

ONLINE WEB-CONFERENCING USING CAUCUS

TUTORIAL PRESENTATION

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Caucus is a Web-based conferencing system used at New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) that supports both text-based messaging and embedded HTML. Thus, a message may contain any valid MIME component, such as embedded graphic, sound, animation, or video. Embedded URLs are recognized and linked within messages automatically, so that conferees may spawn e-mail or browser clients by point-and-click in the course of reading, then return to and recommence perusing the message stream.

Simple text edit and formatting is also supported. Thus, messages may be rendered using a proportional font that is aligned (left, right, centered, justified) or styled (bold, italic, underscored).

Caucus features numerous utilities for conference management. Subconferences may be generated by either the conference leader or participants. Messages are posted chronologically (time/date stamped), but may also be extracted and viewed by each participant as running scripts.

As super-user, the conference leader is able to moderate discussions by editing or striking messages, setting membership privileges, and password-protecting membership lists. Messages are marked as new or read, and may be grouped by either criterion. This facilitates both archiving message streams and focusing on recent submissions.

Caucus supports NYIT's initiative to have the capability to deliver 90% of its instruction by means of distance learning technologies (both online and televised) by the year 2000. Caucus is as open and extensible as the medium of the World-Wide Web, as platform independent, and is being augmented with multimedia components such as Internet Phone for audio and CU-See-Me for video exchanges.

Caucus is a product of Screen Porch, Incorporated (<http://screenporch.com>), and may be downloaded for a 30-day free trial. System requirements and features of the software include:

- Full template-based conferencing system.
- Powerful interpreted control language to customize templates or develop new templates and features.
- Fully-scripted administrative interface.
- Supports conference moderation.
- Supports all Web server or client security models.
- Supports multiple Unix platforms.
- HP-UX, SunOS, Solaris, DEC-UNIX (OSF/1), Unixware, SCO, Linux, AIX, SunOS, IRIX, BSDI, and Windows NT support.
- Compatible with CGI-compliant HTTP server: NCSA, CERN, Netscape.
- Compatible with all HTML 2.0 and 3.0 browsers (Netscape and Internet Explorer).
- Requires no client software -- user works in a familiar browser environment.
- Offers an intuitive model of conferences, items, and responses.
- Automatically formats text responses.
- Allows a user to view and edit responses.
- Shows a scroll of responses -- a conversational give-and-take within each item.
- Automatically recognizes hypertext links typed in items and responses and makes them "hot".
- Supports images, audio, video Javascripts, applets, and all html objects throughout.
- Full user information, editable at any time.
- Text-based searches of items and responses.

This tutorial will demonstrate the basic features of Caucus in the context of a "live" course on Educational Software Evaluation, currently offered under the auspices of the graduate program in Instructional Technology in the School of Education at NYIT. Strategies for motivating group discussion will also be covered.