WinVN Help Index

Press and hold the mouse button on <u>definitions</u>; click and release on <u>cross-references</u>.   To learn more about Help, press F1.

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Main Window

The main window, initially in the upper left corner of the screen, displays a list of newsgroups.   Double-clicking on a newsgroup name causes WinVN to display a list of subjects of available articles in that newsgroup in a group window.

Clicking on a newsgroup name "selects" that newsgroup and displays it in reverse video (light on dark).   Selecting a newsgroup is useful only for subscribing to it; see Subscribing to Newsgroups.   Subscribed groups appear in black; unsubscribed groups appear in red.

The first character of each newsgroup line in the main window gives information about that newsgroup:

space   indicates either that WinVN has no information on the status of this group, or that no new articles have appeared in this group since your last WinVN session.
>   indicates that this newsgroup has been selected as the result of the previous **Find** operation.
*   indicates that new articles have appeared in this newsgroup since your last WinVN session.

Group Menu Commands
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Usenet News

The Usenet News, or Netnews, system is a kind of distributed bulletin board system run on thousands of computers world-wide.   Users of Usenet News exchange views and information by writing articles, which are then transmitted automatically amoungst the computers in the network.   Once posted, an article can by read by others days, hours, or even minutes later, depending upon their computer's type of network link to Usenet.

Articles are organized by topic area into newsgroups, of which there are currently over 1000.

Overview of WinVN

WinVN is a Microsoft Windows-based news reader.   Like other news readers, it can be used to select, view, and write Usenet Newsarticles.   WinVN can also be used to send (but not receive) electronic mail messages.

WinVN offers a more visual approach to Usenet News than most other news readers. WinVN allows you to easily navigate amoungst newsgroups and articles via its point-and-click interface.

In normal operation, WinVN displays three types of windows: the main window, which displays a list of all newsgroups; one or more group windows, each of which displays a list of the articles in a newsgroup; and one or more article windows, which each displays an article.   Double-clicking on a newsgroup or article name causes that item to be displayed in a separate window.

When you want to write an article, WinVN displays a posting window for that purpose. See Posting an Article.   Similarly, when you want to write an electronic mail message, WinVN displays a mail window to accept your text.   See Mailing a Message.

WinVN offers a number of configuration options; see Options Menu Commands.

History of WinVN

WinVN was written at home as an own-time project by me, Mark Riordan, a systems programmer at Michigan State University.   The program and its source code have been placed in the public domain.   WinVN is not a product of MSU or any other institution.

Serioius development of WinVN began in September 1989.   It continues, in fits and starts. A Macintosh version was developed, but it is no longer in sync with the latest Windows version and is not being distributed (I think!).   The recent release of a number of good Macintosh newsreaders has convinced me to cease development of the Mac version. Besides, I don't own a Mac.

You can correspond with the author of WinVN at the email addresses riordanmr@clvax1.cl.msu.edu or 17362MRR@MSU.BITNET.

Mark R.   Lansing, Michigan   September 1991

bulletin board system (BBS)

An electronic system in which users participate in discussions by leaving public messages for each other.   Most BBS's are run on personal computers and are accessible only by dialup modem.   Many have additional features, such as online games and a file repository.

Usenet News is not a BBS in the usual sense of the word, but it provides the messaging features of a BBS on a much grander scale than found on any existing BBS.

Usenet

A loosely-organized network of perhaps 100,000 computers worldwide.   These computers are linked in a number of ways, including modem and TCP/IP.   The best known service provided by Usenet is <u>Usenet News</u>.

article

A message written by a Usenet News user and posted to the network.   Articles are similar to electronic mail messages, but are not private.   They are intended to be seen by potentially hundreds of thousands of people.   Also called "postings".

newsgroup

A collection of articles on a given topic.   When you write an article, you specify to which group or groups it should be sent.

Each newsgroup has a hierarchical name which suggests the topic of that group.   Names consist of several words separated by periods.   The first word in the newsgroup name states the general category covered by that group, the second, a subcategory of that general category, and so on.

For instance, the newsgroups **sci.chem** and **sci.math** are scientifically-oriented groups which are dedicated to chemistry and mathematics, respectively.   **soc.culture.indian** is sociologically-oriented group devoted to the culture of India, and so on.

news reader

A computer program through which you interact with the Usenet News system.   News readers allow you to select and read articles written by others, and to write and post articles of your own.

A number of news readers have been written over the years, many of them for computers running the Unix operating system.   The best-known news readers are probably rn, vn, nn, and xrn.

posting

The act of sending an <u>article</u> to the Usenet network, to be seen by potentially hundreds of thousands of individuals.

Also, a synonym for "article".

header

A series of lines at the beginning of an <u>article</u> or <u>electronic mail message</u> that contain such information as the article's or message's author, its subject, its date and time of transmission, and so on.   The header is separated from the actual text of the article or message by a blank line.

electronic mail message

A message sent privately to one or more explicitly-named individuals.   Electronic mail is not provided by <u>Usenet News</u> per se; electronic mail messages are not the same as news <u>articles</u>.   However, many <u>news readers</u> provide the capability of sending (but usually not receiving) electronic mail because it is often desirable to respond privately to an article.

news server

A computer that runs special software to exchange news <u>articles</u> with other computers in the <u>Usenet</u> network, and makes these articles available to local users.   <u>News readers</u> require access to a news server, but they do not require you to have an account on a news server.

definition

A type of hypertext link in Microsoft Help.   A definition is a (usually) brief description of a term.   Definitions appear when you press and hold the mouse button on a term that appears in Help as green text marked with a dotted underline.

The description disappears as soon as you release the mouse button.
Hence, it is not possible to access hypertext links within a definition.   Some definitions contain hypertext links, however, because they are also available as cross-references.   It is usually possible to reference a definition as a cross-reference via the Help **Search** button.

Cross Reference

A type of hypertext link in Microsoft Help.   A cross reference is a topic that appears in the Help window when you click on a term that appears in Help as green solid underlined text.

Group Menu Commands

Find...
 Searches the <u>main window</u> for a <u>newsgroup</u> name that contains a specified text string.
 Find brings up a dialog box into which you enter the string for which you want to search.
 Click on OK to start the search, or Cancel if you decide not to search after all.

 If a newsgroup is found which contains the specified string, the main window will be
 scrolled so that the newsgroup name is visible.   The selected newsgroup name will be
 marked with a "**>**".   If no such newsgroup can be found, WinVN says so via a message
 box.

Find Next
 Continues the search started by the previous Find... or Find Next.   The next newsgroup
 name containing the string, if any, is displayed.

Subscribe selected groups
 Subscribes to the currently-selected newsgroups.   See <u>Subscribing to Newsgroups</u>.

Unsubscribe selected groups
 Unsubscribes from the currently-selected newsgroups.   See <u>Subscribing to</u>
 <u>Newsgroups</u>.

Move selected groups to Top
 Subscribes to the currently-selected newsgroups if they are not already subscribed, and
 moves them to the very top of the newsgroup list.   See <u>Subscribing to Newsgroups</u>.

Deselect all
 Clears all newsgroups in the <u>main window</u>, so that no newsgroups are currently selected.

Exit
 Terminates WinVN, and writes a record of your activity to <u>the NEWSRC file</u>.

Quit; don't save NEWSRC
 Terminates WinVN, and leaves the NEWSRC file unchanged.

Options Menu Commands

Configure Comm...
Brings up a dialog box allowing you to select communications options.

You must choose between a TCP/IP network connection, and serial communication.   Click on the appropriate button.

TCP/IP operation requires that you own the commercial product PC/TCP from FTP Software, Inc., and that the network driver be loaded.

Serial support is implemented primarily for the benefit of the author, for development purposes.   Serial support requires that you have a link to a computer which has telneted to a news server's NNTP port (typically 119).   The connection must be set up by some other communication package, before WinVN is started.   Serial support is recommended only for experts.

If TCP/IP operation is selected, you must fill in the IP address of a news server.   Obtain this information from your system administrator.   You must also fill in the TCP port number of the news server program.   Typically this is 119; other values can be used if your local news server is so configured.

If serial support is selected, you must select the communications port, the number of data bits and parity, and the communications rate.

See Saving Configuration Information.

Configure Personal Info...
Brings up a dialog box allowing you to specify personal information: your name, electronic mail address, and organization name.   The organization name is typically the name of your employer or educational institution.   This information is used to construct headers for articles and electronic mail messages that you write.

See Saving Configuration Information.

Configure Miscellaneous...
Brings up a dialog box allowing you to specify miscellaneous preferences regarding the operation of WinVN.

If **New window for each group** is checked, WinVN will attempt to create a new group window for each newsgroup selected from the main window.   If this option is not checked, WinVN will reuse an existing group window to display newly-requested newsgroups.

If **New window for each article** is checked, WinVN will attempt to create a new article window for each article selected from the main window.   If this option is not checked, WinVN will reuse an existing article window to display newly-requested articles.

Checking **Append saved articles** affects what WinVN does when you attempt to save the contents of an article to an existing file.   If this box is checked, WinVN will append the article to the file.   Otherwise, it will ask you what to do.   See File Menu Commands.

The **Check for new groups on startup** option determines whether WinVN queries the news server for newly-created newsgroups.   Checking for new newsgroups also allows WinVN to determine which groups have received new articles since the last WinVN

session.   The **Yes** and **No** options are self-explanatory; **Ask** means that WinVN will ask the user whether to check for new groups every time it starts up.   The **Yes** option is recommended for Ethernet-attached PCs.   Checking for new groups can take a very long time on serially-attached PCs, though.

See <u>Saving Configuration Information</u>.

Reset server protocol
  Resets the state of the communications session between WinVN and the <u>news server</u>. This option is used to work around problems with WinVN, the communications connection, or the news server.

Compose mail message
  Creates a <u>mail window</u> to be used to send a mail message.   See <u>Mailing a Message</u>.

Saving Configuration Information

When you have finished specifying configuration information in one of the configuration dialog boxes, you must click on one of the three buttons in the dialog box:

OK & Save   accepts the changes that you have made, and records your preferences on hard disk.   These changes will apply to future WinVN sessions as well as the current session (if applicable).   The [WinVN] section of the WIN.INI file is used.

OK (no save)   accepts the changes that you have made for this session, but does not record them for future sessions.

Cancel   causes WinVN to ignore the changes you have made.

See Options Menu Commands

Help Menu Commands

Index
  Starts the Help system with WinVN's main Help index.

About
  Displays a dialog box containing WinVN version information.

Group Window

Group windows contain a list of subjects of <u>articles</u> in a given <u>newsgroup</u>.   Double-clicking on the subject of an article causes that article to be retrieved into an <u>article window</u>.

Group windows initially appear in the upper right area of the screen.   It is possible to have up to 4 group windows open at any one time.   See <u>Options Menu Commands</u>.

The first character of each subject line in a group window gives information about that article:

space   indicates either that WinVN has no information on the status of this article, or that this article was available in a previous WinVN session and you chose not to view it.
>   indicates that this article has been selected as the result of the previous **Find** operation.
s   indicates that you have already seen this article.
n   indicates that this article has appeared since your last WinVN session.

<u>Articles Menu Commands</u>
<u>Search Menu Commands</u>

Articles Menu Commands

New Posting
  Creates a <u>Posting window</u> for the purpose of composing a new article for this <u>newsgroup</u>.

Exit
  Closes this <u>Group Window</u>.

Search Menu Commands

Find...
  Searches the <u>article</u> subjects in this <u>Group Window</u> for an article whose subject line contains a specified text string.   Find brings up a dialog box into which you enter the string for which you want to search.   Click on OK to start the search, or Cancel if you decide not to search after all.

  If an article is found whose subject contains the specified string, the   window will be scrolled so that the subject line is visible.   The selected article subject will be marked with a "**>**".   If no such article can be found, WinVN says so via a message box.

Find Next
  Continues the search started by the previous Find... or Find Next.   The next article containing the previously-set subject string is displayed if it can be found.

Article Window

An article window displays the text of an <u>article</u>.   The article is initially positioned in the scrollable window to the beginning of the article text, with the article <u>header</u> scrolled out of sight.   (If you scroll the window manually during the short time that the article is being retrieved from the <u>news server</u>, the article is not repositioned.)

<u>File Menu Commands</u>
<u>View Menu Commands</u>
<u>Respond Menu Commands</u>

File Menu Commands

Save
  Saves the <u>article</u> in this <u>Article Window</u> to a file.   The filename from the most recent
  Save As... is used.   If no **Save As...** has been done in this session, **Save** acts just like
  Save As....

Save As...
  Brings up a dialog box asking the user for a file name to which the current article should
  be saved.   The dialog box also contains a check box labelled **Append to this file**.   If
  this box is checked, WinVN will write the article to the end of the specified file.
  Otherwise, WinVN will overwrite the file with the article.

  Press **OK** to actually save the article; press **Cancel** if you have changed your mind about
  saving the article.

Exit
  Closes this window.

View Menu Commands

Next Article
  Causes WinVN to fetch and display the next article in this <u>newsgroup</u>.   If there is no next article, WinVN says so.

Next with same Subject
  Causes WinVN to search the subsequent articles in this newsgroup for an article with the same subject as the current article.   (Leading "Re:" notations are ignored.)   If a matching article is found, it is retrieved and displayed in the current <u>Article Window</u>.   Otherwise, WinVN informs you that there are no more articles with that subject.

Respond Menu Commands

Followup Article
  Creates a <u>Posting Window</u> with the appropriate <u>header</u> and text to compose an article
  that responds to the <u>article</u> in the current <u>Article Window</u>.   See <u>Posting an Article</u>.

via Mail
  Creates a <u>Mail Window</u> with the appropriate <u>header</u> and text to compose an <u>electronic
  mail message</u> to the author of   the current article.   See <u>Mailing a Message</u>.

Posting Window

The posting window allows you to compose and then <u>post</u> an <u>article</u> to the network.   See <u>Posting an Article</u>.

<u>Posting Menu Commands</u>
<u>Edit Menu Commands</u>

Posting Menu Commands

Post completed article
  Sends your   completed article in this Posting Window to the news server for propagation
  throughout the network.

Cancel
  Closes this window.   If you haven't already posted this article, its contents are lost.

Edit Menu Commands

Undo
  Reverses the effects of the most recent change to this window.

Cut
  Deletes the selected text and saves it in the clipboard.

Copy
  Copies the selected text into the clipboard.

Paste
  Retrieves the text most recently copied or cut to the clipboard into the current window.
  The text is inserted at the current cursor position.

Clear
  Deselects all text in the current window.

Select All
  Selects all text in the current window.   Generally used just prior to a Copy operation to
  save the contents of the window to the clipboard.

Mail Window

The mail window allows to you compose and then send an <u>electronic mail message</u>.   See <u>Mailing a Message.</u>

<u>Mail Menu Commands</u>
<u>Edit Menu Commands</u>

Mail Menu Commands

Mail completed message
  Sends your completed <u>electronic mail message</u> to its recipient(s).

Cancel
  Closes this <u>Mail Window</u>.   If you have not already sent the message you were composing, it is lost.

Posting an Article

You can post an article either as a followup to a previous article, or as a "brand new" article.   Note that often it is preferable to respond to an article via an electronic mail message rather than by another article; see Usenet Etiquette and Mailing a Message.

An article contains a header followed by the text of the article.   Each article is directed to one or more newsgroups by a "Newsgroups:" line in the header.   If you want to send an article to more than one newsgroup, type the names of the newsgroups on the "Newsgroups:" line, separated by commas.   The text of an article is separated from the header by a blank line.

Followup Articles

A followup article has the same "Subject:" line as the article which inspired it.   (The notation "Re:" is added.)   This makes it easier for other Usenet News users browsing the newsgroup to follow the discussion.   Also, a followup article typically selectively quotes the earlier article, again to make the discussion easier to follow.

You start composing a followup article by selecting the **Followup Article** option of an article window's **Respond** menu.   (See Respond Menu Commands.)   WinVN creates a posting window.   The header of the article in this window is filled in with information taken from WinVN configuration options and from the header of the referenced article.   (See Configuring WinVN.)   The full text of the referenced article is also included in the posting window, with each line preceded by a "**>**" to indicate that another article is being quoted.

Fill in the text of your response.   You should delete irrelevant quoted lines in your followup article.

New Articles

You start composing a "brand new" article by selecting the **New posting** option from the **Articles** menu of a group window.   (See Articles Menu Commands.)   WinVN creates a posting window for your new article.   The "Newsgroup:" line contains the name of the newsgroup of the group window; you can edit this if necessary.   Other information is based on the way you configured WinVN.

You must fill in an appropriate subject for the new article.

Sending the Article

When you have completed composing your article, you can send it to the network or cancel it.   See Posting Menu Commands.   After you have posted the article, you can close the posting window.

Mailing a Message

You can use WinVN to send an <u>electronic mail message</u> either as a personal reply to the author of an article, or as an independent message.

A message contains a <u>header</u> followed by the text of the message.   A message is directed to one or more recipients by a "To:" line in the header.   If you want to send a message to more than one person, type the electronic mail addresses of the recipients on the "To:" line, separated by commas.   The text of a message is separated from the header by a blank line.

Reply Messages

A reply message has the same "Subject:" line as the article which inspired it.   (The notation "Re:" is added.)   Also, a reply message typically selectively quotes the article which inspired it, to give some context to the recipient.

You start composing a reply message by selecting the **via Mail** option of an <u>article window's</u> **Respond** menu.   See <u>Respond Menu Commands</u>.   WinVN creates a <u>mail window</u>.   The <u>header</u> of the message in this window is filled in with information taken from WinVN configuration options and from the header of the referenced article.   (See <u>Configuring WinVN</u>.)   The full text of the referenced article is also included in this window, with each line preceded by a "**>**" to indicate that an article is being quoted.

Fill in the text of your message.   You should delete irrelevant quoted lines.

New Messages

You start composing a "brand new" message--one that does not reference an article--by selecting the **Compose mail message** option from the **Optionss** menu of the <u>main window</u>.   (See <u>Options Menu Commands</u>.)   WinVN creates a <u>mail window</u> for your new article.   Your name and organization are filled in based on the way you configured WinVN.

You must fill in an appropriate subject for the new article on the "Subject:" line, and a recipient on the "To:" line.

Sending the Message

When you have completed composing your message, you can send it or cancel it.   See <u>Mail Menu Commands</u>.   After you have sent the message, you can close the mail window.

Subscribing to Newsgroups

What is "Subscribing"?

"Subscribing" to a <u>newsgroup</u> means telling a <u>news reader</u> that you are interested in tracking, selecting, and viewing articles in that group.   Most news readers support the concept of "subscribing" to newsgroups as a means of simplifying the way that you interact with the news reader.   There are probably over 1000 newsgroups in which you are not interested; if you are not subscribed to these newgroups, a news reader need not bother prompting you with information on these groups.

WinVN also supports the concept of subscribing to a newsgroup, but primarily as a means of providing compatibility with other news readers.   WinVN's windowed, point-and-click interface makes it less necessary for it to resort to the somewhat artificial distinction between newsgroups in which you are interested and newsgroups in which you are not interested.   You can always access any newsgroup simply by scrolling to its name and clicking on it.

Subscribing to New Newsgroups

When WinVN starts up, it can check the <u>news server</u> to see if any new groups have been created since your last session.   (See <u>Configuring WinVN</u>.)   If WinVN checks and finds that new newsgroups do exist, it displays their names in a scrollable list in a dialog box.   You select the groups to which you want to subscribe by clicking on their names.   When you have finished making your selections, click on the **OK** button.   Alternatively, you can click on the **Cancel** button and WinVN will ignore the new newsgroups altogether.

Subscribing to Existing Newsgroups

Newsgroups to which you are subscribed are displayed in black at the top of the <u>main window</u>.   Following these groups are all of the unsubscribed group names, in red and sorted alphabetically.

You subscribe and unsubscribe to newsgroups by selecting them in the main window and using <u>Group Menu Commands</u>.   Select groups by clicking on their names.   A selected group appears in reverse video (black background).   The **Subscribe selected groups**, **Unsubscribe selected groups**, and **Move selected groups to Top** menu options operate on all currently selected newsgroups.

Subscribing to a newsgroup moves its name to the bottom of the list of subscribed groups in the top portion of the main window.   Unsubscribing to a newsgroup causes it to be moved to its proper alphabetical place in the unsubscribed portion of the main window.

Usenet Etiquette

The ease of posting Usenet News articles causes many inappropriate articles to be sent to the network.   An article can be inappropriate if it:

  --   Is devoid of useful information or ideas.
  --   Is sent to inappropriate newsgroup(s).
  --   Is really intended for a particular individual, rather than the entire Usenet community.
  --   Contains rude or insulting remarks.

Please compose your articles thoughtfully.   Consider sending an electronic mail message rather than posting an article, if appropriate.

Be aware of the fact that many sites must pay long-distance telephone charges to receive your article.   Also be aware of the fact that some of the popular newsgroups have tens of thousands of readers.   10,000 people each reading your article for 20 seconds spend a total of 55 hours reading your article.

See Posting an Article and Mailing a Message.

The NEWSRC File

In order to keep track of your viewing history, WinVN records information about <u>newsgroups</u> in a file named NEWSRC.   This file contains a list of all newsgroups.   For each newsgroup, WinVN records whether it is subscribed and which articles have been seen.

Many Unix-based <u>news readers</u> record this information in a file named **.newsrc**.   WinVN uses the same file format to provide compatibility with these programs.

See <u>Group Menu   Commands</u>.

Configuring WinVN

WinVN offers a number of configuration options.   All are accessible from the **Options** menu of the <u>main window</u>.   The **Configure Comm...** option allows you to set communications parameters.   These parameters must be set properly for WinVN to work.

The **Configure Personal Info...** and **Configure Miscellaneous...** options allow you to specify information about yourself and to set WinVN preferences.   This information is not vital to the proper operation of WinVN.

See <u>Options Menu Commands</u>.