

Using Majordomo

Using Ithaca College's emailing list server

Overview

Mailing list servers allow users to send and receive email messages on a selected topic to a group of users. Unlike traditional email distribution lists, which are manually maintained by one person, users may subscribe and unsubscribe themselves from these lists by sending commands to the list server. Ithaca College's mailing list server is run by software called Majordomo.

Ithaca College faculty, staff, and officially recognized student organizations may request a new mailing list by completing a Majordomo List Request Form available in the ITS Main Office, Muller 102. The user who requests that a list is established is known as the "list owner". The list owner is responsible for configuring the list and maintaining it; list owners should become familiar with the tools for managing a Majordomo mailing list.

Using Majordomo Lists

The process for sending an email to a list is identical to sending a message to an individual. The email message is composed and sent to the address listname@lists.ithaca.edu (where list name is the name of the list). The Majordomo system receives the message and sends it to all subscribers of the list instead of to an individual.

Many lists are configured so that only users who are subscribed to the list can send messages to it. Unless the list is moderated, messages will automatically be sent to everyone on the list. Messages to moderated lists will be sent first to the list moderator, who may then choose whether or not to forward it on to the list.

In addition, commands may be sent to Majordomo to obtain information, to perform a specific action (i.e. subscribe or unsubscribe), or for help. Commands (as opposed to messages) are sent via email to majordomo@lists.ithaca.edu. Majordomo will respond to commands through email sent back to the user. Please note certain commands may only be available to users who are subscribed to a list.

Basic Commands

Commands should be sent in the body of an email message to majordomo@lists.ithaca.edu. For commands, a subject line is not necessary and will not affect the outcome. Note that in this command listing, items in brackets ([]) are optional. (If the optional item is used, do not include the brackets.) Substitute the name of the list for listname and an email address for email_address.

Action	Command to Majordomo
Get a list of commands	help
Show available lists	lists
Get information on a list	info listname
* Subscribe to a list	subscribe listname [email_address]
* Unsubscribe from a list	unsubscribe listname [email_address]
* Find out which lists to which an address is currently subscribed	which [email_address]
† List who is subscribed to a list	who listname
† Get a listing of files in the list archive	index listname
† Get a file from the list archive	get listname filename

* The return address on the message will be used if there is no value for email_address.

† This command may only be available to list subscribers, depending on the list's configuration.

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Replying to Mailing List Messages

Replying to a mailing list message may be somewhat different than replying to a standard email message, depending on the email software being used. Please note that, depending on how a particular list is configured, replies may be sent back to all list subscribers. Alternately, responses may be sent only to the originator of the message. Double-check the reply's address section to make sure the message is going to the intended address.

List Archives

Some lists keep archives of all messages sent to the list. Depending on how the list is configured, messages may be archived on a daily, monthly, or yearly basis. Use the `index` and `get` commands to list and retrieve list archive files (see `Basic Commands`). Currently, there is no method for searching list archives.

List Digests

Some lists may have a "digest" version available. A digest contains a number of messages sent to the list, all bundled into a single mail message, so users receive fewer individual messages. Use the `list` command to check to see if a list offers digests. The digest version of a list will be called `listname-digest`. Unsubscribe from the regular list using the command `unsubscribe listname`, and subscribe to the digest list using the command `subscribe listname-digest`.

Turn Off Mailing List Messages

If a user is unable to read email for an extended period of time, they may turn off incoming messages from list servers. On a list run by Majordomo, the `unsubscribe` command must be used. When users wish to receive messages again, they must re-subscribe when they return (see `Basic Commands`).

Managing a Majordomo List

The person who requests a list is known as the "list owner". The list owner has a number of list management responsibilities to ensure that it runs smoothly, such as configuring the list and approving subscriptions. The list owner should also be familiar with mailing lists from the user's point of view. See the `Using Majordomo Lists` section above for more information about user commands.

Management Basics

Mailing lists run by Majordomo can be managed in two ways. The first method is by using email that includes commands in the body of the message. Majordomo will detect these commands and take the appropriate actions or make the appropriate changes. The second method is MajorCool, a browser-based Web interface. See the `Using MajorCool` section below for more information on this method.

Commands to a list should be emailed to `majordomo@lists.ithaca.edu`. No subject line is necessary for these command messages. Commands often require an administrative password, which is initially set to `listname.admin` by default (where `listname` is the name of the list). More than one command may be included in a single email message. An email response will be sent for every command that is sent, which will indicate whether or not the command was successful.

A list owner should always subscribe themselves to a new list before any other changes or configurations are made. This will allow the owner to see the default welcome message for the list and determine what additional information should be provided. After determining a welcome message, check the configurations for the list to decide if any changes need to be made. See `Configuring a List` for more information on the options available.

Once the list has been fully configured, the owner may notify other users that the list is available for subscription. This can be done through "advertising", word-of-mouth, or through a mass email. Every organization is permitted one mass email per semester; this email can be used to announce a new mailing list, advertise for new subscribers, or to detail any changes to an existing list. To send a mass email, the list owner must fill out a request form available in the ITS Main Office, Muller 102.

Once the list is up and running the list owner may receive several types of messages:

- Confirmations of successful subscriptions and unsubscriptions
- Requests to approve subscriptions or unsubscriptions (see *Approving Subscription Requests*)
- Returned mail: messages sent to the list that couldn't be delivered for some reason (see *Dealing with Undeliverable E-mail*)
- "Bounced" mail: messages sent to the list that need your approval before they can be distributed (see *Moderating a List and Dealing with Bounced E-Mail*)

Configuring a List

Lists can be set up in many different ways. For example, a list can be moderated (meaning that all messages sent to the list by its subscribers must be approved by a moderator), subscription to it can be restricted, etc. The `config` command allows the list owner to modify the list's configuration. To get a copy of the list's current configuration, send an e-mail message to `majordomo@lists.ithaca.edu`:

```
config listname password
```

where `listname` is the name of the mailing list, and `password` is the list's administrative password (initially set to `listname.admin` by default). An email message will be sent in response with the contents of the current configuration file.

To change the configuration, send a new email message to Majordomo. The body of the message should contain the entire configuration file that was sent in the response (including all comment lines). Depending on which mail program being used, it may be easiest to forward the message back to Majordomo or to copy and paste the message from one window to another. Make sure that the email composition window is wide enough so that the lines of the configuration file do not wrap.

Add a line to the very beginning of the message that reads:

```
newconfig listname password
```

Make any changes to the configuration (as described in the section *Configuration Options*). Also make sure to remove any lines starting with "`>>>>`" from the beginning and end of the message from Majordomo; these are not part of the configuration file. Although comment lines (lines that begin with `#`) may be removed, it's probably a good idea to leave them in for reference purposes. To be safe, add a line to the very bottom of the message that reads "EOF" (end-of-file). Email the new configuration back to Majordomo; it will take effect immediately.

Configuration Options

Comments within the text of the list configuration file (lines beginning with a `#`) explain what each variable means and how it can be set. Some common changes are described below. See the *Tips and Tricks* section for more information. ITS highly recommends not changing options unless the user is fully aware and understands how that option works.

Changing the List's Description

The `Majordomo lists` command gives users the names and brief descriptions of all the lists hosted on the server. The `description` option sets the text of that brief description (up to 50 characters). For example, to set a list description of "Ithaca College's humor mailing list", enter the following text in the body of the message as follows:

```
description = Ithaca College's humor mailing list
```

By default, description is set to the list description that was given on the Majordomo List Request Form.

Changing the Subscribe/Unsubscribe Policy

There are three values which can be used with the `subscribe_policy` and `unsubscribe_policy` options: `auto`, `open` (default), and `closed`. For the `subscribe_policy` option, there is also a "+confirm" parameter which may be added to any of the three options.

`auto` – Any (un)subscribe command sent to the list is automatically approved. This option is the least amount of work for the list owner, but it does mean that people can (un)subscribe other people from mailing lists. The list owner will be notified through email of all (un)subscribe requests, but won't need to approve any of them.

`open` – The default setting. Allows users to automatically (un)subscribe themselves from the list, as long as their return email address matches the address they're trying to (un)subscribe. If it doesn't match, the request will be forwarded to the list owner for approval (see [Approving Subscription Requests](#)).

`closed` – Requires the list owner to approve all (un)subscription requests. Since this option can be a lot of work for the owner of a busy list, it should only be used if close control is needed over who is allowed to (un)subscribe to the list. Even with this option, unsubscriptions do not require your approval as long as the person's return email address matches the address they're trying to unsubscribe.

If the "+confirm" parameter is added to any of the three options, the subscriber will be required to reply to a confirmation email message before their (un)subscription will become active. This prevents people from subscribing other people to mailing lists without their permission. For example, to set the list's unsubscription policy to `closed`, set the `unsubscribe_policy` option in the message body as follows:

```
unsubscribe_policy = closed
```

To set the list's subscription policy to automatically subscribe any request, but require that the subscription request be confirmed by the subscriber, set the `subscribe_policy` variable as follows:

```
subscribe_policy = auto+confirm
```

Restricting Email from Non-List Members

It is sometimes necessary to prevent users who aren't subscribed to the list from sending messages directly to the list. This can be controlled with the `restrict_post` option. This option defines the name of a file, which contains the e-mail addresses of people who are allowed to post to the list. By setting this variable to the name of the list membership file, posts from non-members will be bounced to the list owner's account. The owner may then choose to forward the posting on to the list (see [Dealing with Bounced Email](#)) or delete it.

To set this option, set the `restrict_post` option in the body of the message as follows:

```
restrict_post = listname
```

Setting Up a Moderated List

A moderated list is one in which someone reviews every message sent to the list before it is generally distributed to list subscribers. Majordomo lists are un-moderated by default. To make a list moderated, change the value of the `moderate` option from "no" to "yes":

```
moderate = yes
```

By default, the list owner is also the list moderator. To have someone else moderate a list, set the value of the `moderator` variable to that person's email address:

```
moderator = jdoe@ithaca.edu
```

See the section [Moderating a List](#) for information about how to moderate a list.

Changing the List Passwords

Each list has two passwords associated with it: the administrative password (`listname.admin` by default) and the approve password (`listname.pass` by default). The administrative password is used for list management tasks such as approving subscription requests. The approve password is used by the list moderator to approve messages sent to the list. Both of these passwords can be changed using the configuration file.

The administrative password is stored using the option `admin_password`, and the approve password is stored as `approve_password`. To change either password, simply change the value of the option in the body of the email message. For example:

```
admin_password = mysecret
approve_password = nevertell
```

Note that these passwords are case-sensitive. If you have a digest list it may be easiest to keep the digest list's passwords identical to the regular list's passwords. See [Managing Digest Lists](#) for more information.

Creating or Changing the Welcome Message

Most list owners create a "welcome" message which is automatically sent to new subscribers. By default, Majordomo sends a short welcome message which explains the basics of using the list (how to unsubscribe, where to send messages, etc.). It is possible to create a message containing additional information, such as a description of the list or list policies. This message will be appended to the standard welcome message.

There are two types of introductory messages that can be set up. The "info" file is intended to give extended information about the purpose of the list. The "intro" file is optional; it is only when a user subscribes to the list and is intended to provide information needed by new users. If no "intro" file is specified, the "info" file will be sent when a user subscribes to the mailing list. To create a welcome message, send an email to majordomo@lists.ithaca.edu. The first line of the message should read:

```
newinfo listname password or newintro listname password
```

depending on the type of file to be created; `newinfo` for an "info" message or `newintro` for an "intro" message. Enter the message into the body of the email, and then add a line to the very bottom of the message that reads "EOF" (end-of-file). The changes will take effect immediately.

To change an existing welcome message, first retrieve the current message by sending the "info listname" or "intro listname" command to Majordomo (no password required). Make the desired changes and send the new message using the same procedure as for a brand-new message.

Approving Subscribe/Unsubscribe Requests

If the list policy is set to open or closed (see [Changing the Subscribe/Unsubscribe Policy](#)), the list owner will periodically receive email requests from Majordomo to approve new (un)subscriptions. To approve an (un)subscription request, send a message to Majordomo:

```
approve password subscribe listname email_address or approve password unsubscribe listname
email_address
```

where `password` is the list's administrative password, `listname` is the name of the list, and `email_address` is the subscriber's email address. Majordomo will send a response confirming that the (un)subscription request was successful. If the decision is made not to approve an (un)subscription request, no action is necessary (although it's polite to send a message to the user explaining why the request was not approved).

Moderating a List

Once a list has been configured as moderated (using the `moderate` variable in the configuration file), all messages to the list will first be forwarded to the moderator for approval.

The subject of these messages will be "BOUNCE listname@lists.ithaca.edu: Approval required". The body of the message will contain the entire message which was sent to the list, including email headers.

To forward the message on to the list, send a new message to listname@lists.ithaca.edu. A subject line is not necessary. The body of the message should contain the text of the original message. Depending on which mail program being used, it may be easiest to forward the message, or to copy and paste the message from one window to another. Add a line to the very beginning of the message as follows:

```
Approved: password
```

Password is the lists approve password. All email header lines from the original message may be removed, except the following: Date, From, Subject, and To. Leave these headers in order and intact. If this information is left intact, it will appear that the message is coming from the original sender, with the original subject and date. Depending on the list's policies, the message can be edited or sent it as is. If any changes are made to the content, it's polite to notify the user who originally sent the message.

Managing Digest Lists

A digest list is a special type of list which is only sent out periodically. Each message in a digest list contains all mail messages sent to the regular list since the last digest message was sent. Every digest list must have a regular list associated with it, but not every list needs to have a digest version. The digest version of a list is always named listname-digest, where listname is the name of the regular list. If you would like to provide a digest list along with a normal list, you must request this through ITS.

The digest list is set up as a completely separate list, with its own configuration file, passwords, welcome message, etc. If you have a digest list, it's a good idea to keep its configuration similar to that of the regular list.

There are a few ways to control how often digests are sent out. Digests will be automatically sent out whenever one of the following conditions is true:

Condition	Option Used	Description
Age	digest_maxdays	Sends a digest every X number of days. The oldest unsent message in the digest is older than the setting for digest_maxdays.
Lines	digest_maxlines	Sends a digest when the length of the email reaches a set point. Sends message when the combined length of all unsent messages, in lines, is greater than the setting for digest_maxlines.
Length	digest_maxlength	Sends a digest when the length of the email reaches a set point. Sends message when the combined length of all unsent messages, in total number of characters, is greater than the setting for digest_maxlength.

Alternately, the owner of a digest list can force a new digest to be created and distributed at any time by sending the following command to Majordomo:

```
mkdigest listname-digest password
```

where listname-digest is the name of the digest list, and password is the administrative password.

A subject-line summary at the beginning of each digest message can easily be created using the message_fronter option in the digest list's configuration file. Format the command as follows:

```
message_fronter << END  
Subjects in this digest:
```

```
-
```

- `_SUBJECTS_`
END

- The `<<` tells Majordomo that everything contained between the two END's belongs to the `message_fronter` variable. The contents of this variable will always be added to the beginning of all messages from the list.
- `_SUBJECTS_` is a special variable that Majordomo uses to automatically include all subject lines from messages in a digest.
- When used as the first character on a line, the `"-"` preserves a blank line or other white space at the beginning of a line. In the above example, there will be a blank line between "Subjects in this digest:" and the first subject line and each subject line will be indented by one space.

Dealing with Bounced E-Mail

Messages sent to the list that need to be approved for some reason are called "bounced" messages. Messages that couldn't be delivered due to a problem are called "returned" messages. Messages may be bounced to the list owner for a number of reasons: the list is moderated, the message was too large to deliver to the list, or the message failed some criteria (i.e. the user tried to send a command to the list instead of to Majordomo). The subject of these messages will be "BOUNCE listname@lists.ithaca.edu: reason", where reason describes why the message was bounced.

Depending on the reason and the contents of the message, it may be necessary to correspond with the sender personally, ignore the message, or forward the message on to the list. If the message should be sent on to the list, the "Approved" line needs to be added to the message as explained in the section Moderating a List.

Dealing with Undeliverable E-Mail

Email to mailing lists can be returned "undeliverable" just as any other email. For example, a user may forget to unsubscribe themselves from mailing lists when their email address changes or when they leave the College.

To keep error messages from getting out of hand, it may be necessary to unsubscribe people from the list if a number of error messages related to their address have been received (see Adding/Removing Subscribers Manually).

Adding/Removing Subscribers Manually

To add or removed a user from a list, follow the procedure for approving subscriptions:

```
approve password subscribe listname email_address
```

where `password` is the list's administrative password, `listname` is the name of the list, and `email_address` is the user's email address. The person will receive the list's welcome message just as if they had subscribed themselves. Note that you can substitute the `unsubscribe` command in place of "subscribe" to remove a user from a list.

If subscribing or unsubscribing a large number of users in one session, it may be easier to completely replace the subscriber list with a new version. To do this retrieve a list of current subscribers by sending an email to Majordomo with the command `who` in the body of the message. A response will be sent with a list of email addresses for subscribers. Next, send a new message to Majordomo. The first line of the message should contain the following command:

```
newwho listname password
```

The rest of the message should contain the email addresses of the users to be subscribed to the list (one address per line). This will completely overwrite the previous list of subscribers.

Suppressing the Welcome Message

If a welcome message should not be sent to new list subscribers, it can be suppressed using the `welcome` option in the list configuration file. Set `welcome` to "yes" to have the welcome message sent (this is the default), or to "no" to have it suppressed.

Suppressing Subscribe/Unsubscribe Announcements

It is not necessary for the list owner to receive informational messages every time someone subscribes or unsubscribes from the list. These messages can be suppressed using the `announcements` option in the list configuration file. Set `announcements` to "yes" to receive these messages (this is the default), or "no" to stop them.

Hiding a List

By default, most list information is freely available to anyone who requests it. The configuration options that end with the suffix `_access` allow the list owner to control who is allowed to view information about a list. Each `_access` option can be set to "open" (any user has access), "list" (only list members have access), or "closed" (the list password is required for access). The various `_access` options are:

`get_accessControls` – access to message files in the list's archive
`index_accessControls` – access to the list of archive files
`info_accessControls` – access to the list's info message (retrieved via the `info` command or sent to new subscribers)
`intro_accessControls` – access to the list's intro message (retrieved via the `intro` command or sent to new subscribers)
`which_accessControls` – whether this list may be searched by the `which` command
`who_accessControls` – who may use the `who` command to get a list of subscribers

In addition, the `advertise` option allows the list owner to hide a list even from the `lists` command when it is sent from certain addresses. For example, setting:

```
advertise = /ithaca\.edu$/
```

shows the list only to people sending the `lists` command from an on-campus (ithaca.edu) account. There is also a `noadvertise` option, which is similar except that it allows the owner to specify addresses to which the list is not shown (i.e. "hotmail.com"). See [Restricting E-Mail from Non-List Members](#) above for information about how to use the `restrict_post` option to stop non-subscribers from sending email to the list.

Automatically Adding Information to Every Message

Sometimes it may be convenient to add information to every message sent out on the list. For example, some list owners add a reminder about how to subscribe and unsubscribe at the bottom of each message. Others may add the name of the list to the front of each message's subject as a reminder that it's coming from that particular list.

The `message_fronter` and `message_footer` options allow the list owner to add text to the top or bottom (respectively) of every message sent out to the list. Also, more than one line of text can be included using something called a "here document". For example, to add text to the bottom of each message, the `message_footer` option could be set as follows:

```
message_footer << END
-
To unsubscribe, send a message to majordomo@lists.ithaca.edu:
- unsubscribe $LIST your_email_address
END
```

- The `<<` creates a "here document"; it tells Majordomo that everything contained between the two `ENDs` belongs to the `message_footer` option.

- \$LIST is a special variable that Majordomo uses to identify the name of the current list. There are two other built-in variables available: \$SENDER, which contains the original sender's e-mail address, and \$VERSION, which contains the Majordomo version number.
- When used as the first character on a line, the - preserves a blank line or other white space at the beginning of a line. In the above example, there will be a blank line before the first line of footer text, and the second line of footer text will be indented by three spaces.

The `subject_prefix` option adds a prefix to the subject line of each message. Two convenient, pre-set variables you may use are \$LIST, which contains the name of the list, and \$SENDER, which contains the sender as taken from the From: line in the email header. For example:

```
subject_prefix = Message from $LIST:
```

in the configuration file will result in a message sent to the list "sample" with a subject line "Test" would be distributed with a subject line of "Message from sample: test".

Replies to Sender Instead of List

Lists that have a very high volume of messages can become unmanageable from a user's point of view. Some high-traffic list owners address this problem by setting a policy that replies will be sent to the originator of the message, not to the entire list. To implement this policy, set the `reply_to` option in the list's configuration file as follows:

```
reply_to = $SENDER
```

Because this may confuse some users, this policy should be explained in the welcome message.

Messages with Long Lines

List owners may experience problems when sending commands with long lines of text to Majordomo because the system does not understand lines that wrap. When working with the configuration file, make sure that the window width (or the line wrap setting in email preferences) is set so that the longest lines of the file do not wrap. When working with commands like `subscribe` and `unsubscribe`, a long line can be extended to the next line by putting a `\` character at the end of the first line, e.g.:

```
approve myverylonglistname.admin subscribe myverylonglistname \
```

```
jdoe@ithaca.edu
```

VCards and Signature Files

Some e-mail clients (e.g. Thunderbird, Outlook Express, etc.) provide a way to include "signature" information to the bottom of every message. These can cause problems when sending messages to Majordomo, especially the "vCard" option. If using Majordomo extensively, ITS recommends that this option is disabled in email preferences. See the *Email User Guides* for more information on managing email preferences.

Publicizing Your List

To publicize a list outside of Ithaca College, there are directories of many Internet mailing lists available on the World Wide Web. Two useful mailing list directories are "Liszt: Searchable Directory of e-Mail Discussion Groups" at <http://www.liszt.com>, and the "List of Lists" at <http://catalog.com/vivian/interest-group-search.html>. Both sites contain a submission form that can be used to add information about a mailing list.

For More Information

Send the `help` command to Majordomo and the response will include more information about Majordomo and how to use the system.

A variety of support services are available from ITS if you would like additional help:

Computer training on a variety of topics is available to faculty, staff, and students at no charge through the Technology Learning Center (TLC). Check out the current TLC training schedule online at <https://www.ithaca.edu/its/workshops>

Online documentation and tutorials on IC-supported computing software and systems are available at <https://www.ithaca.edu/its/traindoc>

Frontline computing support is available through the ITS Helpdesk in 104 Job Hall; send e-mail to helpdesk@ithaca.edu or call 607-274-1000.

Backline consulting support is available in the Technology Learning Center, room 101 Friends Hall.

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