Using BB

Introduction

Purpose

This bulletin board is provided by Ken Case as a service to Wizards of the Coast, in cooperation with Lisa Lowe, Peter Adkison and Ken McGlothlen. The software is written and maintained by Ken Case and Wil Shipley; it was originally written at the University of Washington, and is still being used there.

As a new user, you are advised to read this document before proceeding further in **bb**. Command reference is available within **bb** via the **help** command.

Ethics

The use of this bulletin board is a privilege -- not a right. Users are reminded that the content of postings are subject to federal and state laws as well as University policies on sexual, racial and religious harassment, misuse of University property, and discrimination based on age, veteran status, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnic origin or marital status -- regardless of the "historical culture" of the room in which a message is posted.

> Failure to comply with these laws and policies could result in disciplinary actions including, but not limited to, suspension or permanent dismissal from the University, civil prosecution, and/or personal liability.

Complaints regarding alleged misconduct should be directed to Ken McGlothlen at 206/784-2083, or mcglk@cpac.washington.edu.

Accessing BB

Connecting to bb

To connect to **bb** enter the command:

```
bb
```

on blegga, or:

```
bb -S blegga.cac
```

on any of the CPAC or UCS UNIX machines.

Signing on

When you connect to **bb** you will see the following message:

Welcome to BB.

bb id:

If you have already established a **bb** signon, enter your id at this prompt, and your password at the ‘‘password’’ prompt that follows. If not, enter ‘‘new’’ as your id. This will produce the following:

Welcome to BB.

bb id: **new**

Creating a new bb signon. Enter an unused id and password.

bb id:
.
.
.
bb password:

At the ‘‘id’’ and ‘‘password’’ prompts, enter any new **bb** id and password you wish. The id and password you choose need not be the same as your system id or password. To change your id or password later, use the **setname** or **password** commands within **bb**.

Getting Around

Architecture

In **bb**, messages are posted in rooms; each room addresses a specific topic. All rooms are in one of two groups: ‘‘supported’’ and ‘‘unsupported.’’ The supported group contains those rooms supported by University Computing Services. Unsupported rooms are initially hidden from view, and messages within those rooms expire more quickly than those in the supported rooms.

Rooms: Priorities and Access

By default, rooms are accessible by everyone. However, they can be assigned the class **no_access** by their owner. If they have this class, only those specified by the owner can ever see the room.

Rooms are sorted by their priority, which is a number assigned to individual rooms and groups. A room assigned a higher priority comes before a room with a lower priority; rooms assigned the same priority are sorted alphabetically.

A room’s priority is determined by the highest priority of the groups in which that room is a member, and an individual offset for the room’s priority. To change the priority of a room, use the **priority** command, and specify what you would like the room’s new priority to be: **bb** will compute the appropriate offset for the room. For example,

bb> **priority unix*hints 50**

sets the priority of the ‘‘unix*hints’’ room to 50 (regardless of the groups of which unix*hints happens to be a member).

There is a configurable cutoff priority, which is initially set to 0. All rooms with priorities below the cutoff are hidden. Those with higher priorities are (if accessible) automatically visible. To change your cutoff priority, use the **cutoff** command.

By default, only the rooms in the supported group are visible. The **priority /group** command changes a group’s priority. To see the rooms in the unsupported group, set its priority to a number above your cutoff, e.g.,

> bb> **priority /group unsupported 0**

For more information, see the internal help.

Directory

The **directory** command shows a list of all the visible, accessible rooms. If messages have been posted in a room following the last message you’ve read in that room, it will be flagged with an asterisk. The currently selected room is flagged with ‘‘>’’. There are various qualifiers (type **directory /**<qualifier>) that modify directory’s output. The most commonly used are:

/count	displays the number of messages posted in each room following the last message read in that room
/full	displays each room’s summary line and owner as well as the standard room name
/messages	lists only those rooms in which messages have been posted since the last message you’ve read
/priorities	displays room priorities

For a complete list of qualifiers, see the internal help.

Selecting rooms

When you enter **bb**, you are placed in the first room in your directory which contains new messages (see the discussion of priorities, above, for information on how to re-order your directory). The command line prompt always shows which room you are in, the message number you are at and the total number of messages in a room. For example,

> bb-general:19/104>

tells you that you are in the ‘‘general’’ room, the 19th message is the current message, and there are 104 messages in the room. The current message is the latest one read.

To select a different room to read from and/or post in, use the ‘‘**goto** <room-name>’’ command. For example, bb> **goto unix*hints**

selects the ‘‘unix*hints’’ room. You can abbreviate room names to as few letters as you choose; if what you specify is ambiguous, **bb** will select the first matching name in your directory. For example,

bb> **goto w**

could select ‘‘weather,’’ ‘‘whine,’’ ‘‘whyever,’’ etc., depending upon the relative order of these rooms in your directory.

You may leave off the **goto**, as long as the room name doesn’t conflict with a **bb** command. For example, to select the vms*hints room, you may simply type ‘‘vms*hints’’ (or probably even just ‘‘vms’’).

Reading messages

There are several commands for reading messages. To read the next message in a room, use the **next** command, or just hit the <return> key. To read a specific message, type ‘‘**read** <message number>’’ or simply ‘‘<message number>’’. (For example, typing ‘‘**23**’’ will read the 23rd message of the current room.) The **first** command reads the first message in a room; likewise, **last** reads the last one. To read the message before the current one, use **back**. **All** reads all of the new messages in a room one right after the other, without a command prompt in between.

Summary

Summary lists the messages in a room, display for each the message number, the author and the time of its posting, and its subject line. To list only those messages posted after the current message, use the **/new** qualifier.

Posting Messages

General instructions for posting a message

To post a message, use the **post** command. You will be prompted for a subject line. Try to make this line relevant and informative: it should give a brief description of the post’s subject matter.

There are two ways to post messages: with an editor, and without one. The latter is easier in the short run, because it does not require you to learn any editors. The former is more useful in the long run; you may change more things, more easily, in your message as you are writing it.

If you do not know how to use an editor and would like to learn, the UNIX manual pages (accessed via the UNIX command **man**) offer instructions, or documentation can be picked up at a campus consulting office.

The editor to be used, if any, is determined by the **set editor** command, or by the system environment variables BBEDITOR and EDITOR. For more information, see ‘‘help set.’’ By default, **bb** does not use an editor.

Posting without an editor

Post prints a line of instructions to your terminal after you enter your subject:

|------Enter your message, followed by CTRL/D on a blank line.------|

Try to end your lines before the vertical bar at the right end of the instruction line, or many terminals will not be able to read the ends of them. You cannot change lines above the one you are on, but you can edit the line you are typing on, using the standard line editing keys (for example, the <delete> key). The arrow keys will not work on the UNIX version.

When you've finished your message, type Control-D (or Control-Z, on VMS) on a blank line. (To type a control character, hold down the <control> key and press the character.) There are four relevant control characters if you're not using an editor:

Control-D posts your message, when typed on a blank line.

Control-L marks a new page in your text. When the message appears on a user's screen, it will scroll down to the Control-L character and stop. Hitting the spacebar will give the user the next page of text.

Control-Z works at any point in **bb**. It puts you at your system prompt; you can get back onto **bb** with the command **fg**. Your message will still be intact, though you will not be able to see what you have already typed.

Control-C aborts your message: nothing is posted.

Posting Files

To post a file to **bb**, use the command:

bb> **post** subject **<** filename

where "filename" is the name of the file you wish to post. If you don't specify a subject on the command line, the first line of the file will be used as the subject.

Deleting messages

The **delete** command will get rid of unwanted messages that you have posted; enter "**delete**" when the message is the current message, or enter "**delete** <message number>" to delete the message specified by <message number>.

Nicknames

A nickname is a short line of text that appears with your **bb** id in messages you post. To set or change it, use the **setnick** command, which prompts you for your new nickname, and then repeats it back to you:

bb> **setnick**
nickname? **Zoology Statistics Consultant**
nickname changed to Zoology Statistics Consultant

You may also specify your nickname following the setnick command on the command line, e.g., ‘‘setnick Zoology Statistics Consultant’’.

Miscellaneous

BB's initialization file

When **bb** starts up, it looks in your home directory for a file named ‘‘.bbrc’’. If this file exists, it should contain a set of commands for **bb** to execute as it starts up. A user's .bbrc file might contain the following commands:

```
signon humboldt ocean
set pager=less
set editor=emacs
users
alias d*ir "directory /messages"
alias hi*de "hide !*; go"
dir
```

The first line will connect the user (humboldt) to **bb** without him having to manually type in his id or password (‘‘ocean’’).

The second line sets the pager: in this case, **less**. A pager is the program used to display most output from **bb**.

The third line defines the editor to be used when posting messages. Your editor and pager will default to values found in your account's environment variables, if not specified with **set**. (See the internal help for **set** for more information.)

The fourth line, ‘‘users’’, is a command which lists the users on **bb**, displaying their system ids, their nicknames, and their **bb** ids.

The next two lines in the initialization file define aliases:

‘‘alias d*ir "directory /messages"’’ sets up an alias so that ‘‘dir’’ invokes the command ‘‘directory /messages’’, which displays a list of all the visible, accessible rooms with new messages.

‘‘alias hi*de "hide !*; go"’’ creates an alias so that typing ‘‘**hide**’’ goes to the next room with new messages after hiding the room. The ‘‘!*’’ specifies that any arguments to the hide alias should be inserted at that point in the translation.

The last line, “dir”, invokes the previously defined alias for directory.

For more information, see the internal help for “.bbrc”.

Executing shell commands from within bb

To execute shell commands while in **bb**, precede your shell command with a “!”. For example,

> bb> **!less blegga**

scrolls a file (named “blegga”) in your account through less onto your screen, and then returns you to the **bb** command line. Similarly,

> bb> **!prt guide**

will print the file named “guide”.

(Please note: in the current implementation, shell commands are executed by the Bourne shell. One side-effect of this is that csh and tcsh aliases will not be translated.)

File Manipulation

“<”, “>”, and “>>” redirect input and output to and from files for all **bb** commands, just as they do in UNIX shells. For example,

> bb> **all >> bb-support.messages**

appends all messages in the current room to a file named “bb-support.messages”.

For more information, see the internal help for “file_manipulation.”

Where to go from here

If you have questions that aren’t answered in this documention, try looking through the internal help, or posting a message in the “bb*questions” room. If you find a problem with the program, post about it in the “bugs” room. Suggestions for improving **bb** can be posted in the “suggestions” room.

List of help topics

Internal help is available on the following topics:

Concepts

Commands	Initialization	Header_Format	Parameters
Ethics	File_Manipulation	Message_Number	Special_Effects

Commands

————	changeclass	hide	quit	set
————	create	info	read	show
————	delete	last	remove	signon
add	directory	list	rename	source
alias	echo	mail	reply	subtract
all	exit	next	reset	summary
back	first	post	respond	unalias
catchup	goto	preserve	search	undelete
change	help	priority	run	users

Program Topics

Programming	Variables	global	prompt
Macros	————	———	return
Selectors	for	let	while

Type “help” at the **bb** prompt for an up-to-date list of available help topics.