

That escalated quickly

The end of a mailing list

By Gerrit Reininghaus, September 2022

Types of play: LAOG, committee larp, chat / message, potential for a zero player game

We have all been there: the moment you know that inevitably a mailing list is going down. Maybe it was calm for years already and then imploded in an outburst of messages within a few days. Maybe it was the most well-intended and enthusiastic crowd behind the mailing list and then all trust is crushed. And usually it all starts with one supposedly innocent out-of-topic email.

This is a game dedicated to all these mailing lists which went downhill. It can turn out sentimental or tragic but most likely it turns out absurd.

In this game, we play subscribers to a mailing list dedicated to a hobby.

Play this game as an actual mailing list or improvise verbally your usually written contributions to the mailing list.

Play time depends on the play mode you choose:

- Real time mode: Play this over a few days or a week in 'real time'
- Sudden death mode: write frantically one email after another (or speak out what you would have written), then the play time is around 1.5 hours

To play, you will need 4 to 20 people. The more - the messier, the better.

Content Warnings:

In-character bad behavior in written form: unfair , partly personal attacks, gaslighting, ghosting etc.

Recommended safety tools:

- X-card (of whole emails or parts of an email):
 - Write an email and start your subject line with "X-card:" to use it
- Go for a round of Lines & Veils (template included in the online play aid)
- The "unsubscribe link" is always available: leave the game whenever you want but please communicate that to the others by writing an email with the subject line "Out of game:..."
- People are more important than a mailing list: if you think somebody is not having a good time, check in with them privately.
- Add any other safety tools your group likes to use.

The game comes with an [online play aid](#). It is strongly suggested to use the play aid as it allows you to use the Bingo! component of the game.

Create your mailing list

The mailing list needs a topic to which all subscribers are dedicated to. You could choose the topic from this list of hobbies from Wikipedia:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_hobbies

Your mailing list is (pick one to three)

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Casual | <input type="checkbox"/> Innovative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Global | <input type="checkbox"/> Rebellious | <input type="checkbox"/> Educational | <input type="checkbox"/> Cynical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Newbies | <input type="checkbox"/> Esoteric | <input type="checkbox"/> Conspirative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academic | <input type="checkbox"/> Veterans | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious | <input type="checkbox"/> Fanatic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional | <input type="checkbox"/> Nostalgic | <input type="checkbox"/> Arty | <input type="checkbox"/> Idealistic |

Create your subscribers

From now on, we play a person on this mailing list. We play only that person. Give that person a name and a reason why they are on this mailing list (only good intentions). Maybe they are an expert in something, an organizer or something else. If you play with your actual email addresses, you may want to consider playing with your real name, as it will make it much easier to associate the emails with the character who wrote it.

The online play aid has a tab to write all this down. That makes it easier to remember who is who at the beginning and when filling this out together to see how everybody is weighing in.

Let the game begin

Now, actual play time can start. Agree on a play length. Depending on your play mode this could be between 45 minutes and 1 week. Write down the exact date and time the actual play time ends. Assign one player as the time keeper. When time is over it is that player's responsibility to write an email to the mailing list with the subject line "The end is near".

Write altogether 8 emails or a few more, everybody at least one, to the mailing list to establish the usual tone of discussion. This tone should be in line with the topic of the mailing list and should establish a constructive and enjoyable atmosphere. This is your chance to be a good mailing list contributor. Use information you can find on the hobby online, pretend to be an expert and consider everybody else to be an expert, no matter if it actually makes sense what they are saying.

From email number 8 onwards, everybody can start with the downturn of our poor mailing list.

This is done with one single out-of-topic email, either

- a) You look for somebody you can sell your old microwave to,
- b) You look for a friend for a new place to rent in another city.

From now on, only out-of-topic-emails are allowed.

The following list provides examples of what you could write.

Threaten to unsubscribe	Explain how this mailing list was the best place and now is shit	Ask sincerely into the group why everybody is misbehaving	Explain how hilarious this all is
Call somebody directly stupid	Write an empty email accidentally	Start commenting every email a specific person sends	Explain how this all has a deeper philosophical meaning
Ask to be unsubscribed	Write a private email accidentally to the group	Explain why it is all Gen Z / boomers fault what is happening	Explain why we should all focus on the real injustice in the world instead of taking each other down
Call people with 'a certain behaviour' indirectly stupid	Be very aggressive about others' misbehavior	Try to solve it all by being funny	Be meaner than the last person who was mean
Ask everybody to be polite and be rude doing so	Explain arrogantly to the group what needs to be done for this mailing list to work again	Start getting ready to tear this mailing list down	Attack the original de-railer as the one and only source of evil
Pretend to be interested in more details on somebody's message - but are not	Beg people to return on topic	Instigate conflict between others by for example siding with one and blaming the other	Write ironically the most ridiculous search & find request into the group
Give a warning out that people who write inappropriate emails will be removed	Suggest moving to another mail service which could handle the situation better	Call for a moderator and suggest the most inappropriate person to become one	Disagree with a person with very, very good arguments
Ask with confusion what is happening	Respond with sincerity to an email which doesn't deserve this sincerity	Express empathy for another person	Wish everybody a good day
Defend somebody with your full heart	Ask a person for forgiveness for an inappropriate email you wrote but defend your email at the same time	Make somebody look ridiculous	Send a link and a summary for a method on conflict resolution or finding peace
Tell the story about another mailing list which went down	Suggest that you found a new mailing list with you as the admin where everything will be better	Attack somebody for their supposed selfishness	Attack somebody for their supposed hidden agenda
Send a poem you found	Show vulnerability by a	Ask everybody who still	Demand that somebody

online which “perfectly describes the situation”	message of self-reflection upon one of your previous messages	reads this to write “here” or something like that into the group	should be ignored because they are just attention seeking
Ask for a period of silence on the mailing list to restart things	Demand from somebody to call for an end of this nonsense	Write emotionally that we are actually just all supposed to like each other and share something beautiful	Explain to everybody “who complains” how easy it is to unsubscribe in the most complicated manner
Make up a number how much time and energy have been wasted by now	Explain to the group why somebody is completely wrong but can’t know it better	Explain why all of this is not good for you in your current mood and tell everybody how you feel and why.	Say that because of this you are leaving the hobby and express how much you loved it before.

Bingo!

If you use the [online play aid](#), you can use the Bingo! component of the game.

Each player has a personal tab in that play aid, a Google Sheet. It contains a Bingo!-card for each player with 25 random elements from the above list of email tactics.

Every time you write an email, you can check off one item on your Bingo-card which fits to your email. A Bingo! is reached when you have checked all items in a row, column or diagonal. The goal is to reach as many Bingo!s as possible before the end of the game. Interpret this playful and not as a challenge dominating the actual game. Your joint joy is more important than a Bingo!

If you reach a Bingo, you are allowed (but not obliged) to write one on-topic-email to the group. People are allowed to respond on-topic to your email with exactly one email each. This is a short sign of hope, before the downfall continues.

End of game

When the end of the actual play has come, each player writes one last email. This is the time to show your character’s vulnerability, either in reflection, in anger or in any other feeling your character has inside of themselves. Say farewell, the mailing list might either shut down or you leave the group, your choice.

The mailing list is now shut down. Come together as a group for a short debrief.

Debrief

Each share

- Your favorite moment from the game
- What you would like to do different next time you come into a real mailing list turmoil

Practical tips to play

You might already have the perfect setup in mind on how to emulate a mailing list. If you don't, here are a couple of thoughts the author already had which might be of help.

Creating an actual mailing list can simply be done by writing one email to everybody in the game. They can hit Reply All and there we go. Begin the subject line with “[name of mailing list]” to be able to filter for messages to this list. Not changing the subject line from the previous email might in this game be a totally valid, sometimes passive aggressive, option.

For this option, everybody in the game needs to be fine with sharing an email address with each other.

You could also use a messenger service and create a group in that messenger service, like Signal, Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger. Then either claim your “mailing list” is actually a messenger group or just pretend that the messenger message is an email. Don't forget to add subject lines if you simulate an actual mailing list. They can be so sweet.

Another valid option is using a Discord server. Create a channel for the game and you are ready to go.

Finally, even the message bar in a video call is an option to write in.

Talking about video calls: if you play the “sudden death mode”, i.e. play the game in an hour and a bit, you could remain together in a video call, all muted or simply not talking (hearing sighing and furious breathing can be so encouraging for your next email!). Facial expressions are also very giving in the game.

For some people, the game is even better with a soundtrack. You could choose tracks together or do that individually. The “Oh Fortuna” from the Carmina Burana might fit pretty well.