Listserv How To's:

How to send mail to LISTSERV

In the following sections, you will see numerous references to "sending commands to LISTSERV". All LISTSERV commands are sent to the server by email. You would create a new message and address it to **LISTSERV@LISTSERV.FREDONIA.EDU**.

How to join a mailing list

Given the list name "listname", joining a list is very easy. The command that needs to be sent is:
subscribe listname firstname lastname
for example
subscribe proftalk John Doe

When you join a list, you are sent a little pamphlet, which looks very boring and does not seem to have anything interesting to say about the list itself. Do not discard it! Treat it like a warranty card -- no immediate value, but you never know when you might need it. You should make a new folder in your mail program for these little pamphlets and search it whenever you have an administrative question about a mailing list, instead of contacting the list owner directly. Although they do look the same from a distance, the pamphlets are customized to the individual lists and do not contain the same information. Finally, saving them in a dedicated mail folder makes it very easy for you to know what mailing lists you are subscribed to, and when you joined.

Leaving the list

You can leave the list at any time by sending a SIGNOFF command to the host server (in this case, LISTSERV@LISTSERV.FREDONIA.EDU):

signoff proftalk

LISTSERV does not need your name for a signoff command, so there is no need to type it.

How To Send Mail To A List

Posting new messages

To post a new message to the list you send mail to the list address using the same procedure as when you send mail to other people. Your mail program does not need to know that you are sending to a list.

The list address is the name of the list, followed by the name of the machine where it is hosted, in our example:

PROFTALK@LISTSERV.FREDONIA.EDU

Depending on how the list is set up, LISTSERV may or may not send you a copy of the messages you post. No matter which behavior the list owner chose to have by default, you can always instruct LISTSERV to behave the way you want it to. This is explained in the "How to set your subscription options" section later in this document.

Replying to messages from the list
The best way to respond to messages from the list is by using the "reply" function of your mail program (which is sometimes called "answer", "respond" or something similar). This way the message subject is preserved and the other subscribers can see that your message is a reply to the original question. You can of course post a new message, but you will then have to retype the subject, and if you enter something slightly different people may not realize it is a reply to a previous post. There is no universally correct place to send your reply. Most of the time, your reply will be useful to at least one other person on the list, but on the other hand that might be only a small fraction of the list membership, and some people might complain that you are wasting their time (some people say that anyway, so don't worry unless several people seem to share this opinion).

In general, if your reply is short there is little harm in sending it to everyone: it does not take much time to discard a message which is not interesting. On the other hand, if your reply is a 2000-line paper you wrote on the subject it might not be a good idea to send it to the list unless you are sure everyone is interested. Some people have to pay for mail by the character, or to download it to a personal computer through a low-speed modem. The best thing to do in that case is to send a short message to the list saying you wrote this paper, and that people who are interested can contact you for a copy.

Always think before sending any message!
Ask yourself a few simple questions:

- Who is getting the message? Carefully check who your mail program intends to send the message to, and make sure this is where you wanted it to go. It is easy to click on the wrong icon, press the wrong key, misunderstand the meaning of a help file, or otherwise do something that will make your computer send the message to the wrong people.
- Have you removed extraneous information not germane to the discussion, such as copies of previous postings included by my mail program or long signature files?

How To Upset People You Don't Even Know

You should keep in mind that for any given list, there are at least three slightly different addresses, all of which point to different places and all of which are meant for specific purposes. Some people who inhabit lists have a tendency to get upset when you send LISTSERV commands to the list address, for instance, or you may wonder why that posting you mailed to LISTSERV keeps coming back with notes like "Unknown command - "HELLO". Try HELP." The following information intended to help you sort out these different addresses.

If you want to send a message to all the PEOPLE on the mailing list, the right address to use is:

listname@hostname
(example: PROFTALK@ LISTSERV.FREDONIA.EDU)

If you want to send a COMMAND for the computer to execute, the right address is:

LISTSERV@hostname
(example: LISTSERV@ LISTSERV.FREDONIA.EDU)

If you want to contact the person who owns the mailing list, write to: listname-Request@hostname
(example: PROFTALK-Request@ LISTSERV.FREDONIA.EDU)

Please note that if you send a message to the person who manages the mailing list you may receive a confirmation message that begins like this (to remind you that it is not the right address to send commands to):

> *Your message to PROFTALK-request@LISTSERV.FREDONIA.EDU has been forwarded to*
>
> *the "list owners" (the people who manage the PROFTALK list)....*

How To See Who Is On The List

To see who is subscribed to the list, send the REVIEW command to LISTSERV following this example:

REVIEW PROFTALK

If the list owner allows this option, LISTSERV will return a copy of the "list header" and a list of all the subscribers. The list header contains the title of the list, various configuration parameters, and a short description of what the list is about. There are also some statistics about the list, after the name and address of the last subscriber, and there may be a mention of "concealed" subscribers. See the description of the CONCEAL/NOCONCEAL option below.

By default, the list of subscribers will be sorted by host name, i.e. people whose account is on the same machine will be next to each other. This is mostly for historical reasons (some list owners have programs that require the list to be in that order). You can also ask LISTSERV to sort the list by surname:

REVIEW PROFTALK BY NAME

Where to report problems

If you still have any problems or questions, please email the List Manager who will be happy to help.

This is an excerpt of the L-Soft international, Inc. General User's Guide to LISTSERV®, version 1.8c customized to Fredonia's Listserv server.