

The Ten Mail Commandments

Can people even mail?

arto

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pWeapon

Introduction

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So I wrote ten mail commandments for you to get your game on track.

Rule number 1: signatures

Good or bad?

Hi mate, how's it going?

--

arto

Backend Engineer

Big Tech Company

No one cares

E: arto@example.org

P: +393284567890

Good or bad?

Hi mate, how's it going?

--

arto

E: arto@example.org

P: +393284567890

Why?

RFC 1855 [1] clearly states that:

If you include a signature keep it short. Rule of thumb is no longer than 4 lines. Remember that many people pay for connectivity by the minute, and the longer your message is, the more they pay.

How to (Thunderbird)

The screenshot shows the Thunderbird account configuration window. On the left is a tree view of settings categories. The 'jenacct@example.com' category is selected and highlighted with a red box. The main area shows the configuration for this account. A red box highlights the 'Signature text' section, which includes a checkbox for 'Use HTML', a large text area for the signature, and checkboxes for attaching signatures from files or vCards. The 'Outgoing Server (SMTP)' is set to 'Example SMTP server - smtp.example.com'. At the bottom right are 'Cancel', 'OK', and 'Manage Identities...' buttons.

Account Name:

Default Identity

Each account has an identity, which is the information that other people see when they read your messages.

Your Name:

Email Address:

Reply-to Address:

Organization:

Signature text: Use HTML (e.g., bold)

Attach the signature from a file instead (text, HTML, or image):

Attach my vCard to messages

Outgoing Server (SMTP):

How to (neomutt)

```
# Neomutt config file  
set signature = "~/arto.sig"
```

Rule number 2: plain text

De facto standard I

The Linux kernel mailing list simply rejects any HTML e-mail [2].

HTML e-mail - even when it is a multi-part mail with a corresponding plain/-text section - is unconditionally rejected by mailing lists.

De facto standard II

The MediaWiki mailing list etiquette prohibits their use [3].

Don't send HTML email to the list, use text only. Also, don't send dual-format mails containing both text and HTML.

De facto standard III

And the curl maintainer really hates them [4].

*Please switch off those HTML encoded messages. You can mail all those **funny mails** to your friends.*

We speak plain text mails.

How to (Thunderbird)

The screenshot shows the 'Account Settings' window for 'jorge.castro@gmail.com'. The left sidebar lists various settings categories, with 'Composition & Addressing' selected. The main pane is titled 'Composition & Addressing' and is divided into two sections: 'Composition' and 'Addressing'. A red arrow points to the 'Automatically quote the original message when replying' checkbox, which is checked. Below this checkbox, there are two dropdown menus: 'Then, start my reply below the quote' and 'and place my signature below the quote (recommended)'. The 'Addressing' section includes a radio button selected for 'Use my global LDAP server preferences for this account' and another radio button for 'Use a different LDAP server:'. Below the second radio button is a dropdown menu set to 'None' and an 'Edit Directories...' button.

Account Settings

▼ jorge.castro@gmail.com

- Server Settings
- Copies & Folders
- Composition & Addressing
- Junk Settings
- Synchronization & Storage
- Return Receipts
- Security

▼ Local Folders

- Junk Settings
- Disk Space
- Outgoing Server (SMTP)

Composition & Addressing

Composition

- Compose messages in HTML format
- Automatically quote the original message when replying
 - Then,
 - and place my signature
- Include signature for replies
- Include signature for forwards

Addressing

When looking up addresses:

- Use my global LDAP server preferences for this account
- Use a different LDAP server:
 -
 -

How to (neomutt)

Neomutt sends plain text emails by default.

Rule number 3: top posting

A weird practice

Humans tend to read top to bottom, try to read this conversation.

A: Because it messes up the order in which people normally read text.

Q: Why is top-posting so bad?

A: Top-posting.

Q: What is the most annoying thing in email?

Corporate communication

The Linux kernel maintainers have an interesting point on this topic [2].

*If you reply to an e-mail on a mailing list do not top-post. Top-posting is the preferred style in **corporate communications**.*

How to (all)

Text is appended to your reply to allow YOU to read it in a chronological fashion, however, you should delete delete the lines that you don't need as you shape your reply.

Rule number 4: line wrap

Leave space for the receiving end

Both the LKML netiquette [2] and RFC 2822 [5] suggest to wrap lines at 78 characters.

Text-based e-mail should not exceed 80 columns per line of text. Consult the documentation of your e-mail client to enable proper line breaks around column 78.

How to (Thunderbird/Neomutt)

Both Neomutt and Thunderbird automatically default to wrapping lines after 72 characters when plain text mode is enabled.

Rule number 5: forking

By popular demand

Even though there is no RFC for how to fork a thread whose topic pivoted, we usually do so by changing the subject and appending the old subject in parentheses.

```
$new_subject (was: $old_subject)
```

Rule number 6: links

Link referencing

We can use Markdown link references by declaring a reference at the end of the mail body like this:

```
[1]: pweapon.org
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```
[Best hackerspace in Parma][1]
```

Or without brackets, like in scientific articles:

```
Best hackerspace in Parma [1]
```

Thank you for your attention!

-  S. Hambridge, “Netiquette Guidelines,” RFC 1855, Oct. 1995. [Online]. Available: <https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc1855>
-  Linux kernel developers, “Notes about netiquette,” <https://people.kernel.org/tglx/>, Sep. 2019, [Online; accessed 07-September-2023].
-  MediaWiki developers, “Mailing list etiquette,” https://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/Mailing_list_etiquette, Jun. 2019, [Online; accessed 07-September-2023].

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-  P. Resnick, “Internet Message Format,” RFC 2822, Apr. 2001. [Online]. Available: <https://www.rfc-editor.org/info/rfc2822>
-  C. Wright, <https://www.solipsys.co.uk/new/WhyTopPostingHasWon.html>, Jun. 2018, [Online; accessed 07-September-2023].