



## Choosing a Browser

### What Is A "Browser"

To put it very simply, a browser enables you to view websites. More definitively, browser software views and interacts with content on the world wide web and the Internet. It also allows you to view a page that has been written in HTML and other programming languages used to display content on web documents.

There are many web browsers (Internet Explorer, Firefox, AOL) to choose from, and most of them are free. Things to consider include filtering features, security, and the age of your hardware.

### Potential Security Vulnerabilities

The same technologies that make web pages more dynamic and interactive can, when used by a malicious web site operator, cause disturbances, annoyances and outright breaches of security. There are two basic kinds of security issues: annoyances and breaches. An annoyance attack may prevent you from getting work done because it may cause your computer to crash. Breaches are more serious because your files could be deleted, your private data could be read or your computer could be infected with a virus.

### What You Should Know About Web Scripting Tools: Java, ActiveX, Hostile Applets, Visual Basic Script, Plug-Ins, Javascript

These technologies introduce some security risk because they can cause potentially dangerous programs to be automatically downloaded and run on your computer only by visiting a web page. The downloaded program could try to access or damage the data on your computer.

Java and ActiveX are two systems that let people attach computer programs to Web pages. They allow Web pages to be much more dynamic and interactive than they could be otherwise. Java applets are used on a wide variety of websites for many functions, such as drop down menus. On the other hand, hostile applets exploit security bugs.

### What you can do

While you don't necessarily have to do much in terms of "configuring," in order to get the most out of your browser, configuring or "set up" is something that you will want to spend at least some time doing. The good news is that you can change the way the browser behaves and control important security functions with just a few mouse clicks. You may need to experiment with different settings to find the right balance between what is safe surfing and what might be overly restrictive. Completely disabling all items can make it very difficult, even impossible, to see some aspects of a page or to do any online shopping. Check the help files on your browser for information about security features and how to use them.

One of the most important things that you can do to guard against the dangers mentioned in this article is to keep your computer software up to date. As bugs are discovered, patches are made available to fix the leaks or glitches.



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## **Additional Resources**

CERT: [Evaluating Your Web Browser's Security Settings](#)

CERT: [Browsing Safely: Understanding Active Content and Cookies](#)

CERT: [Understanding Your Computer: Web Browsers](#)

Smart Magazine: [Choosing A Browser](#)

CERT: [Securing Your Web Browser](#)