

# UNIX Mail

## SYNOPSIS

This section describes the use of "mail" a user program for handling mail on UNIX. The document covers the basic features of UNIX MAIL including how to send, receive, and save messages.

**WARNING:** Cal Poly is migrating all email use to OpenMail mail services during the 1998-1999 Academic Year. As a result all support for the product described in this chapter will be limited or dropped when the migration has been completed.

### WHAT IS THE MAIL PROGRAM?

The UNIX "*mail*" program is a convenient way to generate, read, and handle mail.

The program described here is also known as "ucb mail" (*/usr/ucb/mail*) on some UNIX systems. Other mail-handling programs may exist on your system (e.g., *elm*, *emacs*, *pine*).

### THREE WAYS TO INVOKE THE MAIL PROGRAM

#### A. Enter

% *mailx someaddress*<CR>

% *mail someaddress*<CR>

On HP-UX

to mail a message to somebody. When you finish entering your message, the program ends.

#### B. Enter

% *mailx someaddress < filename*<CR> On HP-UX

% *mail someaddress < filename*<CR>

The contents of the file are sent, and you return immediately to the UNIX prompt.

#### C. Enter

% *mailx*<CR>

% *mailx*<CR>

On HP-UX

to read and handle mail which is waiting for you. If no mail is waiting, the program will just return a "no mail" message and quit. If you do have mail waiting, you will have an opportunity to read it, answer it, delete it, save it, and send new mail.

### SENDING A MAIL MESSAGE

#### A. Send a message to someone on the same system

% *mailx userid [userid2 ... useridn]*<CR> On HP-UX

% *mail userid [userid2 ... useridn]*<CR>

e.g., mail peggy

#### B. Send a message to someone on another system

% *mailx userid@hostname*<CR> On HP-UX

% *mailx userid@hostname*<CR> e.g., mail peggy@cosmos.acs.calpoly.edu

You will have an opportunity to enter a Subject. Then enter a message. Press <CR> at the end of each line.



## READING MAIL

To read or re-read the current message enter

**& t<CR>** For type the current message  
or  
**& p<CR>** For print the current message to the screen

Note that "t" and "p" are equivalent.

Press "<CR>" or "n<CR>" to read the next message while at the mail prompt "&".

Enter a message number, followed by a <CR>, to read the message that is preceded by that number in the header listing.

When reading mail on Sun UNIX, you are using the "more" program. Press the <SPACEBAR> to see the next page, "q" to quit looking at the current message.

When reading mail on central UNIX, you are using the "pg" program by default. Press <CR> to see the next page, "q" to quit looking at the current message. The paging program may be changed permanently in the ".mailrc" file or temporarily at the mail prompt. Please refer to the system documentation outlined in "SYSTEM DOCUMENTATION" for more information.

## REPLYING TO MAIL

The reply function is invoked by **R** and **r**. The effect of these differs on different systems. On most campus UNIX systems,

**& R<CR>** replies to the sender only. You will probably want to use this most of the time.

**& r<CR>** replies to the sender **AND** everyone else who ever received the message. This can be embarrassing! And resource-consuming!

**NOTE:** On some UNIX systems, the meaning of these commands is reversed! Check the meaning of **R** and **r** on your own system by entering "?<CR>" at the "&" prompt.

When using **R** or **r**, the address is entered for you automatically.

You get a subject line, and an opportunity to enter a message. At this point you may enter any of the tilde commands ("~") while entering your text. For instance,

**~f<CR>** to include the current message in your reply.

**NOTE:** When using "~f", please edit any line starting with "From" to something like ">From". If you do not, your message may not be transmitted successfully.

**~m<CR>** to include the current message, indented one tab from the left margin.

**~v<CR>** to edit the message in the vi editor.

For a longer list of tilde commands, see section 9.

When done, press **Ctrl-D**. You will return to the mail "&" prompt. On some systems, you may be asked to indicate any carbon copies (Cc:) before the mail "&" prompt is displayed.

## CANCELING A MAIL MESSAGE

If you decide not to send a message you have started, press *Ctrl-C* twice or *~q<CR>* on a new line by itself.

Messages interrupted this way automatically create a file called "dead.letter" in your home directory.

## FORWARDING MAIL

There isn't one single command to forward mail to somebody else. But do this:

To forward the message you just read (the current message), enter

*& m useri d<CR>*                      the *useri d(s)* of the person(s) you want to forward the message to, just as for sending new mail.

Enter a subject line at the "Subject:" prompt.

Enter your own message, if you wish.

Read in the current message you want to forward by entering on a new line:

*~f<CR>*                                  inserts the current message with the original spacing.

or

*~m<CR>*                                  inserts the current message with each line indented one tab stop.

You will see "interpolating" to show that the message has been inserted.

You can continue with your own message or just press *Ctrl-D* to end.

## GOING ON VACATION?

How do you tell people that you've gone on vacation and that they shouldn't expect a reply from you for a while? By using the "vacati on" command!

Before you set up any of the files for the "vacati on" command, you must first initialize its database. To do so enter

*% vacati on -I<CR>*                      This creates the files ".vacati on. pag" and ".vacati on. di r".

"vacati on" also requires that you set up a couple of files in your account. The first file is of the same name as that of the file you use to forward all mail to another account (e.g., .forward). The format of the .forward file for use with vacation is as follows:

```
\logi n_ID, " | vacati on logi n_ID"
                                On HP-UX.

logi n_ID, " | vacati on logi n_ID"
                                On most other UNIX systems.
```

where "logi n\_ID" is your login ID, or account.

"vacati on" also expects a second file named ".vacati on. msg" which contains the message to be sent to the sender when your account receives mail. This message is sent the first time a message is received from the user, and is not sent again, no matter how many messages that user sends to your account, until a week has passed. The ".vacati on. msg" file should look like the following:

**From:** login\_id@site.calpoly.edu (User\_Name)  
**Subject:** I am on vacation  
**Delivered-By-The-Graces-Of:** the Vacation program

I am on vacation until some date. If you have something urgent, please contact Alternate\_Name <alt\_login\_id@site2.calpoly.edu>.

--- User\_Name

where "login\_ID" is your account; "site" is the name of your machine or your system's mailer site, including a sub-domain if necessary; "User\_Name" is your real name; "some date" is the expected return date from your vacation or time away; "Alternate\_Name" is the real name of the person you would like them to get in touch with if they need to get in touch with someone before you return; "alt\_login\_id" is the alternate person's account; "site2" is the alternate user's site information, including a sub-domain if necessary.

**NOTE:** The header portion of the message should be entered as shown as far as spacing and text that does not indicate your account, site, etc.. The mailer requires this information and will produce error messages if it is not specified.

As mail arrives at your account, a database will be created to keep track of the users who have received your vacation notice. The database files may be removed after your return (their names are ".vacation.pag" and ".vacation.dir"). When you return, you should either rename the ".forward" file or remove it to discontinue the use of the "vacation" command.

#### EDITING YOUR MAIL MESSAGE

The mail program only lets you backspace on the same line to make corrections. If you want to edit your message,

On a new line, enter

`~v<CR>`

This puts you and your message into the vi editor. You can use this editor just as you normally would. When you have finished ( `<ESC>ZZ` or `:wq<CR>`), you will be returned to the mail program.

You can continue the message text or press `Ctrl-D` to end.

Please see the User Guide "vi Editor" for more information on the vi editor.

#### SAVING MAIL

To save the current message, enter

`& s filename<CR>`

If the file already exists, this message will be appended.

The "s" option saves the message with the complete header and also marks the message for deletion when you quit mail.

To save the message content only, without the header, use

`& w filename<CR>`

The "w" option does not mark the message for deletion.

## PRINTING MAIL

There is no direct command for sending mail to a printer. You can save your mail in a file and then print it.

If you want to do this without leaving mail, enter

```
& s filename<CR>
& !lp filename<CR>           On most UNIX systems
```

or

```
& s filename<CR>
& !lp -J xx_BOXnn filename<CR>
```

On central UNIX, where "xx" is your first and last initials and "nn" is the box number in the dispatch area where you would like the output deposited.

or

```
& s filename<CR>
& !lp -Jxx_BOXnn filename<CR>
```

On the ITS Suns, where "xx" is your first and last initials and "nn" is the box number in the dispatch area where you would like the output deposited.

## DELETING MAIL

If you want to delete the current message, enter

```
& d<CR>
```

You can also delete messages by their message number(s), e.g.,

```
& d2<CR>           Will delete message number 2.
```

```
& d1-5<CR>        Will delete messages numbered 1 through 5.
```

## QUITTING THE MAIL PROGRAM

Enter

```
& q<CR>           for "quit" and save.
```

Alternatively,

```
& x<CR>           for "exit" and don't save changes.
```

will quit and leave the mail as it was before you ran "*mail*". Mail that has been read or deleted will still be waiting for you when you come back.

## OLD MAIL NEVER DIES... "MBOX" AND "MAIL -F"

Mail that has been read, but not explicitly saved ("s" option) or deleted, is automatically saved in a file called "mbox" in your home directory. This file keeps growing until you delete it or clean it up.

You can handle mail saved in mbox with the mail program, by invoking the mail program with

```
% mailx -f<CR>           On HP-UX
```

```
% mail -f<CR>
```

This puts you into the mail program as if the mbox mail were mail just received. You can do everything you usually do with mail, including deleting messages.

Mail saved in a file in mail format with the "s" command can be read with

```
% mailx -f filename<CR>           On HP-UX
```

```
% mail -f filename<CR>
```

or with

```
& file filename<CR>
```

if you are already within the mail program at the "&" prompt.

#### CUSTOMIZING MAIL... ".MAILRC", AND OTHER FILES OF YOUR MAKING

The ".*mailrc*" file in your home directory is used for entering aliases and other commands that customize the way mail works. See the UNIX manual page on mail for details ("*man mail*" or "man mailx" on HP-UX). For example, you can include "*set*" commands to change certain options. One option you might want is "*set hold*". This would keep mail you have read in your current active mailbox, instead of sending it to the "*mbox*" file (see section 'OLD MAIL NEVER DIES...' "MBOX" and MAIL -F" above). Another possibility is "*set dot*", which enables you to terminate mail messages by typing a period on a new line (instead of *Ctrl-D*). This option is already set globally on some systems.

You can create your own files for frequently used text, such as your closing or address. Read these into your mail message by entering, on a new line,

```
~r filename<CR>
```

The file "*filename*" will be inserted into the current message.

#### CREATING MAIL ADDRESS ALIASES

Some of your correspondents will have addresses too long to type accurately or too long to remember. Sometimes you will want to create an alias for a whole list of people you want to send mail to as a group. To create an alias, use vi to edit (or create) your ".*mailrc*" file.

Add a line in your ".*mailrc*" where the first word is "*alias*", the second word is the nickname you want to use, and the rest of the line is the address (or addresses, separated by spaces) of the person(s) you want to mail to using that alias. For example

```
alias monitors ado pdohoney mdeale@cosmos
```

Then when you "*mail monitors*" the message will be addressed to all three people.

```
alias greg gjunell@data.acs.calpoly.edu
```

You can now "*mail greg*" or "*mailx greg*" on HP-UX, without having to remember his complete address.

#### RECEIVING ALL YOUR MAIL AT ONE ADDRESS... ".FORWARD"

If you have accounts on more than one UNIX host, you can arrange to have all your mail forwarded to one system, so that you only need to log in once to read your mail.

Choose the system where you want to receive mail. On the other systems, create a file called ".*forward*" in your home directory. It should consist of just one line, that is, the address where you want to receive mail. Your mail will automatically be forwarded to that address.

NOTIFICATION OF MAIL  
WHEN YOU ARE ON  
LINE... "FROM" AND  
"BIFF"

The "*from*" command can be placed in your ".*login*" file or can be executed from the UNIX command line. It lists the mail which is waiting.

The "*bi ff*" command determines whether you will get messages about mail arriving while you are logged on. When "*bi ff*" is on, you are shown the message header and the first line of the message whenever a new message arrives. This can be convenient or annoying, depending on what you are doing on line.

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| % <i>bi ff</i> <CR>   | To see how notification is currently set |
| % <i>bi ff n</i> <CR> | To turn notification off                 |
| % <i>bi ff y</i> <CR> | To turn notification on                  |

You can put the "*bi ff*" command in your ".*login*" file to set it the way you want.

WHAT MAIL ISN'T GOOD  
FOR

- A. Mail is designed for transferring text. When it comes to programs, it can be used successfully for transferring source code (pure text, original program listing), which could then be saved into a file with the "*w*" command (which deletes headers) and afterwards compiled on your local machine.
- B. Mail is NOT good for transferring binary files (already compiled code) or encoded data files. For this purpose, use a file transfer program which has a binary mode, such as FTP or Kermit. If this is not possible (these programs require logging on to the remote site), use the UNIX commands "*uuencode*" and "*uudecode*" for encoding binary files to be sent through the mail. See the UNIX manual page on *uuencode* ("*man uuencode*<CR>") for more information.

COMMAND SUMMARY

Mail commands are divided into two groups, commands entered at the mail prompt "&" and commands entered on a new line while entering mail message text.

**A. MAIL PROMPT COMMANDS (ENTER AT THE "&" PROMPT)**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| - [ <i>n</i> ]<CR>  | if no number " <i>n</i> " is provided, backs up to the previous message. Otherwise backs up <i>n</i> messages.   |
| ?<CR>   | Lists a brief summary of commands.   |
| <i>alias</i> [ <i>alias_name</i> [ <i>alias_list</i> ]]<CR> | By itself, displays all currently defined aliases; with <i>alias_name</i> , displays that alias; with three or more arguments, creates a new alias or over-rides an old alias. |
| <i>copy msg_lst filename</i> <CR>                           | Appends each message in the message list (a list of valid mail message numbers), to the end of the specified <i>filename</i> .   |
| <i>delete [msg_lst]</i> <CR>                                | Deletes each message in the message list, if specified, otherwise, the current message is deleted.   |
| <i>dp</i> <CR> or <i>dt</i> <CR>                            | Delete the current message and display the next message.   |
| <i>exit</i> <CR>  | Exit mail leaving the messages unchanged from before the session started.  |

<i>file [filename]&lt;CR&gt;</i> or <i>folder [foldername]&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Switches to a new mail file or folder. If a name is not provided, it will display the name of the current file or folder.
<i>headers&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Lists the headers in the current screen of messages.
<i>hold msg_lst&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Marks the messages in the message list to be saved in your system mailbox instead of <i>mbx</i> .
<i>mail addr_lst&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Create and send a message to the people you specify in <i>addr_lst</i> .
<i>print [msg_lst]&lt;CR&gt;</i> or <i>type [msg_lst]&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Displays the message(s) in <i>msg_lst</i> .
<i>quit&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Ends the mail session and returns to the shell.
<i>reply [msg]&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Create and send mail to the user who sent and all who received the message <i>msg</i> (or the current message if no <i>msg</i> is provided).  <b>NOTE:</b> "R" and "r" may be reversed on your system. Verify which does which by listing the mail commands on your system with "?<CR>".
<i>Reply [msg]&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Create and send mail only to the user who sent the message <i>msg</i> (or the current message if no <i>msg</i> is provided).
<i>save msg_lst filename&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Appends the messages specified in <i>msg_lst</i> to <i>filename</i> .
<i>set [option]&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Allows the user to set several options to customize the mail environment if an option is present, otherwise lists all variable values.
<i>undelete msg_lst&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Removes the messages in <i>msg_lst</i> from the list of messages to be deleted when you quit mail.
<i>write msg_lst filename&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Appends the messages in <i>msg_lst</i> to <i>filename</i> . Messages are saved without message headers.
<i>z[+ -]&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Changes the current message screenful. If a plus ("+") or no argument is given, the next screenful is displayed. If a minus ("-") is given, the previous screenful is displayed.

**B. MAIL EDITING COMMANDS (ENTER ON A NEW LINE WHEN ENTERING YOUR MAIL MESSAGE)**

<i>~!cmd&lt;CR&gt;</i>	Executes the shell command <i>cmd</i> and returns to the message.
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<code>~f [msg_lst]&lt;CR&gt;</code>	Reads the specified messages into the message being sent. If no messages are specified, read the current message.
<code>~h&lt;CR&gt;</code>	Allows the user to edit the message header fields.
<code>~m [msg_lst]&lt;CR&gt;</code>	Reads the specified messages into the message being sent with each line shifted right one tab stop. If no messages are specified, read the current message.
<code>~p&lt;CR&gt;</code>	Displays the message being created as it exists including the message header fields.
<code>~q&lt;CR&gt;</code>	Aborts the message being created without sending it.
<code>~r filename&lt;CR&gt;</code>	Reads <i>filename</i> into the message.
<code>~v&lt;CR&gt;</code>	Activates the visual editor (usually vi) for editing the message being created.
<code>~w filename&lt;CR&gt;</code>	Writes the message to the named file.

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## **NOTES**