

# Unison File Synchronizer

<http://www.cis.upenn.edu/~bcpierce/unison>

Version 2.7.7

User Manual and Reference

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Unison is a file-synchronization tool for Unix and Windows. It allows two replicas of a collection of files and directories to be stored on different hosts (or different disks on the same host), modified separately, and then brought up to date by propagating the changes in each replica to the other.

Unison shares a number of features with tools such as configuration management packages (CVS, PRCs, etc.) distributed filesystems (Coda, etc.) uni-directional mirroring utilities (rsync, etc.) and other synchronizers (Intellisync, Reconcile, etc). However, there are a number of points where it differs:

- Unison runs on both Windows (95, 98, NT, and 2k) and Unix (Solaris, Linux, etc.) systems. Moreover, Unison works *across* platforms, allowing you to synchronize a Windows laptop with a Unix server, for example.
- Unlike a distributed filesystem, Unison is a user-level program: there is no need to hack (or own!) the kernel, or to have superuser privileges on either host.
- Unlike simple mirroring or backup utilities, Unison can deal with updates to both replicas of a distributed directory structure. Updates that do not conflict are propagated automatically. Conflicting updates are detected and displayed.
- Unison works between any pair of machines connected to the internet, communicating over either a direct socket link or tunneling over an `rsh` or an encrypted `ssh` connection. It is careful with network bandwidth, and runs well over slow links such as PPP connections. Transfers of small updates to large files are optimized using a compression protocol similar to rsync.
- Unison has a clear and precise specification, described below.
- Unison is resilient to failure. It is careful to leave the replicas and its own private structures in a sensible state at all times, even in case of abnormal termination or communication failures.
- Unison is free; full source code is available under the GNU Public License.

There is a moderated announcement list for new Unison releases; the archives of this list are available at the above link. There is also a moderated discussion list for Unison users.

# 1 Preface

## 1.1 People

- Benjamin Pierce is the Unison project leader.
- The current version of Unison was designed and implemented by Sylvain Gommier, Matthieu Goulay, Trevor Jim, Benjamin Pierce, and Jérôme Vouillon.
- Our implementation of the rsync protocol was built by Norman Ramsey and Sylvain Gommier. It is based on Andrew Tridgell's thesis work and inspired by his rsync utility.
- The new mirroring and merging functionality was implemented by Sylvain Roy.
- Jacques Garrigue contributed the original Gtk version of the user interface.
- Heroic alpha-testing by Norman Ramsey, Cedric Fournet, Jaques Garrigue, Karl Crary, and Karl Moerder helped us polish a lot of rough edges off of early releases.
- Sundar Balasubramaniam and Benjamin Pierce built a prototype implementation of an earlier synchronizer in Java. Insik Shin and Insup Lee contributed design ideas to this implementation. Cedric Fournet contributed to an even earlier prototype.

## 1.2 Copying

Unison is free software. You are free to change and redistribute it under the terms of the GNU General Public License. Please see the file `COPYING` in the Unison distribution for more information.

## 1.3 Reporting Bugs

If Unison is not working the way you expect, here are some steps to follow:

- First, try running Unison with the `-debug all` command line option. This will cause Unison to generate a detailed trace of what it's doing, which may make it clearer where the problem is occurring.
- Send mail to `unison-help@cis.upenn.edu` describing the problem and we'll try to fix it for you. Make sure to include the version of Unison you are using (`unison -version`), the kind of machine(s) you are running it on, a record of what gets printed when the `-debug all` option is included, and as much information as you can about what went wrong.

## 1.4 How You Can Help

Unison is a part-time project for its developers: we work on it because we enjoy making something that is useful for us and for the community, but we all have other jobs to do. If you like Unison and want to help improve it, your contributions would be very welcome. For more details on how the code is organized, etc., see the file `CONTRIB` in the source distribution.

If you don't feel like hacking, you can help us by simply letting us know how you like Unison. Even a short note like "I'm using it; works fine" or "I looked at it but it's not quite what I want because..." will give us valuable information.

## 2 Installation

Unison is designed to be easy to install. The following sequence of steps should get you a fully working installation in a few minutes. (If you run into trouble, you may find the suggestions in the Advice section (6) helpful.)

Unison can be used with either of two user interfaces:

1. a simple textual interface, suitable for dumb terminals (and running from scripts), and
2. a more sophisticated graphical interface, based on Gtk.

You will need to install a copy of Unison on every machine that you want to synchronize. However, you only need the version with a graphical user interface (if you want a GUI at all) on the machine where you're actually going to display the interface (the *client* machine). Other machines that you synchronize with can get along just fine with the text version.

### 2.1 Downloading Unison

If a pre-built binary of Unison is available for the client machine's architecture, just download it and put it somewhere in your search path (if you're going to invoke it from the command line) or on your desktop (if you'll be click-starting it).

The executable file for the graphical version (with a name including `gtkui`) actually provides *both* interfaces: the graphical one appears by default, while the text interface can be selected by including `-ui text` on the command line. The `textui` executable provides just the textual interface.

If you don't see a pre-built executable for your architecture, you'll need to build it yourself. See the Building Unison section (2.6). (There are also a small number of "contributed ports" to other architectures that are not maintained by us. See the Contributed Ports section (2.5) to check what's available.)

Check to make sure that what you've downloaded is really executable. Either click-start it, or type `unison -version` at the command line.

### 2.2 Installing Ssh

Unison can be used in several different modes: with different directories on a single machine, with a remote machine over a direct socket connection, with a remote machine using `rsh` (on Unix systems), or with a remote Unix system (from either a Unix or a Windows client) using `ssh` for authentication and secure transfer. If you intend to use the last option, you may need to install `ssh`.

Your local host will need just an `ssh` client; the remote host needs an `ssh` server (or daemon), which is only available on Unix systems. Unison is known to work with `ssh` version 1.2.27 (Unix) and version 1.2.14 (Windows); other versions may or may not work.

#### 2.2.1 Unix

1. Install `ssh`.
  - (a) Become root. (If you do not have administrator permissions, ask your system manager to install an `ssh` client and an `ssh` server for you and skip this section.)
  - (b) Download `ssh-1.2.27.tar.gz` from `ftp://ftp.ssh.com/pub/ssh/`.
  - (c) Install it:
    - Unpack the archive (`gunzip ssh-1.2.27.tar.gz` and then `tar xvf ssh-1.2.27.tar.gz`).
    - following instructions in `INSTALL`, enter `./configure`, `make`, and `make install`.
    - to run the `ssh` daemon:
      - find the server daemon `sshd` (e.g., `/usr/local/sbin/sshd` on RedHat-Linux systems).
      - put its full pathname in the system initialization script to have it run at startup (this script is called `/etc/rc.d/rc.sysinit` on RedHat-Linux, for example).

- (d) Once a server is running on the remote host and a client is available on the local host, you should be able to connect with ssh in the same way as with rsh (e.g., `ssh foobar`, then enter your password).
2. If you like, you can now set up ssh so that you only need to type your password once per X session, rather than every time you run Unison (this is not necessary for using ssh with Unison, but it saves typing).
    - (a) Build your keys :
      - enter `ssh-keygen` and type a passphrase as required.
      - your private key is now in `~/.ssh/identity` (this file must remain private) and your public key in `~/.ssh/identity.pub`.
    - (b) Allow user-mode secure connection.
      - append contents of the local file `~/.ssh/identity.pub` to the file `~/.ssh/authorized_keys` on the remote system.
      - Test that you can connect by starting `ssh` and giving the passphrase you just chose instead of your remote password.
    - (c) Create an agent to manage authentication for you :
      - start `ssh-agent` with the parent program whose children will be granted automatic connections (e.g., `ssh-agent bash` or `ssh-agent startx`).
      - enter `ssh-add` to enter your passphrase and enable automatic login for connections to come.
      - you should now be able to run Unison using SSH without giving any passphrase or password.
      - to kill the agent, enter `ssh-agent -k`, or simply exit the program you launched using `ssh-agent`.

### 2.2.2 Windows

Many Windows implementations of ssh only provide graphical interfaces, but Unison requires an ssh client that it can invoke with a command-line interface. A suitable version of ssh can be installed as follows.

1. Download an ssh executable.

Warning: there are many implementations and ports of ssh for Windows, and not all of them will work with Unison. We have gotten Unison to work with Cygwin's port of openssh, and we suggest you use that one. Here's how to install it:

- (a) First, create a new folder on your desktop to hold temporary installation files. It can have any name you like, but in these instructions we'll assume that you call it `Foo`.
- (b) Direct your web browser to [www.cygwin.com](http://www.cygwin.com), and click on the "Install now!" link. This will download a file, `setup.exe`; save it in the directory `Foo`. The file `setup.exe` is a small program that will download the actual install files from the Internet when you run it.
- (c) Start `setup.exe` (by double-clicking). This brings up a series of dialogs that you will have to go through. Select "Install from Internet." For "Local Package Directory" select the directory `Foo`. For "Select install root directory" we recommend that you use the default, `C:\cygwin`. The next dialog asks you to select the way that you want to connect to the network to download the installation files; we have used "Use IE5 Settings" successfully, but you may need to make a different selection depending on your networking setup. The next dialog gives a list of mirrors; select one close to you.

Next you are asked to select which packages to install. The default settings in this dialog download a lot of packages that are not strictly necessary to run Unison with ssh. If you don't want to install a package, click on it until "skip" is shown. For a minimum installation, select only the packages "cygwin" and "openssh," which come to about 1900KB; the full installation is much larger.

After the packages are downloaded and installed, the next dialog allows you to choose whether to "Create Desktop Icon" and "Add to Start Menu." You make the call.

- (d) You can now delete the directory `Foo` and its contents.
- You must set the environment variables `HOME` and `PATH`. `Ssh` will create a directory `.ssh` in the directory given by `HOME`, so that it has a place to keep data like your public and private keys. `PATH` must be set to include the Cygwin `bin` directory, so that `Unison` can find the `ssh` executable.
    - On Windows 95/98, add the lines

```
set PATH=%PATH%;<SSHDIR>
set HOME=<HOMEDIR>
```

to the file `C:\AUTOEXEC.BAT`, where `<HOMEDIR>` is the directory where you want `ssh` to create its `.ssh` directory, and `<SSHDIR>` is the directory where the executable `ssh.exe` is stored; if you've installed Cygwin in the default location, this is `C:\cygwin\bin`. You will have to reboot your computer to take the changes into account.
    - On Windows NT/2k, open the environment variables dialog box:
      - Windows NT: My Computer/Properties/Environment
      - Windows 2k: My Computer/Properties/Advanced/Environment variablesthen select `Path` and edit its value by appending `;<SSHDIR>` to it, where `<SSHDIR>` is the full name of the directory that includes the `ssh` executable; if you've installed Cygwin in the default location, this is `C:\cygwin\bin`.
  - Test `ssh` from a DOS shell by typing

```
ssh <remote host> -l <login name>
```

You should get a prompt for your password on `<remote host>`, followed by a working connection.

- Note that `ssh-keygen` may not work (fails with 'gethostname: no such file or directory') on some systems. This is OK: you can use `ssh` with your regular password for the remote system.
- You should now be able to use `Unison` with an `ssh` connection. If you are logged in with a different user name on the local and remote hosts, provide your remote user name when providing the remote root (i.e., `//username@host/path...`).

## 2.3 Running Unison

Once you've got `Unison` installed on at least one system, read the Tutorial section of the user manual (or type `unison -doc tutorial`) for instructions on how to get started.

## 2.4 Upgrading

Upgrading to a new version of `Unison` should be as simple as throwing away the old binary and installing the new one.

Before upgrading, it is a good idea to use the *old* version to make sure all your replicas are completely synchronized. A new version of `Unison` will sometimes introduce a different format for the archive files used to remember information about the previous state of the replicas. In this case, the old archive will be ignored (not deleted — if you roll back to the previous version of `Unison`, you will find the old archives intact), which means that any differences between the replicas will show up as conflicts and need to be resolved manually.

## 2.5 Contributed Ports

A few people have offered to maintain pre-built executables, easy installation scripts, etc., for particular architectures. They are not maintained by us and are not guaranteed to work, but you may find them useful. Here's what's available at the moment:

- Dan Pelleg has ported unison to FreeBSD. This means that any FreeBSD user with an up-to-date “ports” collection can install unison by doing: `cd /usr/ports/net/unison; make && make install`. (Make sure your “ports” collection is fully up to date before doing this, to ensure that you get the most recent Unison version that has been compiled for FreeBSD.)

FreeBSD binaries can also be obtained directly from

<http://www.freebsd.org/cgi/ports.cgi?query=unison&stype=all>.

- Andrew Pitts has built binaries for some versions of Unison for the Linux-PPC platform. They can be found in <ftp://ftp.c1.cam.ac.uk/papers/amp12/unison/>.
- Robert Paris maintains a Debian package for Unison.
- Chris Cocosco provides binaries for Unison under SGI IRIX (6.5). They can be found in

[www.bic.mni.mcgill.ca/users/crisco/unison.irix/](http://www.bic.mni.mcgill.ca/users/crisco/unison.irix/).

## 2.6 Building Unison from Scratch

If a pre-built image is not available, you will need to compile it from scratch; the sources are available from the same place as the binaries.

In principle, Unison should work on any platform to which OCaml has been ported and on which the Unix module is fully implemented. In particular, it has been tested on many flavors of Windows (98, NT, 2000) and Unix (Solaris, Linux, FreeBSD, MacOS X), and on both 32- and 64-bit architectures.

Unison does not work (and probably never will) on MacOS versions 8 or 9.

### 2.6.1 Unix

You’ll need the Objective Caml compiler (version 3.00 or later), which is available from <http://caml.inria.fr>. Building and installing OCaml on Unix systems is very straightforward; follow the instructions in the distribution. You’ll probably want to build the native-code compiler in addition to the bytecode compiler, but this is not absolutely necessary.

(Quick start: on many systems, the following sequence of commands will get you a working and installed compiler: first do `make world opt`, then `su` to root, then do `make install`.)

You’ll also need the GNU make utility, standard on many Unix systems. (Type `make --version` to check that you’ve got the GNU version.)

Once you’ve got OCaml installed, grab a copy of the Unison sources, unzip and untar them, change to the new unison directory, and type

```
make UISTYLE=text
```

The result should be an executable file called `unison`.

Type `./unison` to make sure the program is executable. You should get back a usage message.

If you want to build a graphical user interface, choose one of the following:

- Gtk interface:

You will need Gtk (version 1.2 or later, available from <http://www.gtk.org> and standard on many Unix installations).

You also need the most recent version of LablGtk (not the standard version 1.0). Grab the developers’ tarball from <http://wwwfun.kurims.kyoto-u.ac.jp/soft/olabl/lablgtk.html>, untar it, and follow the instructions to build and install it.

(Quick start: `make configure`, then `make`, then `make opt`, then `su` and `make install`.)

Now build unison. If your search paths are set up correctly, typing

```
make UISTYLE=gtk
```

should build a `unison` executable with a Gtk graphical interface.

If this step does not work, don't worry: Unison works fine with the textual interface.

Put the `unison` executable somewhere in your search path, either by adding the Unison directory to your `PATH` variable or by copying the executable to some standard directory where executables are stored.

### 2.6.2 Windows

Although the binary distribution should work on any version of Windows, some people may want to build Unison from scratch on those systems too.

The detailed instructions can be found in the `INSTALL.win32` file provided with the sources. Please refer to it if you encounter any problem with the quick procedure described below.

You'll need the Windows version of the Objective Caml compiler (version 3.00 or later, available from <http://caml.inria.fr>). Note that Objective Caml can compile either to bytecode or to native code, and under Windows, if you want to compile to native code you will also need Visual C++ (version 6.0 or later) and `masm`, the Microsoft assembler.

Once you've got OCaml installed, grab a copy of the Unison sources and type

```
make UISTYLE=text
```

to compile to native code, or

```
make UISTYLE=text NATIVE=false
```

to compile to bytecode (e.g., if you don't have `Vc++`).

The result should be an executable file called `unison.exe`.

Building the GTK version under Windows is currently an "experts only" operation. The tricky part is installing `lablgtk`; grab the sources from

```
http://wwwfun.kurims.kyoto-u.ac.jp/soft/olabl/lablgtk.html.
```

and follow the instructions there.

Once `lablgtk` is built and installed, typing

```
make UISTYLE=gtk
```

should build Unison.

### 2.6.3 Installation Options

The `Makefile` in the distribution includes several switches that can be used to control how Unison is built. Here are the most useful ones:

- Building with `NATIVE=true` uses the native-code OCaml compiler, yielding an executable that will run quite a bit faster. We use this for building distribution versions.
- Building with `make THREADS=true` enables an experimental multi-threaded transport subsystem, which uses network bandwidth more effectively by overlapping several transfers. Use at your own risk.
- Building with `make DEBUGGING=true` generates debugging symbols.
- Building with `make STATIC=true` generates a (mostly) statically linked executable. We use this for building distribution versions, for portability.

## 3 Tutorial

### 3.1 Preliminaries

Unison can be used with either of two user interfaces:

1. a straightforward textual interface and
2. a more sophisticated graphical interface

The textual interface is more convenient for running from scripts and works on dumb terminals; the graphical interface is better for most interactive use. For this tutorial, you can use either.

The command-line arguments to both versions are identical. The graphical version can be run directly by clicking on its icon, but this requires a little set-up (see the Click-starting Unison section (5.15)). For this tutorial, we assume that you're starting it from the command line.

Unison can synchronize files and directories on a single machine, or between two machines on network. (The same program runs on both machines; the only difference is which one is responsible for displaying the user interface.) If you're only interested in a single-machine setup, then let's call that machine the *client*. If you're synchronizing two machines, let's call them *client* and *server*.

### 3.2 Local Usage

Let's get the client machine set up first, and see how to synchronize two directories on a single machine.

Follow the instructions in the Installation section (2) to either download or build an executable version of Unison, and install it somewhere on your search path. (If you just want to use the textual user interface, download the appropriate textui binary. If you just want to the graphical interface—or if you will use both interfaces [the gtkui binary actually has both compiled in]—then download the gtkui binary.)

Create a small test directory `a.tmp` containing a couple of files and/or subdirectories, e.g.,

```
mkdir a.tmp
touch a.tmp/a a.tmp/b
mkdir a.tmp/d
touch a.tmp/d/f
```

Copy this directory to `b.tmp`:

```
cp -r a.tmp b.tmp
```

Now try synchronizing `a.tmp` and `b.tmp`. (Since they are identical, synchronizing them won't propagate any changes, but Unison will remember the current state of both directories so that it will be able to tell next time what has changed.) Type:

```
unison a.tmp b.tmp
```

*Textual Interface:*

You should see a message notifying you that all the files are actually equal and then get returned to the command line.

*Graphical Interface:*

You should get a big empty window with a message at the bottom notifying you that all files are identical. Choose the Exit item from the File menu to get back to the command line.

Next, make some changes in `a.tmp` and/or `b.tmp`. For example:

```
rm a.tmp/a
echo "Hello" > a.tmp/b
echo "Hello" > b.tmp/b
date > b.tmp/c
echo "Hi there" > a.tmp/d/h
echo "Hello there" > b.tmp/d/h
```

Run Unison again:

```
unison a.tmp b.tmp
```

This time, the user interface will display only the files that have changed. If a file has been modified in just one replica, then it will be displayed with an arrow indicating the direction that the change needs to be propagated. For example,

```
<--- new file c
```

indicates that the file `c` has been modified just in the second replica, and that the default action is therefore to propagate the new version to the first replica.

If both replicas are modified and their contents are different, then the changes are in conflict: `<?->` is displayed to indicate that Unison needs guidance on which replica should override the other.

```
new file <?-> new file d/h
```

By default, neither version will be propagated and both replicas will remain as they are.

If both replicas have been modified but their new contents are the same (as with the file `b`), then no propagation is necessary and nothing is shown. Unison simply notes that the file is up to date.

These display conventions are used by both versions of the user interface. The only difference lies in the way in which Unison's default actions are either accepted or overridden by the user.

#### *Textual Interface:*

The status of each modified file is displayed, in turn. When the copies of a file in the two replicas are not identical, the user interface will ask for instructions as to how to propagate the change. If some default action is indicated (by an arrow), you can simply press Return to go on to the next changed file. If you want to do something different with this file, press “<” or “>” to force the change to be propagated from right to left or from left to right, or else press “/” to skip this file and leave both replicas alone. When it reaches the end of the list of modified files, Unison will ask you one more time whether it should proceed with the updates that have been selected.

When Unison is stopped waiting for input from the user, pressing “?” will always give a list of possible responses and their meanings.

#### *Graphical Interface:*

The main window shows all the files that have been modified in either `a.tmp` or `b.tmp`. To override a default action (or select an action in case there is no default), first select the file, either by clicking on its name or by using the up- and down-arrow keys. Then press either the left-arrow key (to cause the version in `a.tmp` to propagate to `b.tmp`) or the right-arrow key (which makes the `b.tmp` version override `a.tmp`).

Every keyboard command can also be invoked from the menus at the top of the user interface. (Conversely, each menu item is annotated with its keyboard equivalent, if it has one.)

When you are satisfied with the directions for propagation of changes shown in the main window, click the Proceed button to set them in motion. The word “done” will be displayed next to each filename when it has been dealt with.

### 3.3 Remote Usage

Next, we'll get Unison set up to synchronize replicas on two different machines.

Follow the instructions in the Installation section to download or build an executable version of Unison on the server machine, and install it somewhere on your search path. (It doesn't matter whether you install the text or graphical version, since the copy of Unison on the server doesn't need to display any user interface at all.)

Now there is a decision to be made. Unison provides two methods for communicating between the client and the server:

- *Remote shell method:* To use this method, you must have some way of invoking remote commands on the server from the client's command line, using a facility such as `ssh` or `rsh`. It is more convenient (since there is no need to manually start a "unison server" process on the server) and also more secure (especially if you use `ssh`).
- *Socket method:* This method requires only that you can get TCP packets from the client to the server and back. A draconian firewall can prevent this, but otherwise it should work anywhere.

Decide which of these you want to try, and continue with the Remote Shell Method section (3.4) or the Socket Method section (3.5), as appropriate.

### 3.4 Remote Shell Method

The standard remote shell facility on Unix systems is `rsh`. `ssh` is a drop-in replacement for `rsh` that provides the same functionality but much better security. (Ssh is available from `ftp://ftp.cs.hut.fi/pub/ssh/`; up-to-date binaries for some architectures can also be found at `ftp://ftp.faqs.org/ssh/contrib`. See section 2.2.2 for installation instructions in Windows.) Both `rsh` and `ssh` require some coordination between the client and server machines to establish that the client is allowed to run commands on the server; please refer to the `rsh` or `ssh` documentation for information on how to set this up. The examples in this section use `ssh`, but you can substitute `rsh` for `ssh` if you wish.

First, test that we can invoke Unison on the server from the client. Typing

```
ssh remotehostname unison -version
```

should print the same version information as running

```
unison -version
```

locally on the client. If it doesn't, then either something is wrong with your ssh setup (e.g., "permission denied") or else the search path that's being used when executing commands on the server doesn't contain the `unison` executable (e.g., "command not found").

Create a test directory `a.tmp` in your home directory on the client machine.

Test that the local unison client can start and connect to the remote server. Type

```
unison -testServer a.tmp ssh://remotehostname/a.tmp
```

Now cd to your home directory and type:

```
unison a.tmp ssh://remotehostname/a.tmp
```

The result should be that the entire directory `a.tmp` is propagated from the client to your home directory on the server.

After finishing the first synchronization, change a few files and try synchronizing again. You should see similar results as in the local case.

If your user name on the server is not the same as on the client, you can add it to the command line:

```
unison a.tmp ssh://username@remotehostname/a.tmp
```

*Notes:*

- If you want to put `a.tmp` someplace other than your home directory on the remote host, you can give an absolute path for it by adding an extra slash between `remotehostname` and the beginning of the path:

```
unison a.tmp ssh://remotehostname//absolute/path/to/a.tmp
```

- You can give an explicit path for the `unison` executable on the server by using the command-line switch `-servercmd /full/path/name/of/unison` or adding `servercmd=/full/path/name/of/unison` to your profile (see the Profile section (5.5)).

### 3.5 Socket Method

To run Unison over a socket connection, you must start a Unison “daemon” process on the server. This process runs continuously, waiting for connections over a given socket from client machines running Unison and processing their requests in turn.

**Warning:** The socket method is insecure: not only are the texts of your changes transmitted over the network in unprotected form, it is also possible for anyone in the world to connect to the server process and read out the contents of your filesystem! (Of course, to do this they must understand the protocol that Unison uses to communicate between client and server, but all they need for this is a copy of the Unison sources.)

To start the daemon, type

```
unison -socket NNNN
```

on the server machine, where NNNN is the socket number that the daemon should listen on for connections from clients. (NNNN can be any large number that is not being used by some other program; if NNNN is already in use, Unison will exit with an error message.) Note that paths specified by the client will be interpreted relative to the directory in which you start the server process; this behavior is different from the ssh case, where the path is relative to your home directory on the server.

Create a test directory `a.tmp` in your home directory on the client machine. Now type:

```
unison a.tmp socket://remotename:NNNN/a.tmp
```

The result should be that the entire directory `a.tmp` is propagated from the client to the server (`a.tmp` will be created on the server in the directory that the server was started from). After finishing the first synchronization, change a few files and try synchronizing again. You should see similar results as in the local case.

### 3.6 Using Unison for All Your Files

Once you are comfortable with the basic operation of Unison, you may find yourself wanting to use it regularly to synchronize your commonly used files. There are several possible ways of going about this:

1. Synchronize your whole home directory, using the Ignore facility (see the Ignore section (5.9)) to avoid synchronizing temporary files and things that only belong on one host.
2. Create a subdirectory called `shared` (or `current`, or whatever) in your home directory on each host, and put all the files you want to synchronize into this directory.
3. Create a subdirectory called `shared` (or `current`, or whatever) in your home directory on each host, and put *links to* all the files you want to synchronize into this directory. Use the `follow` preference (see the Symbolic Links section (5.10)) to make sure that all these links are treated transparently by Unison.
4. Make your home directory the root of the synchronization, but tell Unison to synchronize only some of the files and subdirectories within it. This can be accomplished by using the `-path` switch on the command line:

```
unison /home/username ssh://remotename//home/username -path shared
```

The `-path` option can be used as many times as needed, to synchronize several files or subdirectories:

```
unison /home/username ssh://remotename//home/username \  
-path shared \  
-path pub \  
-path .netscape/bookmarks.html
```

These `-path` arguments can also be put in your preference file. See the Preferences section (5.4) for an example.

When you synchronize a large directory structure (e.g. your home directory) for the first time, Unison will need to spend a lot of time walking over all the files and building its internal data structures. You'll probably save time if you start off focusing Unison's attention on just a subset of your files, by including the option `-path some/small/subdirectory` on the command line. When this is working to your satisfaction, take away the `-path` option and go get lunch while Unison works.

If your replicas are large and at least one of them is on a Windows system, you may find that Unison's default method for detecting changes (which involves scanning the full contents of every file on every sync—the only completely safe way to do it under Windows) is too slow. In this case, you may be interested in the `fastcheck` preference, documented in the Fast Update Checking section (5.14).

Most people find that they only need to maintain a profile (or profiles) on one of the hosts that they synchronize, since Unison is always initiated from this host. (For example, if you're synchronizing a laptop with a fileserver, you'll probably always run Unison on the laptop.) This is a bit different from the usual situation with asymmetric mirroring programs like `rdist`, where the mirroring operation typically needs to be initiated from the machine with the most recent changes.

### 3.7 Going Further

On-line documentation for the various features of Unison can be obtained either by typing

```
unison -doc topics
```

at the command line, or by selecting the Help menu in the graphical user interface. The on-line information is essentially identical to this manual.

There are two email lists for users of unison. Visit <http://www.cis.upenn.edu/~bcpierce/unison/download.html> for more details.

## 4 Basic Concepts

Unison deals in a few straightforward concepts. (A more mathematical development of these concepts can be found in “*What is a File Synchronizer?*” (<http://www.cis.upenn.edu/~bcpierce/papers/snc-mobicom.ps.gz>) by Sundar Balasubramaniam and Benjamin Pierce [MobiCom 1998]. A more up to date version can be found in a recent set of slides (<http://www.cis.upenn.edu/~bcpierce/papers/snc-slides.ps.gz>.)

### 4.1 Roots

A replica’s *root* tells Unison where to find a set of files to be synchronized, either on the local machine or on a remote host. For example,

```
relative/path/of/root
```

specifies a local root relative to the directory where Unison is started, while

```
/absolute/path/of/root
```

specifies a root relative to the top of the local filesystem, independent of where Unison is running. Remote roots can begin with `ssh://`, `rsh://` to indicate that the remote server should be started with `rsh` or `ssh`:

```
ssh://remotehost//absolute/path/of/root
```

```
rsh://user@remotehost/relative/path/of/root
```

If the remote server is already running (in socket mode), then the syntax

```
socket://remotehost:portnum//absolute/path/of/root
```

```
socket://remotehost:portnum/relative/path/of/root
```

is used to specify the hostname and port that the client Unison should use to contact it.

The syntax for roots is based on that of URIs (described in RFC 2396). The full grammar is:

```
replica ::= [protocol:][/[user@][host][:port][path]
           | path
```

```
protocol ::= file
           | socket
           | ssh
           | rsh
```

```
user ::= [-_a-zA-Z0-9]+
```

```
host ::= [-_a-zA-Z0-9.]+
```

```
port ::= [0-9]+
```

When `path` is given without any protocol prefix, the protocol is assumed to be `file:`. Under Windows, it is possible to synchronize with a remote directory using the `file:` protocol over the Windows Network Neighborhood. For example,

```
unison foo //host/drive/bar
```

synchronizes the local directory `foo` with the directory `drive:\bar` on the machine `host`, provided that `host` is accessible via Network Neighborhood. When the `file:` protocol is used in this way, there is no need for a Unison server to be running on the remote host. (However, running Unison this way is only a good idea if the remote host is reached by a very fast network connection, since the full contents of every file in the remote replica will have to be transferred to the local machine to detect updates.)

The names of roots are *canonized* by Unison before it uses them to compute the names of the corresponding archive files, so `//saul//home/bcpierce/common` and `//saul.cis.upenn.edu/common` will be recognized as the same replica under different names.

## 4.2 Paths

A *path* refers to a point *within* a set of files being synchronized; it is specified relative to the root of the replica.

Formally, a path is just a sequence of names, separated by /. Note that the path separator character is always a forward slash, no matter what operating system Unison is running on. Forward slashes are converted to backslashes as necessary when paths are converted to filenames in the local filesystem on a particular host. (For example, suppose we run Unison on a Windows system, synchronizing the local root `c:\pierce` with the root `ssh://saul.cis.upenn.edu/home/bcpierce` on a Unix server. Then the path `current/todo.txt` refers to the file `c:\pierce\current\todo.txt` on the client and `/home/bcpierce/current/todo.txt` on the server.)

The empty path (i.e., the empty sequence of names) denotes the whole replica. Unison displays the empty path as “[root].”

If `p` is a path and `q` is a path beginning with `p`, then `q` is said to be a *descendant* of `p`. (Each path is also a descendant of itself.)

## 4.3 What is an Update?

The *contents* of a path `p` in a particular replica are either a file, a directory, a symbolic link, or absent (if `p` does not refer to anything at all in that replica). More specifically:

- If `p` refers to an ordinary file, then the contents of `p` are the actual contents of this file (a string of bytes) plus the current permission bits of the file.
- If `p` refers to a symbolic link, then the contents of `p` are just the string specifying where the link points.
- If `p` refers to a directory, then the contents of `p` are just the token “DIRECTORY” plus the current permission bits of the directory.
- If `p` does not refer to anything in this replica, then the contents of `p` are the token “ABSENT.”

Unison keeps a record of the contents of each path after each successful synchronization of that path (i.e., it remembers the contents at the last moment when they were the same in the two replicas).

We say that a path is *updated* (in some replica) if its current contents are different from its contents the last time it was successfully synchronized.

(What Unison actually calculates is a slight approximation to this definition; see the Caveats and Shortcomings section (4.7).)

## 4.4 What is a Conflict?

A path is said to be *conflicting* if

1. it has been updated in one replica,
2. it or any of its descendants has been updated in the other replica, and
3. its contents in the two replicas are not identical.

## 4.5 Reconciliation

Unison operates in several distinct stages:

1. On each host, it compares its archive file (which records the state of each path in the replica when it was last synchronized) with the current contents of the replica, to determine which paths have been updated.
2. It checks for “false conflicts” — paths that have been updated on both replicas, but whose current values are identical. These paths are silently marked as synchronized in the archive files in both replicas.

3. It displays all the updated paths to the user. For updates that do not conflict, it suggests a default action (propagating the new contents from the updated replica to the other). Conflicting updates are just displayed. The user is given an opportunity to examine the current state of affairs, change the default actions for nonconflicting updates, and choose actions for conflicting updates.
4. It performs the selected actions, one at a time. Each action is performed by first transferring the new contents to a temporary file on the receiving host, then atomically moving them into place.
5. It updates its archive files to reflect the new state of the replicas.

## 4.6 Invariants

Given the importance and delicacy of the job that it performs, it is important to understand both what a synchronizer does under normal conditions and what can happen under unusual conditions such as system crashes and communication failures.

Unison is careful to protect both its internal state and the state of the replicas at every point in this process. Specifically, the following guarantees are enforced:

- At every moment, each path in each replica has either (1) its *original* contents (i.e., no change at all has been made to this path), or (2) its *correct* final contents (i.e., the value that the user expected to be propagated from the other replica).
- At every moment, the information stored on disk about Unison's private state can be either (1) unchanged, or (2) updated to reflect those paths that have been successfully synchronized.

The upshot is that it is safe to interrupt Unison at any time, either manually or accidentally.

If an interruption happens while it is propagating updates, then there may be some paths for which an update has been propagated but which have not been marked as synchronized in Unison's archives. This is no problem: the next time Unison runs, it will detect changes to these paths in both replicas, notice that the contents are now equal, and mark the paths as successfully updated when it writes back its private state at the end of this run.

If Unison is interrupted, it may sometimes leave temporary working files (with suffix `.tmp`) in the replicas. It is safe to delete these files. Also, if the (deprecated) `backups` flag is set, Unison will leave around old versions of files, with names like `file.0.unison.bak`. These can be deleted safely, when they are no longer wanted.

Unison is not bothered by clock skew between the different hosts on which it is running. It only performs comparisons between timestamps obtained from the same host, and the only assumption it makes about them is that the clock on each system always runs forward.

If Unison finds that its archive files have been deleted (or that the archive format has changed and they cannot be read, or that they don't exist because this is the first run of Unison on these particular roots), it takes a conservative approach: it behaves as though the replicas had both been completely empty at the point of the last synchronization. The effect of this is that, on the first run, files that exist in only one replica will be propagated to the other, while files that exist in both replicas but are unequal will be marked as conflicting.

Touching a file without changing its contents should never affect Unison's behavior. (On Unix, it uses file modtimes for a quick first pass to tell which files have definitely *not* changed; then for each file that might have changed it computes a fingerprint of the file's contents and compares it against the last-synchronized contents.)

It is safe to "brainwash" Unison by deleting its archive files *on both replicas*. The next time it runs, it will assume that all the files it sees in the replicas are new.

It is safe to modify files while Unison is working. If Unison discovers that it has propagated an out-of-date change, or that the file it is updating has changed on the target replica, it will signal a failure for that file. Run Unison again to propagate the latest change.

Changes to the ignore patterns from the user interface (e.g., using the 'i' key) are immediately reflected in the current profile.

## 4.7 Caveats and Shortcomings

Here are some things to be careful of when using Unison. A complete list of bugs can be found in the file `BUGS.txt` in the source distribution.

- In the interests of speed, the update detection algorithm may (depending on which OS architecture you are running on) actually use an approximation to the definition given in the `What is an Update?` section (4.3).

In particular, the Unix implementation does not compare the actual contents of files to their previous contents, but simply looks at each file's inode number and modtime; if neither of these have changed, then it concludes that the file has not been changed.

Under normal circumstances, this approximation is safe, in the sense that it may sometimes detect “false updates” will never miss a real one. However, it is possible to fool it, for example by using `retouch` to change a file's modtime back to a time in the past.

- If you synchronize between a single-user filesystem and a shared Unix server, you should pay attention to your permission bits: by default, Unison will synchronize permissions verbatim, which may leave group-writable files on the server that could be written over by a lot of people.

You can control this by setting your `umask` on both computers to something like `022`, masking out the “world write” and “group write” permission bits.

- The graphical user interface is currently single-threaded. This means that if Unison is performing some long-running operation, the display will not be repainted until it finishes. We recommend not trying to do anything with the user interface while Unison is in the middle of detecting changes or propagating files.
- Unison does not currently understand hard links.

## 5 Reference

This section covers the features of Unison in detail.

### 5.1 Running Unison

There are several ways to start Unison.

- Typing “`unison <profile>`” on the command line. Unison will look for a file `<profile>.prf` in the `.unison` directory. If this file does not specify a pair of roots, Unison will prompt for them and add them to the information specified by the profile.
- Typing “`unison <profile> <root1> <root2>`” on the command line. In this case, Unison will use `<profile>`, which should not contain any `root` directives.
- Typing “`unison <root1> <root2>`” on the command line. This has the same effect as typing “`unison default <root1> <root2>`.”
- Typing just “`unison`” (or invoking Unison by clicking on a desktop icon). In this case, Unison will ask for the profile to use for synchronization (or create a new one, if necessary).

### 5.2 The `.unison` Directory

Unison stores a variety of information in a private directory on each host. If the environment variable `UNISON` is defined, then its value will be used as the name of this directory. If `UNISON` is not defined, then the name of the directory depends on which operating system you are using. In Unix, the default is to use `$HOME/.unison`. In Windows, if the environment variable `USERPROFILE` is defined, then the directory will be `$USERPROFILE\.unison`; otherwise if `HOME` is defined, it will be `$HOME\.unison`; otherwise, it will be `c:\.unison`.

The archive file for each replica is found in the `.unison` directory on that replica’s host. Profiles (described below) are always taken from the `.unison` directory on the client host.

Note that Unison maintains a completely different set of archive files for each pair of roots.

We do not recommend synchronizing the whole `.unison` directory, as this will involve frequent propagation of large archive files. It should be safe to do it, though, if you really want to. (Synchronizing the profile files in the `.unison` directory is definitely OK.)

### 5.3 Archive Files

The name of the archive file on each replica is calculated from

- the “canonical names” of all the hosts (mapping short names like `saul` to full addresses like `saul.cis.upenn.edu`)
- the paths to the replicas on all the hosts (again, mapping relative pathnames, symbolic links, etc. to full, absolute paths)
- an internal version number that is changed whenever a new Unison release changes the format of the information stored in the archive.

This method should work well for most users. However, it is occasionally useful to change the way archive names are generated. Unison provides two ways of doing this.

The function that finds the canonical hostname of the local host (which is used, for example, in calculating the name of the archive file used to remember which files have been synchronized) normally uses the `gethostname` operating system call. However, if the environment variable `UNISONLOCALHOSTNAME` is set, its value will be used instead. This makes it easier to use Unison in situations where a machine’s name changes frequently (e.g., because it is a laptop and gets moved around a lot).

A more powerful way of changing archive names is provided by the `rootalias` preference. The preference file may contain any number of lines of the form:

```
rootalias = //hostnameA//path-to-replicaA -> //hostnameB//path-to-replicaB
```

When calculating the name of the archive files for a given pair of roots, Unison replaces any roots matching the left-hand side of any `rootalias` rule by the corresponding right-hand side.

So, if you need to relocate a root on one of the hosts, you can add a rule of the form:

```
rootalias = //new-hostname//new-path -> //old-hostname//old-path
```

*Warning:* The `rootalias` option is dangerous and should only be used if you are sure you know what you're doing. In particular, it should only be used if you are positive that either (1) both the original root and the new alias refer to the same set of files, or (2) the files have been relocated so that the original name is now invalid and will never be used again. (If the original root and the alias refer to different sets of files, Unison's update detector could get confused.) After introducing a new `rootalias`, it is a good idea to run Unison a few times interactively (with the `batch` flag off, etc.) and carefully check that things look reasonable—in particular, that update detection is working as expected.

## 5.4 Preferences

Many details of Unison's behavior are configurable by user-settable "preferences." (The following list can be obtained by typing `unison -help`.)

```
Usage: unison [options]
       or unison root1 root2 [options]
       or unison profilename [options]
```

### Options:

```
-addversionno    add version number to name of unison executable on server
-auto           automatically accept default actions
-backups        keep backup copies when propagating changes
-batch         batch mode: ask no questions at all
-debug xxx      debug module xxx ('all' -> everything, 'verbose' -> more)
-doc xxx       show documentation ('-doc topics' lists topics)
-dumbtty       do not try to change terminal settings in text UI
-editor xxx    command for displaying the output of the merge program
-fastcheck     do fast (and slightly unsafe) update detection on windows
-follow xxx    add a regexp to the follow list
-force xxx     force changes from this replica to the other
-group         synchronize group
-height n      height (in lines) of main window in graphical interface
-ignore xxx    add a regexp to the ignore list
-ignorenot xxx add a regexp to the ignorenot list
-key xxx      Define a keyboard shortcut for this profile
-killServer   kill server when done (even when using sockets)
-label xxx    Provide a descriptive string label for this profile
-log          Record actions in file specified by logfile preference
-logfile xxx  Log file name
-merge xxx    command for merging files when there is a conflict
-merge2 xxx   command for merging files when there is a conflict
-mirror xxx   add a regexp to the mirror list
-mirrorversions n  Number of mirror versions of a file. (By default the value is 2.)
-numericIds   don't map uid/gid values by user/group names
-owner       synchronize owner
-path xxx     path to synchronize
-perms n     part of the permissions which is synchronized
-prefer xxx   choose this replica's version for conflicting changes
```

```

-root xxx          root of a replica
-rshargs xxx      other arguments (if any) for remote shell command
-servercmd xxx    name of unison executable on remote server
-silent           print nothing (except error messages)
-socket xxx       act as a server on a socket
-sortbysize       list changed files by size, not name
-sortfirst xxx    add a regexp to the sortfirst list
-sortlast xxx     add a regexp to the sortlast list
-sortnewfirst     list new before changed files
-statusdepth n    Status display depth for local files
-terse           suppress status messages
-testServer       exit immediately after the connection to the server
-threads n        maximal number of threads
-times           synchronize modification times
-ui xxx          select user interface ('text' or 'graphic')
-version         print version and exit

```

Some preferences are just boolean flags. Others take numeric or string arguments, indicated in the preferences list by `n` or `xxx`. Most of the string preferences can be given several times; the arguments are accumulated into a list internally.

There are two ways to set the values of preferences: temporarily, by providing command-line arguments to a particular run of Unison, or permanently, by adding commands to a *profile* in the `.unison` directory on the client host.

To set the value of a preference `p` from the command line, add an argument `-p` (for a boolean flag) or `-p n` or `-p xxx` (for a numeric or string preference) anywhere on the command line. There is currently no way to set a boolean flag to `false` on the command line (all the boolean preferences default to `false`, so this is only a restriction you've set one to `true` in your profile and want to reset it temporarily to `false` from the command line).

Here, in more detail, are all the preferences supported by Unison. (Many of these preferences are discussed in more detail in other sections of the manual.)

**addversionno** When this flag is set to `true`, Unison will use `unison-<currentversionnumber>` instead of just `unison` as the remote server command. This allows multiple binaries for different versions of unison to coexist conveniently on the same server: whichever version is run on the client, the same version will be selected on the server.

**auto** When set to `true`, this flag causes the user interface to skip asking for confirmations except for non-conflicting changes. (More precisely, when the user interface is done setting the propagation direction for one entry and is about to move to the next, it will skip over all non-conflicting entries and go directly to the next conflict.)

**backups** When this flag is `true`, Unison will keep the old version of a file as a backup whenever a change is propagated. These backup files are left in the same directory, with extension `.bak`.

**batch** When this is set to `true`, the user interface will ask no questions at all. Non-conflicting changes will be propagated; conflicts will be skipped.

**debug** This preference is used to make Unison print various sorts of information about what it is doing internally on the standard error stream. It can be used many times, each time giving the name of a module for which debugging information should be printed. Possible arguments for `debug` can be found by looking for calls to `Util.debug` in the sources. Setting `-debug all` causes information from *all* modules to be printed (this mode of usage is the first one to try, if you are trying to understand something that Unison seems to be doing wrong); `-debug verbose` turns on some additional debugging output from some modules (e.g., it will show exactly what bytes are being sent across the network).

**diff** This preference can be used to control the name (and command-line arguments) of the system utility used to generate displays of file differences. The default is `'diff'`.

- doc** The command-line argument `-doc xxx` causes unison to display section `xxx` of the manual on the standard output and then exit. Use `-doc all` to display the whole manual (including exactly the same information as the printed and HTML manuals, modulo formatting). Use `-doc topics` to obtain a list of the names of the various sections that can be printed.
- dumbtty** When set to `true`, this flag makes the text mode user interface avoid trying to change any of the terminal settings. (Normally, it puts the terminal in 'raw mode' so that it can do things like overwriting the current line.) This is useful, for example, when running Unison from a shell inside of Emacs.
- When `dumbtty` is set, commands to the user interface need to be followed by a carriage return before Unison will execute them. (When it is off, Unison recognizes keystrokes as soon as they are typed.)
- This preference has no effect on the graphical user interface.
- editor** This preference is used when unison wants to display the output of the merge program when its return value is not 0. User changes the file as he wants and then save it, unison will take this version for the synchronisation. By default the value is 'emacs'.
- fastcheck** When this switch is set, Unison will use file creation times as 'pseudo inode numbers' when scanning Windows replicas for updates, instead of reading the full contents of every file. This may cause Unison to miss propagating an update if the create time, modification time, and length of the file are all unchanged by the update (this is not easy to achieve, but it can be done). However, Unison will never *overwrite* such an update with a change from the other replica, since it always does a safe check for updates just before propagating a change. Thus, it is reasonable to use this switch most of the time and occasionally run Unison once with `t fastcheck` set to false, if you are worried that Unison may have overlooked an update.
- follow** Including the preference `-follow <pathspec>` causes Unison to treat symbolic links matching `<pathspec>` as 'invisible' and behave as if the thing pointed to by the link had appeared literally at this position in the replica. See the Symbolic Links section (5.10) for more details. The syntax of `<pathspec>` is described in the Ignoring Paths section (5.9).
- force** Including the preference `-force <root>` causes Unison to resolve all differences (even non-conflicting changes) in favor of `root`. This effectively changes Unison from a synchronizer into a mirroring utility.
- You can also specify `-force newer` (or `-force older`) to force Unison to choose the file with the later (earlier) modtime. In this case, the `-times` preference must also be enabled.
- This preference should be used only if you are *sure* you know what you are doing!
- group** When this flag is set to `true`, file's groups are synchronized
- height** Used to set the height (in lines) of the main window in the graphical user interface.
- ignore** Including the preference `-ignore <pathspec>` causes Unison to completely ignore paths matching `<pathspec>` (and their children). This is useful for avoiding synchronizing temporary files, etc. The syntax of `<pathspec>` is described in the Ignoring Paths section (5.9).
- ignorenot** This preference overrides the previous one gives a list of patterns (in the same format as `ignore`) for paths that should definitely *not* be ignored, whether or not they happen to match one of the `ignore` patterns.
- key** Used in a profile to define a numeric key (0-9) that can be used in the graphical user interface to switch immediately to this profile.
- killServer** When set to `true`, this flag causes Unison to kill the remote server process when the synchronization is finished. This behavior is the default for `ssh` connections, so this preference is not normally needed when running over `ssh`; it is provided so that socket-mode servers can be killed off after a single run of Unison, rather than waiting to accept future connections. (Some users prefer to start a remote socket server for each run of Unison, rather than leaving one running all the time.)

**label** Used in a profile to provide a descriptive string documenting its settings. (This is useful for users that switch between several profiles, especially using the 'fast switch' feature of the graphical user interface.)

**log** When this flag is set, Unison will log all changes to the filesystems on a file.

**logfile** By default, logging messages will be appended to the file `unison.log` in your HOME directory. Set this preference if you prefer another file.

**merge** This preference can be used to run a merge program which will create a new version of the file with the last backup and the both replicas. This new version will be used for the synchronization. By default, Unison will use its own merge program

**merge2** This preference can be used to run a merge program which will create a new version of the file with the last backup and the both replicas. This new version will be used for the synchronization. By default, Unison will use its own merge program

**mirror** For each path matching this predicate, Unison will keep several old versions of a file as a backup whenever a change is propagated. These mirror files are left in the directory specified by the environment variable `UNISONMIRRORDIR` (`.unison/mirror/` by default). The newest mirrored copy will have the same name as the original; older versions will be named with extensions `.n.unibck`. The number of versions that are kept is determined by the `mirrorversions` preference.

**mirrorversions** This preference specifies the number of mirror versions that will be kept by unison, for each path that matches the predicate `mirror`. The default is 2.

**numericIds** When this flag is set to `true`, groups and users are synchronized numerically, rather than by name.

The special uid 0 and the special group 0 are never mapped via user/group names even if this preference is not set.

**owner** When this flag is set to `true`, file's owners are synchronized

**path** When no `path` preference is given, Unison will simply synchronize the two entire replicas, beginning from the given pair of roots. If one or more `path` preferences are given, then Unison will synchronize just these paths and their children. (This is useful for doing a fast synch of just one directory, for example.)

**perms** The integer value of this preference is a mask indicating which permission bits should be synchronized. It is set by default to `0o1777`: all bits but the set-uid and set-gid bits are synchronised (synchronizing these latter bits can be a security hazard). If you want to synchronize all bits, you can set the value of this preference to `-1`.

**prefer** Including the preference `-prefer <root>` causes Unison always to resolve conflicts in favor of `root`, rather than asking for guidance from the user. (The syntax of `<root>` is the same as for the `root` preference, including the special values `newer` and `older`.)

This preference should be used only if you are *sure* you know what you are doing!

**root** Each use of this preference names the root of one of the replicas for Unison to synchronize. Exactly two roots are needed, so normal modes of usage are either to give two values for `root` in the profile, or else to give no values in the profile and provide two on the command line. Details of the syntax of roots can be found in the Roots section (4.1).

The two roots can be given in either order; Unison will sort them into a canonical order before doing anything else. It also tries to 'canonize' the machine names and paths appearing in the roots, so that, if Unison is invoked later with a slightly different name for the same root, it will be able to locate the correct archives.

- rshargs** The string value of this preference will be passed as additional arguments (besides the host name and the name of the Unison executable on the remote system) to the `ssh` or `rsh` command used to invoke the remote server. (This option is used for passing arguments to both `t rsh` or `t ssh`—that’s why its name is `t rshargs` rather than `t sshargs`.)
- servercmd** This preference can be used to explicitly set the name of the Unison executable on the remote server (e.g., giving a full path name), if necessary.
- silent** When this preference is set to `true`, the textual user interface will print nothing at all, except in case of errors. Automatically sets the `batch` preference to `true`.
- sortbysize** When this flag is set, the user interface will list changed files by size (smallest first) rather than by name. This is useful, for example, for synchronizing over slow links, since it puts very large files at the end of the list where they will not prevent smaller files from being transferred quickly.
- This preference (as well as the other sorting flags, but not the sorting preferences that require patterns as arguments) can be set temporarily using the ‘Sort’ menu in the graphical user interface.
- sortfirst** Each argument to `sortfirst` is a pattern describing a set of paths (in the same syntax as for `ignore`—see the Ignoring Paths section (5.9)). Files matching any of these patterns will be listed first in the user interface.
- sortlast** Similar to `sortfirst`, except that files matching one of these patterns will be listed at the very end.
- sortnewfirst** When this flag is set, the user interface will list newly created files before all others. This is useful, for example, for checking that newly created files are not ‘junk’ that should be ignored or deleted rather than synchronized.
- sshversion** This preference can be used to control which version of `ssh` should be used to connect to the server. Legal values are 1 and 2, which will cause unison to try to use `ssh1` or `ssh2` instead of just `ssh` to invoke `ssh`. The default value is empty, which will make unison use whatever version of `ssh` is installed as the default ‘`ssh`’ command.
- statusdepth** This preference suppresses the display of status messages during update detection on the local machine for paths deeper than the specified cutoff. (Displaying too many local status messages can slow down update detection somewhat.)
- terse** When this preference is set to `true`, the user interface will not print status messages.
- testServer** Setting this flag on the command line causes Unison to attempt to connect to the remote server and, if successful, print a message and immediately exit. Useful for debugging installation problems.
- times** When this flag is set to `true`, file modification times (but not directory modtimes) are propagated.
- ui** This preference selects either the graphical or the textual user interface. Legal values are `graphic` or `text`.
- If Unison was compiled with only a textual interface, this option has no effect. (The pre-compiled binaries are all compiled with both interfaces available.)
- version** Print the current version number and exit. (Only makes sense on the command line.)

## 5.5 Profiles

A *profile* is a text file in the `.unison` directory on the client machine that specifies permanent settings for roots, paths, ignore patterns, and other preferences, so that they do not need to be typed at the command line every time Unison is run. If Unison is started with just one argument `<name>` on the command line, it looks for a profile called `<name>.prf` in the `.unison` directory. If it is started with no arguments, it scans

the `.unison` directory for files whose names end in `.prf` and offers a menu. If a file named `default.prf` is found, its settings will be offered as the default choices.

To set the value of a preference `p` permanently, add to the appropriate profile a line of the form

```
p = true
```

(for a boolean flag) or

```
p = <value>
```

for a flag of another type.

Whitespace around `p` and `xxx` is ignored. A profile may also include blank lines, and lines beginning with `#`, both of which are ignored.

When Unison starts, it reads the profile first and then the command line, so command-line options will override settings from the profile.

Profiles may also include lines of the form `include <name>`, which will cause the file `name` (or `name.prf`, if `name` does not exist in the `.unison` directory) to be read at that point. This allows settings common to several profiles to be stored in one place.

Here is a minimal profile file, such as might be found in `.unison/default.prf`:

```
# Roots of the synchronization
root = /home/bcpierce
root = ssh://saul//home/bcpierce
# Paths to synchronize
path = current
path = common
path = .netscape/bookmarks.html
```

Here is a more sophisticated profile, illustrating some other useful features.

```
# Roots of the synchronization
root = /home/bcpierce
root = ssh://saul//home/bcpierce
# Paths to synchronize
path = current
path = common
path = .netscape/bookmarks.html
# Some regexps specifying names and paths to ignore
ignore = Name temp.*
ignore = Name *~
ignore = Name .*~
ignore = Path */pilot/backup/Archive_*
ignore = Name *.o
ignore = Name *.tmp
# Window height
height = 37
# Keep a backup copy of the entire replica
backup = Name *
# Use this command for displaying diffs
diff = diff -y -W 79 --suppress-common-lines
# Log actions to the terminal
log = true
# Include commands from another profile (named 'common' or 'common.prf')
include common
```

A profile may include a preference `'label = <string>'` giving a descriptive string that described the options selected in this profile. The string is listed along with the profile name in the profile selection dialog, and displayed in the top-right corner of the main Unison window in the graphical user interface.

The graphical user-interface also supports one-key shortcuts for commonly used profiles. If a profile contains a preference of the form `'key = n'`, where `n` is a single digit, then pressing this key will cause Unison to immediately switch to this profile and begin synchronization again from scratch. (Any actions that may have been selected for a set of changes currently being displayed will be discarded.)

## 5.6 Keeping Backups

Unison now maintains full backups of the last-synchronized versions of (some of) the files in each replica; these function both as backups in the usual sense and as the “common version” when invoking external merge programs.

The backed up files are stored in a directory `~/unison/backup` on each host. The name of this directory can be changed by setting the environment variable `UNISONBACKUPDIR`. Files are added to the backup directory whenever unison updates its archive. This means that

- When unison reconstructs its archive from scratch (e.g., because of an upgrade, or because the archive files have been manually deleted), all files will be backed up.
- Otherwise, each file will be backed up the first time unison propagates an update for it.

It is OK to manually delete files from the backup directory (or to throw away the directory itself). Before unison uses any of these files for anything important, it checks that its fingerprint matches the one that it expects.

The predicate `backup` controls which files are actually backed up: giving the preference `'backup = Path *` causes backing up of all files. The preference `backupversions` controls how many previous versions of each file are kept. The default is 2 (i.e., the last synchronized version plus one backup). For backward compatibility, the `backups` preference is also still supported, but `backup` is now preferred.

## 5.7 Merging Conflicting Versions

Both user interfaces offer a `'merge'` command that can be used to interactively merge conflicting versions of a file. It is invoked by selecting a conflicting file and pressing `'m'`.

The actual merging is performed by an external program. The preferences `merge` and `merge2` control how this program is invoked. If a backup exists for this file (see the `backup` preference), then the `merge` preference is used for this purpose; otherwise `merge2` is used. In both cases, the value of the preference should be a string representing the command that should be passed to a shell to invoke the merge program. Within this string, the special substrings `CURRENT1`, `CURRENT2`, `NEW`, and `OLD` may appear at any point. Unison will substitute these as follows before invoking the command:

- `CURRENT1` is replaced by the name of the local copy of the file;
- `CURRENT2` is replaced by the name of a temporary file, into which the contents of the remote copy of the file have been transferred by Unison prior to performing the merge;
- `NEW` is replaced by the name of a temporary file that Unison expects to be written by the merge program when it finishes, giving the desired new contents of the file; and
- `OLD` is replaced by the name of the backed up copy of the original version of the file (i.e., its state at the end of the last successful run of Unison), if one exists (applies only to `merge`, not `merge2`).

For example, on Unix systems setting the `merge` preference to

```
merge = diff3 -m CURRENT1 OLD CURRENT2 > NEW
```

will tell Unison to use the external `diff3` program for merging. A large number of external merging programs are available. For example, `emacs` users may find the following settings convenient:

```
merge2 = emacs -q --eval '(ediff-merge-files "CURRENT1" "CURRENT2"
      nil "NEW")'
merge = emacs -q --eval '(ediff-merge-files-with-ancestor
      "CURRENT1" "CURRENT2" "OLD" nil "NEW")'
```

(These commands are displayed here on two lines to avoid running off the edge of the page. In your preference file, each should be written on a single line.)

If the external program exits without leaving any file at the path `NEW`, Unison considers the merge to have failed. If the merge program writes a file called `NEW` but exits with a non-zero status code, then Unison considers the merge to have succeeded but to have generated conflicts. In this case, it attempts to invoke an external editor so that the user can resolve the conflicts. The value of the `editor` preference controls what editor is invoked by Unison. The default is `emacs`.

(Please send us suggestions for other useful values of the `merge2` and `merge` preferences – we’d like to give several examples in the manual.)

## 5.8 The User Interface

The user interfaces (both text and graphical) are intended to be mostly self-explanatory. Here are just a few tricks:

- By default, when running on Unix the text user interface will try to put the terminal into “raw mode” so that it sends input a character at a time rather than a line at a time. (This means you can type just the single keystroke “>” to tell Unison to propagate a file from left to right, rather than “> Enter.”)

There are some situations, though, where this will not work — for example, when Unison is running in a shell window inside Emacs. Setting the `dumbtty` preference will force Unison to leave the terminal alone and process input a line at a time.

## 5.9 Ignoring Paths

Most users of Unison will find that their replicas contain lots of files that they don’t ever want to synchronize — temporary files, very large files, old stuff, architecture-specific binaries, etc. Unison provides a convenient way of ignoring individual paths or sets of paths, using regular expressions.

- Ignore patterns are stored in profiles, using the same syntax as other preferences. A profile line of the form

```
ignore = <pattern>
```

adds `pattern` to the list of patterns to be ignored.

- Each `<pattern>` can have one of three forms. The most general form is a Posix extended regular expression introduced by the keyword `Regex` (collating sequences and character classes are not supported currently).

```
ignore = Regex <regexp>
```

For convenience, two other styles of pattern are also recognized:

```
ignore = Name <name>
```

matches any path in which the last component matches `<name>`, while

```
ignore = Path <path>
```

matches exactly the path `<path>`. The `<name>` and `<path>` arguments of the latter forms of patterns are *not* regular expressions. Instead, standard “globbing” conventions can be used in `<name>` and `<path>`:

- `a ?` matches any single character except `/`
- `a *` matches any sequence of characters not including `/`
- `[xyz]` matches any character from the set `{x,y,z}`
- `{a,bb,ccc}` matches any one of `a`, `bb`, or `ccc`.

For example, the following pattern will make Unison ignore any path containing the name `CVS` or a name ending in `.cmo`:

```
ignore = Name {CVS,*.cmo}
```

The next pattern makes Unison ignore the path `a/b`:

```
ignore = Path a/b
```

This pattern makes Unison ignore any path beginning with `a/b` and ending with a name ending by `.ml`.

```
ignore = Regex a/b/.*\.ml
```

Note that regular expression patterns are “anchored”: they must match the whole path, not just a substring of the path.

- If a directory is ignored, all its descendents will be too.
- The path separator in ignore patterns is always the forward-slash character `/` — even when the client or server is running under Windows, where the normal separator character is a backslash. This makes it possible to use the same set of ignore patterns for both Unix and Windows filesystems.
- The user interface provides some convenient commands for adding new patterns to be ignored. To ignore a particular file, select it and press `“i”`. To ignore all files with the same extension, select it and press `“E”` (with the shift key). To ignore all files with the same name, no matter what directory they appear in, select it and press `“N”`. These new patterns become permanent: they are immediately added to the current profile on disk.
- If you use the `include` directive to include a common collection of preferences in several top-level preference files, you will probably also want to set the `addprefsto` preference to the name of this file. This will cause any new ignore patterns that you add from inside Unison to be appended to this file, instead of whichever top-level preference file you started Unison with.
- Ignore patterns can also be specified on the command line, if you like (this is probably not very useful), using an option like `-ignore 'Name temp.txt'`.

## 5.10 Symbolic Links

Ordinarily, Unison treats symbolic links in Unix replicas as “opaque”: it considers the contents of the link to be just the string specifying where it points, and it will propagate changes in this string to the other replica.

It is sometimes useful to treat a symbolic link “transparently,” acting as though whatever it points to were physically *in* the replica at the point where the symbolic link appears. To tell Unison to treat a link in this manner, add a line of the form

```
follow = path/of/symlink
```

to the profile. (The `path/of/symlink` can also be a regular expression, following the same conventions as described above for `ignore` patterns.)

Windows filesystems do not support symbolic links; Unison will refuse to propagate a opaque symbolic link from Unix to Windows and flag the path as erroneous. When a Unix replica is to be synchronized with a Windows system, all symbolic links should match either an `ignore` or a `follow` pattern.

## 5.11 Permissions

Synchronizing the permission bits of files is slightly tricky when two different filesystems are involved (e.g., when synchronizing a Windows client and a Unix server). In detail, here's how it works:

- When the permission bits of an existing file or directory are changed, the values of those bits that make sense on *both* operating systems will be propagated to the other replica. The other bits will not be changed.
- When a newly created file is propagated to a remote replica, the permission bits that make sense in both operating systems are also propagated. The values of the other bits are set to default values (they are taken from the current `umask`, if the receiving host is a Unix system).
- For security reasons, the Unix `setuid` and `setgid` bits are not propagated.
- The Unix owner and group ids are not propagated. (What would this mean, in general?) All files are created with the owner and group of the server process.

## 5.12 Cross-Platform Synchronization

If you use Unison to synchronize files between Windows and Unix systems, there are a few special issues to be aware of.

**Case conflicts.** In Unix, filenames are case sensitive: `foo` and `F00` can refer to different files. In Windows, on the other hand, filenames are not case sensitive: `foo` and `F00` can only refer to the same file. This means that a Unix `foo` and `F00` cannot be synchronized onto a Windows system — Windows won't allow two different files to have the “same” name. Unison detects this situation for you, and reports that it cannot synchronize the files.

You can deal with a case conflict in a couple of ways. If you need to have both files on the Windows system, your only choice is to rename one of the Unix files to avoid the case conflict, and re-synchronize. If you don't need the files on the Windows system, you can simply disregard Unison's warning message, and go ahead with the synchronization; Unison won't touch those files. If you don't want to see the warning on each synchronization, you can tell Unison to ignore the files (see the `Ignore` section (5.9)).

**Illegal filenames.** Unix allows some filenames that are illegal in Windows. For example, colons (':') are not allowed in Windows filenames, but they are legal in Unix filenames. This means that a Unix file `foo:bar` can't be synchronized to a Windows system. As with case conflicts, Unison detects this situation for you, and you have the same options: you can either rename the Unix file and re-synchronize, or you can ignore it.

## 5.13 Slow Links

Unison is built to run well even over relatively slow links such as modems and DSL connections.

Unison uses the “rsync protocol” designed by Andrew Tridgell and Paul Mackerras to greatly speed up transfers of large files in which only small changes have been made. More information about the rsync protocol can be found at the rsync web site (<http://samba.anu.edu.au/rsync/>).

If you are using Unison with `ssh`, you may get some speed improvement by enabling `ssh`'s compression feature. Do this by adding the option “`-rshargs -C`” to the command line or “`rshargs = -C`” to your profile.

## 5.14 Fast Update Detection

If your replicas are large and at least one of them is on a Windows system, you may find that Unison's default method for detecting changes (which involves scanning the full contents of every file on every sync—the only completely safe way to do it under Windows) is too slow. Unison provides a preference `fastcheck` that, when set to `yes`, causes it to use file creation times as 'pseudo inode numbers' when scanning replicas for updates, instead of reading the full contents of every file.

When `fastcheck` is set to `no`, Unison will perform slow checking—re-scanning the contents of each file on each synchronization—on all replicas. When `fastcheck` is set to `default` (which, naturally, is the default), Unison will use fast checks on Unix replicas and slow checks on Windows replicas.

This strategy may cause Unison to miss propagating an update if the create time, modification time, and length of the file are all unchanged by the update (this is not easy to achieve, but it can be done). However, Unison will never *overwrite* such an update with a change from the other replica, since it always does a safe check for updates just before propagating a change. Thus, it is reasonable to use this switch most of the time and occasionally run Unison once with `fastcheck` set to `no`, if you are worried that Unison may have overlooked an update.

## 5.15 Click-starting Unison

On Windows NT/2k systems, the graphical version of Unison can be invoked directly by clicking on its icon. On Windows 95/98 systems, click-starting also works, *as long as you are not using ssh*. Due to an incompatibility with `ocaml` and Windows 95/98 that is not under our control, you must start Unison from a DOS window in Windows 95/98 if you want to use `ssh`.

When you click on the Unison icon, two windows will be created: Unison's regular window, plus a console window, which is used only for giving your password to `ssh` (if you do not use `ssh` to connect, you can ignore this window). When your password is requested, you'll need to activate the console window (e.g., by clicking in it) before typing. If you start Unison from a DOS window, Unison's regular window will appear and you will type your password in the DOS window you were using.

To use Unison in this mode, you must first create a profile (see the Profile section (5.5)). Use your favorite editor for this.

## 6 Advice

### 6.1 Frequently Asked Questions

(See the Common Problems section (6.2) and the Tips and Tricks section (6.3) for further suggestions.)

- *What are the differences between Unison and rsync?*

Rsync is a mirroring tool; Unison is a synchronizer. That is, rsync needs to be told “this replica contains the true versions of all the files; please make the other replica look exactly the same.” Unison is capable of recognizing updates in both replicas and deciding which way they should be propagated.

Both Unison and rsync use the so-called “rsync algorithm,” by Andrew Tridgell and Paul Mackerras, for performing updates. This algorithm streamlines updates in small parts of large files by transferring only the parts that have changed.

- *What are the differences between Unison and CVS?*

Both CVS and Unison can be used to keep a remote replica of a directory structure up to date with a central repository. Both are capable of propagating updates in both directions and recognizing conflicting updates. Both use the rsync protocol for file transfer.

Unison’s main advantage is being somewhat more automatic and easier to use, especially on large groups of files. CVS requires manual notification whenever files are added or deleted. Moving files is a bit tricky. And if you decide to move a directory... well, heaven help you.

CVS, on the other hand, is a full-blown version control system, and it has *lots* of other features (version history, multiple branches, etc.) that Unison (which is just a file synchronizer) doesn’t.

- *Is it OK to mount my remote filesystem using NFS and run unison locally, or should I run a remote server process?*

NFS-mounting the replicas is fine, as long as the local network is fast enough. Unison needs to read a lot of files (in particular, it needs to check the last-modified time of every file in the repository every time it runs), so if the link bandwidth is low then running a remote server is much better.

- *When I run Unison on Windows, it creates two different windows, the main user interface and a blank console window. Is there any way to get rid of the second one?*

The extra console window is there for ssh to use to get your password. Unfortunately, in the present version of unison the window will appear whether you’re using ssh or not.

Karl Moerder contributed some scripts that he uses to make the command window a bit more attractive. He starts unison from a shortcut to a .cmd file. This lets him control the attributes of the command window, making it small and gray and centering the passphrase request. His scripts can be found at <http://www.cis.upenn.edu/~bcpierce/unison/download/resources/karls-winhex.zip>.

It is also possible to get rid of the window entirely (for users that only want socket mode connections) by playing games with icons. If you make a symbolic link to the executable, you can edit the properties box to make this window come up iconic. That way when you click on the link, you seem to just get a unison window (except on the task bar, where the text window shows).

- *Why does unison run so slowly the first time I start it?*

On the first synchronization, unison doesn’t have any “memory” of what your replicas used to look like, so it has to go through, fingerprint every file, transfer the fingerprints across the network, and compare them to what’s on the other side. Having done this once, it stashes away the information so that in future runs almost all of the work can be done locally on each side.

- *Will unison behave correctly if used transitively? That is, if I synchronize both between host1:dir and host2:dir and between host2:dir and host3:dir at different times? Are there any problems if the “connectivity graph” has loops?*

This mode of usage will work fine. As far as each “host pair” is concerned, filesystem updates made by Unison when synchronizing any other pairs of hosts are exactly the same as ordinary user changes to the filesystem. So if a file started out having been modified on just one machine, then every time Unison is run on a pair of hosts where one has heard about the change and the other hasn’t will result in the change being propagated to the other host. Running unison between machines where both have already heard about the change will leave that file alone. So, no matter what the connectivity graph looks like (as long as it is not partitioned), eventually everyone will agree on the new value of the file.

The only thing to be careful of is changing the file *\*again\** on the first machine (or, in fact, any other machine) before all the machines have heard about the first change – this can result in Unison reporting conflicting changes to the file, which you’ll then have to resolve by hand.

## 6.2 Common Problems

If you’re having problems with Unison, the suggestions in this section may help.

A general recommendation is that, if you’ve gotten into a state you don’t understand, deleting the archive files on both replicas (files with names like `arNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNN` in the `.unison` directory) will return you to a blank slate. If the replicas are identical, then deleting the archives is always safe. If they are not identical, then deleting the archives will cause all files that exist on one side but not the other to be copied, and will report conflicts for all non-identical files that do exist on both sides.

(If you think the behavior you’re observing is an actual bug, then you might consider *moving* the archives to somewhere else instead of deleting them, so that you can try to replicate the bad behavior and tell us what more clearly happened.)

- *The text mode user interface fails with “Uncaught exception Sys\_blocked\_io” when running over ssh2.*

The problem here is that ssh2 puts its standard file descriptors into non-blocking mode. But unison and ssh share the same stderr (so that error messages from the server are displayed), and the nonblocking setting interferes with Unison’s interaction with the user. This can be corrected by redirecting the stderr when invoking Unison:

```
unison -ui text <other args> 2>/dev/tty
```

(The redirection syntax is a bit shell-specific. On some shells, e.g., csh and tcsh, you may need to write

```
unison -ui text <other args> > & /dev/tty
```

instead.)

- *What does the following mean?*

```
Propagating updates [accounting/fedscwh3qt2000.wb3]
failed: error in renaming locally:
/DANGER.README: permission denied
```

It means that unison is having trouble creating the temporary file `DANGER.README`, which it uses as a “commit log” for operations (such as renaming its temporary file `accounting/fedscwh3qt2000.wb3.unison.tmp` to the real location `accounting/fedscwh3qt2000.wb3`) that may leave the filesystem in a bad state if they are interrupted in the middle. This is pretty unlikely, since the rename operation happens fast, but it is possible; if it happens, the commit log will be left around and Unison will notice (and tell you) the next time it runs that the consistency of that file needs to be checked.

The specific problem here is that Unison is trying to create `DANGER.README` in the directory specified by your `HOME` environment variable, which seems to be set to `/`, where you do not have write permission.

- *The command line*

```
unison work ssh://remote.dcs.ed.ac.uk/work
```

*fails, with “fatal error: could not connect to server.” But when I connect directly with ssh remote.dcs.ed.ac.uk/work, I see that my PATH variable is correctly set, and the unison executable is found.*

In the first case, Unison is using `ssh` to execute a command, and in the second, it is giving you an interactive remote shell. Under some `ssh` configurations, these two use different startup sequences. You can test whether this is the problem here by trying, e.g.,

```
ssh remote.dcs.ed.ac.uk 'echo $PATH'
```

and seeing whether your `PATH` is the same as when you do

```
ssh remote.dcs.ed.ac.uk
[give password and wait for connection]
echo $PATH
```

This seems to be controlled by the configuration of `ssh`, but we have not understood all the details—if someone does, please let us know.

- *I’m having trouble getting unison working with openssh under Windows. Any suggestions?*

Antony Courtney contributed the following comment.

I ran in to some difficulties trying to use this `ssh` client with Unison, and tracked down at least one of the problems. I thought I’d share my experiences, and provide a ‘known good’ solution for other users who might want to use this Windows / Unison / `ssh` / Cygwin combination.

If you launch Unison from `bash`, it fails (at least for me). Running `unison_win32-gtkui.exe`, I get a dialog box that reads:

```
Fatal error: Error in checkServer: Broken pipe [read()]
```

and a message is printed to `stderr` in the `bash` window that reads:

```
ssh: unison_win32-gtkui.exe: no address associated with hostname.
```

My guess is that this is caused by some incompatibility between the Ocaml Win32 library routines and Cygwin with regard to setting up `argv[]` for child processes.

The solution is to launch Unison from a DOS command prompt instead; or see section 5.15.

### 6.3 Tricks and Tips

- *Is it possible to run Unison from `inetd` (the Unix internet services daemon)?*

We haven’t tried this ourselves, but Yan Seiner has contributed a mini-howto describing how he did it.

- *Is there a way to get Unison not to prompt me for a password every time I run it (e.g., so that I can run it every half hour from a shell script)?*

It’s actually `ssh` that’s asking for the password. If you’re running the Unison client on a Unix system, you should check out the ‘`ssh-agent`’ facility in `ssh`. If you do

```
ssh-agent bash
```

(or `ssh-agent startx`, when you first log in) it will start you a shell (or an X Windows session) in which all processes and sub-processes are part of the same `ssh-authorization` group. If, inside any shell belonging to this authorization group, you run the `ssh-add` program, it will prompt you *once* for a password and then remember it for the duration of the bash session. You can then use Unison over `ssh`—or even run it repeatedly from a shell script—without giving your password again.

It may also be possible to configure `ssh` so that it does not require any password: just enter an empty password when you create a pair of keys. If you think it is safe enough to keep your private key unencrypted on your client machine, this solution should work even under Windows.

- *Is there a way, under Windows, to click-start Unison and make it synchronize according to a particular profile?*

Greg Sullivan sent us the following useful trick:

In order to make syncing a particular profile “clickable” from the Win98 desktop, when the profile uses `ssh`, you need to create a `.bat` file that contains nothing but “`unison profile-name`” (assuming `unison.exe` is in the `PATH`). I first tried the “obvious” strategy of creating a shortcut on the desktop with the actual command line “`unison profile`, but that hangs. The `.bat` file trick works, though, because it runs `command.com` and then invokes the `.bat` file.

- *Can Unison be used with SSH’s port forwarding features?*

Mark Thomas says the following procedure works for him:

After having problems with unison spawning a command line `ssh` in Windows I noticed that unison also supports a socket mode of communication (great software!) so I tried the port forwarding feature of `ssh` using a graphical SSH terminal TTSSH:

`http://www.zip.com.au/~roca/ttssh.html`

To use unison I start TTSSH with port forwarding enabled and login to the Linux box where the unison server (`unison -socket xxxx`) is started automatically. In windows I just run unison and connect to localhost (`unison socket://localhost:xxxx/ ...`)

## 7 News

The current version of Unison is 2.7.7.

Changes since 2.7.4:

- Fixed a silly (but debilitating) bug in the client startup sequence.

Changes since 2.7.1:

- Added `addprefsto` preference, which (when set) controls which preference file new preferences (e.g. new ignore patterns) are added to.
- Bug fix: read the initial connection header one byte at a time, so that we don't block if the header is shorter than expected. (This bug did not affect normal operation — it just made it hard to tell when you were trying to use Unison incorrectly with an old version of the server, since it would hang instead of giving an error message.)

Changes since 2.6.59:

- Changed `fastcheck` from a boolean to a string preference. Its legal values are `yes` (for a fast check), `no` (for a safe check), or `default` (for a fast check—which also happens to be safe—when running on Unix and a safe check when on Windows). The default is `default`.
- Several preferences have been renamed for consistency. All preference names are now spelled out in lowercase. For backward compatibility, the old names still work, but they are not mentioned in the manual any more.
- The temp files created by the 'diff' and 'merge' commands are now named by *prepending* a new prefix to the file name, rather than appending a suffix. This should avoid confusing diff/merge programs that depend on the suffix to guess the type of the file contents.
- We now set the keepalive option on the server socket, to make sure that the server times out if the communication link is unexpectedly broken.
- Bug fixes:
  - When updating small files, Unison now closes the destination file.
  - File permissions are properly updated when the file is behind a followed link.
  - Several other small fixes.

Changes since 2.6.38:

- Major Windows performance improvement!

We've added a preference `fastcheck` that makes Unison look only at a file's creation time and last-modified time to check whether it has changed. This should result in a huge speedup when checking for updates in large replicas.

When this switch is set, Unison will use file creation times as 'pseudo inode numbers' when scanning Windows replicas for updates, instead of reading the full contents of every file. This may cause Unison to miss propagating an update if the create time, modification time, and length of the file are all unchanged by the update (this is not easy to achieve, but it can be done). However, Unison will never *overwrite* such an update with a change from the other replica, since it always does a safe check for updates just before propagating a change. Thus, it is reasonable to use this switch most of the time and occasionally run Unison once with `fastcheck` set to false, if you are worried that Unison may have overlooked an update.

Warning: This change is has not yet been thoroughly field-tested. If you set the `fastcheck` preference, pay careful attention to what Unison is doing.

- New functionality: centralized backups and merging
    - This version incorporates two pieces of major new functionality, implemented by Sylvain Roy during a summer internship at Penn: a *centralized backup* facility that keeps a full backup of (selected files in) each replica, and a *merging* feature that allows Unison to invoke an external file-merging tool to resolve conflicting changes to individual files.
    - Centralized backups:
      - \* Unison now maintains full backups of the last-synchronized versions of (some of) the files in each replica; these function both as backups in the usual sense and as the “common version” when invoking external merge programs.
      - \* The backed up files are stored in a directory `/.unison/backup` on each host. (The name of this directory can be changed by setting the environment variable `UNISONBACKUPDIR`.)
      - \* The predicate `backup` controls which files are actually backed up: giving the preference `'backup = Path *'` causes backing up of all files.
      - \* Files are added to the backup directory whenever unison updates its archive. This means that
        - When unison reconstructs its archive from scratch (e.g., because of an upgrade, or because the archive files have been manually deleted), all files will be backed up.
        - Otherwise, each file will be backed up the first time unison propagates an update for it.
      - \* The preference `backupversions` controls how many previous versions of each file are kept. The default is 2 (i.e., the last synchronized version plus one backup).
      - \* For backward compatibility, the `backups` preference is also still supported, but `backup` is now preferred.
      - \* It is OK to manually delete files from the backup directory (or to throw away the directory itself). Before unison uses any of these files for anything important, it checks that its fingerprint matches the one that it expects.
    - Merging:
      - \* Both user interfaces offer a new 'merge' command, invoked by pressing 'm' (with a changed file selected).
      - \* The actual merging is performed by an external program. The preferences `merge` and `merge2` control how this program is invoked. If a backup exists for this file (see the `backup` preference), then the `merge` preference is used for this purpose; otherwise `merge2` is used. In both cases, the value of the preference should be a string representing the command that should be passed to a shell to invoke the merge program. Within this string, the special substrings `CURRENT1`, `CURRENT2`, `NEW`, and `OLD` may appear at any point. Unison will substitute these as follows before invoking the command:
        - `CURRENT1` is replaced by the name of the local copy of the file;
        - `CURRENT2` is replaced by the name of a temporary file, into which the contents of the remote copy of the file have been transferred by Unison prior to performing the merge;
        - `NEW` is replaced by the name of a temporary file that Unison expects to be written by the merge program when it finishes, giving the desired new contents of the file; and
        - `OLD` is replaced by the name of the backed up copy of the original version of the file (i.e., its state at the end of the last successful run of Unison), if one exists (applies only to `merge`, not `merge2`).
- For example, on Unix systems setting the `merge` preference to
- ```
merge = diff3 -m CURRENT1 OLD CURRENT2 > NEW
```
- will tell Unison to use the external `diff3` program for merging.
- A large number of external merging programs are available. For example, `emacs` users may find the following convenient:

```
merge2 = emacs -q --eval '(ediff-merge-files "CURRENT1" "CURRENT2"
      nil "NEW")'
merge = emacs -q --eval '(ediff-merge-files-with-ancestor
      "CURRENT1" "CURRENT2" "OLD" nil "NEW")'
```

(These commands are displayed here on two lines to avoid running off the edge of the page. In your preference file, each should be written on a single line.)

- \* If the external program exits without leaving any file at the path `NEW`, Unison considers the merge to have failed. If the merge program writes a file called `NEW` but exits with a non-zero status code, then Unison considers the merge to have succeeded but to have generated conflicts. In this case, it attempts to invoke an external editor so that the user can resolve the conflicts. The value of the `editor` preference controls what editor is invoked by Unison. The default is `emacs`.
- \* Please send us suggestions for other useful values of the `merge2` and `merge` preferences – we'd like to give several examples in the manual.

- Smaller changes:

- When one preference file includes another, unison no longer adds the suffix `.prf` to the included file by default. If a file with precisely the given name exists in the `.unison` directory, it will be used; otherwise Unison will add `.prf`, as it did before. (This change means that included preference files can be named `blah.include` instead of `blah.prf`, so that unison will not offer them in its 'choose a preference file' dialog.)
- For Linux systems, we now offer both a statically linked and a dynamically linked executable. The static one is larger, but will probably run on more systems, since it doesn't depend on the same versions of dynamically linked library modules being available.
- Fixed the `force` and `prefer` preferences, which were getting the propagation direction exactly backwards.
- Fixed a bug in the startup code that would cause unison to crash when the default profile (`~/.unison/default.prf`) does not exist.
- Fixed a bug where, on the run when a profile is first created, Unison would confusingly display the roots in reverse order in the user interface.

- For developers:

- We've added a module dependency diagram to the source distribution, in `src/DEPENDENCIES.ps`, to help new prospective developers with navigating the code.

Changes since 2.6.11:

- **Incompatible change:** Archive format has changed.
- **Incompatible change:** The startup sequence has been completely rewritten and greatly simplified. The main user-visible change is that the `defaultpath` preference has been removed. Its effect can be approximated by using multiple profiles, with `include` directives to incorporate common settings. All uses of `defaultpath` in existing profiles should be changed to `path`.

Another change in startup behavior that will affect some users is that it is no longer possible to specify roots *both* in the profile *and* on the command line.

You can achieve a similar effect, though, by breaking your profile into two:

```
default.prf =
  root = blah
  root = foo
  include common
```

```
common.prf =
  <everything else>
```

Now do

```
unison common root1 root2
```

when you want to specify roots explicitly.

- The `-prefer` and `-force` options have been extended to allow users to specify that files with more recent modtimes should be propagated, writing either `-prefer newer` or `-force newer`. (For symmetry, Unison will also accept `-prefer older` or `-force older`.) The `-force older/newer` options can only be used when `-times` is also set.

The graphical user interface provides access to these facilities on a one-off basis via the **Actions** menu.

- Names of roots can now be “aliased” to allow replicas to be relocated without changing the name of the archive file where Unison stores information between runs. (This feature is for experts only. See the “Archive Files” section of the manual for more information.)
- Graphical user-interface:
  - A new command is provided in the Synchronization menu for switching to a new profile without restarting Unison from scratch.
  - The GUI also supports one-key shortcuts for commonly used profiles. If a profile contains a preference of the form `'key = n'`, where `n` is a single digit, then pressing this key will cause Unison to immediately switch to this profile and begin synchronization again from scratch. (Any actions that may have been selected for a set of changes currently being displayed will be discarded.)
  - Each profile may include a preference `'label = <string>'` giving a descriptive string that described the options selected in this profile. The string is listed along with the profile name in the profile selection dialog, and displayed in the top-right corner of the main Unison window.
- Minor:
  - Fixed a bug that would sometimes cause the 'diff' display to order the files backwards relative to the main user interface. (Thanks to Pascal Brisset for this fix.)
  - On Unix systems, the graphical version of Unison will check the `DISPLAY` variable and, if it is not set, automatically fall back to the textual user interface.
  - Synchronization paths (`path` preferences) are now matched against the ignore preferences. So if a path is both specified in a `path` preference and ignored, it will be skipped.
  - Numerous other bugfixes and small improvements.

Changes since 2.6.1:

- The synchronization of modification times has been disabled for directories.
- Preference files may now include lines of the form `include <name>`, which will cause `name.prf` to be read at that point.
- The synchronization of permission between Windows and Unix now works properly.
- A binding `CYGWIN=binmode` is now added to the environment so that the Cygwin port of OpenSSH works properly in a non-Cygwin context.
- The `servercmd` and `addversionno` preferences can now be used together: `-addversionno` appends an appropriate `-NNN` to the server command, which is found by using the value of the `-servercmd` preference if there is one, or else just `unison`.

- Both `'-pref=val'` and `'-pref val'` are now allowed for boolean values. (The former can be used to set a preference to false.)
- Lot of small bugs fixed.

Changes since 2.5.31:

- The `log` preference is now set to `true` by default, since the log file seems useful for most users.
- Several miscellaneous bugfixes (most involving symlinks).

Changes since 2.5.25:

- **Incompatible change:** Archive format has changed (again).
- Several significant bugs introduced in 2.5.25 have been fixed.

Changes since 2.5.1:

- **Incompatible change:** Archive format has changed. Make sure you synchronize your replicas before upgrading, to avoid spurious conflicts. The first sync after upgrading will be slow.
- New functionality:
  - Unison now synchronizes file modtimes, user-ids, and group-ids. These new features are controlled by a set of new preferences, all of which are currently `false` by default.
    - \* When the `times` preference is set to `true`, file modification times are propagated. (Because the representations of time may not have the same granularity on both replicas, Unison may not always be able to make the modtimes precisely equal, but it will get them as close as the operating systems involved allow.)
    - \* When the `owner` preference is set to `true`, file ownership information is synchronized.
    - \* When the `group` preference is set to `true`, group information is synchronized.
    - \* When the `numericIds` preference is set to `true`, owner and group information is synchronized numerically. By default, owner and group numbers are converted to names on each replica and these names are synchronized. (The special user id 0 and the special group 0 are never mapped via user/group names even if this preference is not set.)
  - Added an integer-valued preference `perms` that can be used to control the propagation of permission bits. The value of this preference is a mask indicating which permission bits should be synchronized. It is set by default to `0o1777`: all bits but the set-uid and set-gid bits are synchronised (synchronizing these latter bits can be a security hazard). If you want to synchronize all bits, you can set the value of this preference to `-1`.
  - Added a `log` preference (default `false`), which makes Unison keep a complete record of the changes it makes to the replicas. By default, this record is written to a file called `unison.log` in the user's home directory (the value of the `HOME` environment variable). If you want it someplace else, set the `logfile` preference to the full pathname you want Unison to use.
  - Added an `ignorenot` preference that maintains a set of patterns for paths that should definitely *not* be ignored, whether or not they match an `ignore` pattern. (That is, a path will now be ignored iff it matches an `ignore` pattern and does not match any `ignorenot` patterns.)
- User-interface improvements:
  - Roots are now displayed in the user interface in the same order as they were given on the command line or in the preferences file.
  - When the `batch` preference is set, the graphical user interface no longer waits for user confirmation when it displays a warning message: it simply pops up an advisory window with a `Dismiss` button at the bottom and keeps on going.

- Added a new preference for controlling how many status messages are printed during update detection: `statusdepth` controls the maximum depth for paths on the local machine (longer paths are not displayed, nor are non-directory paths). The value should be an integer; default is 1.
  - Removed the `trace` and `silent` preferences. They did not seem very useful, and there were too many preferences for controlling output in various ways.
  - The text UI now displays just the default command (the one that will be used if the user just types `<return>`) instead of all available commands. Typing `?` will print the full list of possibilities.
  - The function that finds the canonical hostname of the local host (which is used, for example, in calculating the name of the archive file used to remember which files have been synchronized) normally uses the `gethostname` operating system call. However, if the environment variable `UNISONLOCALHOSTNAME` is set, its value will now be used instead. This makes it easier to use Unison in situations where a machine’s name changes frequently (e.g., because it is a laptop and gets moved around a lot).
  - File owner and group are now displayed in the “detail window” at the bottom of the screen, when unison is configured to synchronize them.
- For hackers:
    - Updated to Jacques Garrigue’s new version of `lablgtk`, which means we can throw away our local patched version.  
If you’re compiling the GTK version of unison from sources, you’ll need to update your copy of `lablgtk` to the developers release, available from <http://wwwfun.kurims.kyoto-u.ac.jp/soft/olabl/lablgtk.h> (Warning: installing `lablgtk` under Windows is currently a bit challenging.)
    - The `TODO.txt` file (in the source distribution) has been cleaned up and reorganized. The list of pending tasks should be much easier to make sense of, for people that may want to contribute their programming energies. There is also a separate file `BUGS.txt` for open bugs.
    - The Tk user interface has been removed (it was not being maintained and no longer compiles).
    - The `debug` preference now prints quite a bit of additional information that should be useful for identifying sources of problems.
    - The version number of the remote server is now checked right away during the connection setup handshake, rather than later. (Somebody sent a bug report of a server crash that turned out to come from using inconsistent versions: better to check this earlier and in a way that can’t crash either client or server.)
    - Unison now runs correctly on 64-bit architectures (e.g. Alpha linux). We will not be distributing binaries for these architectures ourselves (at least for a while) but if someone would like to make them available, we’ll be glad to provide a link to them.
  - Bug fixes:
    - Pattern matching (e.g. for `ignore`) is now case-insensitive when Unison is in case-insensitive mode (i.e., when one of the replicas is on a windows machine).
    - Some people had trouble with mysterious failures during propagation of updates, where files would be falsely reported as having changed during synchronization. This should be fixed.
    - Numerous smaller fixes.

#### Changes since 2.4.1:

- Added a number of ‘sorting modes’ for the user interface. By default, conflicting changes are displayed at the top, and the rest of the entries are sorted in alphabetical order. This behavior can be changed in the following ways:

- Setting the `sortnewfirst` preference to `true` causes newly created files to be displayed before changed files.
- Setting `sortbysize` causes files to be displayed in increasing order of size.
- Giving the preference `sortfirst=<pattern>` (where `<pattern>` is a path descriptor in the same format as 'ignore' and 'follow' patterns, causes paths matching this pattern to be displayed first.
- Similarly, giving the preference `sortlast=<pattern>` causes paths matching this pattern to be displayed last.

The sorting preferences are described in more detail in the user manual. The `sortnewfirst` and `sortbysize` flags can also be accessed from the 'Sort' menu in the graphical user interface.

- Added two new preferences that can be used to change unison's fundamental behavior to make it more like a mirroring tool instead of a synchronizer.
  - Giving the preference `prefer` with argument `<root>` (by adding `-prefer <root>` to the command line or `prefer=<root>`) to your profile) means that, if there is a conflict, the contents of `<root>` should be propagated to the other replica (with no questions asked). Non-conflicting changes are treated as usual.
  - Giving the preference `force` with argument `<root>` will make unison resolve *all* differences in favor of the given root, even if it was the other replica that was changed.

These options should be used with care! (More information is available in the manual.)

- Small changes:
  - Changed default answer to 'Yes' in all two-button dialogs in the graphical interface (this seems more intuitive).
  - The `rsync` preference has been removed (it was used to activate rsync compression for file transfers, but rsync compression is now enabled by default).
  - In the text user interface, the arrows indicating which direction changes are being propagated are printed differently when the user has overridden Unison's default recommendation (`===>` instead of `---->`). This matches the behavior of the graphical interface, which displays such arrows in a different color.
  - Carriage returns (Control-M's) are ignored at the ends of lines in profiles, for Windows compatibility.
  - All preferences are now fully documented in the user manual.

Changes since 2.3.12:

- **Incompatible change:** Archive format has changed. Make sure you synchronize your replicas before upgrading, to avoid spurious conflicts. The first sync after upgrading will be slow.
- New/improved functionality:
  - A new preference `-sortbysize` controls the order in which changes are displayed to the user: when it is set to true, the smallest changed files are displayed first. (The default setting is false.)
  - A new preference `-sortnewfirst` causes newly created files to be listed before other updates in the user interface.
  - We now allow the ssh protocol to specify a port.
  - Incompatible change: The `unison:` protocol is deprecated, and we added `file:` and `socket:`. You may have to modify your profiles in the `.unison` directory. If a replica is specified without an explicit protocol, we now assume it refers to a file. (Previously `//saul/foo` meant to use SSH to connect to saul, then access the foo directory. Now it means to access saul via a remote file mechanism such as samba; the old effect is now achieved by writing `ssh://saul/foo.`)

- Changed the startup sequence for the case where roots are given but no profile is given on the command line. The new behavior is to use the default profile (creating it if it does not exist), and temporarily override its roots. The manual claimed that this case would work by reading no profile at all, but AFAIK this was never true.
- In all user interfaces, files with conflicts are always listed first
- A new preference 'sshversion' can be used to control which version of ssh should be used to connect to the server. Legal values are 1 and 2. (Default is empty, which will make unison use whatever version of ssh is installed as the default 'ssh' command.)
- The situation when the permissions of a file was updated the same on both side is now handled correctly (we used to report a spurious conflict)
- Improvements for the Windows version:
  - The fact that filenames are treated case-insensitively under Windows should now be handled correctly. The exact behavior is described in the cross-platform section of the manual.
  - It should be possible to synchronize with Windows shares, e.g., //host/drive/path.
  - Workarounds to the bug in syncing root directories in Windows. The most difficult thing to fix is an ocaml bug: Unix.opendir fails on c: in some versions of Windows.
- Improvements to the GTK user interface (the Tk interface is no longer being maintained):
  - The UI now displays actions differently (in blue) when they have been explicitly changed by the user from Unison's default recommendation.
  - More colorful appearance.
  - The initial profile selection window works better.
  - If any transfers failed, a message to this effect is displayed along with 'Synchronization complete' at the end of the transfer phase (in case they may have scrolled off the top).
  - Added a global progress meter, displaying the percentage of *total* bytes that have been transferred so far.
- Improvements to the text user interface:
  - The file details will be displayed automatically when a conflict is been detected.
  - when a warning is generated (e.g. for a temporary file left over from a previous run of unison) Unison will no longer wait for a response if it is running in -batch mode.
  - The UI now displays a short list of possible inputs each time it waits for user interaction.
  - The UI now quits immediately (rather than looping back and starting the interaction again) if the user presses 'q' when asked whether to propagate changes.
  - Pressing 'g' in the text user interface will proceed immediately with propagating updates, without asking any more questions.
- Documentation and installation changes:
  - The manual now includes a FAQ, plus sections on common problems and on tricks contributed by users.
  - Both the download page and the download directory explicitly say what are the current stable and beta-test version numbers.
  - The OCaml sources for the up-to-the-minute developers' version (not guaranteed to be stable, or even to compile, at any given time!) are now available from the download page.
  - Added a subsection to the manual describing cross-platform issues (case conflicts, illegal filenames)
- Many small bug fixes and random improvements.

Changes since 2.3.1:

- Several bug fixes. The most important is a bug in the `rsync` module that would occasionally cause change propagation to fail with a 'rename' error.

Changes since 2.2:

- The multi-threaded transport system is now disabled by default. (It is not stable enough yet.)
- Various bug fixes.
- A new experimental feature:

The final component of a `-path` argument may now be the wildcard specifier `*`. When Unison sees such a path, it expands this path on the client into the corresponding list of paths by listing the contents of that directory.

Note that if you use wildcard paths from the command line, you will probably need to use quotes or a backslash to prevent the `*` from being interpreted by your shell.

If both roots are local, the contents of the first one will be used for expanding wildcard paths. (Nb: this is the first one *after* the canonization step – i.e., the one that is listed first in the user interface – not the one listed first on the command line or in the preferences file.)

Changes since 2.1:

- The transport subsystem now includes an implementation by Sylvain Gommier and Norman Ramsey of Tridgell and Mackerras's `rsync` protocol. This protocol achieves much faster transfers when only a small part of a large file has been changed by sending just diffs. This feature is mainly helpful for transfers over slow links—on fast local area networks it can actually degrade performance—so we have left it off by default. Start unison with the `-rsync` option (or put `rsync=true` in your preferences file) to turn it on.
- “Progress bars” are now displayed during remote file transfers, showing what percentage of each file has been transferred so far.
- The version numbering scheme has changed. New releases will now have numbers like 2.2.30, where the second component is incremented on every significant public release and the third component is the “patch level.”
- Miscellaneous improvements to the GTK-based user interface.
- The manual is now available in PDF format.
- We are experimenting with using a multi-threaded transport subsystem to transfer several files at the same time, making much more effective use of available network bandwidth. This feature is not completely stable yet, so by default it is disabled in the release version of Unison.

If you want to play with the multi-threaded version, you'll need to recompile Unison from sources (as described in the documentation), setting the `THREADS` flag in `Makefile.OCaml` to `true`. Make sure that your OCaml compiler has been installed with the `-with-pthreads` configuration option. (You can verify this by checking whether the file `threads/threads.cma` in the OCaml standard library directory contains the string `-lpthread` near the end.)

Changes since 1.292:

- Reduced memory footprint (this is especially important during the first run of unison, where it has to gather information about all the files in both repositories).
- Fixed a bug that would cause the socket server under NT to fail after the client exits.

- Added a SHIFT modifier to the Ignore menu shortcut keys in GTK interface (to avoid hitting them accidentally).

Changes since 1.231:

- Tunneling over ssh is now supported in the Windows version. See the installation section of the manual for detailed instructions.
- The transport subsystem now includes an implementation of the `rsync` protocol, built by Sylvain Gommier and Norman Ramsey. This protocol achieves much faster transfers when only a small part of a large file has been changed by sending just diffs. The `rsync` feature is off by default in the current version. Use the `-rsync` switch to turn it on. (Nb. We still have a lot of tuning to do: you may not notice much speedup yet.)
- We're experimenting with a multi-threaded transport subsystem, written by Jerome Vouillon. The downloadable binaries are still single-threaded: if you want to try the multi-threaded version, you'll need to recompile from sources. (Say `make THREADS=true`.) Native thread support from the compiler is required. Use the option `-threads N` to select the maximal number of concurrent threads (default is 5). Multi-threaded and single-threaded clients/servers can interoperate.
- A new GTK-based user interface is now available, thanks to Jacques Garrigue. The Tk user interface still works, but we'll be shifting development effort to the GTK interface from now on.
- OCaml 3.00 is now required for compiling Unison from sources. The modules `uitk` and `myfileselect` have been changed to use `labltk` instead of `camltk`. To compile the Tk interface in Windows, you must have `ocaml-3.00` and `tk8.3`. When installing `tk8.3`, put it in `c:\Tcl` rather than the suggested `c:\Program Files\Tcl`, and be sure to install the headers and libraries (which are not installed by default).
- Added a new `-addversionno` switch, which causes unison to use `unison-<currentversionnumber>` instead of just `unison` as the remote server command. This allows multiple versions of unison to coexist conveniently on the same server: whichever version is run on the client, the same version will be selected on the server.

Changes since 1.219:

- **Incompatible change:** Archive format has changed. Make sure you synchronize your replicas before upgrading, to avoid spurious conflicts. The first sync after upgrading will be slow.
- This version fixes several annoying bugs, including:
  - Some cases where propagation of file permissions was not working.
  - `umask` is now ignored when creating directories
  - directories are create writable, so that a read-only directory and its contents can be propagated.
  - Handling of warnings generated by the server.
  - Synchronizing a path whose parent is not a directory on both sides is now flagged as erroneous.
  - Fixed some bugs related to symbolic links and nonexistent roots.
    - \* When a change (deletion or new contents) is propagated onto a 'follow'ed symlink, the file pointed to by the link is now changed. (We used to change the link itself, which doesn't fit our assertion that 'follow' means the link is completely invisible)
    - \* When one root did not exist, propagating the other root on top of it used to fail, because unison could not calculate the working directory into which to write changes. This should be fixed.
- A human-readable timestamp has been added to Unison's archive files.

- The semantics of Path and Name regular expressions now correspond better.
- Some minor improvements to the text UI (e.g. a command for going back to previous items)
- The organization of the export directory has changed — should be easier to find / download things now.

Changes since 1.200:

- **Incompatible change:** Archive format has changed. Make sure you synchronize your replicas before upgrading, to avoid spurious conflicts. The first sync after upgrading will be slow.
- This version has not been tested extensively on Windows.
- Major internal changes designed to make unison safer to run at the same time as the replicas are being changed by the user.
- Internal performance improvements.

Changes since 1.190:

- **Incompatible change:** Archive format has changed. Make sure you synchronize your replicas before upgrading, to avoid spurious conflicts. The first sync after upgrading will be slow.
- A number of internal functions have been changed to reduce the amount of memory allocation, especially during the first synchronization. This should help power users with very big replicas.
- Reimplementation of low-level remote procedure call stuff, in preparation for adding rsync-like smart file transfer in a later release.
- Miscellaneous bug fixes.

Changes since 1.180:

- **Incompatible change:** Archive format has changed. Make sure you synchronize your replicas before upgrading, to avoid spurious conflicts. The first sync after upgrading will be slow.
- Fixed some small bugs in the interpretation of ignore patterns.
- Fixed some problems that were preventing the Windows version from working correctly when click-started.
- Fixes to treatment of file permissions under Windows, which were causing spurious reports of different permissions when synchronizing between windows and unix systems.
- Fixed one more non-tail-recursive list processing function, which was causing stack overflows when synchronizing very large replicas.

Changes since 1.169:

- The text user interface now provides commands for ignoring files.
- We found and fixed some *more* non-tail-recursive list processing functions. Some power users have reported success with very large replicas.
- **Incompatible change:** Files ending in `.tmp` are no longer ignored automatically. If you want to ignore such files, put an appropriate ignore pattern in your profile.
- **Incompatible change:** The syntax of `ignore` and `follow` patterns has changed. Instead of putting a line of the form

```
ignore = <regex>
```

in your profile (`.unison/default.prf`), you should put:

```
ignore = Regexp <regexp>
```

Moreover, two other styles of pattern are also recognized:

```
ignore = Name <name>
```

matches any path in which one component matches `<name>`, while

```
ignore = Path <path>
```

matches exactly the path `<path>`.

Standard “globbing” conventions can be used in `<name>` and `<path>`:

- `a ?` matches any single character except `/`
- `a *` matches any sequence of characters not including `/`
- `[xyz]` matches any character from the set `{x, y, z}`
- `{a,bb,ccc}` matches any one of `a`, `bb`, or `ccc`.

See the user manual for some examples.

Changes since 1.146:

- Some users were reporting stack overflows when synchronizing huge directories. We found and fixed some non-tail-recursive list processing functions, which we hope will solve the problem. Please give it a try and let us know.
- Major additions to the documentation.

Changes since 1.142:

- Major internal tidying and many small bugfixes.
- Major additions to the user manual.
- Unison can now be started with no arguments – it will prompt automatically for the name of a profile file containing the roots to be synchronized. This makes it possible to start the graphical UI from a desktop icon.
- Fixed a small bug where the text UI on NT was raising a ‘no such signal’ exception.

Changes since 1.139:

- The precompiled windows binary in the last release was compiled with an old OCaml compiler, causing propagation of permissions not to work (and perhaps leading to some other strange behaviors we’ve heard reports about). This has been corrected. If you’re using precompiled binaries on Windows, please upgrade.
- Added a `-debug` command line flag, which controls debugging of various modules. Say `-debug XXX` to enable debug tracing for module `XXX`, or `-debug all` to turn on absolutely everything.
- Fixed a small bug where the text UI on NT was raising a ‘no such signal’ exception.

Changes since 1.111:

- **Incompatible change:** The names and formats of the preference files in the `.unison` directory have changed. In particular:

- the file “prefs” should be renamed to default.prf
- the contents of the file “ignore” should be merged into default.prf. Each line of the form REGEXP in ignore should become a line of the form ignore = REGEXP in default.prf.
- Unison now handles permission bits and symbolic links. See the manual for details.
- You can now have different preference files in your .unison directory. If you start unison like this

`unison profilename`

(i.e. with just one “anonymous” command-line argument), then the file `~/.unison/profilename.prf` will be loaded instead of `default.prf`.

- Some improvements to terminal handling in the text user interface
- Added a switch `-killServer` that terminates the remote server process when the unison client is shutting down, even when using sockets for communication. (By default, a remote server created using `ssh/rsh` is terminated automatically, while a socket server is left running.)
- When started in ‘socket server’ mode, unison prints ‘server started’ on `stderr` when it is ready to accept connections. (This may be useful for scripts that want to tell when a socket-mode server has finished initialization.)
- We now make a nightly mirror of our current internal development tree, in case anyone wants an up-to-the-minute version to hack around with.
- Added a file `CONTRIB` with some suggestions for how to help us make Unison better.