

# NetMaster Volunteer Manual

November 6, 2003

## King County Library System Computer Services

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The King County Library System (KCLS) serves over a million people through a vast network of collections, databases, and special services. Each of the 42 libraries is a gateway to the resources offered by the system. From information on aardvarks to zymurgy, a good book to read, an opera to hear, data for a job search, or answers to life's everyday questions, the King County Library System has the information you seek.

### ***Mission***

As part of its mission of providing “free, open and equal access to ideas and information to all members of the community,” KCLS includes computer technology and Internet access in its libraries. To help patrons use these resources effectively, KCLS offers classes in basic computer skills applicable to library computer use.

Classes are taught both by library staff and by volunteers, known as NetMasters. By bringing in enthusiastic, knowledgeable volunteers to help us with computer training, the NetMaster program helps us achieve our goal of making Internet access and computer literacy available to all our patrons.

KCLS' computer training goals include:

- Providing a consistent curriculum of fundamental information for anyone learning about personal computers and the Internet in a KCLS library.
- Meeting the diverse needs of patrons whose computer skills and knowledge vary widely, with a focus on introductory level skills.
- Allowing scope for each trainer's individual creativity and knowledge.
- Placing the Internet in context as an information source that supplements and extends traditional library resources.
- Focusing on the computer and Internet resources available in the KCLS computing environment and informing patrons of KCLS policies for Internet use.

# NetMaster Program

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## *Coordinator*

Steve Kahn, a KCLS public trainer, coordinates the NetMaster program. He can be reached at: [skahn@kcls.org](mailto:skahn@kcls.org) and current NetMaster information and documentation can be found on the NetMaster portion of the KCLS Library System Web site at:

<http://www.kcls.org/nm/netmaster.cfm>

## *Basic Qualifications*

Most NetMasters already have extensive knowledge of computers and the Internet.

Less experienced volunteers can also participate by working with an experienced mentor until they are ready to teach on their own. Younger volunteers (under 18 years old), also work with an older volunteer at first.

## *Minimum Commitment*

Each NetMaster volunteer is asked to teach a minimum of four classes over a period of a year.

Many NetMasters teach one class a month. Some teach more than one class per month; some teach less often. As libraries try to maintain a regular schedule of classes for the public, they tend to prefer someone who teaches on a fairly regular basis to someone who teaches a lot at one time and not much at other times.

## *Scheduling*

KCLS offers considerable flexibility in scheduling classes. Classes can be taught during weekdays, weekends, and evenings. However, scheduling preferences vary from library to library, so one library may prove a better match for your schedule than another.

### ***Preparation***

To participate in the NetMaster program, follow these steps:

First, fill out an electronic application at the following web site:

<http://pubcf.kcls.org/nmform/>

Second, check with the NetMaster coordinator to find out what libraries are currently accepting volunteers. The application process for a library involves the following steps:

1. Arrange and participate in an interview for that library.
2. Observe a demonstration class for the class you want to teach. You can find a list of current demonstration classes at the following web page:

<http://www.kcls.org/nm/demonstrationclasses.cfm>

If you can attend one of the scheduled classes, send an email to Steve Kahn ([skahn@kcls.org](mailto:skahn@kcls.org)) to let him know that you are coming. If you can't attend one of the scheduled classes, let Steve know and he will schedule one at a place and time convenient for you. This will take longer as the class has to be advertised and students signed up.

3. Attend a 2-hour orientation for new volunteers. The orientation can usually be scheduled on short notice. The orientation includes:

- Outline of curriculum;
- Handouts for your students;
- Practice in teaching technical information to a non-technical audience;
- Information about library policies on controversial Internet issues;
- Description of library computer configurations and software;
- Practical details about setting up a teaching schedule and working in the library environment;
- Library policies for volunteers and for training activities.

You can, however, participate in the orientation procedures even if there is not a position currently open in the area where you hope to teach. By completing the training, you then are ready to be placed as soon as a position opens up.

### ***Teaching***

In most cases there will be a delay of at least several weeks before you can start teaching because the class has to be put on the schedule and students signed up. If you are anxious to start teaching sooner, check to see if you can assist in another instructor's class.

Most classes last 1–2 hours. Most classes use 1–5 computers with 1–2 students per computer. The following libraries include teaching labs with nine computers for classes of up to nine students at a time:

- Auburn
- Des Moines
- Federal Way 320th
- Redmond

## ***Classes Taught by NetMasters***

### *Recommended Classes*

#### **Basic Skills**

*Mouse Level 1 (Formerly Basic Skills: Mouse)*

#### **Internet**

*Internet Level 1 (Formerly Introduction to the World Wide Web)*

*Internet Level 2*

*Internet Level 3 (Formerly Search the World Wide Web)*

#### **Microsoft Office**

##### **Microsoft Excel**

*Microsoft Excel Level 1 (Formerly Introduction to Microsoft Excel)*

*Microsoft Excel Level 2 (Formerly Advanced Excel)*

##### **Microsoft PowerPoint**

*Microsoft PowerPoint Level 1 (Formerly Introduction to Microsoft PowerPoint)*

##### **Microsoft Publisher**

*Microsoft Publisher Level 1 (Formerly Introduction to Microsoft Publisher)*

##### **Microsoft Word**

*Microsoft Word Level 1 (Formerly Basic Skills: Working with Words)*

*Microsoft Word Level 2 (Formerly Introduction to Microsoft Word)*

### ***Not Recommended (but still taught at some libraries):***

*Introduction to Computers*

(Creates expectations that Windows will be covered. However, security settings on public computers prevent this.)

*Introduction to Email*

(Better taught in a tutoring format than a class format.)

### *Staff Categories*

You will encounter two main categories of staff in the libraries:

- Reference Librarians have degrees in library science and work at the reference desk helping patrons find information (among other duties).
- Library Assistants handle circulation and shelving of library materials among other tasks. Pages assist the library assistants.

### *Important Staff for NetMasters*

Three staff positions are particularly important for NetMaster volunteers.

- The **Manager** supervises staff and policy at each library.
- The **NetMaster Contact** works with volunteers to schedule classes, answer questions, and generally facilitate a successful volunteer experience. The contact may be the manager, a reference librarian, or a library assistant. This is the person you will have most contact with. Appendix A lists questions to ask during your first meeting with your NetMaster contact.
- The **Library Technical Assistant (LTA)** is a library assistant who has also been trained to help maintain the computers in a library.

# Computers in the KCLS System

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## *KCLS Computer System*

The KCLS computer system includes:

- *Servers* offering library catalog, circulation, staff e-mail, and web services.
- *Personal Computers* running Windows for staff and patron use.
  - *Staff computers* are fairly standard PCs (usually running Windows 2000 with a full Microsoft Office 2000 suite).
  - *Public computers* for the public to use. *Patrons* (library-speak for customers) need a KCLS library card to sign on to a public computer. Public computers run MS Office 2000 and Internet Explorer. The hard disk is locked from patrons. Patrons can use a floppy disk. Public computers are being replaced by thin clients, described below.
  - *Thin clients*, basically PCs without a hard disk (slightly smarter than *dumb terminals*). Thin clients run MS Office and Internet Explorer from our main server at the KCLS Service Center in Issaquah.

## *Computer Administration*

KCLS computers are installed, configured, and maintained by the Information Technology Systems Department (ITS), located in the KCLS Service Center. Library Technical Assistants (LTAs), library assistants who have received additional training, assist the ITS technicians by performing maintenance and troubleshooting tasks in the libraries.

## *Patron Computers*

Patron computers offer a variety of software including:

- Library catalog
- World Wide Web
- Microsoft Office

## ***Security***

Patron computers are protected by security software. Restrictions include:

- The Start menu can only be used for shut down. Applications must be started list of programs accessible after a patron logs on.
- Patrons can't access the hard disk. They can open files from and save files to a floppy disk.
- Most system settings (such as those in the Windows Control Panel) are unavailable.
- File management tools are limited. My Computer and Windows Explorer are not accessible. It is not possible to format disks. However files can be copied, moved, and deleted (on floppies only) using the Open and Save As dialog boxes from applications such as Microsoft Word. (Some commands require using the right mouse button.)
- On the Web, some functions are not available. Software downloading (executable files) is blocked. However patrons can save text files, graphic files, and Acrobat (.pdf) files to floppy disks. Generally MS Office files can be downloaded, though ones with macros may be blocked.
- Web pages that offer special features (such as sounds, video, chat, virtual reality, etc.) based on helpers, Java, Java-Script, plug-ins, Active-X controls, etc. may or may not work. You may find differences in what works from library to library. As KCLS moves to thin clients, restrictions tend to increase.
- Patrons can change Page Setup commands and can manipulate toolbars.
- Telnet is generally not available.

## ***Upgrades***

It's probably safe to say that the KCLS computers are in a perpetual state of upgrade. With such a large number of libraries (and large number of computers within many libraries) upgrades can take a fair amount of time to finish. If you volunteer in more than one library, be prepared to encounter different versions of software and hardware in different libraries.

## ***Hardware and Software Changes in Process***

KCLS is now beginning a changeover to *thin client* stations. Software will be based on a server instead of a PC's hard disk. KCLS is also changing over to network printing. Instead of one printer per computer, one or more printers

serve several public computers. Patrons will need to assign a job name to each print job and log in at a printer station and select each job they want to print. Another possible change is the use of recessed monitors to provide more privacy for patrons as they use a computer station. The recessed monitors do make teaching a little more challenging as it's harder to see a student's monitor.

### ***Library Catalog***

The library catalog allows patrons to perform the following functions:

- Look up books, videos, CDs, magazines, and other library materials.
- Place holds on library materials and pick them up at the library of their choice.
- Check their library record for materials checked out, due dates, overdue materials, and fines. Patrons can also renew materials through the catalog.

While it's not a NetMaster's task to teach the library catalog, it's still a good idea for you to be familiar enough with it to answer basic questions that may come up in passing while teaching classes. KCLS offers several different interfaces to the catalog. The current, most up-to-date catalog is known as Ipac (standing for Internet Public Access Catalog). This browser-based catalog is the most appropriate version to display or recommend to patrons. Other catalog interfaces include telnet, Web PAC, and PAC for Windows. Unless iPac is not working at the time, you should generally guide students to iPac instead.

### ***World Wide Web***

KCLS uses Internet Explorer as its browser. The following features and functions **cannot** be performed on patron computers:

- Browser access to email clients (such as Outlook and Outlook Express) and newsgroups.
- Storing *Favorites* (similar to bookmarks in Netscape).
- Downloading software (executable files).

You **can** perform the following options and tasks:

- Save web page text and/or graphics to a floppy disk.
- Save Acrobat (.pdf) files to a floppy disk.
- Open or save MS Office files to a floppy disk. Files with macros may be blocked. You may see somewhat different behavior when you **open** instead of **saving**—saving is usually more reliable.

- Change page setup and print options.
- Change toolbars.

### ***Printing***

Patrons may print (in black and white) without charge or limit on number of pages printed. However, it's helpful to teach patrons some of the basic of printing that help avoid waste. Things to show patrons include:

- How to limit the number of pages printed by using the print dialog box instead of printing from the toolbar icon.
- How to estimate the length of a web page by looking at the scroll box, pointing out that the smaller the box, the greater the number of printed pages.
- How to use print preview to check how many pages will print.
- On the World Wide Web, how to print from a page containing frames.

A few libraries have color printers available for the public, with some restrictions on the number of items they can print or what printers in the library will print to the color printer. Check with the library staff for details.

### ***Troubleshooting and Problem-Solving***

As with any computers, patron computers malfunction from time to time with such symptoms as freezes, crashes, or various malfunctions. The complexity of the library computer environment, and interactions between the security software and the other software aggravate these problems.

Sometimes, when the system appears frozen while running the browser, it's not really frozen, but Windows has lost contact with the current browser window. In that case, the fix is easy. Click the tile on the task bar that represents the current browser session to reestablish contact. (If you can't see the task bar, press Ctrl+Esc to make it visible.)

In general however, if the computer has frozen or otherwise is unusable, the only thing you can do is reboot. It will take several minutes to finish the restart, as the computer must run through a series of batch files to clear out temporary files and cache files. If the computer appears to have a chronic problem, let the LTA know (or leave a note with one of the librarians if the LTA is not available).

### ***KCLS Web Site***

The KCLS web site offers a variety of resources to library patrons. Become familiar with the web site and its features, and point some of them out to your students.

### ***Booking Software (Telus)***

Most libraries use booking software that requires a library card bar code number for computer use and limits patron's time for using computers. You may sometimes hear library staff refer to this as the "Telus software" (brand name) or as "SRI software" (in reference to the company developing the booking software). Computers can be booked directly at an open computer or reserved in advance at special reservation stations. Computers can be booked from home or other location, sometimes several days in advance. Obviously, a patron must have an Internet connection at the other location to perform this operation.

The booking software provides the following functions:

- Allows a patron to choose a preferred filtering option. **Because of recent court rulings, the filtering situation is in flux. Check with a library staff member to learn about the current situation.**
- Limits the time available for a patron to use the computer. The time available for a login varies from one library to another. Time used in one library does not count against time used in another.
- Reserves computers for classes. A library staff member has to set up the reservations in advance (using a regular staff computer). ***Check with your library contact a day or two before a class to make sure the reservations has been set up.***

A special login is used for classes, so patrons do not need their library card number for a class. The library has to reserve the computers for a class in advance for this to work.

The sign-in is: `master0010`

The password is 1212

**Because of changes in printing procedures, the password may be changing soon. Check with library staff for the latest information.**

The sign-in is not case sensitive. Make sure the students don't put a space in the sign-in. Also make sure the students type numerals. (Some people who learned to type on a typewriter may use an letter "o" instead of 0 (zero) and a letter "l" instead of 1 (numeral one).

The password is not really a secret in that the class login only works if preprogrammed. A patron can't use the class login to avoid using a library card at other times of the day.

*Troubleshooting Class Login Problems*

If the class reservation doesn't work, you need to find another way to log in. Usually the library's information desk will have temporary log-in slips that can be used, or students in your class can use their library card numbers. Ask your library contact for more information about how to deal with a situation where the class logins don't work.

## Teaching Tips

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### *Introduction*

Many of our students are computer beginners. Don't take any knowledge for granted. Much that you know so well that you have forgotten it is new and completely mystifying to your students.

### *More Equal Than You Think*

At first glance the relationship between you and your students may seem very unequal. After all you probably know quite a bit about computers, and most of your students know very little. However, your challenge is to teach effectively, and that often is as difficult for the teacher as learning about how a computer operates is for the student. If you keep that in mind, the relationship may seem much more equal than it does at first glance.

### *Observe Your Students Carefully*

The best way to improve as a teacher is to observe your students carefully. Pay attention to what works and doesn't work. Notice when the students can actually understand and apply what you are telling them, and when the information goes right by them. By attentively observing your students and learning from what works well from them, you may find yourself learning as much from them as they are learning from you.

### *Observe Class Level*

At the beginning of the class, find out about the participants' level of knowledge and experience. Adapt the class to the knowledge, confidence, and interests of those present.

### *Reassure Anxious Students*

Keep in mind that many people who take our classes are inexperienced with computers and often anxious. Reassure them that you will explain the ideas of the class at a simple level. Also mention that they can repeat a class.

### *Encourage Hands-On Participation*

Limit lecturing and demonstrating. Get students working at the computer quickly. Avoid taking control of the mouse from the student even if the student is struggling with it.

Sometimes it is useful to demonstrate a mouse action if the student is confused. Always ask politely if you can borrow the mouse before taking it and then return the mouse and see if the student can perform the actions you demonstrated.

Also be careful about putting your hand over the student's hand or engaging in other inadvertent touching.

### ***Pair Students by Ability***

If students will be sharing computers, pair inexperienced students with more experienced ones. Have the less experienced ones work at the computer first.

### ***Use Analogies and Non-Technical Language***

Use simple, homely analogies to explain technical concepts and vocabulary. For example, you can explain the concept of a *home page* as a table of contents, or a front door. Limit the use of technical jargon

### ***Vary Teaching Techniques***

Not everyone learns the same way, so varying the methods by which you present information helps different people grasp it. Include all three of the common learning modalities throughout the presentation:

- Visual
- Auditory
- Tactile Kinesthetic (touch and doing)

### ***Watch Class Reactions***

Watch how the class is reacting to your presentation. Be aware of signs of confusion, boredom, upset, or anxiety. If you see such problems, evaluate if you need to deal with it before rushing on.

### ***Advanced Classes***

Some of the classes assume that the student has knowledge from previous classes (or equivalent experience). It's fairly common to find students who lack the expected experience. (Library staff will try to guide students in to appropriate classes at sign-up, but for various reasons, the process is not perfect.) Gently suggest to students who may be "over their head" as far as skill level goes that they may want to watch another student's computer or do as much as they can and retake the class at another time. (After all, all classes are free!) Don't create a confrontation by asking a student to leave. (It's library policy that any students may take any class.)

***Don't Fake It***

If someone asks a question you don't know the answer to, admit ignorance and suggest possible ways to find answers.

***Minimize Disruptions***

If one person talks too much, wants too much attention, or otherwise disrupts the class, gently guide the class back to the main focus. You can agree to talk to disruptive individuals after the class (if you have time), or direct them to a librarian for further assistance.

## Exiting the Program

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As much as we appreciate your participation, we know the time may come when your teaching will come to an end. The best way to deal with that is in a straightforward manner with your library contact. Please don't just disappear. Simply tell your library contact (or email them) that you need to set an end date for your participation.

## Appendix A: NetMaster Contact Questions

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Listed below are questions to ask your NetMaster library contact during your first meeting.

### *Scheduling*

When do you prefer classes to be held?

- During regular library hours?
- Before regular library hours? (If the library is closed to the public, where should I enter the building? Where do the students enter the building?)
- Weekdays?
- Evenings?

How far ahead do you prefer to schedule classes?

### *Computers*

Where are the patron computers located in the library?

Which computers (and how many from the specific location) should I use?

Are there any special configuration details I should know about?

Are you using print stations or individual printers?

Are there any special printing details I should know about? Where do you keep extra paper for the printers?

How many people are usually signed up for a class?

Who usually reserves the computers for classes using the booking (Telus) software? Where do you keep slips for emergency log-ins? What is the usual time period(s) allotted to patrons for computer use? What types of computers can they choose from? Where is (are) the self-booking (for reserving) computers located?

### ***Arranging Classes***

Does the reference desk take class sign-ups, or is there another arrangement? Can students sign up by phone? Are there limits on how often a student can take a class or other special restrictions?

What procedure is used to remind students of the class?

Will someone mark (as reserved) computers for class?

Is there a copy machine I can use?

Are there enough disks for classes that require the use of floppy disks?

Where do I turn in the student evaluations?

### ***Teaching***

Whom should I contact if there are disruptions while I am teaching? (For example, other patrons are noisy, or interrupt to ask for help. *Note: if you run into problems involving patrons, ask a staff member for assistance. Don't try to handle it yourself.*)

Where are class manuals and other supplies kept?

### ***Computer Problems***

To whom should I report computer problems in the library? Where are the power switches for the computers?

## Appendix B: NetMaster Expectations

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### *Library*

- Complete four training sessions in a year. Libraries prefer a minimum of at least once class per month.
- Three days before a scheduled class, email a confirmation to your library contact that you will be present. Ask them to make sure that the computers for the class have been reserved and that students have signed up.
- Arrive promptly (a few minutes early if possible) at all scheduled classes.
- Notify library in timely manner if unable to attend a class or if leaving program.
- Follow library procedures as presented by manager or library contact.
- Inform library in a clear and forthright manner when you wish to stop teaching.

### *Teaching*

- Follow assigned curriculum to a reasonable degree.
- Treat all students with courtesy and respect and work to build their confidence.
- Explain technical concepts in non-technical ways.
- Provide all students with hands-on experience.
- Don't use classes to promote commercial products and services or personal causes.

## Appendix C: NetMaster Self-Evaluation

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After teaching a class, evaluate the following:

What went best in the class?

What most needs improvement?

Is there something I need assistance with? (Contact Steve Kahn at [skahn@kcls.org](mailto:skahn@kcls.org).)

Were there problems with library procedures, computers, or preparation?  
(Discuss with your library contact or contact Steve Kahn.)

## Appendix D: Check Before Class

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To avoid problems, check the following before class:

*Check with Library by email three days before class*

- Are students signed up for the class?
- Have students been called to remind them of class?
- Has the Telus booking system been programmed to reserve computers for a class?
- Are class manuals available?

*For you*

- Extra set of class manuals (in case library has run out).
- Class disks if needed.