How to Download and Use Internet Data

A practical guide of how to import and parse text data using Netscape and Excel 97

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Introduction
It is well known that the Internet is full of data sources of various kinds. As more and more institutions post their data and the number of on-line data banks proliferate, collecting data by visiting the library will become something of the distant past.

What is this document?
This guide, using pictures and text, will walk you through step by step on how to take advantage of the wealth of available internet text data. When you finish reading and replicating the steps presented here you will be able to access data in text format in the Internet, bring the data into a spreadsheet program in your PC, and make the necessary manipulations to make the data usable by the spreadsheet program.

What is the problem?
Copying a block of text data and pasting it into a spreadsheet is not going to help you much. The data cannot be used in making graphs or calculations. You must know how to parse the data. Parsing means separating a block of text into columns.

What you need
First, you need access to the Internet either from home (through a modem) or from a student lab or an office in WIU.
Second, you need an Internet browser program like Netscape or Internet Explorer.
Third, you need a spreadsheet program like Lotus, Quattro, or Excel.
Forth, you need the WWW address of the data bank where the data is stored, like http://www.stls.frb.org/fred/. This is the address of FRED (Federal Reserve Economic Data) a place for macroeconomic data for the USA.

Although the steps might slightly different using other software, this document uses only Netscape and Microsoft Excel 97 programs since both are readily available throughout the student labs.
Preliminary
Let’s say that you need to access data on the Unemployment Rate in the USA to strengthen your point of view and enhance the appearance of a short paper on unemployment you are working on.

Step 1: Locating the Data

Connect to the Internet and launch Netscape from your PC. Access FRED data bank by typing its WWW address, \textit{http://www.stls.frb.org/fred/}, in the address box of Netscape and hit return. After a few moments FRED’s Homepage appears in the screen.

Under the heading ”Data Base Categories”, we see a diverse set of data that seem to cover the whole spectrum of macroeconomic data. Reading through the titles, we conclude that any data about the Unemployment Rate should be included under the \textit{Monthly Employment and Population Data}. We click on it.

Question: What about if I click on the wrong link? Am I in “trouble”? 
Answer: No. Just click on the BACK button of Netscape to go back to where you were before.
You may skip this page, if you started by going directly to FRED and not through my home page.

Those who have accessed FRED through the link in my home page, http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfda/wiu/frames.htm see the same FRED page but surrounded by frames on the left side and on the top of it. information.

To temporarily remove the left frame and increase the viewing area, place the pointer of the mouse on the left border of the FRED page, click the mouse hold and drag it all the way to the left.

Repeat the same to remove the frame on the top.

Now you may proceed.
After clicking on *Monthly Employment and Population Data* a new screen appears with a list of different types of data related to unemployment statistics.

Scrolling down a little (depending on the size of your monitor), we find what we are looking for: *Unemployment Rate – 1948.01*.

Click on the *Unemployment Rate – 1948.01* series to see the unemployment rate data.
**Civilian Unemployment Rate**

PERCENT, Seasonally Adjusted  
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>UNRATE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</table>
Step 2: Copying the Data and Pasting into a spreadsheet Program

Select the data you want to copy by highlighting it with the mouse. (Let’s say you want the Unemployment Rate data for only the twelve months of 1948).
After you have highlighted the range of data you would like to copy, click the right button on the mouse while its pointer is on the highlighted part of the data and click COPY (or on Netscape’s main menu click on EDIT/COPY).

This copies the data into clipboard (the memory of the computer).
Step 3: Pasting the Data into a Spreadsheet Program

Now it is time to launch Excel97, if you have not done it already. You may do so by clicking on START/PROGRAMS/EXCEL97 or clicking on the Excel97 icon on the desktop, or choosing Excel97 from the Microsoft floating bar. This depends on how the computer was setup.

After Excel97 has been launched:
Click on cell A1
Right click on the mouse and select PASTE (or from Excel97's main menu click on EDIT/PASTE)

The data appears to be in Excel97!!!!
Let’s not celebrate yet. When we click on any cell in column A (let’s say A1) both numbers appear on the status box above. This indicates that the data is in a single block and therefore not useful in making graphs or making calculations.

What we need to do next is to parse the data, to place each series into a separate column.
Step 4: Parsing the Data

Select the range of cells that contains the pasted data.
Read carefully the following:
The range can be any number of rows tall, but no more than one column wide, although the data extent into more columns.

In Excel 97 main menu click on DATA/TEXT TO COLUMNS.
Follow the instructions in the Convert Text to Columns Wizard to specify how you want to divide the text into columns (click on the Fixed Width radio button).
Finally we are done!!!. The data reside in separate columns.

Now you may proceed with making graphs and manipulating the data in Excel 97.