

Using Shares

Introduction

It has been my observation that volunteers at the SJC often email documents to each other within the office setting. This is inefficient, probably annoying, and wasteful of network resources, mail server space, etc. Instead, one should use Windows peer-to-peer file sharing. This document discusses briefly how to use this file sharing as set up in the SJC office¹. It consists of four further parts: (1) connecting to an existing share, (2) how to set up a share of new files, (3) removing a share and (4) troubleshooting.

Connecting to an Existing Share

The most straightforward way to use an existing shared document is to be told which computer it is on, the name of the shared folder in question² and the following the steps below. To know which computer it is on generally requires whoever created the share to tell you. Each computer in the office has a name and the computer must be on (obviously) for the sharing to work. The names are: “derek” is the name of the computer that Derek uses principally, “farcorn” is the name of the computer next to his in the far corner of the resource room. “the_cheat” is the slow computer right near the door of the other room. “corner” is the computer next to it, with the printer attached. “3rin3” is the computer on Ernie’s desk, down near the closets. In the subroom with no door, the one right next to the door is “karen” and the one near the phone “gloria”. The final, slower machine in that subroom is “lazarus”. This is especially important, as there is no good way set up to search more than one computer at once for a file; it is also sometimes rather difficult to search on any remote computer.

Using the program you wish to use to edit or view the file in question (usually, in our workflow, Word), select “open” from the file menu (or press control-O). From there, select the network choice from the lefthand buttons. (The exact appearance of this is different on the different versions of Windows; it is right in the button bar in 2000 and XP, and on the Desktop in 98) From there select “entire network” or similar phrases and then “Microsoft windows network” and then “workgroup”³ and then finally the computer name. After that, a list of the shared folder names will appear. (Due to some versions of Windows, some of these are named “Shared Folder”, a name which is rather unfortunate, as it is like encountering a woman whose name is “Woman”.) Pick the appropriate one and navigate (as usual) to your required file. If you are trying to connect to “Karen” and it

¹ It thus runs roughshod over the difference between technical matters and what are merely the results of policy decisions. Please keep this in mind if you are adopting the instructions herein for another setting.

² As you will learn in the second section of this document, shared documents are always shared by adding a special property to their enclosing folders.

³ An unfortunate name, but we are stuck with it for the time being.

asks you for a username and password, use the following: “administrator” (without the quotes) is the username, and there is no password. Leave this blank.

Sometimes there are problems with other sharing possibilities (particularly the Windows 98 machines trying to share off Windows 2000 or XP machines). See below in the troubleshooting for more on this.

If you routinely use the same computer and connect to the same share, you may talk to Keith about setting up a “more permanent” connection.

Sharing New Files

First, check to see if your document belongs with others on a similar topic or theme. If so, save the document in the location of the others, following similar steps as found in the opening step of the previous section if the location in question is already shared. If, on the other hand, you wish to place your document with an existing collection which is now to be shared, save it as you would at any other time, then follow the steps below, skipping the step about creating the folder.

Thus, to create a new folder of shared documents, first create the folder normally. I suggest, due to compatibility reasons with old versions of Windows, to name the folder something relatively short, preferably 12 characters or less. Then, right click on the folder in question while in Windows Explorer and select the sharing. From here there is a checkbox item to select whether or not the item is to be shared. Click this and activate the sharing. You may enter a long description of your shared item so that people have a better idea of what it contains, but it isn't necessary. Follow up by granting appropriate read and write permissions to the item. Generally, since we are quite trusting around the SJC and also run a small network, it is easier to grant everyone full access. Note that this means in principle someone could stomp all over your work. Such is the danger of freedom. To avoid clutter and ease of finding your work, please share the minimal enclosing folder of your entire work. Please also note that sharing gets “inherited” by all enclosed folders. So if you are working on two projects, A and B, and they are in a common enclosing folder C, you may share A and B by sharing C. On the other hand, it might prove useful and easier if you share each separately. This is especially true if you wish to have different access permissions on each.

Removing a Share

There is not really any good reason to remove a share in our work environment, but it might prove useful from time to time. (I suppose there might be some limit on number of shares, but it is likely to be very large.) Simply reverse the steps found in the last paragraph of the previous section. Again, one can be rude if one is not cautious. Take care!

Troubleshooting

Make sure that one pressed enter at startup on the machines that ask for a username and password for Windows networking. (I.e., the Windows 98 machines) Failure to do this will prevent file sharing and printing!

Make sure that the computer that you want to share from is on. If someone is using it, they will be warned that shutting it down will disconnect users. Please be courteous and ask others if they are finished with the shares if one is about to do this. (Sometimes Windows doesn't keep track of this as well as it should, so it may be that there is, in fact, nobody connected.) If one has to start up a shut down computer to use its shares, wait until Windows Explorer⁴ is visible before trying to connect to it to make sure its network connection is available.

If you get a message about incorrect users and that sort of thing, sorry, that's a known problem. (Different versions of Windows unfortunately use different means of determining who is authorized to share and in what context. Unfortunately these means are poorly explained within Windows itself and are hard to trace down generally.) I may eventually have the time to fix this up, but for the moment, please work around it. Often times the solution is merely to run the share "the other way around". (I.e. share from the other machine and have the problematic machine connect to it instead.)

Once in a while, perhaps, our network will totally die. If you suspect that this has happened, talk to Keith or Derek. Remember also that the shares are only visible on the local network. If you are on another network (borrowing wireless access from local businesses on your laptop, perhaps) you cannot gain access to our network and hence our shares.

Please note that shares do degrade performance of the computer they are on when they are in use. This should generally not be a problem, but if your computer behaves sluggishly or the network seems slow on it after you let the whole office access your files, please consider restricting your sharing. (To my knowledge this has never happened here at the SJC, so don't get too alarmed!)

⁴ Note: not Internet Explorer. Explorer (or Windows Explorer) is the application that first appears when you start Windows and has the desktop and its icons etc. "in" it.