MailMan: User Guide for List Subscribers

Aurora University
Information Services
Technical Bulletin #X
Revised 8.10.99

Aurora University has recently adopted the GNU MailMan mail list manager program. MailMan is a web-based program that will allow the university to more effectively use e-mail for courses, departmental communications, and interactions within campus groups and clubs.

MailMan will not affect your normal e-mail operations. As you become a subscriber to various lists you will begin receiving e-mail traffic through the server. All you need do to participate is read the mail as you normally would and reply to the messages as you normally would. In addition to basic mail list services, MailMan provides a number or web-based features that will make your participation in lists more valuable. This document is intended for people who are members of a MailMan list and who want to get the most out of the new system. Information Services provides a separate guide for list managers, the persons who "own" lists and are responsible for list maintenance should read Technical Bulletin #X+1..

Contents

What is a mail list?.....1
Mail list terms.....1
Getting information from the list server.....2
Doing things with the MailMan MLM.....3
Subscribing.....3
Setting your list options.....4
Unsubscribing and accessing other lists.....4
Password options.....5
General subscription options 5
Participating in the list.....6
Mail list archives.....7
Using MailMan without the web...7

What is a mail list?

A mail list is simply a list of e-mail addresses of people that are interested in the same subject, are members of the same work group, or who are taking a class together. When a member of the list sends a note to the group's special address, the e-mail is broadcast to all of the members of the list. The key advantage of a mail list over things such as web-based discussion is that as new messages become available they are immediately delivered to the participants' mailboxes. MailMan, the subject of this document, is a program that will make it easy for your to customize your participation in lists that you will be using at the University.

Mail list terms

Before we look further at MailMan there are some key terms that it will help to understand.

- A **mail list** is simply a collections of e-mail addresses that will be receiving mail on a particular topic. Every mail list has a **list name** and a **list address**. For example: the mail list for the course EDU 765 would be named edu765 and would have the address edu765@lux.aurora.edu. For historic reasons mail lists are also sometimes referred to as “listserves”.

- MailMan is actually a **Mail List Manager** (**MLM**). The mail list manager is a program on the server that makes it easy to create and remove lists, to add or remove users from lists, and to do things such as make message digests or maintain message archives. As a list subscriber you will only be using the mail list

manager to modify your personal account preferences. Examples of other list managers that you may hear about are Majordomo or LISTSERV.

- Joining or being added to a list is called **subscribing**. When you leave a list it is called **unsubscribing**.

- Many MailMan lists will be **archived**. When a list is archived the mail list manager will store a copy of list traffic on the web server that you will be able to access with your browser.

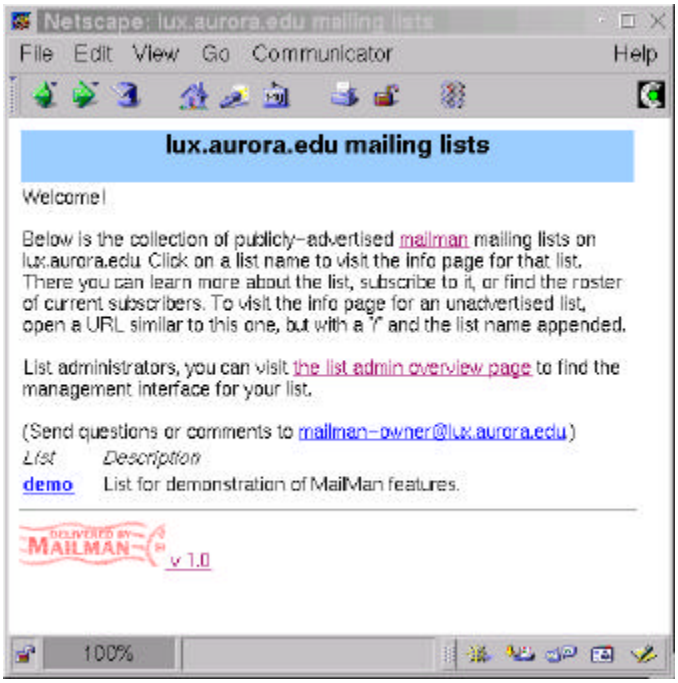
- Sometimes mail lists will produce a lot of traffic and the additional traffic can be a nuisance in your mailbox. One of the options that you will be able to set allows for the delivery of a **digest**. If you request digest delivery then MailMan will store all of the messages that the list receives and send them to you bundled together as one large message every day.

Getting information from the list server

The MailMan web interface allows you to visit a mail list server and find out about the lists that the server hosts. Keep in mind, however, that MailMail will not show you lists that the managers have opted to keep private. To access the directory of lists tell your web browser to go to:

`name.of.server/mailman/listinfo`

At Aurora University our list servers can be found at `www.aurora.edu/mailman/listinfo` and `lux.aurora.edu/mailman/listinfo`. Note that for the purposes of this document we will be working with a mail list that is named "demo."



Every mail list on the server, both public and private, has its own mail list information page. When you go to the server's main list information page you will see a listing of the publicly available lists along with a brief description of each. To access the information page for a particular list (including subscription information and the list archives) just click on the name of the list. If you want to access a private list that is not advertised (such as a list for a course) then you will need to go directly there using the following address format:

name.of.server/mailman/listinfo/NameOfTheList

If, for example, you are trying to reach the demo list as shown in the graphic above, you could either click on the list's name or type in "lux.aurora.edu/mailman/listinfo/demo".

It is important that you understand how to get to a mail list's information page as that is the gateway through which all mailman features are accessed. When you join a list or are added to the list membership by the owner the list manager software automatically sends you a note telling you the URL that you need to go to in order to access the information page. On most lists the list manager will also send you a monthly reminder with the web address of the list information screen. If you have difficulty finding the location of the information page for a particular list you should contact the list owner or the information services department.

Doing things with the MailMan list manager

This section will detail some of the things the you can do with MailMan through the web interface. This assumes that you are able to access your list's information page either directly or through the directory of lists discussed in the above section. In the event that you are unable to access the list's web interface but still have access to e-mail, alternate instructions can be found the this document's final section: *using MailMan without the web*.

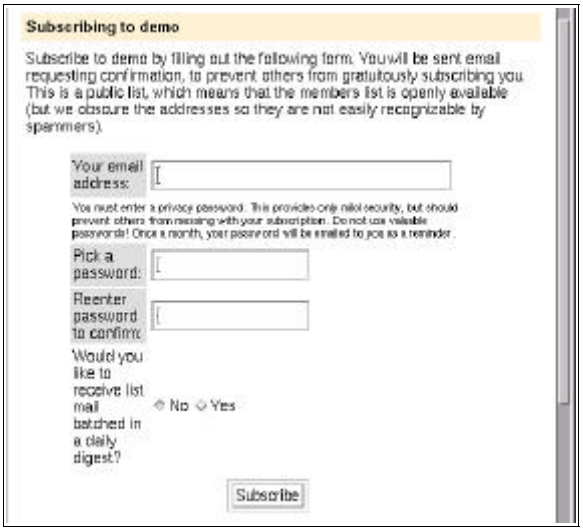
When you arrive at the information page of a list you will see information divided into sections. The first section directs you to the list's archives if they are available. See the archive section below for detailed information. The list info page also tells you how to send a note to the list. Note that the conventional list configuration prevents postings to the list from people who have not subscribed: so if you try to send a note to the list before you join it the message will probably be rejected and returned to you.

At the bottom of the list information page is a section for people who are already subscribers. The first option is a button that allows you to see the people who are subscribed to the list. Note that some list owners disable this function in which case it will not appear on this page. Other lists make this option available only to individuals who are members of the list - in which case you will be prompted for your e-mail address and list password after requesting subscriber information.

The final item on the page allows list subscribers to change their configuration information. Members of the list can type their e-mail address into the box (they need to use the address that the mail list delivers mail to if they have multiple addresses) and then click the Edit Options button. Details on this feature are in the List Options section below.

Subscribing

Subscribing to a list is simple and includes safeguards to prevent abuse of the list. In the subscription section type your e-mail address and then select a password. The password will be used later when you want to log in and change your personal settings.



When you fill out the form you also have the option to receive mail from the list batched in a daily digest. This is convenient if you are a member of a number of lists or if the list that you are joining has a lot of traffic. If you change your mind you will be able to change the digest option at a later time as detailed in the "options" section below.

After you supply your e-mail address and password you should press the subscribe button to add yourself to the list. Your addition to the list is not, however, immediate. After you submit the form MailMan will send an e-mail message to the address that you used to subscribe. The message that you receive will ask you to confirm your subscription request (this is to prevent someone from maliciously adding you to mail lists that you do not want to join). When you receive the confirmation request just follow the instructions - the simplest thing being just to hit the "reply" button in your mail program. If you send the message back without altering the subject line (the Re: added by your mailer is OK) then your confirmation will be accepted.

After successfully confirming your subscription MailMan will send you a welcome note. The note will include the following important information:

- The URL that takes you directly to the list's information page.
- The URL that takes you directly to your personal settings page.
- Your password.

Please keep this message in a safe place. You will need the information that it contains if you ever want modify your personal settings or remove yourself from the list. For most lists this information will be mailed to you as a monthly reminder, but just to be safe you should always keep the original.

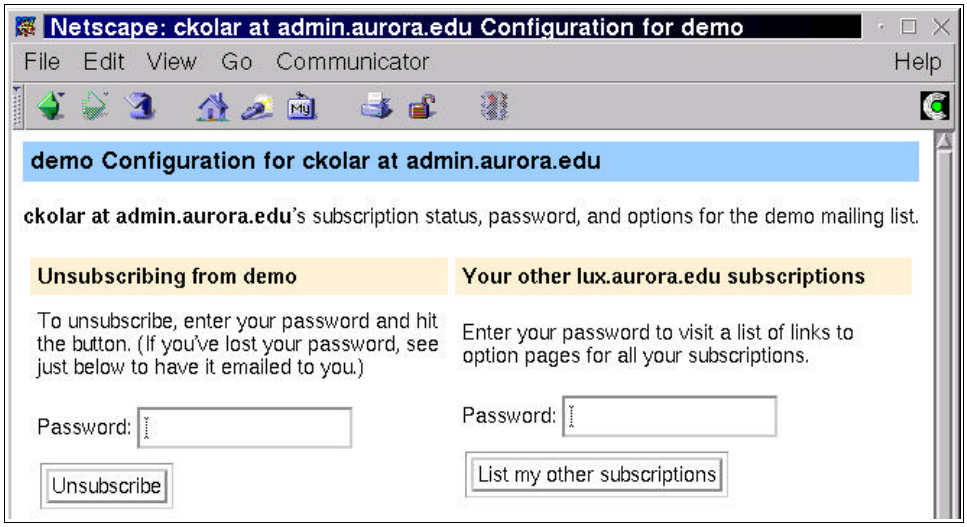
Setting your list options

Once you have subscribed to a MailMan list there are number of things that you can to do administer and customize your subscription. The most straightforward means of accessing your subscription options is by going to the URL delivered in your welcome message. If you do not have it handy, then you can go directly to the list information page if you know the name of the list. Tell your browser to open:

http://name.of.server/mailman/listinfo/NameOfList

In our examples, you could go to lux.aurora.edu/mailman/listinfo/demo. At the bottom of the list information page is a blank that will allow you to type in your e-mail address and click the edit options button. Note that if you have multiple e-mail accounts you need to supply the address that you are using as a member of the list whose options you are trying to edit. When you reach your settings the configuration screen is divided into four sections.

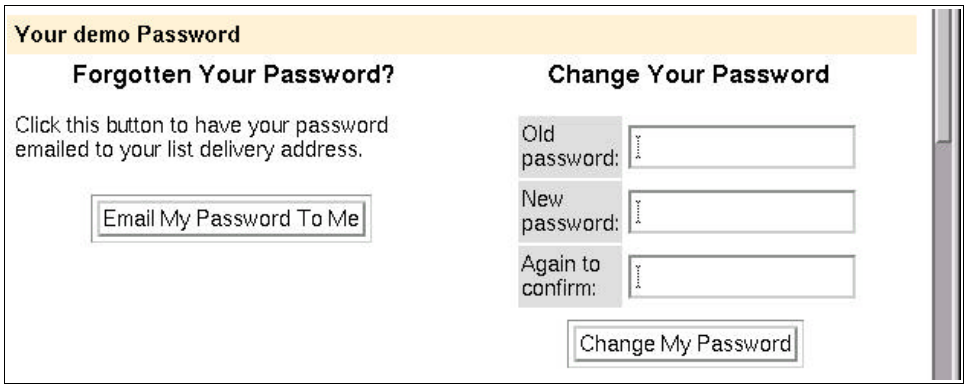
Unsubscribing and accessing other lists



The first section of the configuration screen is straightforward. If you want to remove yourself from the mail list then all you need do is put your password in the blank and click the unsubscribe button. The password is required to prevent other people from removing you from the list without your knowing.

It is likely that you will be subscribed so several lists that reside on the same server. MailMan allows you to jump from one configuration screen to the other through the use of the "other subscriptions" feature. This is useful, for example, if you are going on vacation and need to change to the no mail option on several lists while away.

Password options



The password section of the configuration screen provides you with two options. First, it allows you to look up your password if you have forgotten it. Note that for security purposes it will mail your password to the account that you have registered - preventing unauthorized access to your password.

The second section allows you to change your password. To change your list password you need to type in your old password once and then the new password twice. It is a good security habit to change all of your passwords once a month; it is also a good idea to change your password from the computer generated random password if you were added to the list by the list administrator.

There are two additional things that you should know about MailMan's handling of passwords. As a convenience to the user, the list manager is configured to send you a monthly reminder of the lists that you are subscribed to, the list information URLs of those lists, and your personal passwords for those lists. When you receive this reminder you do not need to do anything, but it is a good idea to keep the note in case you want to make modifications to your subscriptions. It is also important to keep in mind that you have a separate password for each of the lists that you are subscribe to, even though they may be on the same mail server. For convenience you may visit each list and set your password to something common, but changing your password on one list will not change your password on others on the same server. If you ever forget a password, remember that you can request that it be sent to you from the list information page.

General subscription options

At the bottom of the configuration screen are the general subscription options for the list as they are set for your account. When you first load this page the options reflect your current settings. You may make changes to these settings and then put them into effect by typing in your password at the bottom of the screen and then clicking on the "submit my changes" button.

Here is a summary of the settings and a description of what they mean:

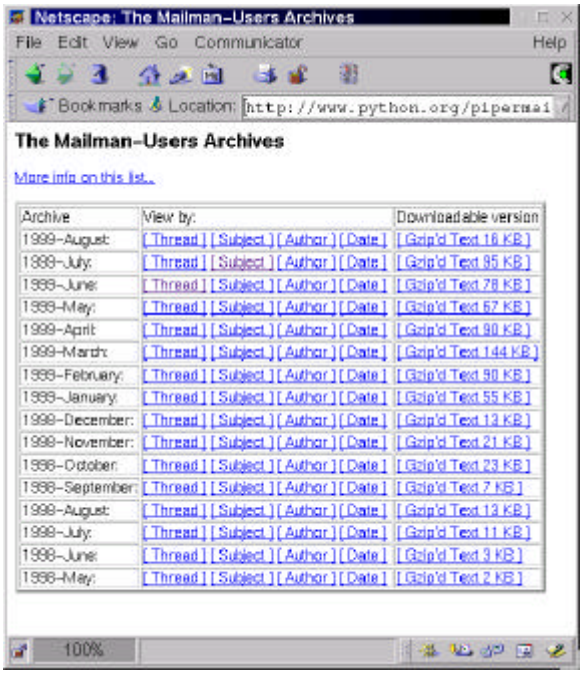
Option	***Available Settings***
Disable mail delivery	You need to look at this setting carefully if you are thinking about changing it. The settings may mean the reverse of what you think they do: • **Off**: mail delivery *is not* disabled. "Off" means that you will receive mail. • **On**: mail deliver *is* disabled. "On" means that you will not receive mail.

Option	*Available Settings*
	• **Off**: messages sent to the list will be delivered to your one at a time. • **On**: mail sent to the list will be collected by the server, batched together, and then mailed to you daily as a single, large message.
Get MIME or Plain Text Digests	MIME is a way of sending mail that allows for document formatting and the easy shipping of attachments. Most modern mail readers can handle MIME mail; older, text-based mail readers may have problems. • : digests will be sent in MIME-compliant format. • : use this setting if your mail reader has problems with MIME digests.
Receive posts you send to the list?	• **Yes**: messages that you send to the list will be sent to your account. **No**: you will not receive a copy of messages that you send to the list. Some people find copies of their own messages annoying, this option will prevent then from having to read their own words.
Receive acknowledgment mail when you send mail to the list?	**No**: when you send mail to the list, you will have to assume that your message has been successfully received by the list manager and is on its way. • : when you send a note to the list the list manager will send acknowledgment of its receipt. This is particularly helpful in two instances: when you are subscribed to the digested version and will not see your own posting until the following day; and when the list is moderated and the moderator may not review/forward your note to the list for some time.
Conceal yourself from subscriber list?	• No: people who have access to the "view list members" option will be able to see that you are a member of the list. •

Participating in the list

[This will be a short section on how to be a good list participant and how not to mail personal replies back to the entire list.]

Mail list archives



Most list managers will choose to activate MailMan's powerful archival features to make list traffic available to members. MailMan makes it archives available through each list's information page. Keep in mind that the list manager may have chosen not to archive a particular list to which you belong. Also keep in mind that it is a general practice to make the list archive available only to individuals who are subscribed to the group.

If the archive is "open" then you will be able to go straight in from the information page. If the archive is for subscribers only then you will be prompted for your e-mail address (make sure to use the address that the list knows you as) and your list password. Once in, you will be shown a historical listing of list traffic similar to the one shown at right.

The default setting for the archive is to divide messages by month. Do not be surprised, however, if you see some other division of the archive contents: the list manager decides how things will be divided up. There are different viewing options for each month:

- **Thread**: separates each topic that was discussed from one another and then displays the notes that are part of each "thread" following one another in an indented fashion. This view is the best to use if you want an idea of how conversation on a particular topic progressed.

- **Subject**: sorts all postings alphabetically by the subject line. This view is useful for finding a particular topic, but it will not show the relationships in a visual fashion as in the Thread view.

- **Author**: sorts all postings alphabetically based on the name of the author.

- **Date**: sorts all postings by the date that they were delivered to the list.

The final option allows you to download a Gzip'd version of the archive text. Gzip is a compression utility whose files end in .gz. Most "zip" utilities are able to open Gzip'd files. When you download and unzip this file you will have the entire contents of the archive's period.

After you have chosen how you wish to view the archive you will see the headers of the notes displayed according to your specified criterion. To read an individual note just click on the subject line. When the note appears there will be additional navigational information allowing you to see the previous or next messages (as you had them sorted), or to request the listing of all of the notes again sorted by a different criterion.

Using MailMan without the web

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[This will be a short section explaining the non-web interface for
MailMan in human terms.]
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