



Assistive Technology Quick Reference Series

## E-Mail Discussion Lists

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### What is an E-mail Discussion List?

An E-mail discussion list is an electronic meeting place, where people with similar interests can exchange information and opinions. It is not “live” interaction, as you would experience in a chat room, rather people send E-mail messages to an administrator or account, then the messages are posted to the members from the discussion list address. It might be described as a sort of Internet club.

### Where do I find out about lists that cover my interest areas?

Talk to people with similar interests to find out if they have any leads to a discussion list. Additionally, there are Internet resources that can assist you. Lists of interest groups can be found at <http://tile.net>, <http://paml.net> and <http://www.lsoft.com/lists/listref.html>. You can also search for topics of interest through <http://www.dejanews.com>. Several web sites actively keep track of the various lists. You might want to try a search using <http://www.webcom.com/impulse/list.html> or <http://alabanza.com/kabacoff/Inter-Links/listserv.html> to find pertinent groups. The Children's Disability List of Lists - <http://www.comeunity.com/disability/speclists.html> - includes links and subscription information for many lists pertaining to children with disabilities.

### You mentioned an administrator or account. What's the difference?

There are two kinds of discussion lists. One is a manually administered list. This means that messages sent to the list go to a real person – an administrator. The administrator saves the messages from list members, then periodically sends all the messages received to all the list members. The other type is an automated list. Messages from list members are sent to a storage area in a computer, then periodically forwarded to the list membership. With an automated list, there are two accounts – a list account and a server account. The server account is the administrative department for the list, and is the account address you use to subscribe, report problems, and unsubscribe. There are two main types of automated lists – listserv and majordomo - depending upon the software used to administer the account.

### What does a list administrator do?

Sometimes an administrator just collects messages and sends them onward. This is called an unmoderated list. Sometimes an administrator reads through the messages, then picks out certain messages and only sends them onward. This is called a moderated list.

### Why wouldn't a moderator send a message to the list members? Isn't that censorship?

There are general rules you have to follow as a list member. These might designate the topics that are discussed by the members, the format of messages, or rules of etiquette. If you joined a list to learn more about cooking, you might not appreciate receiving a message discussing rock formations in Texas. Sometimes message length has to be regulated so the members won't use up computer space too quickly. And nasty messages are never tolerated.

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**If there isn't a moderator, no one is there to censor messages. Does that mean I can send any message I want?**

A moderator isn't the only one looking out for problems. The list membership will quickly reprimand members who don't follow the rules. If there are enough complaints to the server account, a list member may be removed from the list account. Particularly abusive members might even be reported to his or her Internet provider.

**I want to sign up for a discussion list membership. How do I do that?**

If you know there is a list administrator, a simple E-mail requesting to be added to the list is often sufficient. If the list is automated, you send an E-mail message to the server account.

Listserv lists:

Leave the Subject: line blank in your E-mail header  
The body of the message should contain the single line:  
subscribe {listname} {your first name} {your last name}  
(or) unsubscribe {listname} {your first name} {last name}

Majordomo lists:

Leave the Subject: line blank in your E-mail header  
The body of the message should contain the single line:  
subscribe {listname} (LEAVE OUT FIRST & LAST NAME)  
(or) unsubscribe {listname}

**Can I go to the list and read the messages any time I want?**

People on a list don't have to go to a special place to read current messages. Instead, once you are a member, the messages come to you! You receive list interactions in the form of E-mail messages. Simply open the messages as you do your regular E-mail. Some lists keep archives of past discussions that can be read later. Lists with archives will generally include instructions on how to access them in the list FAQ file.

**I don't know anyone on the list. Do I have to send messages to the list, or can I just read what everyone else writes?**

Go ahead and read! You don't have to post any messages if you don't want to. Being a member and never posting a message is called LURKING and is perfectly acceptable. In fact, sometimes it is a good idea to just "lurk" for a few days before joining in. It allows you time to learn about how the list functions. By the way, it seems list members don't remain strangers long. Don't be surprised if you find yourself especially interested in the postings of certain members – due to content, relevance of subjects to personal interests, or even their ability to tell good jokes – to a point you feel you know them well.

**What if someone asks a question I can answer? I don't necessarily want to tell everyone, especially if the question is very personal.**

An answer to an E-mail often should only be sent to the person who posted. Many messages are of no interest to other members. An example might be to send a congratulatory E-mail to a member who just graduated from college. Not everyone wants to read "Congratulations!" sent from one person to another. Imagine if 50 people sent the same message and that all were posted to the list! Sending an E-mail to one person is called sending a private message. Sending a private message is a good way to contact another list member. Be careful when you reply to a posting to be sure it is going where you want it to go. If you hit the "Reply" button, your message will be sent to the list and posted for all to see. To send a private message, you need to change the **To:** address to that of the individual you wish to contact.

## Disability Related Lists

There are many disability-related lists. Some of the following may be of interest to you:

**AMPUTEE**      Discussion list for amputees.

To subscribe, send E-mail to  
listserv@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU  
and in the body of the message, put  
subscribe amputee

**BLIND-L**      For discussion of computer use by the blind and visually impaired (without the GUI (graphical user interface)). Topics relating to use of VM/CMS and PCs are of particular interest; discussion of other systems is also welcome. The discussion of Windows and related GUI topics is not welcome, as there are other lists specifically for those topics.

To subscribe, send E-mail to  
listserv@LISTSERV.UARK.EDU  
and in the body of the message, put  
subscribe blind-l

### BLIND-ISSUES

Many things affect the lives of the blind and visually impaired in everyday life. This list deals with the major issues that the blind and visually impaired encounter each day. It's a place to vent frustrations or participate in a spirited debate.

Welcome topics include Blind Organizations and their goals, policies, conventions and treatment of social issues; transportation issues specific to the blind; discrimination shown by society toward the blind; the general anger and frustration which may be a part of every day life; or whatever else makes you a little hot under the collar.

To subscribe, send E-mail to  
listserv@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU  
and in the body of the message, put  
SUBSCRIBE BLIND-ISSUES Firstname Lastname

**DEAF-L**      For the discussion of questions, topics, and concerns related to deafness.

To subscribe, send E-mail to  
listserv@SIU.EDU  
and in the body of the message, put  
subscribe deaf-l

**DSSHE-L**      To facilitate the sharing of information among providers of services for students with disabilities in higher education. Issues discussed include: service delivery models, legal issues pertaining to the American's with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, publications of interest, assistive technology, counseling and career issues for students with disabilities, removing architectural and attitudinal barriers, grants and other

funding sources, athletics/physical education, testing and other academic accommodations, disability awareness programming, available resources, student development theory, and other issues that relate to students with disabilities and to higher education service providers.

To subscribe, send E-mail to  
listserv@LISTSERV.ACSU.BUFFALO.EDU  
and in the body of the message, put  
subscribe DSSHE-L

**Fibroland**      A weekly newsletter for those suffering with fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue.

To subscribe, send E-mail to  
fibroland-subscribe@onelist.com

**MOBILITY**      Mobility Disabilities List.

To subscribe, send E-mail to  
listserv@MAELSTROM.STJOHNS.EDU  
and in the body of the message, put  
subscribe mobility

**REHAB-RU**      Physical medicine and rehabilitation in rural and community settings is the topic of this list. The list is unmoderated and open to all who wish to share ideas, opinions, inquiries, and information related to the topic. The list is provided by the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, USA, which serves a large population in Appalachia and other rural areas of our region.

To subscribe, send email to  
listserv@LSV.UKY.EDU  
and in the body of the message, put  
subscribe rehab-ru

**Sorehand**      For discussion of typing injuries, Repetitive Stress Injuries/Disorder, Cumulative Trauma Disorder, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, Thoracic Outlet Syndrome, etc.

<http://www.ucsf.edu/~sorehand/>

To subscribe, send E-mail to  
listserv@ITSSRV1.UCSF.EDU  
and in the body of the message, put  
subscribe sorehand Firstname Lastname

## **Other Resources**

Contact the following resources for further information on finding E-mail discussion lists:

<http://www.techconnections.org> or 800-TEK-SEEK

<http://www.assistivetech.net> or 800-726-9119