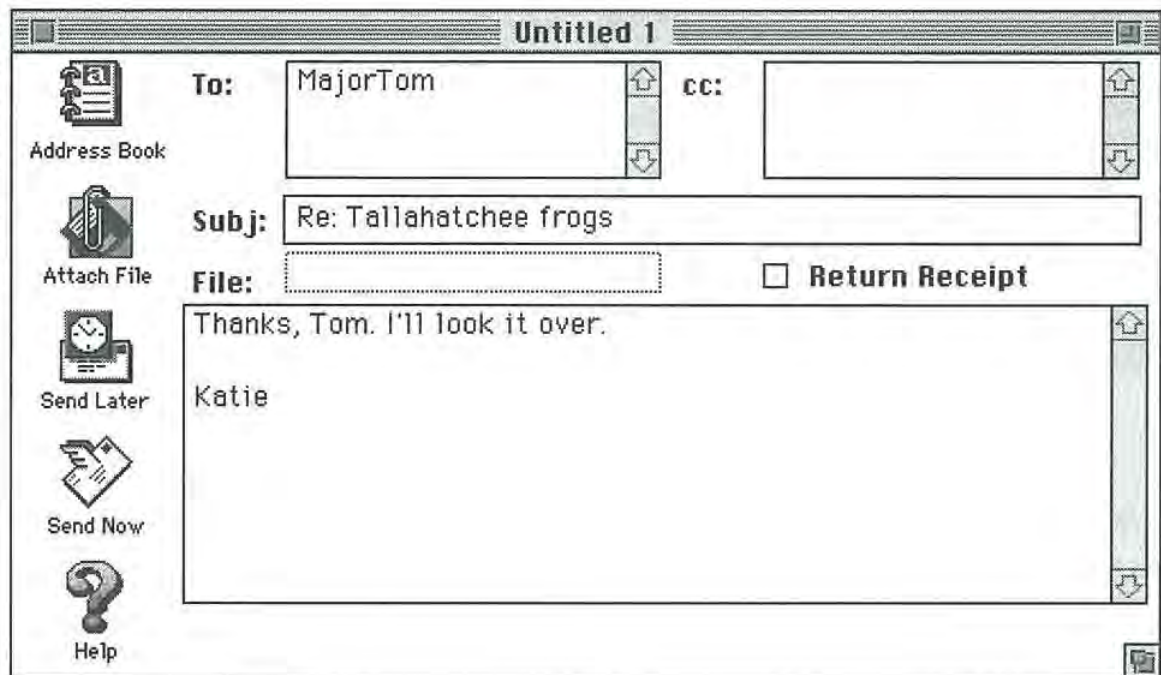


The top window pictured in Figure 4-11 is where you enter your forwarding comment and the address of the person who is to receive the forward. The new recipient then receives the forwarded mail with your comment preceding it. America Online clearly identifies forwarded mail by including a line at the top of the message that declares it as forwarded mail and identifies the person who did the forwarding (see the bottom window in Figure 4-11).

## Replying to Mail

You'll probably reply to mail more often than you forward it. Actually, all the Reply icon does is call up a Compose Mail window with the To and Subject fields already filled in with the appropriate information (see Figure 4-12). Aside from these two features, a reply is the same as any other message. You can modify the To and CC fields if you wish, and discuss any subject that interests you in the message text. You can even change the Subject field or remove the original recipient's screen name from the To field, though this somewhat defeats the purpose.

Figure 4-12: The reply window. The Subject and To fields are already completed for you; all you have to do is provide the message.





### Replying to All

Look once again at the lower window in Figure 4-11. Note that there are two reply icons, including one marked Reply to All. Reply to All allows you to reply to everyone who was sent a message, including any carbon copy addressees. In other words, you have your choice of replying only to the original sender (Reply button) or to everyone who receives a message (Reply to All button).

Note: Reply to All does not necessarily reply to blind carbon copy addressees. The rule here is, Reply to All replies to all whose screen names are visible in the Mail window. If you don't see a name (which would be the case if someone received a blind carbon copy), that person will not receive your reply.



### Replying with a Copy of the Original

Some people get lots of mail. Steve Case, for instance, gets hundreds of pieces a day. For Steve's benefit, I always include a copy of his original message when I reply. I do this to help him remember the subject of our discussion. Rather than copy and paste his message into a Reply window, I use the Forward button. Remember that forwarded mail includes a copy of the original message along with your comment. This little trick also works when you want to reply to a very old message the sender might not recall.

Because a copy of the original message gets sent with the reply, using the Forward button is an inefficient way of handling mail. More significantly, AOL has to store much more data. America Online's storage problems, however, are not our concern. The people at AOL are gonna love me for telling you about this.

### Checking Mail You've Read

We all forget things now and again: "What did I promise to get my mother for Valentine's Day?" That's why AOL provides the Check Mail You've Read option under the Mail menu. When you choose this command, AOL responds with the Mail You Have Read window (see Figure 4-13).





Figure 4-13: The Mail You Have Read window lists all of the mail you have read, just in case you forget.



There are no surprises here. Double-click any message in the window to reread it; click the Status button to see when you read it (and when any other addressees, if any, read their copies). Reread mail can be forwarded and replied to just like any other mail.

## The Address Book

America Online provides an address book just like the address book next to your telephone. In effect, AOL's book is a cross-reference, listing people's real names and their corresponding screen names. My recommendation is that you use the Address Book, even if you only have a name or two to put there now. Eventually you'll have scores of entries in your book, and you will be glad they're there.

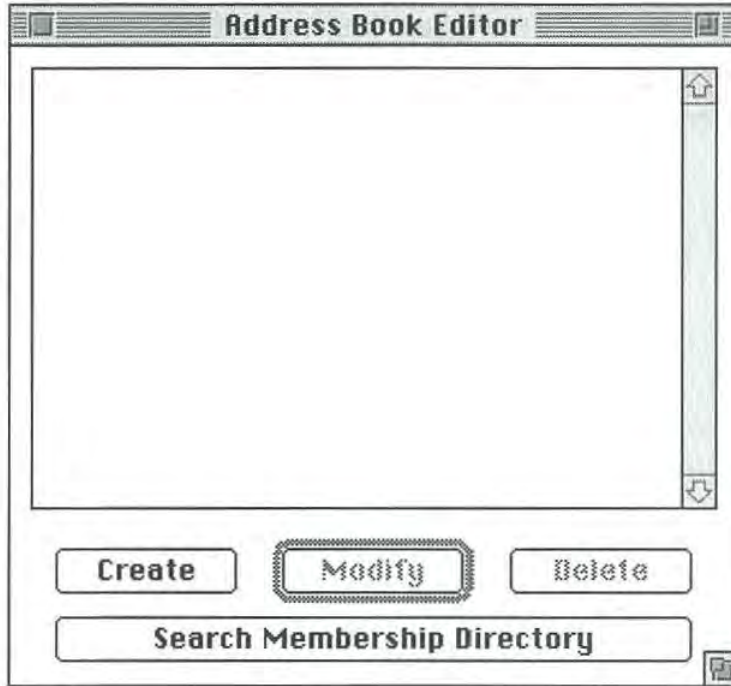
### Adding a Name to the Address Book

No one memorizes screen names. Screen names are eccentric composites of letters and numbers like "MikeQ4506," which AOL's sign-on software cooks up for each new member, or something clever like "DerringDo," which the member creates later when AOL's default screen name becomes insufferable. Either way, most screen names are eminently forgettable. That's why AOL provides an Address Book.

Of course, before you can use the Address Book you have to put some names there. It's easy. Online or off, choose Address Book from the Mail menu and AOL will provide the Address Book Editor window pictured in Figure 4-14.



Figure 4-14: The Address Book Editor window allows you to create, modify and delete members' names and screen names.



To add an entry to your Address Book, click the Create button. America Online will provide the editing form pictured in Figure 4-15.

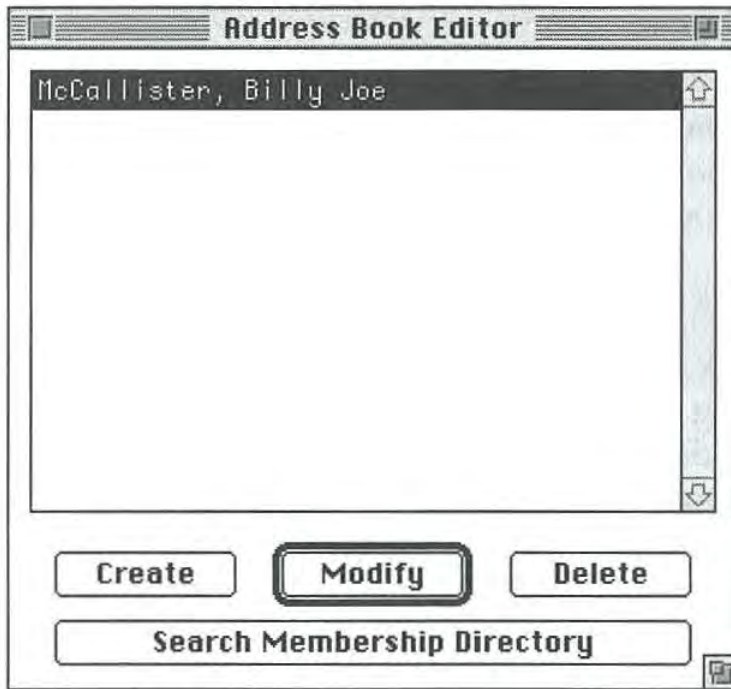
Figure 4-15: The Address Book editing form.

Place the person's real name in the Name field, then place their AOL or Internet address in the Accounts field. The next time you choose Address Book from the Mail window, the name will appear there (see Figure 4-16).





Figure 4-16: The Address Book now contains the new entry.



Now you are ready to use the Address Book whenever you prepare mail. Look again at Figure 4-1. Do you see the icon in the upper left corner marked Address Book? If your Address Book is current, you can use it to look up people's addresses and plug them into the To and CC fields of the Compose Mail window. Whenever a Compose Mail form is displayed on your screen, all you have to do is click that icon. From then on, it's only a matter of clicking the mouse.

### Multiple Accounts

If you look again at Figure 4-15, you'll notice there's room for multiple addresses in the Accounts field. In fact, the word "accounts" appears, not "account." You might wonder why.

Imagine that you're participating in an online discourse of frog heaven with three other esteemed theologians. Nearly every piece of mail on the subject has to be sent to all three of them. In this situation, you might want to create an entry in your Address Book called Froggers and list all three addresses—with commas between each address—in the Accounts field. Once you have done so, all you have to do is select Froggers from your Address Book to send them mail.