

# Internet Services: Mailing Lists

Joining a mailing list is one way to connect with people on the Internet. There are thousands of mailing lists in existence, covering topics from hematology to home brewing, medical informatics to *Grey's Anatomy* (television show). To join a list, all you need is an email account and the subscription address of the list. (NOTE: Not all lists open to everyone. Some lists are only open to a select group of people, such as members of an organization.)

Mailing lists work by distributing email automatically among its members; a copy of each message sent to a list is sent to every member of that list.

## Types of Mailing Lists

Many of the routine tasks of maintaining a mailing list are handled by special software. (In some cases, a human do them.) The easiest way to determine what kind of software a list uses is to look at the form of the subscription address.

Type	Form of the Subscription Address	Format of Subscription Request
Listserv	<i>listserv@computer.domain.name</i>	subscribe listname firstname lastname
Listproc	<i>listproc@computer.domain.name</i>	subscribe listname firstname lastname
Majordomo	<i>majordomo@computer.domain.name</i>	subscribe listname youremailaddress
Mailbase	<i>mailbase@computer.domain.name</i>	join listname firstname lastname
Human	<i>listname-request@computer.domain.name</i>	No special format

The latest development in mailing list technology is the Web-based list. Web-based services such as [groups.yahoo.com](http://groups.yahoo.com) allow people to subscribe, unsubscribe, and otherwise manage mailing list subscriptions using a Web interface. They tend to be easier to use because they use Web forms instead of commands.

*NOTE: The format of subscription and other routine requests is important for mailing lists maintained by software. If the format of the message is incorrect, the system will return your message.*

Sometimes you will hear people refer to mailing lists as “listservs.” This is because one of the most popular mailing management software programs is Listserv. (Like people calling all adhesive bandages “Band-Aids”, even though Band-Aid is a brand of adhesive bandage.) Get in the habit of calling mailing lists “mailing lists,” unless you are actually referring to a list using Listserv software.

## Two Email Addresses to Remember

No matter what kind of mailing list is being used, there are always two email addresses to keep straight: a subscription address and a list address. For this table, Listserv is given as an example, but most types of lists follow this structure.

Form of Email Address	Subscription Address	List Address
<b>Types of requests/messages</b>	Those dealing with your subscription to the mailing list (see below)	Anything to be distributed to everyone on the list
<b>Special format for requests</b>	Yes	No

send mail to each address. Messages sent to the subscription address that should have gone to the list address will be returned to you. Messages sent to the list address that should have gone to the subscription address will not be processed and may spur impolite messages from other list members!

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## Finding Interesting Mailing Lists

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There are many ways to identify mailing lists of interest: ask colleagues or coworkers; review the professional literature for new and established mailing lists; check books such as the *Internet Yellow Pages*; check web sites such as Tile.net (<http://tile.net/>) or Yahoo! ([dir.yahoo.com/Computers\\_and\\_Internet/Internet/Chats\\_and Forums /Mailing\\_Lists/](http://dir.yahoo.com/Computers_and_Internet/Internet/Chats_and_Forum/Mailing_Lists/)). [groups.yahoo.com](http://groups.yahoo.com) has searchable directories for lists run from their individual sites.

## Subscribing/Unsubscribing Procedure

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Once an interesting list has been identified, send an email message to the *subscription address* (not the list address) in the appropriate format. If the subscription is successful, there will be one or more welcome messages. *It is important to keep these messages; print them off and stick them in a file for future reference.* They will, for example, describe the different ways to modify the subscription and how to get help. Sometimes they will give information about the list topic.

Email accounts have limited space and some lists have a lot of traffic (daily email messages). It is a good practice to join one list at a time, to determine how busy the list actually is. Some lists generate too much mail to handle. If so, simply unsubscribe.

## Some Commands Used by Listserv (to be sent to the subscription address)

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These are some of the Listserv commands. For other types of lists, these commands may or may not be available. The list of options that are actually available for your list will be described in the welcome message. The format for the available commands will also be found there.

<b>subscribe</b>	Become a member of the list. [ <b>subscribe listname firstname lastname</b> ]
<b>unsubscribe</b>	Get off the list. [ <b>unsubscribe listname</b> ]
<b>repro</b>	Have Listserv send you a copy of the messages you send to the list. This is useful to see if the message was distributed and not damaged in the process. [ <b>set listname repro</b> ]
<b>ack norepro</b>	Have Listserv send you a short message acknowledging receipt and distribution of messages sent to the list. It will not send you a copy of your own messages. [ <b>set listname ack norepro</b> ]
<b>noack norepro</b>	Have Listserv to send no acknowledgment and no copy of the message [ <b>set listname noack norepro</b> ]
<b>query</b>	Get information about your subscription [ <b>query listname</b> ]
<b>review</b>	Receive a list of all members of the list [ <b>review listname</b> ]
<b>conceal</b>	Remove your name from the review list. This does not unsubscribe you from the list [ <b>set listname conceal</b> ]
<b>nomail</b>	Temporarily stop getting mail from the list without unsubscribing. This is useful when you go on vacation and will not be checking your email. [ <b>set listname nomail</b> ]
<b>mail</b>	Begin receiving mail again after having set the list to no-mail. [ <b>set listname mail</b> ]
<b>info refcard</b>	Receive a message containing a description of all Listserv commands [ <b>info refcard</b> ]

## Reading/Replying to Messages from the List

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List messages will appear in your email account. Read them as you would any email message.

NOTE: Be careful when replying to a message. Depending on the email program, **Reply** may reply just to the sender of the message or it might send the reply back to the whole list. People have caused themselves great embarrassment by accidentally sending a personal message to the whole list!