

NAME

mail, **Mail**, **mailx** - send and receive mail

SYNOPSIS

mail [-dEiInv] [-s *subject*] [-c *cc-addr*] [-b *bcc-addr*] [-F] *to-addr* ... [-sendmail-option ...]

mail [-dEHiInNv] [-F] -f [*name*]

mail [-dEHiInNv] [-F] [-u *user*]

mail [-d] -e [-f *name*]

INTRODUCTION

The **mail** utility is an intelligent mail processing system, which has a command syntax reminiscent of `ed(1)` with lines replaced by messages.

The following options are available:

- v Verbose mode. The details of delivery are displayed on the user's terminal.
 - d Debugging mode. See the *debug* mail option for details.
 - e Test for the presence of mail in the (by default, system) mailbox. An exit status of 0 is returned if it has mail; otherwise, an exit status of 1 is returned.
 - H Write a header summary only, then exit.
 - E Do not send messages with an empty body. This is useful for piping errors from `cron(8)` scripts.
 - i Ignore tty interrupt signals. This is particularly useful when using **mail** on noisy phone lines.
 - I Force **mail** to run in interactive mode even when input is not a terminal. In particular, the '~' special character when sending mail is only active in interactive mode.
 - n Inhibit reading the system-wide *mail.rc* files upon startup.
 - N Inhibit the initial display of message headers when reading mail or editing a mail folder.
- s *subject*
Specify *subject* on command line. (Only the first argument after the -s flag is used as a subject; be careful to quote subjects containing spaces.)
- c *cc-addr*

Send carbon copies to *cc-addr* list of users. The *cc-addr* argument should be a comma-separated list of names.

-b *bcc-addr*

Send blind carbon copies to *bcc-addr* list of users. The *bcc-addr* argument should be a comma-separated list of names.

-f [*mbox*]

Read in the contents of your *mbox* (or the specified file) for processing; when you **quit**, **mail** writes undeleted messages back to this file.

-F Record the message in a file named after the first recipient. The name is the login-name portion of the address found first on the "To:" line in the mail header. Overrides the *record* variable, if set.

-u *user*

Is equivalent to:

```
mail -f /var/mail/user
```

Startup Actions

At startup time **mail** will execute commands in the system command files */usr/share/misc/mail.rc*, */usr/local/etc/mail.rc* and */etc/mail.rc* in order, unless explicitly told not to by the use of the **-n** option. Next, the commands in the user's personal command file *~/.mailrc* are executed. The **mail** utility then examines its command line options to determine whether a new message is to be sent, or whether an existing mailbox is to be read.

Sending Mail

To send a message to one or more people, **mail** can be invoked with arguments which are the names of people to whom the mail will be sent. You are then expected to type in your message, followed by a <control-D> at the beginning of a line. The section below *Replying To or Originating Mail*, describes some features of **mail** available to help you compose your letter.

Reading Mail

In normal usage **mail** is given no arguments and checks your mail out of the post office, then prints out a one line header of each message found. The current message is initially the first message (numbered 1) and can be printed using the **print** command (which can be abbreviated **p**). You can move among the messages much as you move between lines in *ed(1)*, with the commands **+** and **-** moving backwards and forwards, and simple numbers.

Disposing of Mail

After examining a message you can **delete** (**d**) the message or **reply** (**r**) to it. Deletion causes the **mail** program to forget about the message. This is not irreversible; the message can be **undeleted** (**u**) by giving its number, or the **mail** session can be aborted by giving the **exit** (**x**) command. Deleted messages will, however, usually disappear never to be seen again.

Specifying Messages

Commands such as **print** and **delete** can be given a list of message numbers as arguments to apply to a number of messages at once. Thus "delete 1 2" deletes messages 1 and 2, while "delete 1-5" deletes messages 1 through 5. The special name '*' addresses all messages, and '\$' addresses the last message; thus the command **top** which prints the first few lines of a message could be used in "top *" to print the first few lines of all messages.

Replying To or Originating Mail

You can use the **reply** command to set up a response to a message, sending it back to the person who it was from. Text you then type in, up to an end-of-file, defines the contents of the message. While you are composing a message, **mail** treats lines beginning with the character '~' specially. For instance, typing **~m** (alone on a line) will place a copy of the current message into the response right shifting it by a tabstop (see *indentprefix* variable, below). Other escapes will set up subject fields, add and delete recipients to the message and allow you to escape to an editor to revise the message or to a shell to run some commands. (These options are given in the summary below.)

Ending a Mail Processing Session

You can end a **mail** session with the **quit** (**q**) command. Messages which have been examined go to your *mbox* file unless they have been deleted in which case they are discarded. Unexamined messages go back to the post office. (See the **-f** option above).

Personal and System Wide Distribution Lists

It is also possible to create a personal distribution lists so that, for instance, you can send mail to "cohorts" and have it go to a group of people. Such lists can be defined by placing a line like

```
alias cohorts bill ozalp jkf mark kridle@ucbcory
```

in the file *.mailrc* in your home directory. The current list of such aliases can be displayed with the **alias** command in **mail**. System wide distribution lists can be created by editing */etc/mail/aliases*, see *aliases(5)* and *sendmail(8)*; these are kept in a different syntax. In mail you send, personal aliases will be expanded in mail sent to others so that they will be able to **reply** to the recipients. System wide aliases are not expanded when the mail is sent, but any reply returned to the machine will have the system wide alias expanded as all mail goes through *sendmail(8)*.

Network Mail (ARPA, UUCP, Berknet)

The **mail** utility has a number of options which can be set in the *.mailrc* file to alter its behavior; thus "set askcc" enables the *askcc* feature. (These options are summarized below.)

SUMMARY

(Adapted from the *Mail Reference Manual*.)

Each command is typed on a line by itself, and may take arguments following the command word. The command need not be typed in its entirety -- the first command which matches the typed prefix is used. For commands which take message lists as arguments, if no message list is given, then the next message forward which satisfies the command's requirements is used. If there are no messages forward of the current message, the search proceeds backwards, and if there are no good messages at all, **mail** types "No applicable messages" and aborts the command.

- Print out the preceding message. If given a numeric argument *n*, goes to the *n*'th previous message and prints it.

ignore the remainder of the line as a comment.

? Prints a brief summary of commands.

! Executes the shell (see *sh(1)* and *csh(1)*) command which follows.

Print (P) Like **print** but also prints out ignored header fields. See also **print**, **ignore** and **retain**.

Reply (R) Reply to originator. Does not reply to other recipients of the original message.

Type (T) Identical to the **Print** command.

alias (a) With no arguments, prints out all currently-defined aliases. With one argument, prints out that alias. With more than one argument, creates a new alias or changes an old one.

alternates

(alt) The **alternates** command is useful if you have accounts on several machines. It can be used to inform **mail** that the listed addresses are really you. When you **reply** to messages, **mail** will not send a copy of the message to any of the addresses listed on the **alternates** list. If the **alternates** command is given with no argument, the current set of alternative names is displayed.

chdir (c) Changes the user's working directory to that specified, if given. If no directory is given, then changes to the user's login directory.

- copy** (**co**) The **copy** command does the same thing that **save** does, except that it does not mark the messages it is used on for deletion when you **quit**.
- delete** (**d**) Takes a list of messages as argument and marks them all as deleted. Deleted messages will not be saved in *mbox*, nor will they be available for most other commands.
- dp** (also **dt**) Deletes the current message and prints the next message. If there is no next message, **mail** says "at EOF".
- edit** (**e**) Takes a list of messages and points the text editor at each one in turn. On return from the editor, the message is read back in.
- exit** (**ex** or **x**) Effects an immediate return to the shell without modifying the user's system mailbox, his *mbox* file, or his edit file in **-f**.
- file** (**fi**) The same as **folder**.

folders

List the names of the folders in your folder directory.

- folder** (**fo**) The **folder** command switches to a new mail file or folder. With no arguments, it tells you which file you are currently reading. If you give it an argument, it will write out changes (such as deletions) you have made in the current file and read in the new file. Some special conventions are recognized for the name. '#' means the previous file, '%' means your system mailbox, "%user" means user's system mailbox, '&' means your *mbox* file, and "+folder" means a file in your folder directory.
- from** (**f**) Takes a list of messages and prints their message headers.

headers

(**h**) Lists the current range of headers, which is an 18-message group. If a '+' argument is given, then the next 18-message group is printed, and if a '-' argument is given, the previous 18-message group is printed.

help A synonym for ?.

hold (**ho**, also **preserve**) Takes a message list and marks each message therein to be saved in the user's system mailbox instead of in *mbox*. Does not override the **delete** command.

ignore

Add the list of header fields named to the *ignored list*. Header fields in the ignore list are not printed on your terminal when you print a message. This command is very handy for suppression of certain machine-generated header fields. The **Type** and **Print** commands can be used to print a message in its entirety, including ignored fields. If **ignore** is executed with no arguments, it lists the current set of ignored fields.

- inc** Incorporate any new messages that have arrived while mail is being read. The new messages are added to the end of the message list, and the current message is reset to be the first new mail message. This does not renumber the existing message list, nor does it cause any changes made so far to be saved.
- mail** (**m**) Takes as argument login names and distribution group names and sends mail to those people.
- mbx** Indicate that a list of messages be sent to *mbx* in your home directory when you quit. This is the default action for messages if you do *not* have the **hold** option set.
- more** (**mo**) Takes a list of messages and invokes the pager on that list.
- next** (**n**, like + or CR) Goes to the next message in sequence and types it. With an argument list, types the next matching message.
- preserve**
(**pre**) A synonym for **hold**.
- print** (**p**) Takes a message list and types out each message on the user's terminal.
- quit** (**q**) Terminates the session, saving all undeleted, unsaved messages in the user's *mbx* file in his login directory, preserving all messages marked with **hold** or **preserve** or never referenced in his system mailbox, and removing all other messages from his system mailbox. If new mail has arrived during the session, the message "You have new mail" is given. If given while editing a mailbox file with the **-f** flag, then the edit file is rewritten. A return to the shell is effected, unless the rewrite of edit file fails, in which case the user can escape with the **exit** command.
- reply** (**r**) Takes a message list and sends mail to the sender and all recipients of the specified message. The default message must not be deleted.
- respond**
A synonym for **reply**.
- retain** Add the list of header fields named to the *retained list*. Only the header fields in the retained list

are shown on your terminal when you print a message. All other header fields are suppressed. The **type** and **print** commands can be used to print a message in its entirety. If **retain** is executed with no arguments, it lists the current set of retained fields.

save (s) Takes a message list and a filename and appends each message in turn to the end of the file. The filename in quotes, followed by the line count and character count is echoed on the user's terminal.

set (se) With no arguments, prints all variable values. Otherwise, sets option. Arguments are of the form *option=value* (no space before or after '='), or *option*. Quotation marks may be placed around any part of the assignment statement to quote blanks or tabs, i.e. "set indentprefix="->"

saveignore

Saveignore is to **save** what **ignore** is to **print** and **type**. Header fields thus marked are filtered out when saving a message by **save** or when automatically saving to *mbox*.

saveretain

Saveretain is to **save** what **retain** is to **print** and **type**. Header fields thus marked are the only ones saved with a message when saving by **save** or when automatically saving to *mbox*. **Saveretain** overrides **saveignore**.

shell (sh) Invokes an interactive version of the shell.

size Takes a message list and prints out the size in characters of each message.

source

The **source** command reads commands from a file.

top Takes a message list and prints the top few lines of each. The number of lines printed is controlled by the variable *toplines* and defaults to 5.

type (t) A synonym for **print**.

unalias

Takes a list of names defined by **alias** commands and discards the remembered groups of users. The group names no longer have any significance.

undelete

(u) Takes a message list and marks each message as *not* being deleted.

unread

(U) Takes a message list and marks each message as *not* having been read.

unset Takes a list of option names and discards their remembered values; the inverse of **set**.

visual (v) Takes a message list and invokes the display editor on each message.

write (w) Similar to **save**, except that *only* the message body (*without* the header) is saved. Extremely useful for such tasks as sending and receiving source program text over the message system.

xit (x) A synonym for **exit**.

z The **mail** utility presents message headers in windowfuls as described under the **headers** command. You can move **mail**'s attention forward to the next window with the **z** command. Also, you can move to the previous window by using **z-**.

Tilde/Escapes

Here is a summary of the tilde escapes, which are used when composing messages to perform special functions. Tilde escapes are only recognized at the beginning of lines. The name "tilde escape" is somewhat of a misnomer since the actual escape character can be set by the option *escape*.

~a Inserts the autograph string from the *sign=* option into the message.

~A Inserts the autograph string from the *Sign=* option into the message.

~b *name ...*

Add the given names to the list of carbon copy recipients but do not make the names visible in the Cc: line ("blind" carbon copy).

~c *name ...*

Add the given names to the list of carbon copy recipients.

~d Read the file *dead.letter* from your home directory into the message.

~e Invoke the text editor on the message collected so far. After the editing session is finished, you may continue appending text to the message.

~f *messages*

Read the named messages into the message being sent. If no messages are specified, read in the current message. Message headers currently being ignored (by the **ignore** or **retain** command)

are not included.

~F *messages*

Identical to **~f**, except all message headers are included.

~h Edit the message header fields by typing each one in turn and allowing the user to append text to the end or modify the field by using the current terminal erase and kill characters.

~i *string*

Inserts the value of the named option into the text of the message.

~m *messages*

Read the named messages into the message being sent, indented by a tab or by the value of *indentprefix*. If no messages are specified, read the current message. Message headers currently being ignored (by the **ignore** or **retain** command) are not included.

~M *messages*

Identical to **~m**, except all message headers are included.

~p Print out the message collected so far, prefaced by the message header fields.

~q Abort the message being sent, copying the message to *dead.letter* in your home directory if *save* is set.

~r *filename*, **~r** *!command*

~< *filename*, **~<** *!command*

Read the named file into the message. If the argument begins with a '!', the rest of the string is taken as an arbitrary system command and is executed, with the standard output inserted into the message.

~R *string*

Use *string* as the Reply-To field.

~s *string*

Cause the named string to become the current subject field.

~t *name ...*

Add the given names to the direct recipient list.

~v Invoke an alternative editor (defined by the VISUAL environment variable) on the message collected so far. Usually, the alternative editor will be a screen editor. After you quit the editor, you may resume appending text to the end of your message.

~w filename

Write the message onto the named file.

~x Exits as with **~q**, except the message is not saved in *dead.letter*.

~! command

Execute the indicated shell command, then return to the message.

~| command, ~^ command

Pipe the message through the command as a filter. If the command gives no output or terminates abnormally, retain the original text of the message. The command `fmt(1)` is often used as *command* to rejustify the message.

~: mail-command, ~_ mail-command

Execute the given **mail** command. Not all commands, however, are allowed.

~. Simulate end-of-file on input.

~? Print a summary of the available command escapes.

~~ string

Insert the string of text in the message prefaced by a single '~'. If you have changed the escape character, then you should double that character in order to send it.

Mail Options

Options can be set with the **set** command and can be disabled with the **unset** or **set no name** commands. Options may be either binary, in which case it is only significant to see whether they are set or not; or string, in which case the actual value is of interest. If an option is not set, **mail** will look for an environment variable of the same name. The available options include the following:

append

Causes messages saved in *mbox* to be appended to the end rather than prepended. This should always be set (preferably in one of the system-wide *mail.rc* files). Default is *noappend*.

ask, asksub

Causes **mail** to prompt you for the subject of each message you send. If you respond with simply

a newline, no subject field will be sent. Default is *asksub*.

askbcc

Causes you to be prompted for additional blind carbon copy recipients at the end of each message. Responding with a newline indicates your satisfaction with the current list. Default is *noaskbcc*.

askcc

Causes you to be prompted for additional carbon copy recipients at the end of each message. Responding with a newline indicates your satisfaction with the current list. Default is *noaskcc*.

autoinc

Causes new mail to be automatically incorporated when it arrives. Setting this is similar to issuing the **inc** command at each prompt, except that the current message is not reset when new mail arrives. Default is *noautoinc*.

autoprint

Causes the **delete** command to behave like **dp**; thus, after deleting a message, the next one will be typed automatically. Default is *noautoprint*.

crt

The valued option *crt* is used as a threshold to determine how long a message must be before PAGER is used to read it. If *crt* is set without a value, then the height of the terminal screen stored in the system is used to compute the threshold (see *stty(1)*). Default is *nocrt*.

debug

Setting the binary option *debug* is the same as specifying **-d** on the command line and causes **mail** to output all sorts of information useful for debugging **mail**. In case **mail** is invoked in this mode to send mail, all preparations will be performed and reported about, but the mail will not be actually sent. Default is *nodebug*.

dot

The binary option *dot* causes **mail** to interpret a period alone on a line as the terminator of a message you are sending. Default is *nodot*.

escape

If defined, the first character of this option gives the character to use in place of '~' to denote escapes.

flipr

Reverses the sense of **reply** and **Reply** commands. Default is *noflipr*.

folder

The name of the directory to use for storing folders of messages. If this name begins with a '/', **mail** considers it to be an absolute pathname; otherwise, the folder directory is found relative to your home directory.

header

If defined, initially display message headers when reading mail or editing a mail folder. Default is *header*. This option can be disabled by giving the **-N** flag on the command line.

hold This option is used to hold messages in the system mailbox by default. Default is *nohold*.

ignore

Causes interrupt signals from your terminal to be ignored and echoed as @'s. Default is *noignore*.

ignoreeof

An option related to *dot* is *ignoreeof* which makes **mail** refuse to accept a <control-D> as the end of a message. *Ignoreeof* also applies to **mail** command mode. Default is *noignoreeof*.

indentprefix

String used by the **~m** tilde escape for indenting messages, in place of the normal tab character (^I). Be sure to quote the value if it contains spaces or tabs.

metoo Usually, when a group is expanded that contains the sender, the sender is removed from the expansion. Setting this option causes the sender to be included in the group. Default is *nometoo*.

quiet Suppresses the printing of the version when first invoked. Default is *noquiet*.

record

If defined, gives the pathname of the file used to record all outgoing mail. If not defined, outgoing mail is not saved. Default is *norecord*.

Replyall

Reverses the sense of **reply** and **Reply** commands. Default is *noReplyall*.

save If this option is set, and you abort a message with two RUBOUT (erase or delete), **mail** will copy the partial letter to the file *dead.letter* in your home directory. Default is *save*.

searchheaders

If this option is set, then a message-list specifier in the form *"/x:y"* will expand to all messages containing the substring *y* in the header field *x*. The string search is case insensitive. If *x* is omitted, it will default to the "Subject" header field. The form *"/to:y"* is a special case, and will expand to all messages containing the substring *y* in the "To", "Cc" or "Bcc" header fields. The check for "to" is case sensitive, so that *"/To:y"* can be used to limit the search for *y* to just the "To:" field. Default is *nosearchheaders*.

toplines

If defined, gives the number of lines of a message to be printed out with the **top** command; normally, the first five lines are printed.

verbose

Setting the option *verbose* is the same as using the **-v** flag on the command line. When **mail** runs in verbose mode, the actual delivery of messages is displayed on the user's terminal. Default is *noverbose*.

ENVIRONMENT

- DEAD** Pathname of the file to save partial messages to in case of interrupts or delivery errors. Default is *~/dead.letter*.
- EDITOR** Pathname of the text editor to use in the **edit** command and **~e** escape. If not defined, then a default editor is used.
- HOME** Pathname of the user's home directory.
- LISTER** Pathname of the directory lister to use in the **folders** command. Default is */bin/ls*.
- MAIL** Location of the user's mailbox. Default is */var/mail*.
- MAILRC** Pathname of file containing initial **mail** commands. Default is *~/mailrc*.
- MBOX** The name of the mailbox file. It can be the name of a folder. The default is *mbox* in the user's home directory.
- PAGER** Pathname of the program to use in the **more** command or when *crt* variable is set. The default paginator *less(1)* is used if this option is not defined.
- REPLYTO** If set, will be used to initialize the Reply-To field for outgoing messages.
- SHELL** Pathname of the shell to use in the **!** command and the **~!** escape. A default shell is used if this option is not defined.
- TMPDIR** Pathname of the directory used for creating temporary files.
- VISUAL** Pathname of the text editor to use in the **visual** command and **~v** escape.
- USER** Login name of the user executing mail.

FILES

`/var/mail/*` Post office.
`~/mbox` User's old mail.
`~/.mailrc` File giving initial **mail** commands. This can be overridden by setting the MAILRC environment variable.
`/tmp/R*` Temporary files.
`/usr/share/misc/mail.*help` Help files.

`/usr/share/misc/mail.rc`
`/usr/local/etc/mail.rc`
`/etc/mail.rc` System-wide initialization files. Each file will be sourced, in order, if it exists.

SEE ALSO

`fmt(1)`, `newaliases(1)`, `vacation(1)`, `aliases(5)`, `sendmail(8)`

HISTORY

A **mail** command appeared in Version 1 AT&T UNIX. This man page is derived from *The Mail Reference Manual* originally written by Kurt Shoens.

BUGS

There are some flags that are not documented here. Most are not useful to the general user.

Usually, **mail** is just a link to **Mail** and **mailx**, which can be confusing.

The name of the **alternates** list is incorrect English (it should be "alternatives"), but is retained for compatibility.