1 Introduction

This document will describe a few editor commands for vi. To begin, type vi followed by the file name and the contents of the file will appear on the screen.

Except for special characters (like tab and control characters) what you see on the screen is the exact contents of the file. The exception is the last line on the screen. It is used to display message and is the place where some of the commands that you type will appear.

Before we start, you should know that the "bell character" means that you did something wrong. The first wrong thing you will do is try to locate the cursor in a place in the file that contains no text. It will beep at you then or flash the screen or whatever the "bell" is on your system.

To edit this file, type vi edit.tex.

vi Commands

Moving around in a file

Control F

Move forward in the file one page (screen).

Control D

Move down in the file a half page.

Control B

Move backwards in the file one page.

Control U

Move up in the file a half page.

Carriage return (or enter) moves the cursor to the beginning of the next line.

The four letters h,j,k,l move the cursor left,down,up,right respectively.

To get to the top of the file, type: 1G

To get to the bottom of the file, type: G

To get to any line, type the number of the line followed by G. For instance, to go to the 6th line, type: 6G

To move down n lines from the current line, type n then carriage return. (Or nj)

To move to the beginning of the next word, type the single letter w.

To move to the end of the next word, type the single letter e.

To move to the beginning of the word, type the single letter b.

Locating text

To locate a character string, type slash followed by the sequence of characters that you want to find.

To locate the next occurance of the same string in the file, type n (lowercase).

string

The cursor should move to the beginning of that string.

Deleting text

The letter x (lowercase) deletes whatever character is under the cursor.

The letter X (uppercase) deletes whatever character is before the cursor.

The letter D (uppercase) deletes whatever from the present position of the cursor to the end of the current line.

The two character sequence, dw, means delete word. It deleted the characters in the word where the cursor is located and the space following the word. If the cursor is on the first character in the word, the whole words disappears, otherwise, just those letters from the cursor to the end of the word.

To delete and entire line, put the cursor on he line and type the two characters, dd. It

will just disappear.

To delete the current line, plus n more lines, type the sequence dn carriage return. Thus, d5 deletes the current line and 5 more lines.

Inserting text

Before learning how to insert text, we will learn how to stop inserting text. There are half a dozen commands to put text into a file. **All commands which insert text terminate the insertion process with the escape character.**

To insert text before the location of the cursor, the letter i (lowercase) is typed followed by the characters to be inserted and ended with escape.

To insert text after the location of the cursor, the letter a (lowercase) is typed followed by the characters to be inserted and ended with escape.

To add a line after the line containing the cursor, type the character o (lowercase - meaning open a line) and begin typing the characters to be added. This can go on for as long as you want and as many lines as you want. Terminate with escape.

Replacing text

To replace a single character, place the cursor on the character and type r (lowercase) followed by the letter to replace it. This does not require termination, i.e. does not need an escape.

Copying text

The yank command allows you to copy text from one part of a file to another. It does not delete text, but just saves a copy so you can put it someplace else.

To yank the current line, type the three character sequence: yy carriage return.

Then, move the cursor to the location where you want to put the line and type the single letter p. Lowercase p "puts" the line below the cursor and uppercase P puts it before the line with the cursor. This can be repeated making as many copies of the line as you want.

Repeating a command

The most useful command in vi is the character dot, "." which allows you to repeat the previous command. It just tells the computer to do whatever command you just did again.

The next most useful command is the one which lets you undo what you did. That is the single letter u.

Leaving vi Changes that you make on the screen are not make in the actual until you instruct the computer to do so. The two character command, :w will "write" the changes to the file.

If you mess up big time, then you may want to stop editing and not make the changes. The command to quit is :q, but the computer will query you as to why you want to do this. Try it now. Normally the quit is issued only after the save or write, :w. To quite without saving, :q! is needed. The "!" is added emphasis meaning, "Yes, I really want to quit.". All changes made to the file since the last write are then lost forever.

Normally, you leave vi and save the changes you have made. This is accomplished by the two character sequence ZZ (uppercase). It does not have any meaning, it is only easy to type.

To save the contents of the edited file under a new name, type :w newname, where newname is any name you want. This does not save the changes you have made in the file you are editing. If you :q now, all changes sine the last :w are lost. Since vi knows that you saved them someplace, it does not require the quit to be followed by the !.

Other useful commands

To learn the line number where the cursor resides, type Control G.

The "arrow keys" on some terminals work. These move the cursor, but you can not rely on this on all terminals.