

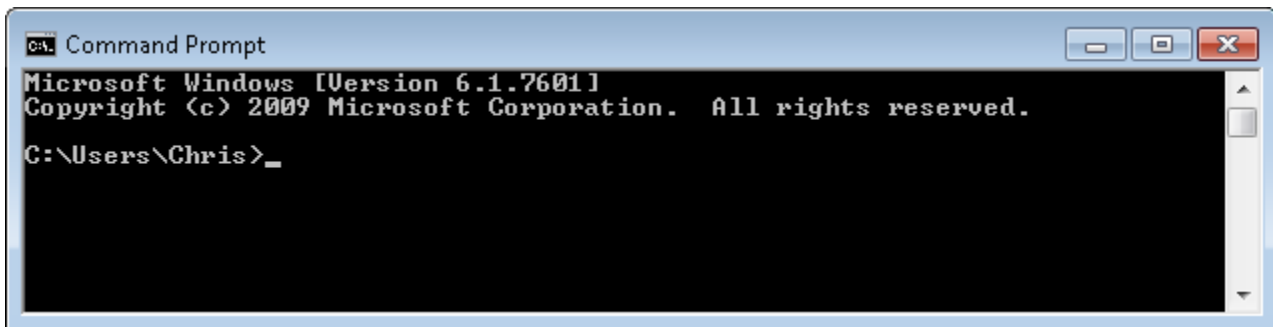
Getting Started with Command Prompts

Updated July, 2017

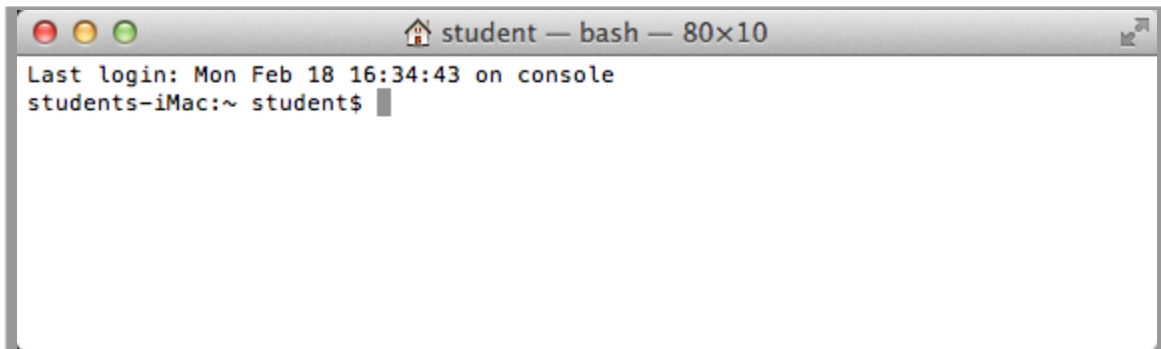
Some courses such as *Java Programming* will ask the student to perform tasks from a command prompt (Windows) or Terminal window (Mac OS). Many students have never had an opportunity to work with command prompts before, so this document will introduce the concepts necessary to be successful in the course activities.

What is a Command Prompt?

Before graphical operating systems like Microsoft Windows and Apple Mac OS, users interacted with computers through a command prompt. Command prompts are text-based windows where users can type commands and receive text-based output. You don't have any familiar mouse input options or graphical buttons, labels, or other widgets common in graphical forms.



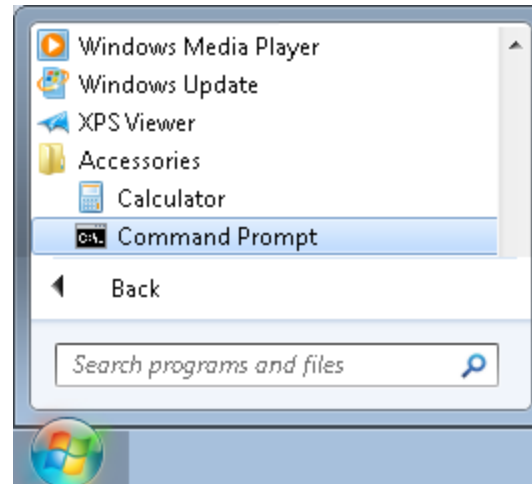
Windows Command Prompt



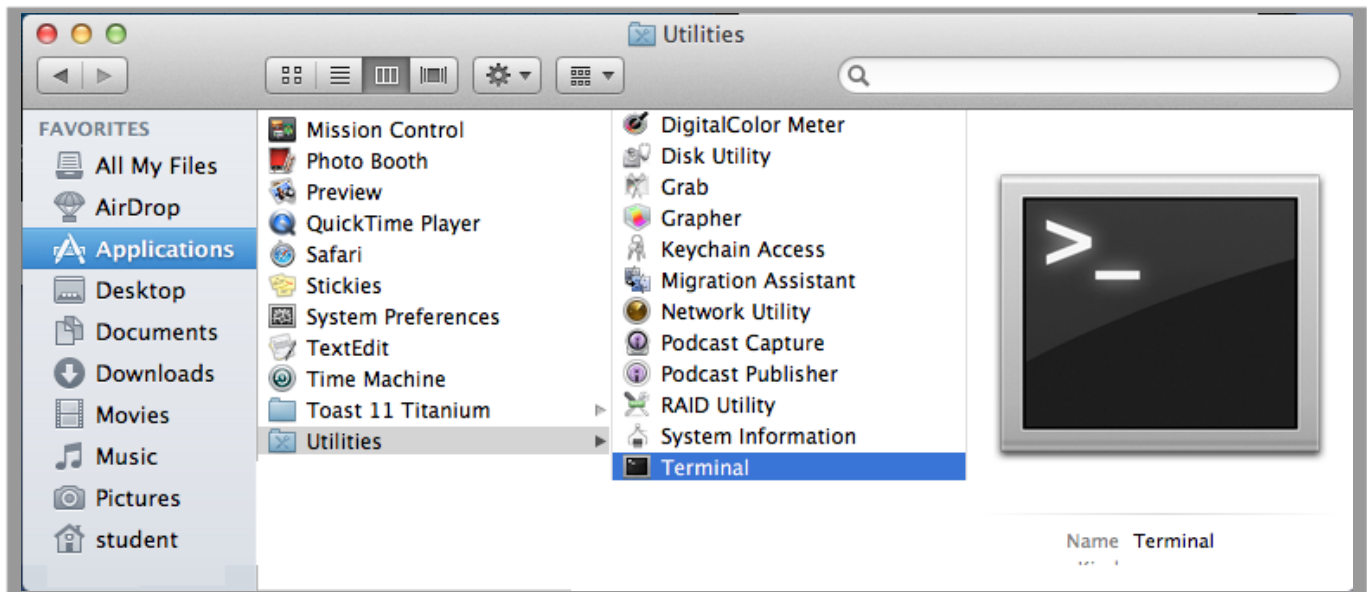
Mac OS Terminal Prompt

How do I Start a Command Prompt?

On Windows computers you can start a command prompt from the Start Menu. Select “Programs” or “Programs and Features” and then scroll down to the “Accessories” folder. Inside the Accessories folder you will find the “Command Prompt” icon. Click that icon to launch your Command Prompt.

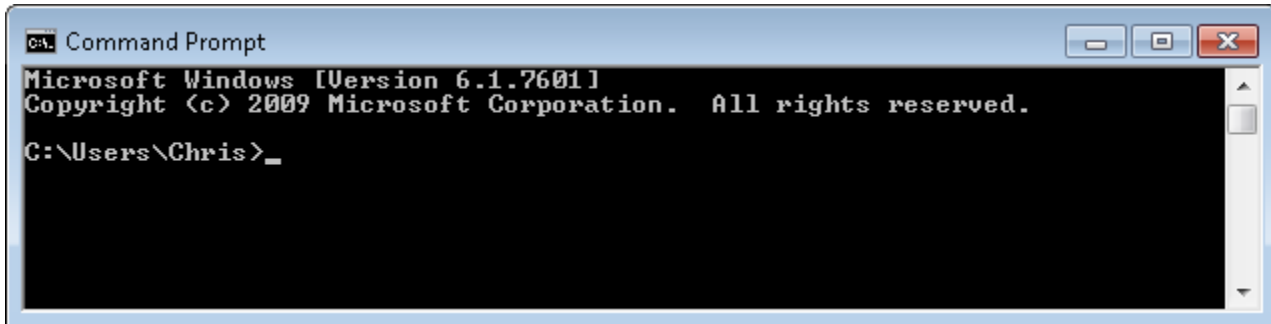


On Mac computers you may have the terminal docked near the bottom of your screen as shown to the left. If not you can start it from your Finder application by navigating to your “Applications/Utilities” folder and clicking on the “Terminal” icon.



Command Prompts Focus on a Directory

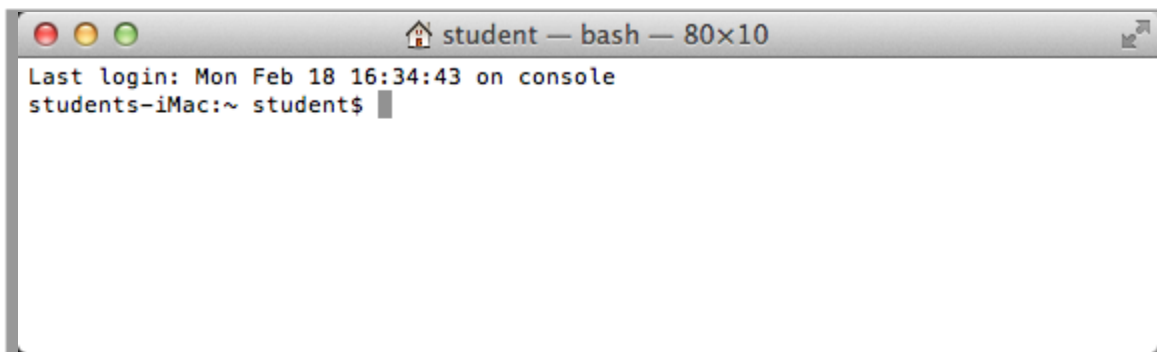
Your computer hard drive contains a number of directories and sub-folders in a hierarchical arrangement. Your command prompt will always be “focused” on one particular directory at a time, and that directory is typically reflected in the text prompt. In the example below the Windows command prompt is focused on the “C:\Users\Chris” directory. Commands that you type into the Windows command prompt will appear after the right angle bracket “>”.



```
Command Prompt
Microsoft Windows [Version 6.1.7601]
Copyright (c) 2009 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

C:\Users\Chris>_
```

On Mac OS your directories are also displayed on the command line. In this example we are in the student home directory, represented by a tilde character (~).



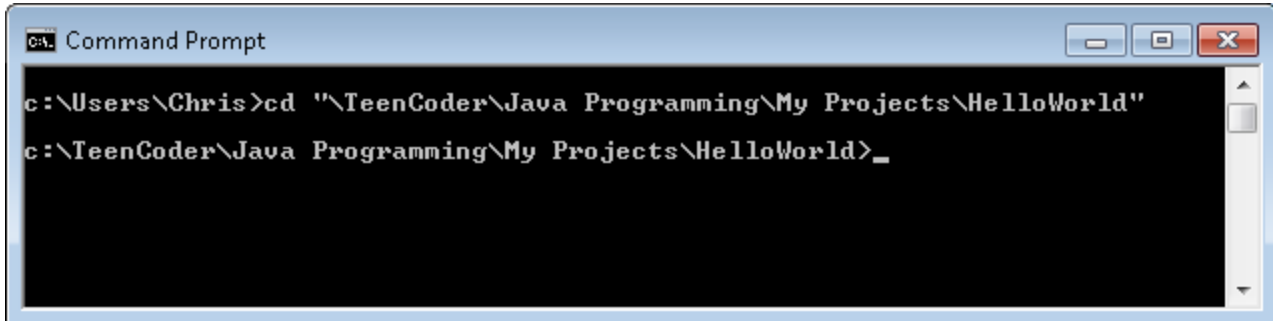
```
student — bash — 80x10
Last login: Mon Feb 18 16:34:43 on console
students-iMac:~ student$
```

Changing Directories

Whenever you run a command (such as compiling or running a Java program), that command will execute in the context of your current directory. So you will want to change your current directory to focus the command prompt in the area that contains your source files. To change the directory, use the “cd” command. That means from the command prompt you type “cd” followed by the target directory:

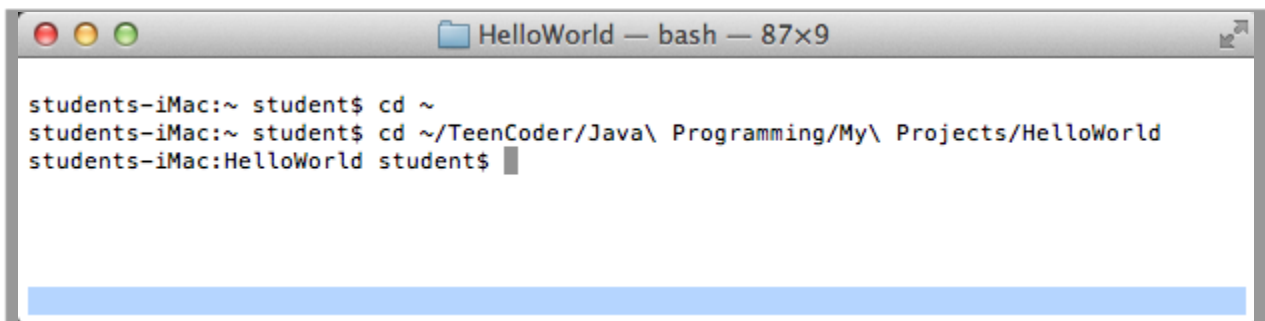
cd “<target directory>”

Directories are names separated by backslashes (windows) or forward slashes (Mac OS) like “\TeenCoder\Java Programming\My Projects\HelloWorld”. In this Windows example we use the “cd” command to change to a new directory.



```
Command Prompt
c:\Users\Chris>cd "\TeenCoder\Java Programming\My Projects\HelloWorld"
c:\TeenCoder\Java Programming\My Projects\HelloWorld>_
```

We can use the same “cd” command on Mac OS, however you don’t enter double quotes around the path. Instead you add a backslash (\) in front of every space within the path like this:



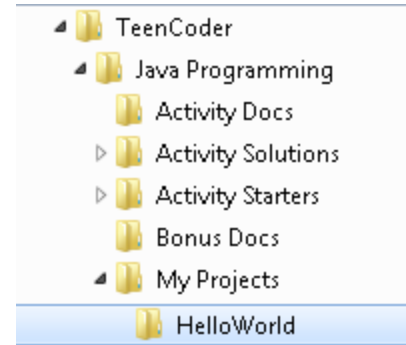
```
HelloWorld — bash — 87x9
students-iMac:~ student$ cd ~
students-iMac:~ student$ cd ~/TeenCoder/Java\ Programming/My\ Projects/HelloWorld
students-iMac:HelloWorld student$
```

The Mac Terminal will only show the last (leaf) subdirectory and not your full path. Above you can see just the “HelloWorld” part of the full path.

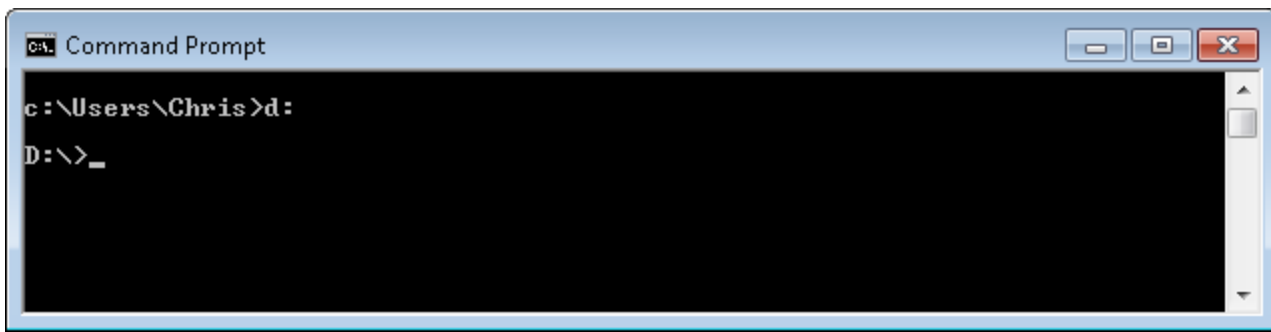
Notice how the command prompt changes to reflect the new directory that has the focus. If you attempt to change to an invalid directory you will get an error message! An error message almost certainly means you have made one of these common mistakes:

- Spelling a directory name incorrectly (Spaces are important! Mac OS is also case sensitive.)
- Failing to use the correct forward slash (/) or backslash (\) for your operating system.
- Forgetting to use double-quotes on Windows to surround your full directory name
- Forgetting to put a backslash in front of spaces within a path on Mac OS
- Attempting to change to a directory that does not actually exist

If you have not created the “HelloWorld” directory underneath “My Projects” in the example above, then you will not be able to “cd” to that directory and you will receive an error message. If you are confused about what directories are on your hard drive, you can always use Windows Explorer or Mac OS Finder to review your directory structure and create directories.

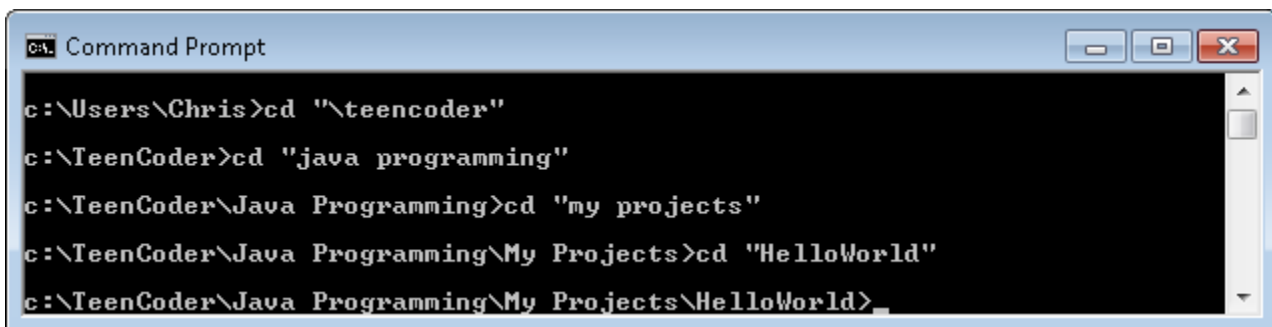


Some Windows computers may have more than one hard drive identified by different letters like C or D. To change your command prompt to focus on a different drive, just type the drive letter followed by a colon. From there you can use the “cd” command to access other directories on that different drive.

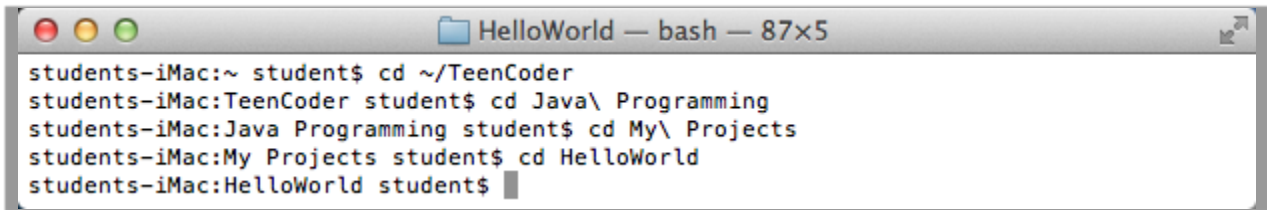


Absolute vs. Relative Paths

When you run the “cd” command to change to a different directory, you can use an absolute path containing the entire directory structure at once. If your target directory starts with a slash, that indicates an *absolute* path that will begin from the root of that hard drive. If you omit the leading slash, that means you want to change to a directory *relative* to your current location. In this example we begin with an absolute step to get to the “\TeenCoder” directory and then take smaller steps to reach “HelloWorld”.



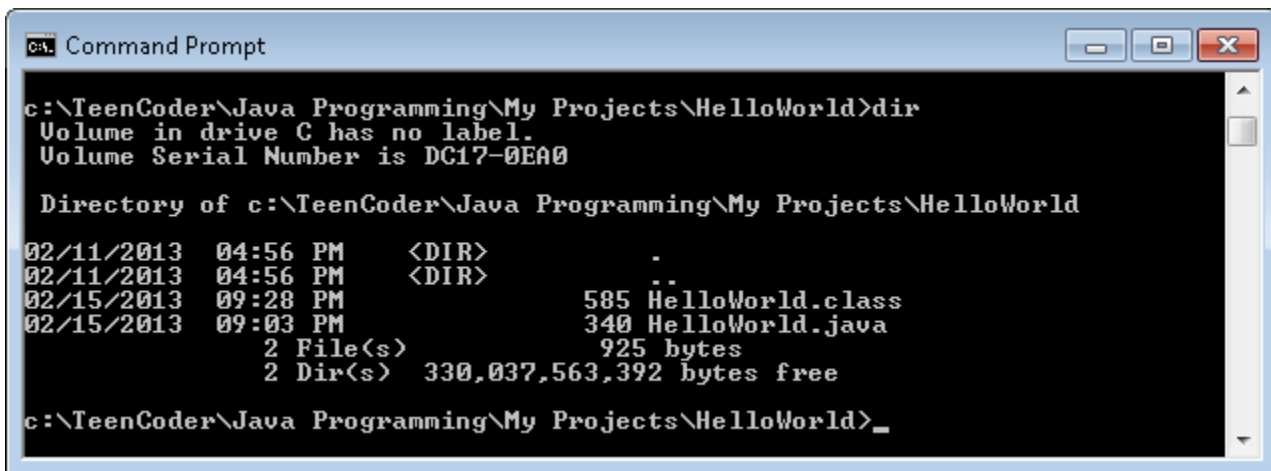
Mac OS works the same way, but you also have a special character (~) that represents your account's home directory. Our course material is installed underneath your home directory.



```
students-iMac:~ student$ cd ~/TeenCoder
students-iMac:TeenCoder student$ cd Java\ Programming
students-iMac:Java Programming student$ cd My\ Projects
students-iMac:My Projects student$ cd HelloWorld
students-iMac:HelloWorld student$
```

Getting Directory Listings

Students may want to examine the contents of the current directory in order to confirm that the right files are in the right place. On Windows type “dir” to get a directory listing.



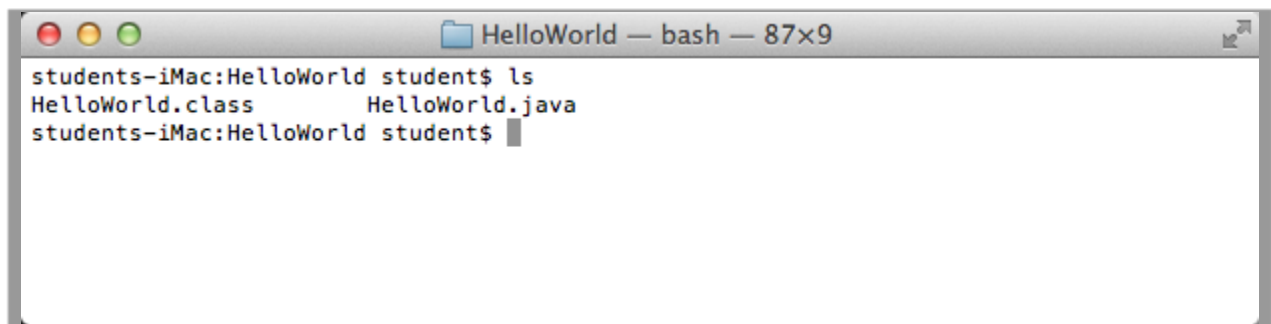
```
C:\TeenCoder\Java Programming\My Projects\HelloWorld>dir
Volume in drive C has no label.
Volume Serial Number is DC17-0EA0

Directory of c:\TeenCoder\Java Programming\My Projects\HelloWorld

02/11/2013  04:56 PM    <DIR>          .
02/11/2013  04:56 PM    <DIR>          ..
02/15/2013  09:28 PM             585 HelloWorld.class
02/15/2013  09:03 PM             340 HelloWorld.java
           2 File(s)                925 bytes
           2 Dir(s)  330,037,563,392 bytes free

c:\TeenCoder\Java Programming\My Projects\HelloWorld>_
```

On Mac OS, type “ls” to get a directory listing.



```
students-iMac:HelloWorld student$ ls
HelloWorld.class      HelloWorld.java
students-iMac:HelloWorld student$
```

Attempting to build and run Java programs against files require you to be in the right directory containing the correct files. If you receive error messages while following the documented activity steps, that means you are either focused in the wrong directory, or have not stored the correct files in that directory.