Managing the queue of questions

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1 Starting the program

You must first login to an Athena workstation *as lucy*. If you login using your own account, posting or replying to questions will reveal your identity.

After you have successfully logged in, you will see the `athena%` prompt. At this point, type `lucy` and press the Return or Enter key. When you see the `lucy:` prompt, you are ready to start using the program.

2 Using the program

2.1 Scanning the queue

Just typing `scan` will give you a list of questions in the queue, along with each question's status and subject line.

```
40 FAP- Mar 27  Women's Support Groups
43 F-pr Mar 27  Cambridge water
44 FAPr Mar 29  Who are you?
45 FA-r Mar 31  How many Martian professors are there at MIT?
50 --p- Apr  1  Are footballs really made out of pigskin?
```

The number in the first column is called a *transaction number*. A transaction is a question or anything that happens to a question. The letters in the second column describe the status of the transaction.

F means a question has been forwarded.

A means a question has been answered.

P means a question has been posted. A lower-case p means a question has not yet been posted, but should be when an answer is ready.

R means a reply has been sent to the question asker. A lower-case r means that a reply has not yet been sent, but should be when an answer is ready.

2.2 Scanning question transactions

Typing, for example, `scan 45` will give you a listing of everything that has happened to question 45 so far.

Here is an example of such a listing:

```
45 FA-r Mar 31  How many Martian professors are there at MIT?
46 F--- Mar 31  forw 45 bhoneyde@eagle
48 -A-- Apr  1  reply from bhoneyde@eagle.mit.edu (Dr. Bunsen Honeydew)
51 ---- Apr  2  prep for reply
```

In the example above, someone sent a question and wanted a personal reply, but did not want the question/answer posted in the browser. Then this question (transaction 45) was forwarded to bhoneyde@eagle (46). An answer came back (48), which was then edited (51). Note that the transaction numbers for a question aren't necessarily consecutive.

2.3 Getting information on a transaction

Sometimes you may want more specific information on a transaction than `scan` gives you. Here's an example of what you might see if you type `stat 48`.

```
lucy:  stat 48
Subject: reply from bhoneyde@eagle.mit.edu (Dr. Bunsen Honeydew)
 Author: daemon@ATHENA.MIT.EDU
 (a.k.a. bhoneyde@eagle.mit.edu (Dr. Bunsen Honeydew))
   Date: Mon Apr  1 10:23:13 1991
 Length: 7 lines, 277 characters
 Status: -A--
```

The date is given in 24-hour time. It is accurate to the second for most transactions. However, there is a variable lapse of time between someone sending a reply via mail and the arrival of that reply in the queue.

2.4 Showing the text of a question

To see the text of, for example, question 45, type `show 45`. This works not only for questions, but for any transactions. Transactions that announce that a question has been replied to, posted or forwarded do not have text associated with them.

You can show multiple transactions by typing, for example, `show 45 48 51`.

If the transaction is too large to show on one screen, you will see the word **More** at the bottom. You can press the spacebar to scroll forward, B to scroll backward, or Q to quit. Once you see the `lucy:` prompt, you will need to type the `show` command again to return the top of the text.

2.5 Chaining two transactions together

Sometimes you will see something in the queue that appears to be a new question, but upon closer examination turns out to be an answer to a previous question. For example:

```
65 F--- Aug 23  skydiving
72 ---- Sep 15  that skydiving question
```

You first type `show 72` to verify that it should be connected to number 65. Then type `chain 65 72`. You will probably also want to mark 65 as answered (see next section in this manual).

Note: The queue of questions is set up in such a way that a transaction cannot be changed once it is entered. For this reason, the chain command has to create a new transaction chained to the first, and delete the old one. This is why a command like `chain 65 72` will get a response from the computer like `The new number for 72 is 81`

You can undo chaining, but only for the most recent chain command you typed. So whenever you use `chain` more than once, use `scan` to check to make sure that you chained the right transactions together. If you made a mistake, type `unchain` to undo it.

2.6 Marking a transaction

Sometimes lucy will receive a question via email that is incorrectly marked regarding posting/personal reply. For example:

```
74 ---- Jan 21  question from Oregon
```

It may marked as status `----`, but upon reading it you realize that it should be `--pr`. Type `mark 74 --pr` to correct the situation.

2.7 Forwarding a question

The first thing you will usually want to do when a you see a new question is forward it to an appropriate correspondent. You should usually send the question completely unedited, but sometimes you may wish to add a note to the question in order to give special instructions to the correspondent. If such is the case, you should read the next section, **Editing an answer**.

Suppose, for example, you want to forward question 45 to a correspondent whose username is bhoneyde. Here is the procedure you follow:

1. Type `forw 45 bhoneyde` at the `lucy:` prompt.
2. You will be shown the text of transaction 45 to verify that you typed the right number. Type "yes" when asked "Is this what you want to forward?"
3. In order to help you avoid mistyping a username and sending the question to the wrong place, there is a list of correspondents to whom you may send questions. If this is the first time you have forwarded a question to bhoneyde, then you will see this message:

   ```
   Could not find Joe R. User in your list of correspondents.
   Add to list?
   ```

   Check to make sure you got bhoneyde's name right. If so, type yes. Otherwise, type no, and the question will not be forwarded. Find the right username and go back to step 1.

2.8 Correspondents

To help you avoid sending a question to the wrong email address, lucy keeps a list of people to whom you frequently forward questions. If you need to edit this list, say, to delete someone, type `emacs c`.

One way to help minimize mistakes is to keep the address as short as possible. Addresses like `waldorf@MIT.EDU` and `statler@ATHENA.MIT.EDU` can be shortened to `waldorf` and `statler`. Addresses like `beaker@EAGLE.MIT.EDU` can be shortened to `beaker@eagle`. MIT network services is currently (fall '91) working on allowing such addresses to be shortened to `beaker`, but for now you'll have to add at least the @eagle part.

2.9 Editing a transaction

The example used in this section is of editing an answer someone has returned to you, but you can also use the `emacs` command to add a note to a question before forwarding. Follow the steps below, but instead of answering "prep for posting" to the question "Reason for edit:", you would type something like "note about anonymity."

When you get an answer back from someone, you may want to edit it for proper grammar and formatting. Let's take our previous example:

```
lucy: scan 45
  45 FA-r Mar 31  How many Martian professors are there at MIT?
  46 F--- Mar 31  forw 45 bhoneyde@eagle
  48 -A-- Apr  1  reply from bhoneyde@eagle.mit.edu (Dr. Bunsen Honeydew)
lucy: show 48
```

By typing `scan 45` you see that bhoneyde has sent a reply, which has transaction number 48. By typing `show 48` you see that this reply has poorly-formatted paragraphs. You can use emacs to fix it up.

Here's the dialogue you would have with lucy:

```
lucy: emacs 48
Reason for edit: prep for posting
An emacs window should appear shortly.
lucy:
```

If possible, lucy will put up a separate emacs window, so that you can move back and forth between editing and typing lucy commands.

When you have finished editing, hold down the Ctrl key, press X and C one after the other, then release the Ctrl key. Press Y, and the emacs window should disappear.

2.10 Posting an answer

Once you have edited an answer so that it looks just as it should look in the browser, you are ready to use the post command. At the `lucy` prompt, type `post 51`, for example. You will be shown the text of transaction 51 to verify that you typed the right number. Examine the text of the transaction *very carefully* to make sure that any information that would identify the question asker has been removed.

Here's the dialogue you would then have with lucy:

```
Is this what you want to post? (y/n, default: n) yes
Is this a reply to a previous posting? (y/n, default: n) yes
Which one? 28
  28 ---- Apr  3  discrimination against Martians
Is this the right one? (y/n, default: y) yes
Subject: Re: discrimination against Martians
Use this subject? (y/n, default: y) yes
```

```
Posted 51 in the browser.
If this was a mistake, type this:  unpost 32
lucy:
```

2.11 Looking at the browser

To stop looking at the queue of incoming questions and start looking at the browser, type `go browser` (or `go b` for short). You can then use `scan` and `show` as you would in the queue. When you want to go back, type `go queue` (or `go q` for short).

2.12 Unposting an answer

If you are careful, you should never have to use the technique described in this section. Instead, you will catch all problems when you use the `post` command, because you will carefully examine what you are about to post to make sure that no information therein can identify the question asker. You also will have checked spelling, etc. As soon as something goes into the browser, someone else may read it.

However, if you are looking at the browser, and you notice something that shouldn't be there, e.g. a question that gives away the identity of the asker:

```
  35 ---- Apr  9  question from Chuck Vest
```

you may remove it by typing `unpost 35`.

2.13 Sending a personal reply

When an answer is ready to be sent back to the question asker, slow down and proceed very carefully. If you send the answer to the wrong person, or if you send the wrong thing to the right person, there is no way of retrieving it.

First scan the question to find the right transaction number. For example,

```
lucy: scan 45
  45 FA-r Mar 31  How many Martian professors are there at MIT?
  46 F--- Mar 31  forw 45 bhoneyde@eagle
  48 -A-- Apr  1  reply from bhoneyde@eagle.mit.edu (Dr. Bunsen Honeydew)
  51 ---- Apr  2  prep for reply
```

The transaction you want to send is number 51, which you have already prepared for reply. In this example, the next thing you would do is type `show 45` to see where to send the reply. If you are given only an MIT phone number, dial 65 before dialing the number to ensure that the call won't be traced back to your phone.

If you are given an email address, say `pigs@space`, carefully type `repl 51 pigs@space`. Check to see that you've typed it correctly, then press Return or Enter. As a last check, you will be shown the text of transaction 51, which is about to be sent to pigs@space. Look it over very carefully, because once you press y and hit Return or Enter, that text will be sent, and you won't be able to stop it.

2.14 The Archive

When you are completely finished with a question, it should look something like this:

```
lucy: scan 45
  45 FA-R Mar 31  How many Martian professors are there at MIT?
  46 F--- Mar 31  forw 45 bhoneyde@eagle
  48 -A-- Apr  1  reply from bhoneyde@eagle.mit.edu (Dr. Bunsen Honeydew)
  51 ---R Apr  2  prep for reply
  52 ---R Apr  2  repl 51 pigs@space
```

Now you are ready to type `archive 45`. Here's the dialogue you would have with lucy:

```
lucy: archive 45
  45 FA-R Mar 31  How many Martian professors are there at MIT?
Use this subject? (y/n, default: y) y
Archived 45.  Type `unarchive 198' to undo.
```

When you next scan the queue, you won't see question 45.

To stop looking at the queue of incoming questions and start looking at the archive, type `go archive` (or `go a` for short). You can then use `scan` and `show` as you would in the queue. When you want to go back, type `go queue` (or `go q` for short).

2.15 Creating a report

Looking at the archives, you will see that there is far too much information there for you to find old questions on a given topic quickly. However, you can compile a printed report on any given topic which you can refer to when similar questions reappear.

First, scan through the archives and jot down the transaction numbers of questions you want to include in the report. You can specify a range of transactions with a dash, e.g. 115-122. Here's the dialogue you would have with lucy:

```
lucy:  report 115-122 127 132 160 198
Title of report: Martian Questions
. . .
No file report.aux.
[0]
No file report.toc.
[1] [2]
Overfull \hbox (2.72635pt too wide) in paragraph at lines 81--81
. . .
Output written on report.dvi (8 pages, 13760 bytes).
Transcript written on report.log.
```

You type the word "report" followed by a long list of numbers, then type in the title of the report, which will appear on the front page when you print it out. At this point, you will see a lot of error messages which you should just ignore. What matters is that it finishes with the last two lines like those above.

If something does go wrong, everything will stop and you will see a question mark. Type X and hit Return or Enter. You may have to do this twice. This is what you will see:

```
? x
No pages of output.
Transcript written on report.log.
```

This may be a result of typing a title that confuses the report-formatting program (latex). The following characters may cause problems:

```
~   #   $   %   ^   &   {   }   _   \
```

However, you can include them in your title if preceded with a backslash, thus: "Martians & Earthlings."

2.15.1 Printing the report

After the `report` command has done its work, you are ready to send the report to the printer:

```
lucy: lpr -Plinus
. . .
lucy: lpq -Plinus
```

In this example, the printout is sent to ‘‘linus,’’ the printer at the IS dispatch desk, room 11-226. The `lpr` command prints it. The `lpq` command lets you see where your printout stands in the line of waiting printouts.