The Ten Mail Commandments

Can people even mail?

arto September 8, 2023

pWeapon

Introduction

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

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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
```

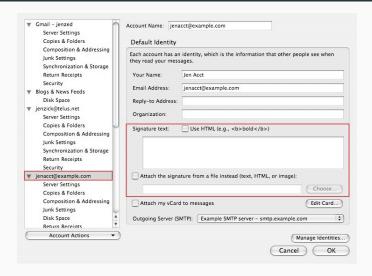
Why?

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.

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How to (Thunderbird)



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 multipart 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.

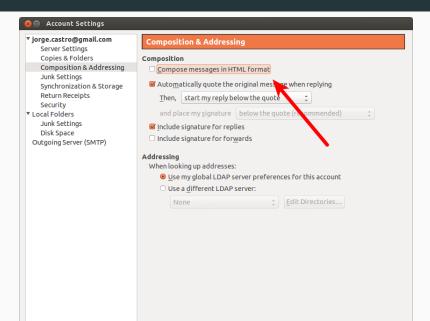
De facto standard III

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)



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 receving 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]

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[1]: pweapon.org

Then I reference it like either this:

[Best hackerspace in Parma][1]

Or without brackets, like in scientific articles:

Best hackerspace in Parma [1]

Thank you for your attention!

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