Internet Explorer (IE) and others such as Edge (Win 10), Firefox, Chrome and Safari

All Internet browsers essentially do the same thing - facilitate your computer going from one website to another. If you think of the Internet as a gigantic shopping mall (with the websites being analogous to stores), the browser is the transportation mechanism that takes you from site to site. You can have more than one browser loaded on your computer. Even though they do the same thing, they differ in appearance and their settings are found in different places.

This write-up is meant to present a lot of information without giving click-by-click instructions. It is probably best used while looking at the referenced program (browser) on your own computer.

Internet Explorer (IE) comes with Windows (written by Microsoft) and has been around a long time. It was the browser that most of us first used to learn on. Other browsers such as Firefox (by Mozilla), Chrome (by Google), Safari (by Apple) and AOL have always sort of been in competition with IE. With Windows 10 Microsoft introduced Edge - more or less a replacement for IE, claiming it to be faster in its execution.

Default Browser

In your computer, one browser is designated as the default. This means that whenever a link is clicked on (perhaps in an email) the default browser will be the one to take you to that site. It seems every browser wants to be the default, so if you install Chrome or Firefox, the first thing that browser will ask you is to change it to the default. Pick the one you are most comfortable with and let it be the "chosen one". It is still not a bad idea to have several browsers loaded. You may run into a website that will work fine with one browser and not another. Internet Explorer is regarded by many people as not being the best. In the end, it is up to you to choose and that choice can always be changed.

Browser Appearance & Performance

There are a few things that can improve the appearance and speed of your surfing or browsing. First of all, in IE 7 through IE 11 the Menu Bar is <u>off</u> by default. Since this is a convenient way to get at your list of favorites, you will probably want it on. To turn it on, point anywhere in the top part of IE, RIGHT click and then check the line that says Menu Bar. Another set of choices in revealed by clicking on the gear icon in the upper right of the screen.   IE 8 is as high as XP will let you go; IE 9 for Vista; IE 10 and 11 with Win 7, 8 & 10.   A new Explorer was added with Win 10 called "Edge". Remember IE 11 is still there - but somewhat hidden. ARE YOU CONFUSED YET??

In the Tools Menu, have a look at the Pop-Up Blocker and SmartScreen Filter and Manage Add-Ons entries. I, personally, turn off IE's Pop-Up blocker because the Google Toolbar (and other applications) also has a built-in blocker. I also turn off the SmartScreen Filter because this slows down your browsing. Another item to look at on the Tools Menu is the Manage Add-Ons entry. I would disable anything labeled as a "Browser Helper Object" or BHO in the Type column. Sometimes you will find a lot of these. Contrary to intuition, disabling them will speed your browsing. In other browsers these Add-Ons can be referred to as Extensions.

Under Tools, Internet Options in IE, in the General tab you can set your home page. Also, further down under the General Tab is a Delete button. This can be used to get rid of the Temporary Internet Files and Browsing History. Do not delete the cookies here, because this gets rid of the both the "good" cookies and bad ones. Use another program such as SuperAntiSpyware or CCleaner to clean the cookies. SuperAntiSpyware identifies "tracking cookies" which should be nuked. BTW, as I've said in other handouts, only one virus checker should be loaded, but you can load all the cookie cleanup programs you want.

Also, under Internet Options, there are six other tabs besides General. The default setting for Security is Medium-High. I would consider lowering it to Medium. Under Privacy, click on Advanced and check the box that says Override Automatic Cookie Handling. Some websites actually won't work unless you let their cookie in. This makes for smoother navigating, but also makes it important that you run the selective cookie eradicating software periodically. Blocking third party cookies sounds like a good idea, but it slows you down, almost prohibitively. It can even prevent you from accessing certain websites that require you to take a cookie.

Similar settings changes can be made to any browser, such as Chrome and Firefox, Usually these are made in the settings area accessed by clicking on an icon in the upper right - can be a set of dashes (Firefox), a set of dots (Chrome has vertical dots; Edge has horizontal dots) or some other icon…perhaps a gear. It is in the settings area that home page can be changed, Add-Ons or Extensions disabled. The settings list in any browser is unique. A

detailed explanation is beyond the scope of this write-up but suffice to say that exploring this area can make browsing more efficient. As stated above, my advice is to have a couple of browsers loaded, but stick with one that you feel confident using. Make that one your default.

With proper settings in any browser and a well-functioning high-speed Internet connection your home page should be revealed in fewer than five seconds. Content-heavy sites, such as www.msn.com and www.yahoo.com, which shows many pictures and news stories can take longer to load than a simple website such as www.google.com. An Internet connection speed can be obtained by going to a site such as www.speedtest.net. Clicking "Go" should give you three numbers - ping (should be 30 milliseconds (ms) or less), Download speed in Megabits/sec and Upload speed, also in Mbs. Download speed is typically 4 or 5 times higher than upload.

Browser Characteristics

All browsers have an address line where a website's URL (Uniform Resource Locator) appears. If you know a site's URL you can type it. You would enter something like www.google.com and it would take you to the Google Search page. In the address bar would appear "https://www.google.com". The http stands for Hyper Text Transfer Protocol and is always there. If there is a letter "s" after the http, it means that communication between your computer and that website is encrypted or secure - the s stands for secure. Be sure the s is present if you are going to enter any credit card information or make a payment of some sort. In some browsers the presence of the s is accompanied with a little picture of a padlock.

The address bar doubles as a search bar. What this means is, if you type a non-URL in this field, it will use a search device such as Bing or Google to look for websites with those keywords in them. Which search device is used depends on what "default search engine" your browser has loaded. IE and Edge use Bing, because that was written by Microsoft, but it can be changed.

Favorites, Bookmarks or Favorite Places is a list that you create in your browser of frequently visited websites. Typically this list is built by the user as you use the browser. This becomes a powerful tool to save you time. Most browsers permit transferring this list to other browsers. If you commonly use IE and you want to move your favorites list to Chrome it can be done with a couple of clicks.

Toolbars and other features can be added to personalize your Internet use. A common toolbar that many users like is the Google Toolbar. If this toolbar is present, you can highlight a word or phrase in a website text and that text will appear in the Toolbar. This facilitates quick and easy searching. Another example of a bar that can be revealed or hidden is the Favorites Bar. When revealed this shows the last few websites you have visited.

Most browsers (at this point I'm beginning to wish I had a suitable synonym for "browser") have a zoom capability. This allows you to enlarge the pictures and print showing on a website. This may be good to help the visually challenged, but zooming in too far may require horizontal scrolling. Usually 125% is as high as you can go without invoking this need, but using a high zoom, temporarily, may be worthwhile.

Summary

The above descriptions may not be as detailed as you would like, but there are so many different settings and so many subtleties between browsers, that some self discovery is necessary. It became prohibitive to get into the details of how to handle every setting.

A browser is necessary for roaming, navigating, surfing or visiting websites on the Internet. There are several common browsers today including Internet Explorer, Edge (Win 10), Firefox, Safari (Apple) and Chrome to name a few. Many can be downloaded for free from www.filehippo.com under the sub heading of Browsers. One browser will be your default and that choice is up to you. My advice is to experiment with several browsers, pick one you are comfortable with, get familiar with its setting and characteristics and stick with it. If I am asked which one is the best, I usually say something like, "That's like asking whether Ford, Chevrolet or Toyota is best". It depends on your experience with each. Once you make a decision, I wouldn't bother telling others unless you want to argue…ha.

Next week's handout will cover two Internet-related topics: the effective use of a search engine and a list of my favorite websites. We should have a lot of fun with those.

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