HOW TO READ THE NETWORK NEWS

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1. What are USENET and netnews, and why should you care?

USENET is an agreement, a culture, and an ideal. It's an agreement among thousands of computer sites all over the world to exchange information, a culture that has grown up around this exchange, and an ideal that drives this culture − the ideal of information wealth for everybody, of cheap or free sharing of the thoughts, dreams, jokes and creations of the many kinds of people on USENET.

USENET can educate, entertain, and stimulate you. If you program or use computers, it can give you access to public-domain software tools and games of remarkably high quality. A person wishing to announce a new program or product can reach a wide audience immediately. A user can ask ''Does anyone have an *x* ?'' and usually get several responses within a day or two. Bug reports and their fixes can be made quickly available without the usual overhead of sending out mass mailings. Discussions involving many people at different locations can take place without having to get everyone together. Because of this latter, USENET is also a new and thought-provoking kind of community − perhaps a window on the social future implied by widespread use of computer-assisted telecommunications.

USENET can also bore, confuse, anger or overload you -- with huge amounts of irrelevant, distracting or incorrect information. The secret of getting the best out of it is to have the tools, and the kind of experienced judgement, that can separate the wheat from the chaff. As with any other information resource, using USENET is a learned skill, one that improves with practice.

At the time of writing (late 1988), USENET is estimated to have about a million users worldwide (the network tends to approximately double in size every year). Other computer information networks of comparable size do exist, but USENET is unique in being decentralized, nonprofit, and entirely maintained by volunteers.

Technically, USENET (Users' Network) is a bulletin board shared among thousands of computer systems around the world. Each one of these systems is a USENET 'node', connected to other USENET nodes by a logical network (a set of communications channels). The USENET logical network uses several physical networks, including **uucp**, **BLICN**, **Berknet**, **X.25**, and the **Internet**. Sites on USENET include many universities, private companies, research organizations, and an increasing number of individual people running home machines.

Eventually, the friends of USENET intend that it will grow into a true world information network, available on all but the most primitive and specialized computers. Already it includes sites from New Jersey to New Zealand. By far the largest concentration of USENET nodes is in the USA, but there are large and growing USENET communities in Europe, around the Pacific Rim, and in South America. There are even a few USENET nodes in communist Eastern Europe.

Netnews is the set of programs that provide access to the news, and transfer it from one machine to the next. As of this writing, USENET is found mostly on machines that run the UNIX operating system; but versions for other systems such as VMS and OS/370 do exist, and ports of netnews to other systems such as MS-DOS and OS/2 are in the works.

Since you're reading this, there is almost certainly a working netnews program somewhere nearby. This guide will teach you how to use netnews, and it will start you on the skills you will need to get the most out of USENET.

Netnews was originally written at Duke University, and later modified extensively by the University of California at Berkeley. The version this document comes with was rewritten from the ground up by Eric S. Raymond, an itinerant UNIX guru and pagan anarchist gadfly who happens also to be your author. It incorporates ideas and criticisms from many long-time USENETters; detailed credits can be found in the *Hacker's Guide* attached to the distribution and in comments in the source.

2. What can I do with USENET?

USENET gives the user access to a large and rapidly changing collection of text **articles**, divided into topic area called **newsgroups**. A user can specify which topics he or she is interested in via a *subscription list*. This document includes a list of newsgroups that were active at the time it was written, to assist you in determining which newsgroups you may want to subscribe to.

A user's dealings with USENET will consist of a) reading articles, and b) posting articles. You'll do this with two kinds of program, called (logically enough) ''readers'' and ''posters''. USENET *administratorsI (people who maintain USENET at a node) need to know about some other kinds of tools that we'll discuss later.*

USENET supports many different readers, tuned for different styles of news-reading and various kinds of terminals. When you fire up a reader, you will will usually be presented with all articles of interest that have made it to your site and that you have not yet read. Readers also include facilities for browsing through old news, for posting follow-up articles (by calling one of the posters), and for sending direct electronic mail replies to the author of an article.

Each of the news readers implements a different command set and style of visual presentation. Here are the alternatives:

readnews The original news reader, mostly with line-oriented I/O and appropriate for printing terminals and glass-tty CRTs.

vnews A nice full-screen interface for smart terminals. The command set is modelled after those of **vi** and **emacs**, two popular UNIX editors.

Your mailer You can use /bin/mail, Berkeley Mail, msg, or the Rand mailer MH as an interface to news with mailnews. This has the virtue of familiarity, but (unlike the other interfaces) may not be able to accurately track which articles you actually read in a given session.

rn Another alternative mail reader, not part of this USENET distribution but popular at many sites. The distribution does include a no-guarantees emulation of it called rn.

There are, by contrast, only two posting programs (*postnews* and **inews**), because posting is a task with fewer style choices outside the composition of the text itself. The *inews* program is intended mainly for use by other programs; you'll almost certainly use *postnews*.

On most systems, any user can post an article, which will be sent out to the network to be read by anyone interested in that topic. Some USENET sites with security or disclosure concerns may restrict the groups an ordinary user can post to, though this is not encouraged.

Netnews allows articles to be posted for limited or very wide distribution. When creating a new article, the level of distribution can be controlled by use of the Distribution field. This will prevent notices of apartments for rent in New Jersey from being broadcast to California (or even Europe).

The remainder of this guide is a tutorial, aimed at the user who wants to read and possibly post news. Anyone who must install the software should see the companion document *USENET Installation Guide*.

3. Why USENET isn't just electronic mail

Another facility with similar capabilities to *netnews* is the *electronic mailing list*. A mailing list is a collection of electronic mailing addresses of users who are interested in a particular topic. By sending electronic mail to the list, all users on the list receive a copy of the article.

While the mailing list facility is quite useful, USENET offers a number of advantages not present in mailing lists. Getting yourself on a mailing list is not always easy. You have to figure out who maintains the list and ask them to put you on it. Often these people are out of town or busy, and don't put you on the list for several days. Sometimes you have to send mail to the entire mailing list, hoping that one of the readers will tell you who maintains the list.

Once you are on the list, you often find yourself in the middle of a discussion. Netnews keeps old articles around until they expire (usually about two weeks) so you can browse through old news to catch up on what you missed. Similarly, referring to an old article is easy, without having to keep a personal file of all old mail to the list.

Another advantage is appreciated by the other users of the system. There is less overhead in having only one copy of each message sent to each machine, instead of separate copies for each of several users on the same machine. This cuts down on computer time to process the messages, and on line costs for telephone calls to transfer messages from one machine to another (when phone lines are used).

Yet another advantage is in the disk space consumed. When only one message is sent to each system, only one copy of the message is kept on disk. In a mailing list environment, each user has a copy in his mailbox.

4. Using readnews

If you have a CRT and *termcap*(3) or equivalent, you will probably want to use vnews. We'll describe readnews first, however, because it is the prototype of the other news readers and many vnews commands are based on readnews commands.

4.1. Getting started

To invoke this program, type

readnews

Each newsgroup to which you subscribe will be presented, one article at a time. As each article is presented, you will be shown the *header* (containing the name of the author, the subject, and the length of the article) and you will be asked if you want more. There are a number of possible choices you can make at this point. The three most common (y, n, and q) are suggested by the program. (To see a complete list of possible responses, type "**?**" for help.) You can type "**y**" for "yes" (or simply hit return) and the rest of the message will be displayed. If the message is long, it may stop before it runs off the top of the screen. Type space or return to see more of the message. Another choice you can make is "**n**" for "no". This means you are not interested in the message - it will not be offered to you again. A third option is "**q**" for "quit". This causes a record to be made of which articles you read (or refused) and you will exit netnews. When you have read all the news, this happens automatically. The quit command is mainly useful if you are in a hurry and don't have time to read all the news right now. (Many users put a **readnews** or **checknews** command in their *.profile* or *.login* files so that they will see new news each time they log in.)

4.2. Tips for first-timers

If you are reading news for the first time, you may find yourself swamped by the volume of unread news, especially if the default subscription is "all". Don't let this bother you. If you are getting newsgroups which you have no interest, you can change your subscription list (see below). Also, bear in mind that what you see is probably at least two weeks accumulation of news. If you want to just get rid of all old news and start anew, type

readnews -K &

which will throw away all old news, recording that you have seen it all. (The '&' puts it in the background; chances are that there is so much old news on your machine that you won't want to wait for it all.) Or, you can use the "K" command to mark all articles in the current newsgroup as read.

Once you catch up with (or ignore) all the old news, the news will come in daily at a more manageable rate. If the daily rate is still too much you may wish to unsubscribe to some of the higher volume newsgroups. Finally, note that while an article is printing, you can hit your **INTERRUPT** character (usually Control-C or Delete), which will throw away the rest of the article.

4.3. Commands

Among the other commands you can type after seeing the header of an article are:

x Exit readnews. This is different from **quit** in that the quit command will update the record of which articles you have read, but the exit command will pretend you never started readnews.

N Go on to the next newsgroup. The remaining articles in the current newsgroup are considered ‘‘unread’’ and will be offered to you again the next time you read news. If you follow this command with a space and newsgroup name you will go directly to the named group.

s *file* The article is saved in a disk file with the given name. In practice, what usually happens is that an article is printed, and then *readnews* goes on to print the header of the next article before you get a chance to type anything. So you usually want to write out the *previous* message (the last one you have read in full); in this case, use the form ‘‘**s−** *filename*’’.

w Like the s command except that it leaves the article header off the saved file.

e Erase the memory of having seen this article. It will be offered to you again next time, as though you had never seen it. The ‘‘**e−**’’ case is useful for checking follow-ups to see if anyone has already said what you wanted to say.

r Reply to the author of the message. You will be placed in the editor, with a set of headers derived from the message you are replying to. Type in your message after the blank line. If you wish to edit the header list, to add more recipients or send carbon copies, for instance, you can edit the header lines. Anyone listed on a line beginning with ‘‘To: ’’ or ‘‘Cc: ’’ will receive a copy of your reply. A **mail** command will then be started up, addressed to the persons listed in the header. You are then returned to readnews. The case **r−** is also useful to reply to the previous message. Another variation on this is **rd−** which puts you in $MAILER (or ‘‘mail’’ by default) to type in your reply directly.

f Post a follow-up message to the same newsgroup. This posts an article on this newsgroup with the same title as the original article. Use common sense when posting follow-ups; many follow-up articles should have just been replies. You will be placed in the editor - enter your message and exit. The case **f−** is also useful to follow up the previous message. In each case, the editor you are placed in will be **vi** unless you set **EDITOR** (in your environment) to some other editor. You should enter the text of the follow-up after the blank line.

+ The article is skipped for now. The next time you read news, you will be offered this article again.

- Go back to the last article you looked at. In previous versions of readnews this toggled, so that two −’s got you the current article; this version actually permits you to back up through all your previous articles to the beginning of the session. Hitting the spacebar will bring you forward again.

ˆ Takes you to the beginning of the current discussion. This version of news tries to show you all the followups to an article before going to what would otherwise be the next article in sequence. This command is useful if you find yourself in the middle of a discussion and want to review the whole thing.

b Back up one article in the current group. This is not necessarily the previous article.

ug Unsubscribe to the current group. Your .newsrc file will be edited to change the ‘‘:’’ for that newsgroup to an ‘‘!’’, preventing you from being shown that newsgroup again. This is a two character command to ensure that it is not typed accidentally and to leave room for other types of unsubscribes (e. g. unsubscribe to discussion). You may also type ‘‘U’’ to unsubscribe from a group.

ud Unsubscribe from the current discussion. Followups of this message will not be shown when you read future news.

< Assumes that the rest of the line is an Internet-style Message-ID and attempts to find the corresponding message. Each news article has a unique article ID.

d The message is an ARPANET digest, display it as such.

l Display the newsgroup index page. This shows you a list of articles in the current newsgroup, giving their subject lines. Articles you haven’t seen are marked with an asterisk.

! Passes the rest of the command line to the shell. The environment variable $A is set to the name of the file containing the current article. If the last character of the command is a "&", then the "&" is deleted and the command is run in the background with stdin, stdout and stderr redirected to /dev/null. If the command is missing, the shell is invoked.

/pattern Scan forward for article containing *pattern* in the subject. The pattern may be plain text or contain certain wildcards. See the section on Regular Expressions in for a description of the kinds of wildcards you can use. If *pattern* is omitted, the previous pattern is assumed.

/pattern/h Scan forward for article containing *pattern* in the header.

/pattern/a Scan forward for article containing *pattern* anywhere in article.

/pattern/r Scan read articles also.

/pattern/c Make search case sensitive.

?pattern Scan backward for article containing *pattern* in the subject. May be modified as the forward search is: ?pattern?modifiers[:commands]. It is likely that you will want an r modifier when scanning backward.

t Mark as read all articles with the same subject as the current article.

T Do the same as the t command, but also add a line to the initial commands for this newsgroup to kill this subject every time the newsgroup is started up.

? If you type any unrecognized command a summary of valid commands will be printed.

4.3.1. The /bin/mail interface

The interface described above is called the ‘‘msgs’’ interface because it mimics the style of the Berkeley **msgs** program. (This program, in turn, mimics a program at MIT of the same name.) The key element of the msgs interface is that after printing the header, you are asked if you want the rest of the article. This is appropriate for printing terminals and low-speed display terminals.

Another interface is available with the **−c** option of readnews. In this case, the start if the article text is printed, header and body, and you are prompted at the end of the page. This is appropriate for high-speed displays, where the time required to paint the first page is short and eliminating the extra keystroke is judged worthwhile.

The command options are the same as the msgs interface, but it is usually not necessary to use the ‘‘-’’ suffix on the reply, save, or follow-up commands. This interface is called the ‘‘/bin/mail’’ (pronounced *bin mail*) interface, because it mimics the UNIX program of that name.

Readnews includes some advanced commands not documented here that you will want to learn once you become proficient with it. For details see the *readnews*(1) manual entry.

5. Using vnews

Vnews is another program for reading USENET news. It is based on readnews but has a CRT oriented user interface. The command line options are mostly the same as those of readnews. The list of available commands is quite similar, although since vnews is a "visual" interface, most vnews commands do not have to be terminated by a newline.

Vnews uses the first 22 lines of the screen to display the current article. Line 23 is the secondary prompt line, and is used to input string arguments to commands. Line 24 contains several fields. The first field is the prompt field. If vnews is at the end of an article, the prompt is "next?"; otherwise the prompt is "more?" (except that after you have read all new articles you will be prompted with "Done?" once rather than dropped abruptly out of vnews).

The second field is the newsgroup field, which displays the current newsgroup, the number of the current article, and the number of the last article in the newsgroup. The third field contains the current time, and the last field contains the word "mail" if you have mail. When you receive new mail, the bell on the terminal is rung and the word mail appears in capital letters for 30 seconds. This field may not be displayed if you’re on a Sun, AT&T 7300 or other workstation-type display that puts a new-mail icon on its status line automatically.

5.0.1. Commands

It is useful to know that there are actually three viewing modes in vnews. These are: article mode (for reading text), subject-index mode (useful for going through lots of articles by sender and subject) and group-list mode.

Vnews starts you in group-list mode. You will see a list of the groups you are currently subscribed groups. Visited groups will be marked with an underscore in the second column. The current group will be pointed at with a '>'. Groups marked with a '*' are new ones created since since the end of your last reader session. All normal movement and marking commands work as usual, but a space or newline takes you to subject-index mode to view the current group. As you exit each group, you'll return to group list mode.

Subject-index mode helps you to browse through lots of news, looking only at messages with interesting titles and/or senders. In subject-index mode, instead of seeing the articles themselves, you see a list of articles, senders and subjects for the current group in a format much like a mailer message list. Messages already seen will be marked with an underscore in the second column. The current message will be pointed at with a '>'. Articles marked with a '*' are new ones that came in since the start of your session; you'll see these after the next time that vnews updates its tables.

All normal movement and marking commands work as usual in subject-index mode, but a space or newline takes you back to article mode to view the current article, after which you return to subject list mode. Thus, once you're in it, you can just hit the spacebar repeatedly to see articles and then pop out to the index again.

Article mode is what you read article text in; it presents you with article headers (and, if the -c option is on, first pages) of messages to be accepted or rejected. In this mode, a space or newline brings up the next page of the article; if you're at the last page, it pops you back to subject-index mode pointing at the next article.

Most of the readnews commands have vnews counterparts and vice versa. Some differences are:

1. It lacks a digest command, but tries to recognize digest boundaries (when you type 'm' you're taken to the start of the next digest if there is one).
2. To get to the previous group, use the N command with a '-' argument.
3. Vnews has commands commands for moving around in the article which readnews does not have since they aren't applicable.
4. The decrypt command always does rot 13; rot 13 seems to be the default standard and the readnews version occasionally gets confused.

5.0.2. Commands that differ from readnews

Each vnews command may be preceded by a count. Some commands use the count; others ignore it. If count is omitted, it defaults to one. Some commands prompt for an argument on the second to the bottom line of the screen. Standard UNIX erase and kill processing is done on this argument. The argument is terminated by a return. An interrupt (delete or break) gets you out of any partially entered command.

<CR> A carriage return prints more of the current article, or goes on to the next article if you are at the end of the current article.

^B Goes backwards count pages.

^F Goes forward count pages.

^N or ^Y Go forwards count lines.

^P or ^Z Go backwards count lines.

^D Go forwards half a page.

^U Go backwards half a page.

h Go back to the top of the article and display only the header.

! Use the l command (or essentially any other command) after ! to turn on the display, after the program terminates.

N Go to a different newsgroup. You are prompted for a newsgroup name. A null newsgroup name gets the next group, the name "-" gets the previous group.

^L Rewrites the screen. CONTROL-L may be typed at any time.

D Decrypts a joke. It only handles rot 13 jokes. The D command is a toggle; typing another D re-encrypts the joke.

a The vnews a command is a toggle; type 'a' while on the index page and you'll go back to the article you were in when you typed the first 'a'. All other commands operate normally in index mode; the article you entered the index page from is considered the current one.

Vnews also includes some advanced commands not documented here that you will want to learn once you become proficient with it. For details see the *vnews*(1) manual entry. You will probably want to learn at least the 'l' and 'g' commands; these control two alternate viewing modes that are useful for plowing through a lot of news very quickly.

5.1. Using your system mailer as a news viewer

The *mailnews*(1) program allows you to use various mail programs to view news. It replaces the -c option of readnews.

5.1.1. Using Berkeley Mail with mailnews If you have the Berkeley *Mail*(1) program with the −T option that asks Mail to tell mailnews which articles you read, you can use the *Mail* (pronounced *cap mail*) interface. This invokes the Berkeley **Mail** program directly, and allows you to read news with the same commands as you read mail.

5.1.2. Using other mailers with mailnews

If Berkeley Mail does not exist on your system (or if it does but your USENET administrator is ignoring it) the mailnews program will call the default local mailer to help you read news.

There are a number of other mail reading programs commonly found on UNIX systems, including /bin/mail, msg, and MH. Whether Berkeley Mail exists or not, you can force mailnews to use whatever mailer you like with its -c option (the only requirement is that the mailer accept an -f option to specify a remote mailbox). If you type

mailnews −c "/bin/mail"

for example, you'll view news through the /bin/mail interface. Mailnews will dump all new articles into an invisible temporary mailbox and call the mailer on it. When you are done, mailnews will try to deduce which articles you read by looking at the mailbox; anything you deleted will be considered seen. You can invert this (have it mark all articles **except** those you delete seen) by setting the -d option of mailnews.

5.2. Using rn

The **rn**(1) interface is a complete, self-contained news reading and posting program. Though rn uses the standard .newsrc and active file formats and a vnews-like screen-oriented display its command and option conventions are very different from the interfaces included with this distribution. For details, find an rn distribution kit and read its documentation files. Kits are available from the designer, Larry Wall (lwall@sdcrdcf.UUCP).

An emulation, incomplete but quite usable, is supplied as in this distribution.

6. Changing your Subscription List

If you take no special action you will subscribe to a default subscription list. This default varies locally. To find out your local default, type

readnews −s

Typically this list will include newsgroups used for posting site- and net-wide announcements. such as **general**, and **all.announce**. (As distributed, the default is ''general,all.announce''. Another popular default is ''all''.) You can change this by creating or altering a file in your home directory named ".newsrc" in which contains as its first line a line of the form:

options −n newsgroup,newsgroup,newsgroup ...

If your lines get too long, you can continue them on subsequent lines by beginning those lines with a space. (The netnews system will put extra lines in this file to record which articles you have read. You should ignore these lines

unless you want to edit them.) For example, if you are creating a subscription list for the first time, and have already read news, you will find some text already in your *.newsrc* file, recording which articles you have read. You should put your **options** line before the first line of the file.) Thus,

options −n general,comp.unix.questions,comp.unix.wizards

will subscribe to those three newsgroups.

A ‘‘!’’ can be used to exclude certain newsgroups and the word **all** can be used as a wild card, representing any newsgroup. You can also use **all** as a prefix or suffix to match a class of newsgroups. For example,

options −n all,!rec.humor,!all.unix.all

will result in a subscription to all newsgroups except for ARPANET news, jokes, and any UNIX information. The metacharacter ‘‘.’’ is like ‘‘/’’ to the shell, and ‘‘all’’ is like ‘‘*’’.

A simpler way to subscribe to news is to subscribe to ‘‘all’’, and then use the ‘‘U’’ readnews command to unsubscribe to newsgroups you don’t want to read. This way you will see new newsgroups that are created, get a chance to evaluate them, and then unsubscribe to those that don’t interest you.

The order of the newsgroups in your .newsrc (after the options line) is the order in which newsgroups will be shown. If you want something other than the default, move the lines around until you are satisfied with the order. Be careful to keep the options line as the first line in the file.

7. Submitting Articles

To submit a new news article type

postnews

First, it will ask you if this is a follow-up to an article. Answer yes or no. If yes, you really should have done an ‘‘f’’ from readnews, but it will try and figure out which article you are following up to. It will ask for the newsgroup you read the article in and the article number. If you can’t remember, type ? to see a list of subjects in the group. It is important that discussions are kept together. It is very frustrating for someone to read a follow-up that says: I agree. It’s very dangerous to leave that program as distributed.", and not have any idea what the poster was refering to.

If you you answer no, postnews will ask you for the Subject of the new article. This should be as informative as possible. For example, "Car for sale in New Jersey" is much better that "Car for sale" or even "For sale". It will then ask which newsgroups you want the article posted in. If you are unsure, type ‘‘?’’ instead of a specific newsgroup and it will show you the list of currently available groups. Then, you will be asked how far your article should be distributed. It is important to keep this as small as possible to accomplish the purpose of your article. Remember that many newsgroups are read in Europe, Australia and Asia in addition to the United States and Canada. It does no good (to use the previous example) to post a "Car for sale in New Jersey" article with a distribution of **world**. There is almost no chance that a person in Sweden or Korea would be interested in buying your car. It is a waste of money and computer resources to transmit the article that far. For this specific case, the appropriate distribution would be "nj" or only in New Jersey. If there were no local distribution available, at least it should be confined to "usa". If you are unsure of the distributions available at your site, type ‘‘?’’ instead of a distribution and you will receive a list of distributions valid for your site.

Then you will be placed in the editor. Enter the text of your article, after the blank line, and exit the editor. The article will be posted to the newsgroups specified. If you change your mind about the headers while you are still in the editor, you can edit them as well. Extra headers can also be added before the blank line.

If you change you mind about posting the article, you can hit your interrupt key, or if you are in the editor, either delete all of the lines or do no write out the modified file. In either case, the article will not be posted.

8. Browsing through Old News

There are a number of command line options to the **readnews** command to help you find an old article you want to see again. The **−n** *newsgroups* option restricts your search to certain newsgroups. The **−x** option arranges to ignore the record of articles read, which is kept in your *.newsrc* file. This will cause all articles in all newsgroups to which you subscribe to be displayed, even those which you have already seen. It also causes **readnews** to not update the *.newsrc* file. The **−a** *date* option asks for news received since the given *date*. Note that even with the **−a**

option, only articles you have not already seen will be printed, unless you combine it with the **−x** option. (Articles are kept on file until they expire, typically after two weeks.) The **−t** *keywords* option restricts the query to articles mentioning one of the *keywords* in the title of the article. Thus, the command

readnews −n comp.unix **−x −a** last thursday **−t** setuid

asks for all articles in the comp.unix groups since last thursday about the setuid feature. The above example will not find articles about ‘‘suid’’, nor will it find articles with no title or whose author did not use the word ‘‘setuid’’ in the title.)

Other useful options include the **−l** option (which lists only the headers of articles - a useful form for browsing through lots of articles). The **−p** option prints the articles without asking for any input; this is similar to some older **news** programs on many UNIX systems and is useful for directing output to a printer. The **−r** option produces articles in reverse order, from newest to oldest.

9. Getting News when you Log In

Most users like to be told when they first log in if there is any news. This way they are reminded of news, but are not interrupted by it during the day. If you log in once in the morning, you can think of getting the news as reading the morning newspaper. It is common to put a **checknews** or **readnews** command in your *.profile* or *.login* file of commands that happen when you log in.

Since there might not be any news, and since the **readnews** command goes to a considerable amount of work to find all unread news (assuming you are going to read it), there is another command, called **checknews**, which tells you if there is any news. The **checknews** command is smaller and faster than **readnews**, and was designed especially for a login file. There are also options to be silent if there is (or is not) news, and to start up **readnews** automatically if there is news.

The options to **checknews** are:

−y Print ‘‘There is news’’ if there is any unread news.

−v If **−y** is also given, instead of printing ‘‘There is news’’, print ‘‘News: *newsgroup ...*’’ giving the name of the first newsgroup containing unread news. If **general** is the first newsgroup presented, this can be used to tell users whether the unread news is important.

−n Print ‘‘No news’’ if there is no unread news.

−e If there is any unread news, start up **readnews.** Any additional arguments after the **−e** will be passed to readnews.

Thus, ‘‘**checknews −yn**’’ tells you whether there is any unread news. ‘‘**checknews −e −M**’’ starts up **readnews** with the Mail interface if there is news, and otherwise does nothing. ‘‘**checknews −y**’’ tells you if there is news, and is silent if there is no news.

10. Creating New Newsgroups

New newsgroups are created by the users. To create a newsgroup, first make sure this is the right thing to do. Normally a suggestion is first posted to news.groups,net.relatedgroup for a net newsgroup (net.relatedgroup should be the group which you are proposing to sub-divide. E.g. to propose creating rec.arts.tv.soaps, post the original article to rec.arts.tv, news.groups). Followups are made to news.groups ONLY. (You can force this by putting the line:

Followup-To: news.groups

in the headers of your original posting). If it is established that there is general interest in such a group, and a name is agreed on, then ask your local netnews administrator to create the newsgroup. net, within the scope of the newsgroup.) Once the newsgroup is created and the first article has been posted, the newsgroup is available for all interested persons to post to.

11. Moderating a Newsgroup If you are the moderator of a newsgroup, you will see articles in your mail that contain news headers. These are, of course, submissions to your group. You will want to post at least some of them to the net.

Pre-News 3.0 (beta level 7) versions of news generate mail that contains partial news headers along with a To: header addressed to you. These articles must be posted through postnews or inews to supply missing headers.

News 3.0 (beta level 7) users, on the other hand, will send you submissions with full news headers including an Message-ID; you can post those through rnews if you want to preserve all those headers (this is recommended so that the posting site won't see the article again under a different ID).

This change is a necessary side-effect of some other changes designed to completely hide the difference between normal and moderated newsgroups from the human-interface level of posting programs (in particular, these programs now properly handle newsgroup lists that contain any mixture of moderated and normal groups).

Another change in News 3.0 (beta level 7) is that it automatically detects when you are the moderator of an addressed group and will generate a sensible Approved header if you don't supply one.

Under News 3.0 (beta level 7), moderated groups may have more than one moderator. The second through nth fields in a moderators file line list the moderators' addresses. Submissions will be sent to all of them, and the News 3.0 (beta level 7) software will permit any of them to approve a article. Earlier versions of news at other sites have no way to know this is going on, so there is no compatibility problem.

12. List of Newsgroups

A current list of newsgroups can be obtained by typing "?" to the Newsgroups? prompt in postnews. The file this brings up lives in your library directory (usually /usr/lib/news) under the name 'newsgroups'.

Note that the list is constantly changing. It is recommended that other installations edit the list of local newsgroups to fit their installation before distributing this document to their users. If this is not possible, a local appendix can be created.

Local groups are kept on the current machine only. Local names can be identified by the lack of a prefix, that is, there are no periods in local newsgroup names.

general News to be read by everyone on the local machine. For example: The system will be down Monday morning for PM. Or, a new version of program x has been installed. This newsgroup is usually mandatory - you are required to subscribe to this newsgroup. (The list of mandatory newsgroups varies locally.) This requirement assures that important announcements reach all users.