

*.answers submission guidelines

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.answers/2004-11/0025.html>

From: *.answers moderation team (*news-answers-request_at_MIT.EDU*)

Date: 11/17/04

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Archive-name: news-answers/guidelines

Version: \$Id: guidelines,v 2.56 2003/06/14 20:00:11 ngb Exp \$

Posting-Frequency: monthly

Copyright: see Section 5

[The most recent copy of this document can be obtained via anonymous FTP as rtfm.mit.edu/pub/faqs/news-answers/guidelines. If you do not have access to anonymous FTP, you can get a copy by sending email to mail-server@rtfm.mit.edu with the command "send faqs/news-answers/guidelines" in the message.]

Subject: 0. What is this document?

This document describes what you need to do in order to cross-post an article to news.answers and, if appropriate, one or more of the other moderated *.answers newsgroups (alt.answers, comp.answers, de.answers, humanities.answers, misc.answers, rec.answers, sci.answers, soc.answers, and talk.answers). If you're not familiar with these newsgroups, please read the posting "Introduction to the *.answers newsgroups". For help with writing the FAQ itself, try the "FAQs about FAQs". See Section 4 for how to get a copy of either of these.

These guidelines are pretty long, but you probably won't need to read all of them. Please at least read all of Section 1, "Probably all you'll need to know," before submitting your posting. If you have problems, you're submitting a multi-part posting, or you'll be doing anything fancy at all, read the appropriate sections of Section 2 as well. We can help you better and more quickly if you follow the guidelines as closely as you can.

Please note that you DO NOT need to follow these guidelines if you are not interested in cross-posting to the *.answers newsgroups. Although we encourage authors of appropriate postings to submit them for cross-posting into *.answers, there are numerous reasons why authors may choose not to do so. If you don't want to cross-post your article but you'd like it listed in the List of Periodic Informational Postings

and archived at rtfm.mit.edu and various mirrors anyway, see Section 3.2.

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Subject: 1. Probably all you'll need to know

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1.1 What to do

First, make sure your article is appropriate for the newsgroups, then modify the headers of your posting to conform to the guidelines in Section 1.4 (and appropriate sections of Section 2). Submit it to us (see Section 1.5), wait for approval, and then begin cross-posting your article (see Section 1.6).

1.2 Sample posting headers

A. Full

Here is what the headers of a FAQ might look like, as submitted to us. For more information, see the checklist and the guidelines themselves, Sections 1.3 and 1.4.

From: guru@foosys.com (Joe R. Programmer)
Newsgroups: misc.foo,soc.culture.foo,misc.answers,soc.answers,news.answers
Subject: [soc.culture.foo] Welcome – read this first!
Followup-To: misc.foo,soc.culture.foo
Summary: This posting describes the newsgroup soc.culture.foo, including where to find more information. It should be read by anyone who wishes to post to the soc.culture.foo newsgroup.
Expires: Fri, 1 May 1995 00:00:00 GMT
Supersedes: <foo-faq/part2_701650000@foosys.com>

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Archive-name: foo/welcome

Posting-Frequency: monthly

Last-modified: 1992/03/25

Version: 2.5

URL: http://some-site.org/my_faq.html

Copyright: (c) 1995-1996 Joe Programmer

Maintainer: Joe Programmer <guru@foosys.com> and Cathy Code <code@foosys.com>

The line separating the normal header from the auxiliary header must be completely blank, i.e., with no tabs or spaces; there must also be one or more lines immediately following the auxiliary header which are completely blank.

B. Minimal

A minimal set of headers which would still meet these guidelines might look like this:

From: joeuser@somewhere.org

Newsgroups: misc.bar,misc.answers,news.answers

Followup-To: poster

Subject: misc.bar Resource Guide (v. 1.0)

Archive-name: bar/resource-guide

1.3 Checklist

Following is a checklist for your *.answers submission. Please go through all the questions; if you're not positive you can say "yes" to all of them, look at the relevant sections of this article, and correct your submission accordingly. (Even if you can say "yes" to them all, please look over Section 1.4, the Guidelines, anyway. They're not that long, and they're packed with vitamins and minerals.)

Newsgroups line

Does the posting have a properly-formatted Newsgroups line with at least one newsgroup other than the *.answers newsgroups?

Does the Newsgroups line contain news.answers?

Are the *.answers newsgroups at the end of the Newsgroups line, with news.answers last?

Does the Newsgroups line contain all necessary *.answers newsgroups?

Does the Newsgroups line contain only necessary *.answers newsgroups?

Subject line

Does the posting have an informative Subject line?

Is important information in the Subject line near the beginning?

Followup-To line

Does the posting have a valid Followup-To line?

Does the Followup-To line not have any *.answers newsgroups?

>*From line*

Does the posting have a From or Reply-To line with your correct email address?

Summary line

If your posting has a Summary, and if it's on more than one line, does each line after the first start with a tab or space?

Auxiliary header

Does the posting have an auxiliary header with (at least) an Archive-name line?

Is the auxiliary header separated from the main header by exactly one completely blank line?

Is the auxiliary header separated from the body of your posting by at least one completely blank line?

Are all the headers in the auxiliary header in a valid format?

Other information

Have you told us the frequency of your posting?

If you want to subscribe to faq-maintainers, have you done so?

If you want to subscribe only to faq-maintainers-announce, have you told us so?

1.4 The guidelines

The *.answers guidelines don't cover the format or content of your article at all, as long as it's periodically posted, human-readable information of some sort, and not overly commercial. (Unbiased discussions of commercial products are welcome, but advertisements aren't appropriate in *.answers.) See Section 2.6 for suggestions about formats, though.

What the guidelines do specify is some of the headers.

A. Normal Usenet header lines

In addition to the headers below, your posting can contain any of the standard Usenet headers.

a. Newsgroups (REQUIRED)

Example:

Newsgroups: misc.foo,soc.culture.foo,misc.answers,soc.answers,news.answers

Include the "home" (appropriate, non-*.answers) newsgroup(s) for your posting, the corresponding *.answers newsgroup(s) for the hierarchies of those home newsgroup(s) (e.g., if you post to any soc.* groups, include soc.answers), and news.answers

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(even if you're not posting to any news.* newsgroups). Your posting must have at least one "home" newsgroup. Put all the *.answers groups at the end, and news.answers last. Put a single space after the colon, and no spaces, tabs, or carriage returns anywhere else in the line. (Many news programs can't handle multi-line Newsgroups headers.)

b. Subject (REQUIRED)

Examples:

Subject: [soc.culture.foo] Welcome – read this first!

Subject: Foo FAQ, v. 1.1 (modified 07/11/95)

Make sure your subject is understandable to someone who isn't familiar with the topic being discussed and doesn't know which home newsgroup it came from. Put important information near the beginning, so news readers that truncate Subjects don't cut it off. Don't start with "The" or "FAQ", or your posting won't alphabetize nicely. Unless you think your posting will be read by many people who don't know what the acronym means, using "FAQ" instead of "Frequently Asked Questions" will be more legible.

Your Subject must have the exact same capitalization, punctuation, and spacing every time, but a date or version number can change, as long as the format stays constant.

c. Followup-To (REQUIRED)

Examples:

Followup-To: soc.culture.foo

Followup-To: misc.foo,soc.culture.foo

Followup-To: poster

Include a Followup-To header so followup postings don't get sent to *.answers newsgroups or to the moderators. It can contain one or more of the home newsgroup(s), or, if you want followups sent directly to you, the word "poster". Do NOT put an email address in the Followup-To line.

d. From (REQUIRED)

Example:

From: guru@foosys.com (Joe R. Programmer)

Your posting should have a From line. On nearly all systems, the From line will automatically contain your correct Internet address. If it doesn't, see section 2.1B.

e. Summary (OPTIONAL)

Example:

Summary: This posting describes the newsgroup soc.culture.foo, including where to find more information. It should be read by anyone who wishes to post to the soc.culture.foo newsgroup.

You are encouraged to put a summary of the contents of your article in the Summary line of the header. There have been discussions about using the Summary lines of the postings in *.answers to construct a short "catalog" of the information available, so think of the Summary line as a catalog entry for your posting.

Your Summary can span multiple lines, as long as every line after the first one STARTS with a space or tab.

B. Auxiliary header lines

The auxiliary header looks like the main message header (i.e., has lines of the format "Line-name: line value"), but it's separated from the main message header by exactly one completely blank line, as well as followed by a completely blank line separating it from the body of the message. The "Line-name" part can't contain any spaces; use hyphens instead.

a. Archive-name (REQUIRED)

Examples:

Archive-name: foo/welcome
Archive-name: foo-faq/reading-list

Your posting must include an auxiliary header with an Archive-name line. Choose a name that's reasonably comprehensible to someone outside the field; try to avoid abbreviations. The archive name should describe what's in the posting, not necessarily the name of the newsgroup it's in. If you're not sure what name to use, take a guess, and we'll suggest a different one if we think it would fit better. For multiple-part postings or diffs (files of changes), see Sections 2.4 and 2.5.

Separate words with hyphens, and put slashes between name components. Try to keep each component under 14 characters, or at least put the important parts in the first 14 characters. Don't use spaces, tabs, punctuation (apart from hyphens (-), slashes (/), and underscores (_)), or all uppercase. Only use slashes to show levels in the hierarchy, since when your posting is archived, components between slashes will become directory and subdirectory names.

To make the archives more useful, we encourage collecting similar postings in the same directory; for example, there are a number of FAQs about Macintosh computers and software in the archive, all of whose names begin with "macintosh/". To see some of the directories that already exist, look at the index of the archives (see Section 4.5 for how to get it). Don't worry too much about finding just the right place for your posting; we will suggest a new name for it if we think it fits into one of the existing directories.

Your posting will be archived in several different places at rtfm.mit.edu, but the most stable one is derived from your archive name: /pub/faqs/ARCHIVE-NAME

b. Posting-Frequency (OPTIONAL)

Example:

Posting-Frequency: monthly (except June)

If you specify this line, updates you make to it will be automatically copied into the "List of Periodic Informational Postings" (see Section 3.2). You can describe your posting frequency however you like.

If you don't choose to include a Posting-Frequency header, you still have to let us know how often you plan to post, so we can put the information in the List of Periodic Informational Postings. If it isn't obvious from the Subject or Summary of your FAQ, you can tell us the frequency in a separate note.

Please note that you're welcome and encouraged to keep posting regularly even if your FAQ hasn't changed between postings. If you don't post at least every three months, and you don't tell us to expect your FAQ less often than that, it may disappear from the rtfm.mit.edu archive because the automatic archive cleanup scripts assume it's out of date.

For advice on how often to post and some comments about posting frequently, see Section 2.2.

c. Last-modified, Version, URL, Copyright, Maintainer (all
OPTIONAL)

Example:

Last-modified: March 25, 1995

Version: 2.5

URL: http://some-site.org/my_faq.html

Copyright: (c) 1995-1996 Joe Programmer

Maintainer: Joe Programmer <guru@foosys.com> and Cathy Code <code@foosys.com>

You can have other lines in the auxiliary header, if you want. Some common ones are "Last-modified:", "Version:", and "Copyright:", which should be self-explanatory. A "URL:" line could contain a World Wide Web "address," if you have one for your FAQ. (See Section 2.7B for information about HTML versions, including some automatically created ones.) The required "From:" header in the main headers (see Section 1.4A) will usually give the name and email address of the maintainer, but if you want to provide more information, or if your FAQ is being posted by someone else (see Section 2.8A), you may wish to add a "Maintainer:" header.

Our archive scripts and other software "know" about these particular auxiliary headers, and may attempt to handle them in special ways. Although it's not specifically required, it would be best if you stuck to these exact header names for information which fits these categories, rather than using arbitrary variations on the themes. However, if you have other types of information to include, you can create new auxiliary headers as you see fit.

You may put any text you want in these and other unrequired headers, in any format you like, as long as the name of the header doesn't have any whitespace; use hyphens instead (i.e., "Last-modified: " instead of "Last modified: ").

[However, some formats may enable additional functionality on certain archives. For example, several formats have been proposed for auxiliary header lines to allow citation of multiple, not just one, URL's, or which would allow the poster to control what descriptive text will be displayed for the hyperlinks corresponding to those URL's after conversion of the posting by one of the Web-based archives. See the faq-maintainers mailing list for continuing discussion. If consensus is reached, examples will be included in future versions of this document.]

1.5 Submitting your article

A. How actually to submit your postings

After you've changed your posting to follow the guidelines, there are three ways to submit it to the *.answers moderators for approval, listed below from most to least recommended.

If your posting does not contain a Posting-Frequency line in the auxiliary header, please also email us at news-answers-request@mit.edu telling us how often you plan to post. You should also ask any questions you may have or make any comments or explanations by sending us email at that time.

Maintainers of FAQs and other periodic informational postings are strongly urged to join the faq-maintainers mailing list. See Section 2.3 for more information.

1. The automated FAQ-checker

The recommended method is to use the FAQ-checker, which will automatically check to be sure that your posting follows these guidelines and send you a message explaining what's wrong if it doesn't. If your posting passes, the FAQ-checker will send it on to us. Articles which have been "okayed" by the FAQ-checker can be processed by us more quickly.

To use the FAQ-checker, put your whole FAQ, including all the regular and auxiliary headers, in the BODY of a message sent to news-answers-submit@rtfm.mit.edu. (If you're counting on your news software to include a From: line for you, you'll have to add it by hand for this submission.) That means that your final message will have three sets of headers: the email headers which tell it to go to the FAQ-checker, the main headers for your news posting, and the auxiliary header which includes the Archive-name.

Note that the faq-checker doesn't understand MIME, so you can't just attach your posting to your email. If your mail software has an "encode" or "quoted-printable" option, turn it off, and make sure there are no stray 8-bit characters (accents, "smart" quotes, em dashes, etc.) in your file. You should also be sure your mailer doesn't split long lines (e.g., your Newsgroups: header). If the faq-checker can't find lines that you know are present in your submitted file, chances are either your lines are being wrapped or your message is being MIME encoded.

If you want to have your posting checked, but for some reason you don't want to submit it just yet, include the word "ignore" in the Subject of your email to the FAQ-checker.

It'll send you the same diagnostic reply, but it won't actually send your posting to us, even if it has no problems. Otherwise, you can use whatever you like as the Subject of your email.

2. Cross-posting

If your mailer won't send your submission correctly (for instance, it insists on splitting long lines) or you're concerned that your news software won't handle the post properly, you can also submit it for approval by cross-posting it to all the newsgroups you would eventually like to post it to -- unless you're posting to another moderated newsgroup too, in which case see Section 2.8B. Please send the file exactly as you plan to post it. As long as you don't have approval from a newsgroup moderator, your posting will be mailed to us and will NOT show up in any newsgroup, even if you list other newsgroups on the Newsgroups line besides *.answers groups. Therefore, you can and should place ALL Newsgroups to which you intend to post in the Newsgroups line, in the order they'll be in when you post.

If you are taking over an existing posting (i.e., the old maintainer has given responsibility to you for posting), be sure to remove any existing approval headers before posting it as a submission, or we won't receive it.

3. Direct submission

If you have problems with the other submission methods, you can send your posting to us by email to news-answers@mit.edu instead. Only articles should go to that address, not comments or questions. For any other *.answers-related messages, use news-answers-request@MIT.EDU.

B. What will we do with your submission

We'll either agree that the posting belongs in *.answers as-is, ask you to make minor modifications to its headers in order to make it acceptable, or reject it as inappropriate for *.answers. If you are asked to make modifications, please do so and resubmit the posting to us using one of the three methods above.

Note: the *.answers moderators are all volunteers, doing *.answers moderation in our (sometimes rare) spare time; we receive thousands of submissions, correspondence, and other email each month in our roles as *.answers moderators. Therefore, we can't always process submissions and other *.answers-related

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correspondence immediately. As of February 1995, all submissions and e-mail to the *.answers moderation team are automatically acknowledged with a return-receipt message to assure submitters that we have received their articles and will review them eventually, usually in the order that they were received.

If you do not receive an acknowledgment message from us within 48 hours or so, one of two things has likely happened:

1. If you posted your submission, your news site is misconfigured and did not send us your posting. You may have to mail it to news-answers-submit@rtfm.mit.edu or news-answers@mit.edu instead (see Section 1.5) and send a bug report to your local news administrators (usenet@site, where site is your local domain, works in most cases).
2. We received your article, but our acknowledgment message bounced because the From: address in your news article was invalid. Confirm that it is correct and send us a short followup message to news-answers-request@mit.edu asking if we received it. If E-mail to us does not bounce, and does not result in an acknowledgment message from us, your site may have serious configuration problems that need to be brought to the attention of its administrators (postmaster@site in most cases).

[Special note to America On-Line submitters: There is a configuration problem in the AOL news server that prevents our filter program, which is based on Procmail, from sending the acknowledgment message. The reasons are somewhat complex, but the general idea is that AOL is doing something non-standard with its mail-header formatting that fools Procmail into thinking that AOL submissions might cause a mail loop if they were automatically replied to. The simplest fix is for AOL to change this to something standard. We have brought this to their attention and eagerly await a solution.]

Because of the potential length of delays involved in getting your postings approved, in the meantime you will probably want to continue posting your posting in its home newsgroup(s) on its regular schedule, so that it remains available to the readers there.

Please do not send email to any individual moderator's address, even if he or she was the member of the moderation team who dealt with you most recently; this will only delay the processing of your submission. Always direct your questions, comments, or flames to news-answers-request@MIT.EDU for anything which is related to *.answers.

1.6 What to do next

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Once your posting has been approved for *.answers, you will cross-post it directly to all group(s) yourself, by including a special header.

We will explain how to do this in our approval email to you. (Note that we are intentionally being somewhat vague. When we approve your posting for *.answers, we will provide more specific instructions.)

The *.answers moderators will NOT be posting your articles for you; it is up to you to do so. There are several ways to have it posted automatically; see Section 2.7A for more information.

After your posting has been approved, if any of the required headers, the maintainer, or the frequency changes, you will probably have to let us know and wait for reapproval before posting with the changes. You'll get more detail on this when we approve your posting, or you can see the "/*.answers post-approval guidelines" document (see Section 4.4). You don't need to notify us if you only change the contents or style of the body of your post.

Subject: 2. More detail and special cases

2.1 More optional headers

A. Expires, Supersedes (both OPTIONAL)

Examples:

Expires: Fri, 1 May 1995 00:00:00 GMT

Supersedes: <foo-faq/part2_701650000@foosys.com>

It is a good idea to use Expires and Supersedes header lines to make sure that each version of your posting stays around until the next time it is posted, and so that each posting replaces the now-outdated previous posting.

The Expires header should contain a date (in the above format) which is far enough into the future that a new version of the article will be posted before the one you're posting now expires. The Supersedes header should contain the Message-ID of the previously-posted article. Please note that 'Supersedes' does not contain the letter 'c' -- most Usenet software will ignore Supersedes: headers that use a variant spelling of the word.

It's easiest to include these by using an automated posting script or server (see Section 2.7A). We've shown both headers in the format the post_faq package would use.

B. Reply-To (OPTIONAL)

Example:

Reply-To: foo-faq@foosys.com (Foo FAQ Comments Address)

If you want mail about the posting to go to a different address than the rest of your mail, put the other address in a Reply-To header.

Likewise, if your news system doesn't put your correct email address in the From line, then you will need to either use a posting package (see Section 2.7A) or use a Reply-To line so that you can get responses to your post.

C. Other archive names (OPTIONAL)

Examples:

Misc-foo-archive-name: culture-reading-list

Soc-culture-foo-archive-name: reading-list

As noted above, the software which builds the periodic informational postings archive on rtfm.mit.edu automatically uses the "Archive-name:" line for a posting's file name, when saving it in any newsgroup ending in ".answers" (news.answers, rec.aviation.answers, etc.). In other archive locations, the file name is usually derived from the posting's Subject.

However, if you have a line of the form "Newsgroup-name-archive-name: name" in your posting's auxiliary header ("Newsgroup-name" should be replaced with an actual newsgroup name, replacing periods with hyphens), the specified archive name will be used to save in the specified newsgroup. Such a newsgroup-specific archive name overrides the generic "Archive-name:" line.

If your posting already has an Archive-name line for other purposes which is not a valid *.answers archive name and you do not want to change it (e.g., you are already using an Archive-name line to specify where your posting should be archived on sites which archive *.sources newsgroups), you can use a "News-answers-archive-name:" header line instead.

For example, if you have this in your normal header:

Newsgroups: misc.foo,soc.culture.foo,misc.answers,soc.answers,news.answers
Subject: [soc.culture.foo] Welcome – read this first!

and this in your auxiliary header:

Archive-name: foo/welcome

Misc-foo-archive-name: welcome

then the posting will be saved as "foo/welcome" in the directories misc.answers/, soc.answers/, and news.answers/ (because they are all *.answers newsgroups and will use the Archive-name line), but as "welcome" in misc.foo/. (It will also be archived under its Subject line in soc.culture.foo/.)

If you do decide to specify additional newsgroup-specific archive names in your posting, please follow the guidelines for archive names given in Section 1.4B.

2.2 Posting frequency

The frequency with which you post is left to your discretion. Some maintainers find that monthly posting, with an Expires header (see Section 2.1A) to prevent postings from going away before their replacement is posted, is sufficient. Some other newsgroups are so busy that weekly posting is needed.

Regardless, you're welcome and encouraged to keep posting regularly even if your FAQ hasn't changed between postings. If you don't post at least every three months, and you don't tell us to expect your FAQ less often than that, it may disappear from the rtfm.mit.edu archive because the automatic archive cleanup scripts assume it's out of date.

If you choose to post more frequently than once or twice a month, you might want to consider not cross-posting to *.answers every time you post, especially if your FAQ is very long or has many parts (this overrides our previously expressed desire that you keep your Newsgroups line static). [Note, however, that if you do this, you can't use Supersedes every time you post, since a posting in just the home newsgroup(s) should not supersede the posting in both the home newsgroup(s) and *.answers. You might then want to only use a Supersedes line in the version you cross-post to *.answers, and live with the fact that there might be multiple copies of your postings in the home newsgroup(s), which isn't that big a problem. If you don't understand this parenthetical comment, don't worry about it.]

Another possibility is to post the complete informational posting(s) relatively infrequently, while posting a shorter pointer to it (e.g., providing instructions for getting it from archives) more frequently. Such reminder postings could be posted in the home newsgroups(s) as often as needed and would not need to be cross-posted to *.answers, since the full FAQ would be posted there occasionally. You could also keep the full FAQ on a WWW page and only ever post a brief pointer, which would then go to *.answers as well.

When submitting your posting, please be sure to let us know the frequency at which you intend to post it to its home newsgroup(s), as

well as the frequency at which you intend to cross-post it to *.answers (if different). The best way for this is to put this information into the Posting-Frequency lines of the auxiliary header -- you can describe your frequency in any format that a person reading it will understand.

If possible, pick some random time of the week or month to do your posting. For example, don't automatically decide to post it on the first of the month. This would cause a flood of postings in *.answers (and on the Usenet in general) at certain times of the month, and would be big enough to overwhelm some smaller news sites and many readers of *.answers.

2.3 Mailing lists for periodic informational postings maintainers

All administrative requests related directly to the faq-maintainers mailing list should be sent to faq-maintainers-request@faqs.org, using the commands described below. Requests related to the faq-maintainers-announce list should be sent to that list's maintainers at faq-maintainers-announce-request@mit.edu.

Official archives of the faq-maintainers list are available from rtfm.mit.edu at <<ftp://rtfm.mit.edu/pub/faq-maintainers>>. Unofficial archives are also available by FTP from <<ftp://ftp.landfield.com/faq-maintainers/mail-archive/mailbox/>> or in searchable form on the World Wide Web at <<http://www.landfield.com/faq-maintainers/mail-archive/>> .

A. faq-maintainers

Maintainers of FAQs and other periodic informational postings are encouraged to join the faq-maintainers mailing list, which is used for discussion about the *.answers newsgroups and the maintenance of Usenet periodic informational postings. Anyone can subscribe to these mailing lists -- in particular, you're welcome to subscribe before you even submit your posting to us, or if you never plan to.

Traffic on faq-maintainers tends to come in bursts -- it averages three to four messages per day, but during a burst there may be as many as several dozen messages in a few hours, and in between such bursts, there may be a week of no messages at all.

To subscribe, send email to faq-maintainers-request@faqs.org with the command "subscribe" in the Subject line. For information about other commands, send the command "help". If you have problems subscribing or unsubscribing, send email to the list administrators at <owner-faq-maintainers@faqs.org>.

B. faq-maintainers-announce

If you don't want to be on the discussion list, you may wish to join the faq-maintainers-announce list, which will be used only for announcements, instead. Note that subscribers to the faq-maintainers list automatically receive all messages sent to faq-maintainers-announce.

Traffic on faq-maintainers-announce is very low; it is not unheard of for many months to pass with no messages except for a periodic copy of the mailing lists policy document.

To subscribe only to faq-maintainers-announce, send email to faq-maintainers-announce-request@mit.edu (read by humans).

2.4 Multiple part postings

A. Header example

This is what the headers from part 2 of a 2-part posting might look like:

From: guru@foosys.com (Joe R. Programmer)
Newsgroups: comp.sys.foo,comp.answers,news.answers
Subject: comp.sys.foo Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), Part 2/2
Followup-To: comp.sys.foo
Reply-To: faq-mail@foosys.com (FAQ Comments address)
Summary: This posting contains a list of Frequently Asked Questions (and their answers) about Foo computers. It should be read by anyone who wishes to post to the comp.sys.foo newsgroup.
Expires: Fri, 1 May 1995 00:00:00 GMT
Supersedes: <foo-faq/part2_701650000@foosys.com>
References: <foo-faq/part1_702000000@foosys.com>

Archive-name: foo-faq/part2
Posting-Frequency: monthly
Last-modified: 1995/03/25
Version: 2.5 (text)
URL: http://some-site.org/my_faq.html

B. Subject (REQUIRED)

Example:

Subject: comp.sys.foo Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), Part 2/2

For postings which are being split into multiple parts, you should indicate in each posting's Subject line which part that particular posting is, and how many parts total there are. Use regular Arabic numerals instead of Roman numerals, because they're more

easily sorted and manipulated by software.

C. Archive-name (REQUIRED)

Examples:

Archive-name: foo-faq/part1

Archive-name: foo-faq/part2

Archive-name: bar-faq/intro

Archive-name: bar-faq/history

Archive-name: bar-faq/references

Multi-part postings should be named "name/part1", "name/part2", etc. If the parts of the postings are split by topic rather than by size, then you can use short topic names instead. See Section 1.4B for more examples. If you plan to post one or more diffs (files of changes) for your files, please see Section 2.5.

D. Summary (OPTIONAL)

If you have a group of related postings or a multi-part posting, you should consider either keeping your summaries in each posting short (describing only that posting's contents), or having a completely identical summary for all the postings, describing what topics the postings collectively cover. If someone uses your Summary lines to construct a catalog, as mentioned above, having identical summaries will allow automatic elimination of redundant summary text in the catalog.

E. References (OPTIONAL)

Example:

References: <foo-faq/part1_702000000@foosys.com>

If you are posting a multi-part posting or a series of related postings, it is a good idea to add a "References:" line to all of the postings except the first one, making the contents of that line the Message-ID of the first posting in the series. People who use threaded news readers will then be able to manipulate the entire series as a single thread, including (for example) saving the entire thread to a file with one command. The posting tools mentioned in Section 2.7A all support an option for doing this.

2.5 Diffs (lists of changes to other files)

Examples:

Archive-name: foo-faq/part1

Archive-name: foo-faq/diff

A diff is a file containing only changes to a larger posting. If you post a diff for a one-part posting, then the original posting should be named "name/part1" (or "name/faq", or whatever else has been approved) and the diff should be named "name/diff".

If you post multiple diffs for multi-part postings, they should be named "name/diff1", "name/diff2", etc. (If you want to use just one diff for multi-part postings, use "name/diff" as its name.)

2.6 FAQ formats

These guidelines DO NOT specify a required format for the bodies of periodic informational postings. Maintainers are free to choose whatever format they want (assuming that it is human-readable) for the bodies of their postings. However, you should try to keep your posting well organized and easy to read.

Articles which contain HTML tags won't be necessarily be rejected, but they must be coded so that the text remains easily readable in its original form, without an HTML browser. Since HTML ignores whitespace nearly everywhere, it's relatively easy to separate tags from the actual content and keep the file readable.

A few formats have been suggested for FAQs. One which has been proposed is the "minimal digest format"; see Section 4.3 for how to get a copy. For other format ideas, browse some of the postings in the *.answers newsgroups.

These guidelines also DO NOT specify lower or upper limits for the size of an acceptable posting. However, a pragmatic lower limit is set by the requirement that the articles be reasonably useful to people. As for a pragmatic upper limit, maintainers may wish to consider that part of their audience may not be able to access too large articles due to intermediary news (and gateway) software problems (64kB is a common magic size).

2.7 Maintenance tools

Two World Wide Web sites which maintain lists of FAQ maintenance tools and information resources are David A. Lamb's page of FAQ Maintenance Aids, at

<http://www.qucis.queensu.ca/FAQs/FAQaid/>

and Infinite Ink's Writing FAQs and Periodic Postings, at

(primary) <http://www.ii.com/ii/internet/faqs/writing/>

(mirror) <http://www.best.com/~ii/internet/faqs/writing/>

A. Automatic posting

Many maintainers post their files by hand with no problems. However, several packages are available if you want to automate the process. These all provide options for including Expires, Supersedes, and References headers and posting multiple parts, as well as posting on any of a variety of schedules.

a. mail-to-news server

No matter what system you use, you can use the FAQ server which we run: you use it by mailing your periodic informational postings and various commands to it, and it posts them periodically for you, at intervals you specify. This is a good solution if your site does not have Perl, or you cannot conveniently install either of the other two software packages, or your local news server won't let users post to a moderated newsgroup at all.

For more information about the FAQ server, send e-mail to `faq-server@rtfm.mit.edu` with "help" (without the quotes) in the Subject line of your message. Note that before you send your posting to the `faq-server`, you should get it approved by us.

b. post_faq

One useful tool for automatically posting your posting at a frequency you choose is the FAQ poster written by Jonathan Kamens, which requires the utility program Perl. `Post_faq` takes an article with its static headers (i.e., the headers that don't change each time the article is posted), adds dynamic headers to it, and posts the article.

It is available from `rtfm.mit.edu` via anonymous FTP as `/pub/post_faq/post_faq.shar`, or via mail server (send e-mail to `mail-server@rtfm.mit.edu` with "send `post_faq/post_faq.shar`" in the body). The `post_faq` program is currently maintained by the *.answers moderators.

c. auto-faq

Another utility, `auto-faq`, provides more functionality, including automatic building and insertion of all headers. It also requires Perl. Originally written by Ian Kluft, it is now maintained by Paul W. Schleck. If you are looking for something with a high level of automation to assist you in your FAQ maintenance and posting, you might want to try `auto-faq` instead of `post_faq`. The latest version as of the writing of this text is 3.3.1. It may be freely used and

distributed under the terms of the GNU General Public License (GPL). It may be obtained from:

<http://www.novia.net/~pschleck/auto-faq/>

For further assistance with this particular package, send e-mail to auto-faq-help@novia.net. To subscribe to the user's mailing list, send e-mail to auto-faq-users-request@novia.net with "subscribe auto-faq-users" in the message body. An acknowledgment and welcome message will follow shortly.

B. HTML conversion

All postings on news.answers are automatically converted to HTML by, and made available at, several World Wide Web sites; for a good list, see Infinite Ink's page, listed under the Section 2.7 heading.

If you want to make your own HTML version, there are a number of ways to convert among formats, including HTML, plain text, LaTeX, SGML, troff, WordPerfect, and Nisus. See the WWW page of FAQ Maintenance Aids, listed under the Section 2.7 heading, for more information.

2.8 Special cases