Writer's Note: Internet users will not be able to use the interactive commands used here.   They can, however send commands via mail.

Syntax Note: In illustrating examples of interactive messaging, the IBM Tell command is used. VAX/VMS users should substitute the SEND command here.

A> What is a LISTSERV?

A LISTSERV is a program, written by Eric Thomas, that has been developed to efficiently manage many network "mailing lists", handling subscription, distribution and archiving functions.   Mailing lists usually focus on a specific topic, often indicated by the name of the list.

B> Who can use a LISTSERV?

Anyone with network access can use LISTSERV's functions.   However, certain functions relating to specific lists may have limited access, for example, subscriptions to certain lists may require owner approval, as may postings to that list.   Restrictions placed on mailing lists will be apparent when you try to utilize appropriate LISTSERV functions.

C> How do I find out what mailing lists are available.

Many schools maintain an in-school LISTSERV.   If this is so, sending the command LIST GLOBAL to your local LISTSERV (see Appendix A) will return a list (large) of the currently active mailing lists system wide.   If your school does not have a local LISTSERV, ask your contact person where the nearest LISTSERV is.   In addition, LISTSERV at BITNIC stores a file called BITNET SERVERS which lists some other interesting functions.   See the section on accessing files for information on how to retrieve this file (and others).

D> Now that I know what topics interest me, how do I use that particular list?

To subscribe to a list, send the following command to your local LISTSERV:

SUB (Listname) (Your full name)

Your local LISTSERV will automatically forward the subscription request to the correct LISTSERV site.   You should receive a mail message shortly after that contains a greeting and introductory message from the list you have subscribed to.

E> Once I have subscribed, what next?

That depends on what you wish to do.   If you wish to simply sit back and

read the messages distributed by the list, do nothing.   The messages will arrive automatically into your mailbox for you to read.   If you wish to make a contribution to the current discussion, you just mail a message to (Listname) at (Listnode), where Listnode is the node where the mailing list in question is based.   This message will (once sent) be distributed to all members of the mailing list.   The Listnode is available from the GLOBAL listserv list you requested above.

F> What other commands can I use?

The following commands can be used to determine information about a particular mailing list or listserv site.   All of the commands should be sent to LISTSERV at (Listnode).   Commands that are not connected with a specific list can be sent to your local LISTSERV.

Review (Listname) - Sends a list of all members of the specified mailing list. The header contains information about the distribution and processing options of the list.   Sometimes this function is restricted for security reasons.

Version - Indicates what version of LISTSERV is running.

Help - Self explanatory

Query (Listname) - returns your distributions for the specified list.

G> Is there a way to read older messages?

Many, not all, mailing lists maintain a log of older messages.   The amount of back messages stored generally depends on the amount of disk space avaialble, and how active the list is.   Logs are generally stored on either a weekly or monthly basis.   To retrieve a log, send the following command to LISTSERV at (Listnode):

Monthly Logs:
   GET (Listname) LOG(Last 2 digits of year)(Month 2-digits)
   Ex: GET GAMES-L LOG9003 will get you a log from March 1990.

Weekly Logs:
   GET (Listname) LOG(Year-2 Digits)(Month-2 Digits)(Week A-E)
   Ex: GET GAMES-L LOG9003A will get the log from Week1 of March 1990

H>   Do LISTSERVs have other functions?

Yes.   Many LISTSERVs maintain a storage area for publicly accessible files. These files can include reports and programs associated with specific lists, or items of interest to the general net community.   Some commands relating to

files are:

INDEX (ListName/Directory Name) - sends a listing of all files associated with a given list, or contained in the specified directory.   Sending the command INDEX without a list or directory name will send the master filelist for that node which contains a list of all subdirectories.

GET (Filename) - Sends you a copy of the specified file.

PUT (Filename) - Stores a copy of the specified file.   This is often restricted access.

Commands to access files should be sent to LISTSERV at the appropriate node.

I> How do I stop receiving mail from a list?

The command to remove yourself from a discussion list is SIGNOFF (Listname).   This command may be sent to your local LISTSERV and will be forwarded as appropriate.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Sending Commands/Instructions to a LISTSERV.

First and foremost, LISTSERV commands should only be sent to LISTSERV at the appropriate node.   The only items that should be sent to the mailing list address are those intended for distribution to all list recipients.

Commands may be sent to LISTSERV in two ways, by interactive messaging, or by mail.

The most efficient way to send short messages via the BITNET is interactive messaging.   For example, to subscribe to the HELP-NET at TEMPLEVM, you could use:

TELL LISTSERV at TEMPLEVM SUB HELP-NET (Your Name).
Note that for this example, the nodename is included.   If you have a local LISTSERV, the nodename for that may be substitued.

Commands sent by mail take longer, but are more reliable.   All commands should be included in the body of your letter, with no subject line or extraneous items, such as signature files.

Appendix B: The INFO function.

Most LISTSERVs maintain an on-line library of documentation for the various LISTSERV functions.   To find out what files are available, send the command INFO ? to your local LISTSERV.   This will return a list of info topics that can be retrieved by the INFO command.   Sending the command INFO GENINTRO will return a useful file.   Try it and see.

Appendix C: LISTHELP

For users of IBM CMS systems, such as Temple's IBM Mainframe, a utility is available from LISTSERV at TEMPLEVM which acts as a simple and limited front-end for dealing with LISTSERVs.   To get this package, which is documented, send the following commands to LISTSERV at TEMPLEVM.

GET LISTHELP MODULE
GET LISTHELP HELPCMS