1 Mailing List Guidelines

Truth and clarity are complementary.

> ~ *Niels Bohr*

1.1 Sir, Madam

The use of "Sir" and "Madam" is usually avoided when addressing people. It becomes really annoying, when students use it often. In conversation, for example, they start and finish every sentence with "Sir".

```
"Sir, I have a compilation problem, Sir."

"Sir, how can I install both Windows and Fedora on
the same system, Sir?"
```

As long as the two parties acknowledge that they have mutual respect for each other, the use of titles is to be avoided. Getting the message across is more important.

You should always address people by their first name. Abbreviated titles before names like "Prof.", "Dr." are acceptable though.

1.2 Meaningful subject line

Many a time when sending an e-mail, people do not type anything in the subject line. The e-mail either goes into the spam folder, or gets delivered and the subject line looks like:

```
[none]

(no subject)
```

It is very important to use an appropriate subject line when composing a message. A person must be able to tell the context of the e-mail given the subject line.

1.3 SMS

Short Message Service (SMS) is a text messaging service for mobile communication, and for mobile communication only. It is considered very unprofessional to use SMS language in business or when writing e-mail. I always ask students why they don't write their answers in exams in SMS language. They should probably try it once (and probably it will be their last time too!).

```
"ur lec is very usefull to as,thank u for ur lec
by me and my friends,plz provide knowlodge
support to as."
```

The reason that text matter in most books is written in full is because it is legible, easy to read and understand.

Everything has a place and time, and it is important to use the right protocol, at the right place, at the right time, with the right people.

You may not be a native speaker of the English language, but, you must at least use a spell-check on any text that you write. It doesn't matter much if the grammar is incorrect. The above message could have been written as:

```
"Your lecture is very useful to us. Thank you for
your lecture by me and my friends. Please provide
knowledge and support to us."
```

1.4 Continuity

```
"i am a fresh computer science enggr, i saw ur
website and interest in
linux.......
really i am proud of ur dedication.....
keep in touch"
```

The ellipsis is a series of three dots that is added for text that has been omitted. I had asked the student who had written the above, as to why so many dots were used, and the reply

was that he was thinking at that point of time. It doesn't mean anything to the reader on what the author was doing when writing the e-mail.

If you are quoting a paragraph, and you want to omit irrelevant text, you can use ellipsis. Otherwise, always end a sentence with a full-stop, and start a new sentence with a capital letter. The above e-mail message could have been written as:

```
"I am a fresh computer science engineer. I saw
your website and interest in Linux. I am proud
of your dedication.
Keep in touch."
```

1.5 Capital Letters

```
"HOW TO TRACE C CODE - ANY SUGGESTION?"
```

Newbies assume that writing in capital letters means that they are emphasizing the importance of the text. In Internet forums and mailing lists, text in capital letters means that the person is shouting the sentence at whoever is reading it. Acronyms are exceptions, but, please avoid typing the entire text in capital letters. The above subject line should have been written as:

```
"How to trace C code - any suggestion?"
```

1.6 Top-posting

The method of posting style in mailing lists and forums has been debated for years. The preferred method of style used in free and open source software mailing lists is interleaved, trimmed, bottom-posting.

Top-posting is when you write your answer above the question in your exams (don't try it!). The following individual has top-posted:

```
Or else you could install kaffeine rather
than xchat.

On 8 July 2011 18:59, a b <abc at gmail.com> wrote:
>
>
> On Fri, Jul 8, 2011 at 4:02 PM, x y <xyz at
> gmail.com>wrote:
>
>> hi Everyone
>> this is x y from foo...
>> in irc my nick is xyz.
>> My problem is very surprising though it is true.
>> my problem is that : in #foo, on class time when
>> pqr give his dialogue at class;that not appear
>> to my irc client (xchat or in xchat-gnome).
>> For that i can see pqr is available although
>> when he say something it not comes to my
>> laptop screen.
>>
>> For information i would like to say: i am using
>> ubuntu 9.10. i have
>> already reinstalled xchat twice.
>> please suggest to get me out from this problem.
>> thank you.
>> ##i am very much surprised : why it is occurring
>> with pqr and me!
>> -----------------------------------------------
>> Users mailing list
>> Users at lists.mno.org
>> http://lists.mno.org/listinfo.cgi/users-mno.org
>>
> if you are having mozilla than you probably would
> want this https://*addons*.*mozilla*.org/en-US/
> firefox/*addon*/chatzilla/. I think this would
> solve your problem
> regards
> xyz
```

A person who follows bottom-posting scrolls down to
the end of the message to realize that the person has actually

top-posted. Bottom-posting is when you write your answer
below the question. There are e-mail clients that by default
follow top-posting style. You need to change their setting to
use bottom-posting. But, just that isn't sufficient as shown
in the following reply:

```
On 7/8/13, x y <xyz at gmail.com> wrote:
> First install the dependencies:
>
>  To install dependencies: become root ($ su -)
>  in Ubuntu ($ sudo -s)
>  # git clone git://github.com/xyz/requests.git
>  # cd requests
>  # python setup.py install
>
> THEN:
>
> 1. Become root ($ su -) in Ubuntu ($ sudo -s)
>    DONT if you are already root
> 2. cd /usr/bin/
> 3. wget http://xyz.in/tmp/submit_hometask
> 4. chmod +x /usr/bin/submit_hometask
> 5. exit from the root account (press Ctrl+d)
>
> 6. Now from your normal user account create a
> file called ~/.foo.conf
> Paste the text bellow in that file:
>
> [foo]
> user=
> password=
>
> 7. Add your github username after user=
> It will look like:
> user=foo
>
> 8. reply to this email directly to me with
> your username. I will send a personal email
> with the password.
>
> Foo
```

```
> --
> Users mailing list
> Users at lists.mno.org
> http://lists.mno.org/listinfo.cgi/users-mno.org
>
Hi,
My github username=abc

regards,
ABC
```

The above reply is a bottom-post, but, the author has not trimmed the message. Interleaved, trimmed, bottom-posting is the preferred approach where you remove irrelevant text in the reply, quote only what is relevant to your reply, and reply below the quoted text. The above reply should have been:

```
Hi,

--- On 7/8/13, x y <xyz at gmail.com> wrote:
> 8. reply to this email directly to me with
> your username.

My github username=abc

regards,
ABC
```

1.7 Over-quoting

```
On 28/03/07, foo b <foo b at gmail.com> wrote:
>
> On 3/27/07, xyz f <xyz f at gmail.com> wrote:
>>
>> No..i didnt installed it ...
>>
>>>> Can any one kindly help me to start the
>>>> ssh service.
```

```
>>>>
>>>> FYI: Here is /etc/ssh/ssh_config file content
```

When replying to an e-mail, if you leave a big trail of the previous replies, the reply-to (">") character gets appended as seen above. This can get big for long conversations, and difficult to follow. Hence, avoid large over-quoting of messages. Just quote what is relevant to the context, and reply to the same.

1.8 No HTML messages

```
<html>
<body>
<div style="color:#000; background-color:#fff;
    font-family:arial, helvetica, sans-serif;
    font-size:10pt">
<div><span>My git repo url :</span></div>
<div style="color: rgb(0, 0, 0); font-size: 13px;
    font-family: arial, helvetica, sans-serif;
 background-color: transparent; font-style:
    normal;"> <span><br></span></div>
<div style="color: rgb(0, 0, 0); font-size: 13px;
    font-family: arial, helvetica, sans-serif;
 background-color: transparent; font-style:
    normal;"><span><a href="https://github.com/
    Foo/Home_Tasks">https://github.com/Foo/
    Home_Tasks</a><br></span></div>
<div style="color: rgb(0, 0, 0); font-size: 13px;
    font-family: arial, helvetica, sans-serif;
 background-color: transparent; font-style:
    normal;"><br></div>
<div style="color: rgb(0, 0, 0); font-size: 13px;
    font-family: arial, helvetica, sans-serif;
 background-color: transparent; font-style:
    normal;">Foo(nick : foo)</div><div><br></div>
<div dir="ltr"><hr size="1"><font size="2"
    face="Arial"><b><span style="font-weight:bold;
 ">From:</span></b>abc<abc$@$gmail.com><br><b>
    <span style="font-weight: bold;">To:</span>
```

```
</b>users$@$lists.mno.org<br><b><span style=
"font-weight: bold;">Sent:</span></b>Thursday,
July 4, 2013 7:30 AM<br><b><span style=
"font-weight: bold;">Subject: </span></b>Re:
[mno-users] [demo] setup a github repo for home
</div></div></div>
</body>
</html>
```

What is important is the message that is being conveyed
and not what formatting you use. If your e-mail client is
configured by default to send HTML e-mail, please change
the settings to send plain ASCII text. There are a number of
HTML e-mail clients available, but, we cannot assume that
everyone uses it. Moreover, not everyone is on broadband
connection these days, or people may be on the move with a
slow mobile connection. Hence, it is important to not send
rich text formats, including RTF, that have additional tag
elements. Getting the message across is essential.

1.9 No attachments

People tend to send forwards to mailing lists with huge images
or text, that are not relevant to the group. There might even
be statements in them saying that if you forward these to
other people, you might get something useful. The mailing
list servers will also rip out any attachments sent to the list.
Refrain from sending anything unrelated to the group.

```
On Fri, Jul 5, 2013 at 12:25 PM, abc
<abc at gmail.com> wrote:

> my github url is:-
> https://github.com/abc/repo
> ---------------------------------------------
> Users mailing list
> Users at lists.mno.org
> http://lists.mno.org/listinfo.cgi/users-mno.org
>
-------------- next part --------------
An HTML attachment was scrubbed...
```

```
URL: <http://lists.mno.org/pipermail/users-mno.org/
      attachments/20130705/64361145/attachment.htm>
```

1.10 Social networking website

Social networking websites, sometimes ask for your e-mail passwords. They then login to your account, get all your contacts, and send them invites to join their website. The e-mails sent resemble the following:

```
Person X        Person X has Tagged you! :)

Person Y        Person Y wants to share sites
                with you...

Person Z        Person Z left a message for you...
```

If you have subscribed to a mailing list, then such e-mails will be sent to the group as well, because they are part of your contacts list. Be conscious of where you type your passwords, and don't give them away!

1.11 Disclaimers

Depending on the nature of work, and in the interest of the organization you work for, you may or may not use your official e-mail address to participate in free and open source software mailing lists. Some organization e-mail servers attach disclaimers like the one below to every e-mail that is sent from their server. Some of the clauses are not in line with the philosophy and freedom of free and open source software, and hence avoid using your official e-mail address for such discussions.

```
DISCLAIMER: The  information  contained  in  this
message is intended only and solely for the
addressed individual or entity indicated in this
message and for the exclusive use of the said
addressed individual or entity indicated in this
message (or responsible for delivery of the message
to such person) and may contain legally privileged
```

and confidential information belonging to
CompanyName. It must not be printed, read, copied,
disclosed, forwarded, distributed or used (in
whatsoever manner) by any person other than the
addressee. Unauthorized use, disclosure or copying
is strictly prohibited and may constitute unlawful
act and can possibly attract legal action, civil
and/or criminal. The contents of this message need
not necessarily reflect or endorse the views of
CompanyName on any subject matter. Any action taken
or omitted to be taken based on this message is
entirely at your risk and neither the originator of
this message nor CompanyName takes any
responsibility or liability towards the same.
Opinions, conclusions and any other information
contained in this message that do not relate to the
official business of CompanyName shall be understood
as neither given nor endorsed by CompanyName or any
affiliate of CompanyName. If you have received this
message in error, you should destroy this message
and may please notify the sender by e-mail.
Thank you.

There are other disclaimers that are phrased as:

This e-mail (including any attachments) is intended
for the sole use of the intended recipient/s and
may contain material that is CONFIDENTIAL AND
PRIVATE COMPANY INFORMATION. Any review or reliance
by others or copying or distribution or forwarding
of any or all of the contents in this message is
STRICTLY PROHIBITED. If you are not the intended
recipient, please contact the sender by email and
delete all copies; your cooperation in this regard
is appreciated.

It is you who have subscribed with your official e-mail
address. If the organization isn't okay with you using this
account, please refrain from using it. If other e-mail services
are blocked in your corporate network, then access the
mailing lists outside of work. Learning to respect the values

and principles of a group will help you become part of what they stand for.

1.12 Digest mode

Digest mode configuration in mailing lists send a summary of all the week's e-mail discussions that were sent to the group. People who don't have time or bandwidth to follow the discussions as and when they happen subscribe to this mode. But, when they have a query or want to post a reply, they need to edit the subject line before sending the e-mail. Otherwise, the people who are subscribed to receive e-mail as and when it is sent, will receive a subject like:

```
Person Z        Re: Users Digest, Vol 63, Issue 4
```

Some people also tend to top-post their reply, and leave the entire trail of the digest.

```
hi this is my repo url https://github.com/rst/foo

On 7/5/13, a b <abc at gmail.com> wrote:
> hi, this is a b.
> My repo url is https://github.com/abc/Training_
> tasks_demo.
>
> On 7/5/13, xyz <xyz at gmail.com> wrote:
>> my github url is https://github.com/xyz/
>> demo/settings
>>
>> On Thu, Jul 4, 2013 at 6:12 PM,
>> <users-request at lists.mno.org> wrote:
>>
>>> Send Users mailing list submissions to
>>>        users at lists.mno.org
>>>
>>> To subscribe or unsubscribe via the World Wide
>>> Web, visit http://lists.mno.org/listinfo.cgi/
>>> users-mno.org or, via email, send a message with
>>> subject or body 'help'
>>>        to users-request at lists.mno.org
```

```
>>>
>>> You can reach the person managing the list at
>>>         users-owner at lists.mno.org
>>>
>>> When replying, please edit your Subject line so
>>> it is more specific than "Re: Contents of
>>> Users digest..."
>>>
>>> Today's Topics:
>>>
>>>    1. [demo] setup a github repo for home tasks
>>>       (Foo)
>>>    2. Setup a github repo (xyz)
>>>    3. Re: [demo] setup a github repo for home
>>>       tasks (bcd)
>>>    4. Re: [demo] setup a github repo for home
>>>        tasks (efg)
>>>
>>> ------------------------------------------------
>>>
>>> Message: 1
>>> Date: Thu, 4 Jul 2013 15:06:44 +0530
>>> From: Foo <foo at gmail.com>
>>> To: users at lists.mno.org
>>> Subject: [foo-users] [demo] setup a github repo
>>>         for home tasks
>>> Message-ID:
>>>          <
>>> foo at mail.gmail.com>
>>> Content-Type: text/plain; charset=UTF-8
>>>
>>> Hi all,
>>>
>>> For the home tasks in the future sessions, one
>>> needs to go through the following steps.
>>>
>>> 1. Create an account in github
>>> 2. Create a new repo for home tasks (name it
>>> properly)
>>> 3. Goto  settings->Service hooks->Webhooks URL
>>> and the url [1] as a webhook.
```

```
>>> 4. create a directory as test1 in the repo.
>>> 5. Inside it add a file called solution.rst
>>> (Example is at [2])
>>> 6. Do a git push
>>> 7. Reply to this email to the list with the git
>>> repo url
>>> 8. Go back to settings->Service hooks->Webhooks
>>> URL and click on Test Hook
>>>
>>> [1] http://foo.com:5000/updatehook/
>>> [2]
>>> https://raw.github.com/foo/studenttest/master/
>>> assignment1/solution.rst
>>>
>>> Foo
>>>
>>> -----------------------------
>>>
>>> Message: 2
>>> Date: Thu, 4 Jul 2013 16:07:47 +0530
>>> From: xyz <xyz at gmail.com>
>>> To: users at lists.mno.org
>>> Subject: [foo-users] Setup a github repo
>>> Message-ID:
>>>         <bcd at mail.gmail.com>
>>> Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"
>>>
>>> Hello,
>>>
>>> My git repo url [1].
>>>
>>> [1] <https://github.com/bcd/training>
>>> https://github.com/bcd/training
>>>
>>> Thank You
>>> bcd
>>> -----------------------------
>>>
>>> Message: 3
>>> Date: Thu, 4 Jul 2013 11:23:50 +0000 (UTC)
>>> From: e f <efg at gmail.com>
```

```
>>> To: Users at lists.mno.org
>>> Subject: Re: [mno-users] [demo] setup a github
>>> repo for home tasks
>>> Message-ID:
>>>          <
>>> efg at gmail.com
>>> >
>>>
>>> Content-Type: text/plain; charset=UTF-8
>>>
>>> At 4 Jul 2013 09:36:44 +0000 (UTC) from Foo
>>> <foo at gmail.com>:
>>>
>>> >
>>> >Hi all,
>>> >For the home tasks in the future sessions, one
>>> >needs to go through the following steps.
>>> >1. Create an account in github
>>>
>>> Hello,
>>> My git repository url is :
>>> https://github.com/xyz/foo
>>>
>>> Regards,
>>> xyz
>>>
>>> ----------------------------
>>>
>>> Message: 4
>>> Date: Thu, 4 Jul 2013 16:57:12 +0530
>>> From: p q <pqr at gmail.com>
>>> To: users at lists.mno.org
>>> Subject: Re: [mno-users] [demo] setup a github
>>> repo for home tasks
>>> Message-ID:
>>>          <
>>> pqr at mail.gmail.com>
>>> Content-Type: text/plain; charset=ISO-8859-1
>>>
>>> git repo url : https://github.com/pqr/demo.git
>>>
```

```
>>> On 7/4/13, Foo <foo at gmail.com> wrote:
>>> > Hi all,
>>> >
>>> > For the home tasks in the future sessions, one
>>> > needs to go through the following steps.
>>> >
>>> > 1. Create an account in github
>>> > 2. Create a new repo for home tasks (name it
>>> > properly)
>>> > 3. Goto  settings->Service hooks->Webhooks URL
>>> > and the url [1] as a webhook.
>>> > 4. create a directory as test1 in the repo.
>>> > 5. Inside it add a file called solution.rst
>>> > (Example is at [2])
>>> > 6. Do a git push
>>> > 7. Reply to this email to the list with the
>>> > git repo url
>>> > 8. Go back to settings->Service hooks->
>>> > Webhooks URL and click on Test Hook
>>> >
>>> > [1] http://foo.com:5000/updatehook/
>>> > [2]
>>> >
>>> https://raw.github.com/foo/studenttest/master/
>>> assignment1/solution.rst
>>> >
>>> > Foo
>>> > --
>>> >
```

If the reader is following interleaved, trimmed, bottom-posting, then, he/she will scroll all the way down to the bottom of the e-mail to see if there is more text as part of the reply, only to realize that the person has actually top-posted! If you are not sure how to use digest-mode, it is better to avoid using it. Otherwise, please change the subject line, quote whatever is relevant, and bottom-post. The above reply could have been:

```
Person X          Setup a github repo for tasks
```

```
Hi,

--- On 7/8/13, x y <xyz at gmail.com> wrote:
> 7. Reply to this email to the list with the git
> repo url

My repo url is https://github.com/rst/foo

Regards,

xyz
```

1.13 Out of context

A threaded discussion has a series of replies on a topic, and the replies allow you to follow the conversation in it. Any query not relevant to the discussion is to be sent as a new e-mail, with a new subject line. You can fork a discussion, but, it is better to start a new post for a discussion. Replying out of context is termed as "thread hijacking". The following is an example of a reply that is out of context, with spelling mistakes, and is also a top-post:

```
I am using bsnl3g modem for net conection. For that
I am using foo script. But now this foo is not
workin giving some error
""in line 4898 kill 12678"".

On Fri, May 23, 2008 at 9:26 AM, <users-request at
lists.mno.org> wrote:

Hi all,
In case you missed, submit the html hometask using
the submit_hometask command that you use, with a
link to the html file in github in your rst file.
```

1.14 Flooding

A query sent to a mailing list may or may not get answered. It doesn't mean that people haven't read your question. People

on the list are volunteers, so, you are not guaranteed with an answer always. It could be that they may not know the answer, or your question was not suitable for the group. This doesn't mean you should send the same e-mail again to the list. You could try in a different mailing list or find a more appropriate forum for your query.

```
Knowledge advances by steps, not by leaps.
    ~ Lord Macaulay
```

1.15 Private e-mails

```
If you wish to converse with me, define your terms.
    ~ Voltaire
```

When someone sees a reply to their post in the mailing list, newbies have a tendency to reply to the author in private. In general, this is not recommended, unless both the parties agree to communicate in private. The purpose of having a discussion in the mailing list is that you can possibly get replies from a wider group of people, than from an individual. Also, if the sender requests that any reply be sent to him/her instead of the list, then you shouldn't reply to the list!

1.16 Tags

```
[Commercial] Java/Lisp Developer Position in Norway

[OT] Effective mentoring programs
```

Most mailing lists are run by volunteers. If you wish to send any job offers that are of commercial interest, please mark the subject line with a "[Commercial]" tag. Off-topic discussions can be marked with "[OT]", but, it is important to keep a tolerant level for the signal-noise ratio.

1.17 Others

Free and open source software is when the code is made available to you in a free and open source software license. There exists free and open source software for proprietary platforms, and it is fine to discuss it as long as the code is available. There is also freeware, where only the binaries are distributed. Just because the binaries run on GNU/Linux, it doesn't mean it is free and open source, and it doesn't mean you can ask the mailing list for support! If you have paid for a proprietary product and support, you are entitled for commercial support. You need to ask your vendor for support, because you are entitled to it. It is inappropriate to discuss queries not related to free and open source software, just because you find many technical people in the list. Every group has its own principles and values - and it is important to know what they believe in.

```
The tension between open source developer needs and
commercial product needs will never go away.
    ~ Eric Allman
```

1.18 References

1. RFC 1855.   October 1995.   Netiquette Guidelines. http://rfc.net/rfc1855.html.

2. Fedora Project Mailing List Guidelines. https://fedoraproject.org/wiki/Mailing_list_guidelines.

3. Moen, Rick, & Raymond, Eric S. 2006. How To Ask Questions The Smart Way. http://www.catb.org/~esr/faqs/smart-questions.html.

4. Indian Linux User's Group-Chennai guidelines. http://ilugc.in/mailinglist-guidelines.

5. Debian Community Guidelines. http://people.debian.org/~enrico/dcg/.