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Bibliography Mode User's Manual

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Introduction

Bibliography mode (`bibl-mode`) is a subsystem of GNU Emacs which allows you to keep track of information on the World Wide Web and elsewhere. It is primarily intended for storing information about software packages, Web pages, mailing lists, and other data of interest to users of the Internet, but can also be used to keep references to books and papers, and can be extended to hold a heterogeneous database of most any sort of textual information.

Commands are provided to simplify the task of creating and maintaining records in the database, to access information over the Web, and to move easily through medium-sized databases. Other commands exist which allow information to be grabbed from mail and news articles, and to allow records to be pasted into other buffers.

Bibl-mode is an attempt on my part to speed up the process of adding to and searching through databases without going to *too* great an effort in this direction. However, if you can think of any features which could do with improving, or any useful features which are missing entirely, please get in touch with me.

The latest version of bibl-mode may always be picked up via anonymous ftp from `ftp.maths.tcd.ie:pub/bosullvn/elisp/bibl-mode.tar.gz`.

Background and Motivation

I picked up the notion of using a bibliography file while working for a time with Jim Blandy <jimb@cyclic.com>, and have found it so useful that I finally sat down to write some non-trivial support for it. I find this package to be useful too, so my time may not have been wasted (more to the point, I can now waste my time with greater efficiency).

My bibliography file consists of all kinds of random pieces of information: I keep in it pointers to useful sites on the net, books that are worth reading, and various other things. The main use for this package is for keeping track of all these data, and thereby attempting to address the one problem that no software systems currently seem to attack.

The Internet quite probably has available whatever information it is you want on a subject somewhere, but you will have trouble finding it (yes, there are Archie, FAQs, and Web pointer sites, but the problem still exists). What I usually do, upon seeing a posting or receiving a piece of email pertaining to some subject which interests me, or upon finding an interesting page on the Web, is create a bibliography entry for it, with (if possible) a Universal Record Locator (URL) pointing to whatever it may be. This can be invaluable for future references.

Reporting Problems

If you encounter a bug while using bibl-mode, *please* use `bibl-submit-bug-report` when submitting a bug report (you can get at this using `C-c C-r` from a bibl-mode buffer).

In addition, *please* be concise in your description of the problem, *and* try to put together some sort of test case which will allow me to reproduce the problem with a minimum of effort. The more information you can provide, the greater the speed with which I can provide a fix for the problem. See [section “Reporting Bugs” in the GNU Emacs Manual](#).

The Mailing List

If you find yourself using this package much, you may wish to join its associated mailing and discussion list, `<info-bibl@serpentine.com>`. Send mail to `<info-bibl-request@serpentine.com>` with a message body of ‘subscribe info-bibl’.

If you are just sending in a suggestion or a question, then I probably don’t need all the extra baggage that gets carried in a bug report message. Also, the extra gumph may annoy other people on the mailing list, so please be careful.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Karl Fogel `<kfogel@cyclic.com>` and Jim Blandy `<jimb@cyclic.com>` for their original help, code, and suggestions, and to Jamie Zawinski `<jwz@netscape.com>` for his very useful BBDB package, which gave me some ideas. Some bibl-mode code has also been taken and adapted from Per Abrahamsen’s excellent AUC TeX package.

Further thanks go to Richard Everson `<rme@camelot.rockefeller.edu>` and Rohit Namjoshi `<rohit@austin.wireline.slb.com>` for their Lucid Emacs compatibility fixes, and to Ray Nickson `<nickson@cs.uq.oz.au>` for his code and suggestions about grabbing information from mail and news buffers.

Other people are variously credited for their feedback and help in the ‘ChangeLog’ file which comes with the bibl-mode distribution.

1 Starting Up

Before you start using bibliography mode, you may have to set a few variables in your ‘~/**.emacs**’ file.

Once this is done, typing *M-x bibl-visit-bibliography* (or *C-c b v* if you have done the keymap binding) should get you into a bibliography file.

Should you open a file which seems to be a valid bibliography file but bibl-mode is not entered correctly (a short header should be visible at the top of the file), try typing *M-x bibl-mode*. This probably won’t work if Emacs hasn’t automatically put the buffer in bibl-mode (since it *should* do so), but it might be worth a try.

The value of the variable **bibl-mode-hooks** is run when a buffer enters bibl-mode (i.e. by any of the file visiting commands See [\[Global Keymap\]](#), page [\[undefined\]](#)).

1.1 Global Key Bindings

Use something like (`global-set-key "\C-cb" 'bibl-global-map`) to define a prefix binding for bibliography file visiting commands.

If **bibl-prompt-on-visit** is non-nil, you are prompted for the name of the file to visit by all of bibl-mode’s file visiting commands (and a few others).

The above definition gives you the following key bindings:

C-c b v (**bibl-visit-bibliography**) Visit a bibliography file; the default for all file visiting commands is to visit **bibl-file-name** See [\[Primary Database\]](#), page [\[undefined\]](#). If the given file is empty, it is initialised as a bibliography file, but nothing else is done. *C-c b c* (**bibl-visit-create**) Visit a bibliography file and create a new empty record See [\[Creating Records\]](#), page [\[undefined\]](#). *C-c b g* (**bibl-visit-grab**) Visit a bibliography file, grabbing as much information as possible from the current buffer to create a partial new record See [\[Grabbing Records\]](#), page [\[undefined\]](#). *C-c b k* (**bibl-visit-list-keywords**) Visit a bibliography file and pop up a second buffer which contains a list of all the keywords used in the file See [\[Listing Information\]](#), page [\[undefined\]](#). *C-c b n* (**bibl-visit-list-names**) Visit a bibliography file and pop up a second buffer which contains a list of all the record names in the file See [\[Listing Information\]](#), page [\[undefined\]](#). *C-c b o* (**bibl-visit-goto**) Visit a bibliography file and go to a specified record in it See [\[Going to Records\]](#), page [\[undefined\]](#).

1.2 The Primary Database

Under most circumstances, you should only need a single bibliography file in which to keep all your information. The name of this file should be given by the variable **bibl-file-name**, which you can set in your ‘~/**.emacs**’ file with something like (`setq bibl-file-name "~/etc/bibliography"`).

Should you *not* wish to just use a single bibliography file, make sure that the values of **bibl-prompt-on-visit** and **bibl-use-any-buffer** are non-nil, and that **bibl-cache-keys** is set to nil. This may slow down the popping up of record name and keyword list buffers See [\[Listing Information\]](#), page [\[undefined\]](#).

1.3 The Web Interface

The value of variable `bibl-web-interface` determines the method that will be used to access information over the World Wide Web.

If set to a string (for example `'TkWWW %s &'`), `bibl-mode` runs the given command, expanding instances of the `'%s'` string into the URL to be accessed. In this way, you can use your favourite Web browser or a command of your choice to access data over the Web.

If `bibl-web-interface` is set to a symbol (for example `'w3-fetch'`), `bibl-mode` attempts to call the function of the same name. It passes the function a single argument, which is a string containing the URL to access. In this way, you can either write your own Emacs Lisp code to do the work, or use an existing Emacs package such as William Perry's (`<wmperry@indiana.edu>`) `w3` browser, or Mike Walker's (`<M.D.Walker@larc.nasa.gov>`) `mrc-lib` for 'remote controlling' NCSA Mosaic.

1.3.1 Esoterica

If you decide to use Emacs' built-in remote file access, you may wish to check to see that the value of `bibl-user-name` is set correctly. This variable is used as the password for internal anonymous ftp.

You may also wish to change the value of `bibl-default-user`. This variable is the default login name that will be used for internal ftp; it defaults to `anonymous`. The value of this variable overrides the value of `ange-ftp-default-user`. Note that the behaviour of this variable may change slightly once `efs`, the replacement for `ange-ftp`, is released.

1.4 Emacs and the Web

Emacs 19 comes with standard facilities to allow remote file access and remote login. Since these are so useful, `bibl-mode` provides a way to use them directly, rather than the Web interface you choose See [\(undefined\) \[Web Interface\], page \(undefined\)](#).

This behaviour is governed by the value of the `bibl-use-elisp` variable. By default, it is set to `'both`, which means that `bibl-mode` uses the internal Emacs facilities to perform remote accesses when a URL you want to access See [\(undefined\) \[Accessing Records\], page \(undefined\)](#) is of type `'file'` or `'telnet'`.

If you set `bibl-use-elisp` to `'efs`, only remote file access is done through standard Emacs facilities; all other types of Web accesses use the Web interface you have chosen See [\(undefined\) \[Web Interface\], page \(undefined\)](#). If you set to `'telnet`, only remote login is performed using Emacs facilities.

2 Browsing the Bibliography File

The usual Emacs commands perform motion actions around bibliography files. In addition, the page motion commands move you between the elements of a record See [section “Text” in the GNU Emacs Manual](#).

2.1 Listing Information

If you are working in a bibliography mode buffer, you can obtain a list of all record names or keywords using short keystrokes.

Typing `C-c C-n` (`bibl-list-names`) pops up a second buffer, which contains an alphabetically sorted list of the names of all records in the `bibl-mode` buffer.

Hitting `C-c C-k` (`bibl-list-keywords`) performs the same task, except it results in a sorted list of all unique keywords in the `bibl-mode` buffer.

2.2 Names Mode Buffers

Buffers which contain lists of either record names or keywords are in `bibl-names-mode` (the mode line should say ‘`*Names*`’ or ‘`*Keywords*`’). In this mode, the following actions may be performed:

`SPC` (`bibl-names-find-resource`) The record name or keyword under the cursor is searched for in the `bibl-mode` buffer associated with this `bibl-names-mode` buffer. Searches wrap around as in `isearch` See [section “Searching and Replacing” in the GNU Emacs Manual](#). `mouse-2` (`bibl-names-mouse-select`) Clicking the middle mouse button over a name or keyword causes `bibl-names-find-resource` to be run on that name or keyword.

The value of `bibl-names-mode-hooks` is called upon a buffer entering Names Mode.

2.3 Going to Records

You can jump to a particular named record at any time in a `bibl-mode` buffer by typing `C-c C-o` (`bibl-goto-record`). This will bring up a minibuffer prompt which asks you which record you wish to jump to; you can perform completion on a record name while you type by hitting `<TAB>`.

2.4 Accessing Resources on the Web

Typing `C-c C-f` (`bibl-find-resource`) in a `bibl-mode` buffer attempts to fetch the Web resource listed under the ‘`Location`’ field of the current record. If more than one such field exists in a record, you are prompted for the one to fetch.

When you attempt to fetch a resource, `bibl-mode` will use the value of `bibl-web-interface` and `bibl-use-elisp` to determine what action to take See [\(undefined\) \[Web Interface\]](#), page [\(undefined\)](#).

By default, bibl-mode will allow you to edit the URL you have selected before it tries to fetch it. If you wish, you can disable this feature by setting `bibl-find-resource-edit` to `nil` in your `'~/.emacs` file See [\[Web Interface\]](#), page [\[Web Interface\]](#).

If the URL you attempt to access is of type `file` and *doesn't* have a leading `//` string, it is automatically passed to Emacs' file-finding code, regardless of the value of `bibl-use-elisp`. This permits you to use local file names in `Location` fields as well as remote ones.

2.5 Sending Electronic Mail

If you type `C-c C-s` (`bibl-mail-contact`), bibl-mode will set up a mail buffer for you to send mail to the contacts listed in the current record.

Currently, three mailers are supported: RMAIL, mh-e, and VM. You should set `bibl-send-mail-style` according to the mailer you use. Set it to `'vm`, `'mh`, or `'mail`.

In addition, the value of `bibl-mail-subject-prompt` determines whether bibl-mode will prompt you for a message subject line before setting up the mail buffer.

3 Editing Records

The commands provided to make the editing of records easier fall into several categories.

3.1 Creating a New Record

Typing `C-c C-c` (`bibl-create-record`) creates a new record template at the top of a `bibl-mode` buffer. You can move down through this template manually and add information to each field as necessary. Note that the ‘Record’ field is already filled out when you type `C-c C-c`; you should not change this line manually.

When you are done filling out a record template, you can clear away unused fields See [\(undefined\)](#) [Tidying Records], page [\(undefined\)](#).

The default list of fields which are inserted into a buffer when you type `C-c C-c` are given in `bibl-record-fields`. You can add to the list of fields used by making a list of your own in the variable `bibl-custom-record-fields`.

Should you decide to extend the list of fields in a record template in this manner, be sure to run `M-x bibl-update-record-fields` afterwards, so that `bibl-mode` will correctly ‘see’ the changes you have made.

3.2 Tidying a Record

Once you have filled out all the fields you wish to in a record template, type `C-c C-t` to ‘tidy away’ those fields which remain empty.

The key bindings for the following two functions can be turned off *before* you load `bibl-mode` by setting the value of `bibl-dont-fill` to `t`.

Hitting `TAB` will indent the current line correctly.

You can reformat the current paragraph by typing `M-C-q`. The *current paragraph* for our purposes is the area around point, demarcated by empty or header lines.

3.3 Extending a Record

You may sometimes wish to add another field to an already extant record. The easiest way to do this is to type `C-c C-x` (`bibl-extend-record`), which will prompt you for the field you wish to add (with completion), and insert it at the bottom of the current record.

The possible fields that may be added to a record are drawn from the default list of fields plus any extra ones you may have specified See [\(undefined\)](#) [Creating Records], page [\(undefined\)](#).

3.4 Updating a Record

If you edit or change a record at some stage, you may wish to keep track of when you last changed it. This date can easily be updated by typing `C-c C-u` (`bibl-update-record`). The *creation date* of the record (in the ‘Record’ field) is not affected by this.

3.5 Sorting a Buffer

The key sequence `C-c C-b` (`bibl-sort-buffer`) will sort all records in the current buffer alphabetically, by the ‘Name’ field of each.

You can also sort records in a buffer alphabetically by keyword by calling this function with a prefix argument (`C-u C-c C-b`).

3.6 Marking and Deleting Records

Typing `C-c C-d` (`bibl-delete-record`) deletes the record at point.

If you type `C-c C-m` (`bibl-mark-record`), mark is set to the beginning of the current record, and point is put at its end. This makes life easier for use with commands such as `M-w` (`kill-ring-save`), so you can pop bibliography records into email and such with greater speed. See [section “Yanking” in the GNU Emacs Manual](#).

4 Grabbing Information from Mail and News Buffers

Typing `C-c b g` (`bibl-visit-grab`) fetches as much information as possible from the current buffer and visits your bibliography file. Once there, it creates a new record template and fills it out from the information found in the previous buffer.

If you call this function from a mail or news buffer, it will attempt to grab useful information from the current message's headers. The mail and news packages currently supported are VM, mh-e, and GNUS.

In addition to grabbing information from mail headers, `bibl-visit-grab` will also grab bibliography record information which is embedded in a mail message or news article, even if it has been tabbed in or each line preceded by Lisp-style comments.

By default, `bibl-visit-grab` works from the top of the current buffer. Calling it with a prefix argument (`C-u C-c b g`) causes the search for information to go from point instead.

4.1 Caveats

Please note that the code which performs the grabbing work is *not* very intelligent (specifically, it can currently only cope with one-liner 'Description' lines in embedded bibliography records, and will only grab one of any field type). However, it does the job pretty well most of the time.

5 Using the Mouse

If you hold down the control key in a bibl-mode buffer, you can use *mouse-2* to perform actions on certain fields in a record.

Location Clicking on this field causes `bibl-find-resource` to be run on the current record. Record, Updated Mousing on either of these fields causes the ‘last updated’ time stamp on the current record to be updated. Email address Clicking on this record causes mail to be sent to the contact listed in the current record.

Key Index

(Index is nonexistent)

Command Index

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