What is it and what can you do with the Electronic Mail?

In many ways, electronic mail or e-mail is similar to postal mail. Just like this one is used to send letters or other information to familiar people.

However, the e-mail, instead of being delivered to the home by a postal service (i.e., postman), the e-mail is sent through a network of computers to the computer used by the person to whom it is addressed.

Email is used mostly for the same purposes as postal mail, except that it can not be used to send physical objects. It is even better than the postal mail: if it invests days in arriving at its destination, the electronic mail only requires seconds or minutes.

What do you need to know to use the Electronic Mail?

As you have surely written letters, it will be easy for you to understand the email thinking about the similarities you have with postal mail.

In effect, when you intend to write someone you know, to communicate something, the process you follow is as simple as:

1. Write the letter on a piece of paper
2. Put your name and address in an envelope
3. Introduce the letter in the envelope and put it with its stamps in a mailbox

Using email is just as simple, and involves exactly the same three steps:

1. Write the text of the electronic message on a computer
2. Include the email address of the person to whom it is addressed
3. And ... send your message

How to use this service?

There are many kinds of email software packages. All of them are quite different from each other, to the point that it is impossible to explain the functioning of all of them briefly.

However, we can briefly state the name, in each system, of the application that most usually carries it out:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SW</th>
<th>MS-OutLook Express, ThunderBird, NetScape Messenger, Eudora</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Windows</td>
<td>Mail, ThunderBird, Eudora, MailDrop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macintosh</td>
<td>Thunderbird, Evolution, Kmail, pine, mutt, mailx, mail</td>
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Basic steps to send a message

- Step 1. You start the application by typing the name of it, (or on computers such as Macintosh or Windows, by clicking on the icon of the application). It will always be necessary to give a username and password, which are used to prevent others from reading your mail.
- Step 2. At some point you will be asked to indicate one or more email addresses, those of the recipients to whom the message is addressed.
- Step 3. You will also be asked to enter the 'subject', i.e., a small description of the subject (subject) that the message is about.
- Step 4. To make the letter you will use an email editor, which is usually similar to any normal word processor on your computer.
- Step 5. When you have finished typing the message, you can send it by typing the corresponding command or by pressing the appropriate button (which varies greatly from one application to another).

What is the style label of the Electronic Mail?

- Be brief Very often everything you need to express can fit you on just one screen.
- Try that the lines do not exceed 65 columns; In fact, short lines are easier to read. But the main reason is that some screens can not display more than 70 columns of text, which could not read the end of your longer lines (or it could be very uncomfortable).
- Always leave blank lines between paragraphs, or other logical units of text.
- Use uppercase and lowercase letters as appropriate. It becomes more difficult to read a text written only in uppercase or lowercase.
Many computers do not have the possibility to underline or italicize characters, so, to highlight something or emphasize it \textbf{you can type in capital letters}, or also, * by placing asterisks * or another special character at the beginning and end of the text, or _including_ putting this_.

Try to cut the paragraphs short; in general, always less than 15 lines.

Always avoid using control sequences, such as Ctrl z, or special keys, such as the tabulated one. Although they do not give problems while you edit them, those characters look different on other screens.

(In 2005 this is a bit obsolete, but sometimes it is still valid) Avoid putting \textbf{accents, signs, symbols, and of principle of interrogation and exclamation, and in general of all non-English characters}. 50% of computers in the world still put together a mess with those characters: "María Ibáñez" (well written on your screen), you can appear as "Mar% a Ib &? Ez" to your recipients.

How should the content of the Electronic Mail be?

- Start the message with the name of the person you are writing to, just as you would if you were writing a normal letter. That way the message seems more personal.
- If you are answering a message from another person, you can include, if you like, some passages of the original message. This allows you to specify the context, or give your message a more conversational tone. The usual agreement is to use a ‘>' symbol at the beginning of each of these lines:
  - > here would go the text that said person put on his own
  - > message when I sent it to you

Some email packages allow you to automatically insert all the text of a message to which you are going to reply. Afterwards, you are free to eliminate everything that does not interest you. But try to include only the parts of the original message that are essential.

- Never forget that the person to whom the message is addressed is also a human being, with feelings and beliefs that may not coincide with yours.
- In a face-to-face conversation, thanks to a series of gestures and the intonation of the language itself you can know if what you are saying is affecting the other person. All this does not exist when you use e-mail, so be concise, clear and educated in the way you express yourself, be flexible in interpreting the mail of others.
- Since electronic mail cannot contain gestures, a series of peculiar conventions have been assumed. In particular, you can include a "smile" to indicate the state of humor in which you are. Those "smiles" when you look at them from the side look like human faces. There are hundreds of them, made with the basic characters of the keyboard and each one has a different meaning. Here is a small example of some of them:
  - :-) It's the basic smile
  - :) It's also a smile
  - ;-)) The smile with guinyo
  - > - ( Pucker the cenyo
  - : -] A dismayed smile
  - :-D Laughter
  - : -O With an open mouth
  - : -o Oh, no

- Finish the message with your name. This makes, again, the most personal mail.
- With some mail program packages, you can easily create a file called "signature", which is automatically added at the end of each message you send. If you use a "signature", bear in mind that:
  - It has to be short, it should be enough with less than 5 lines.
  - Do not include heaps of graphics made of letters and other characters, or lists of all your possible phone numbers, not all email addresses where you can contact you, or, finally, include your favorite quotes. At a minimum, those signatures bother the reader and, what's worse, they occupy space on other people's computers.
- Finally, before sending a message:
  - Take a look at everything you've written.
  - Make sure you have said everything you wanted.
  - Make sure you have not said things you did not want.
  - Make sure you have used the grammar correctly. It is not pleasant to read a text full of mistakes.

Note that many of these rules are general rules of courtesy applicable to all letters you write, whatever means you use to send them.

Example of how a message should not be:

Date: Wed. 5 May 1993 10:45
From: tamarira@vm.ci.uv.es
To: 
I am very glad to know that you are going to visit VAlenia these fallas that you It seems if we stay for a while when it suits you. Of sorce planned a couple of little things / ---- that you will like a lot. Get in contact | with me / before Sunday and we'll see how what / | we do / @@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@
Example of how a message should be:

Date: Wed, 5 May 1993 10:45
From: Raul <tamarira@vm.ci.uv.es>
To: Juan <juan@graf.ci.uv.es>

Hello John:
I am very glad to know that you are going to visit Valencia these failures.
I remember you said:
> Possibly only the weekend can be for reasons of
> work.
What do you think if we stay a while when it comes right ?. In fact,
I've planned a couple of little things that you'll like a lot.
Get in touch with me before Sunday and we'll see how
we do.
A hug,
Raul
---
Raul Tamarit User-id: tamarira@vm.ci.uv.es
Computer Service, University of Valencia
Doctor Moliner, s/n Burjasot (Valencia)
Telf: (96) 386 43 10

How is a header and how is the body of a Message

An Email message consists of two parts. The first is called a header, the one that contains the message itself, is called the body of the message.

The message begins with the header and is separated from the body exactly by a line that is normally added automatically. The header has information about the sender, the recipients, the date of sending, the subject of the message, etc.

The most important lines of the header are:

- **From**: (From :) It is the sender's address. There can only be one line of this type in the header.
- **To**: (A :) The recipient or recipients of this message. This line can specify more than one destination address.
- **Cc**: Copy to recipients. This line is equivalent to the carbon copy in the case of normal mail. A copy (merely informative) of the letter is sent to the indicated recipients.
- **Bcc**: This would be a hidden copy. A copy will be sent to the address indicated here without the other recipients having knowledge of it.
- **Subject**: (Subject :) Subject of the message. The text is free, but you must choose one that is short and that describes the content of the message. Be careful with punctuation, use the appropriate ones, for example:
  - Free phone calls? It's not the same as free phone calls!
- **Date**: Indicates the date and time the message was sent.
- **Message-Id**: It is an identifier of each message, it is unique and inserted by the computer that sends it. For example:
  - <33116.130423T AMARIRA@EVALUN11.BITNET>
- **Received**: It is the information that is used to check the problems that have appeared in the distribution of a message. It shows the addresses of the machines through which the message passed in the direction of its destination, along with the date and time it was sent.
- **Resent-From**: Address of the person or program from which the message arrives. The fact of saying "resent" notifies you that the message has reached the person indicated in this field and she, in turn, sends you a copy.
- **Reply-To**: Obviously, the address to which you must answer. It does not have to be the same from where the letter was sent.

Syntax of an Email Address

An example of the three possible formats in which the electronic address of someone who sends you a message may appear is:

- From: Raul Tamarit <tamarira@vm.ci.uv.es>
- From: tamarira@vm.ci.uv.es
- From: tamarira@vm.ci.uv.es (Raul Tamarit)

Although the character string "Raul Tamarit" specifies the name of the sender, it is not part of the address used by the system that is responsible for distributing the messages. The system will treat these three hypothetical messages equally, since it only looks at the string "tamarira@vm.ci.uv.es". This is the so-called email address, and corresponds to a (electronic) mailbox in which the mail destined to that address is deposited.

Let's look at the @ character in the Mail Address:
The part on the left of the @ character is called the local mailbox; while the part that appears on the right is the domain. If neither the @ character nor the domain is specified, for example:

- To: tamarira

this indicates that the message is sent to a local address, that is, to an address in your same domain. In this case, it should be "vm.ci.uv.es" for the message to arrive.

Note that the format described here corresponds to the format of email addresses for the Internet. The Internet has become so popular and has so many users that its address format has become the standard in practice. In other networks, email addresses would be written differently, for example:

- BITNET format: tamarira at evalun11
- UUCP format: mcvax! Ukc! Gatekeeper! Hotspot! Federico
- Format X400: S = tamarira; OU = vm; OU = ci; O = uv; P = iris A = mensatex; C = is

What is and what does the name of a mailbox mean?

A mailbox can belong to a user or a group of users, or it can be the place to store the mail of someone with a specific function.

There is no standard convention about what the name of a mailbox for a particular user is or should be. Normally this is usually the identifier with which the user accesses the machine that manages the mail; and usually consists of the acronyms of his name, or some combination of the letters that identify his last name and name. However, there is a kind of standard agreement on the name of a mailbox when it is going to be used for some kind of special service:

postmaster
It is assumed that every place (domain of mail) within the network has a mailbox to solve problems or doubts that may arise regarding the mail system in that domain. Example:

- postmaster@vm.ci.uv.es

abuse
Likewise, it is assumed that every place (domain of mail) within the network has a mailbox to address complaints if it detects any abuse by machines, addresses, people in that domain. Typical abuses are the sending of unsolicited propaganda or attacks with viruses; but you have to make sure that the suspicious message really comes from where it seems, since it is typical that the references are falsified. Example:

- abuse@vm.ci.uv.es

XXXXX-request
The names that end in "-request" are administrative addresses of distribution lists. That is, they send, for example, requests for subscription or unsubscription of a list.

- aeronautics-request@rascal.ics.utexas.edu

listserv
It is the name of an automatic program, very popular, used to manage distribution lists. The messages that are sent to this mailbox are processed automatically, answering each request as required. These messages can be to subscribe or unsubscribe from a list, or they can also be requests asking for information about the services or files that that "listserv" in particular has. Example:

- listserv@uva.ci.uv.es

How are the domains of an E-mail address interpreted?

The part on the right of the @ symbol is what is called a domain and often identifies a particular computer, which belongs to an organization. To identify which one, that chain, located to the right of the @ symbol, is divided into subdomains, all separated from each other by points. That subdomain that is located more to the right is called domain of more high level, and, in most of the world, this dominion corresponds to:

- to a country, such as, for example, "ES" in the case of Spain.
- to a network, such as "BITNET".
- or the type of institution in question, for example "EDU" for educational centers, "MIL" for military installations, "COM" for private companies, etc. When the highest level domain is not a country, it generally means that the institution is located in the United States or Canada.

The syntax of an email address is in general:

- mailbox @ subdomain. ... .subdomain2.subdomain1.most-level-level-domain

Let's see some examples:

tamarira@vm.ci.uv.es

It would be interpreted as:
In this case, that address describes the mailbox of a user whose identifier is 'tamarira'. This mailbox is located on a machine called 'vm', which belongs to the 'Computer Center'. Institution that in turn is within the 'University of Valencia' which is within the domain-of-more-high-level that, in this case, is that of Spain: 'is'.

tamarira@evalun11.bitnet

It would be interpreted as:

- Buzon Name: tamarira
- Subdomain1: evalun11
- Top-level-domain: bitnet

Now what we have is the mailbox of a person whose user ID 'tamarira', this is inside a machine called 'evalun11' which belongs to the network 'bitnet'.

federico@iubio.bio.indiana.edu

It would be interpreted as:

- Buzon Name: federico
- Subdomain3: iubio
- Subdomain2: bio
- Subdomain1: indiana
- Top-level-domain: edu

This time, the mailbox corresponds to the user 'federico' who is in an educational institution 'edu', the machine that contains that mailbox is called 'iubio' and is probably in the department of Biology, 'bio', within the University of Indiana, in the United States.

The type of Internet addresses is usually called domain addresses. This term is synonymous with RFC822 addresses (referring to the document that describes and specifies them).

There are many people who read the addresses starting with the "domain-of-more-high-level" and assumes that the domain address shows you a bit of information about the way a message is delivered. So a message addressed to:

cule@chemistry.oxford.uk

It should be distributed to a distributor in the UK (United Kingdom), so that it can be sent to the OXFORD institution, and from there it can be distributed to the CHEMISTRY department.

However, you do not have to read an email address in this way because it can lead to confusion: a Domain Address only tells us where that message is destined, never the route nor the path it will follow to reach its destination.

In addition, an Internet domain must never be confused with an email domain. Internet domain names always correspond to the IP address of a machine on the Internet network. A mail domain can correspond to a machine from another network (Example: evalun11.bitnet) and, in general, it will correspond to an entity, which does not have to have anything to do with a specific machine (Example: If you want to send a message to a friend from the USA and his email address is jose@attmail.com, really "attmail.com" does not correspond to a specific physical machine, but to a "domain", managed by a set of machines, which will eventually lead the message to the mailbox dedicated to the individual called "jose", somewhere in the institution).