



FAQs about FAQs

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This article is a description and primer on Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

Webified/HTMLized versions of this FAQ can be found at the following locations:

<http://www.faqS.org/faqs/faqs/about-faqs>

<http://www.irwa.org/about/faq.html>

This FAQ is also available in the following languages:

French French USENET newsgroup - fr.usenet.reponses
 ftp://ftp.univ-lyon1.fr/pub/faq/by-name/fr/usenet/
 translation by Philippe Ladame <ladal751@eurobretagne.fr>
 Korean http://www.netusers.org/FAQen/faq_about_faq.html
 translation by BangYeon Kim (kbay) kbay@chollian.net
 Spanish <coming soon - maybe - someday>

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1) WHAT ARE FAQs?

1.1) What does FAQ stand for?

FAQ is an acronym for Frequently Asked Questions. It is also sometimes used as the singular Frequently Asked Question (Although when was the last time you heard only one question?).

Some have called it Frequently Answered Questions as well. This isn't necessarily correct, but it isn't necessarily wrong either. It effectively has the same meaning.

A compilation of Frequently Asked Questions (and their answers) is referred to as a FAQ list or FAQ article. Sometimes the term FAQ itself is used to refer to the article - as an example, I refer to this article as a FAQ about FAQs.

The term FAQ has a meaning of its own that could almost qualify it as a word of its own. Sometimes, FAQs are full of answers. Other times they are policy statements for USENET groups, without the Question and Answer format that is popular.

FAQs fall into the realm of articles called "Periodic Postings". In addition to FAQs, other articles or compilations of information are posted and/or archived.

1.2) How is FAQ pronounced?

FAQ is pronounced three ways:

- 1. By pronouncing the letters individually: F - A - Q
- 2. As a word: fack
- 3. Obscenely: <figure it out on your own>

The first two pronunciations are the most common, and are used about equally. Some will say F - A - Q if they are speaking with someone that really doesn't know the Internet. Those who are lazy (me for example) will use "fack", since it is easier to say. Often when initiating a conversation it is useful to say F - A - Q, and then once the subject has been established, "fack" should be sufficient.

You will notice that in this document I use the phrase "a FAQ" rather than "an FAQ". This is because most of the time I say "a fack" instead of "an F-A-Q".

Feel free to use whichever pronunciation you prefer and don't let anyone bully you. Both ways are acceptable. If you use the third way... well, you're on your own.

1.3) What do FAQs contain?

FAQs are compilations of information which are [usually] the result of certain questions constantly being asked (posted) in a newsgroup - hence the name FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions).

It seems that those who frequent USENET are a polite bunch. In my house, the "frequently asked questions" that my three rug rats come up with are usually referred to as stupid questions or pestering. There is a lesson to be learned from this... before asking a question in a newsgroup or mailing list, make sure that you've checked out the appropriate FAQs. A frequently asked question can be a stupid question if the answer is posted right in front of your face in one or more FAQs.

Sometimes a FAQ or periodic posting is compiled as a result of extensive research on a specific subject. A convenient way to share the information with others is by posting the article. In this case, the article might not really be a FAQ - that is, it isn't necessarily based on frequently asked questions. However, the term FAQ is sometimes used as a catch all term for articles, periodic postings, compilations, etc.

It is becoming common practice to refer to some "off-line documentation" as FAQs. Yes, it's true, off-line documentation still exists, I actually saw some a little while back ;-). All sorts of stuff now comes with support-staff-written FAQs, whereas they would have been called Q&A sections before.

Many of the FAQs found on USENET or the Internet today (including mine :-) could actually be considered NSFAQBTIWTS - Not So Frequently Asked Questions, But Things I Wanted To Share (thanks to Robin Getz for this gem). I've also seen them referred to as LFAQ (Less Frequently Asked Questions). Is there no end?! Where is Chicken Man, now that we need him?

1.4) What are FAQs used for?

Before asking a question in a USENET newsgroup, check out the appropriate FAQs. If you can't find the answer to your question there, then you can post your question to the newsgroup. Frequently asked questions in a newsgroup tend to make the news hard to read. With more news traffic, there is more to sift through. Do everyone a favor, first try to find the applicable FAQs. Then read them. If you can't find them, look for them. If you still can't find them, ask where they are. Then read them.

If after reading the appropriate FAQs, you still can't find the answer to your question, then you can post your question to the appropriate newsgroup. It is recommended that after you receive your answer(s), you post a summary to the newsgroup. It might also be nice to notify the maintainer of the appropriate FAQ(s) of the answers so that they can update their articles accordingly (keep in mind that they don't always have the time to scan the newsgroups for new information).

Don't assume that the FAQ maintainer is willing or able to answer every question he or she receives. Some make every attempt possible to answer as best as they can. Others either just get too many questions to deal with, or they're busy with other things. Please keep this in mind - it might be better to ask your question in a newsgroup.

1.5) Where are FAQs found/kept/hidden?

Please do not ask the FAQ maintainer to mail you a copy of their FAQ.

They just don't have the time - believe me, I know. Instead, make every possible effort to obtain the FAQ from the standard locations described in this section (USENET newsgroups, archives, etc).

1.5.1) USENET

FAQs can be found all over the Internet. The most common place to find FAQs are in USENET newsgroups. USENET is a distributed discussion system that exists on the Internet and some other networks. Many newsgroups have a FAQ specific to the subject of the newsgroup. It is also common, in some newsgroups (that by nature cover more ground), to have a number of FAQs on different, pertinent subjects. Some FAQs that have been approved by the *.answers moderators team (more on this in section 3) appear in the various *.answers newsgroups ([news.answers](#), [comp.answers](#), [sci.answers](#), etc). A quick browse through these newsgroups will turn up many interesting articles - do yourself a favor and check from time to time.

1.5.2) Mailing lists

Many mailing lists also have their own FAQs. Some mailing lists automatically mail the FAQ to the list of subscribers. Other lists send a notice advising subscribers how to get a copy. The second option seems to be the most prevalent. An important reason for this is that most FAQs are fairly large (some are even multi-part), and it wouldn't make sense to periodically mail it out to an entire mailing list. Some mailing lists automatically mail the FAQ(s) out to new subscribers (probably with the hope that this will avoid stupid questions), and then letting the subscriber retrieve updated versions of the FAQ(s) by ftp.

1.5.3) Archives

Many FAQs are also archived. One important repository of FAQs and other articles is the [news.answers](#) archive maintained by the moderators of the [news.answers](#) newsgroup. All FAQs that have been approved for posting to the [news.answers](#) newsgroup are archived at <ftp://rtfm.mit.edu> (and all of the mirror sites) in the following directories:

By subject line -

/pub/usenet/news.group.name
/pub/usenet-by-group/news.group.name

By subject category -

/pub/usenet/news.answers
/pub/usenet-by-group/news.answers
and for the other *.answers newsgroups
/pub/usenet/*.answers (eg. [comp.answers](#), [sci.answers](#), [rec.answers](#))
/pub/usenet-by-group/*.answers

By newsgroup hierarchy -

/pub/usenet-by-hierarchy/news/group/name

To find a FAQ by the newsgroup it belongs to, look in the directory /pub/usenet (which is the same as /pub/usenet-by-group). There you will find that each newsgroup has its own subdirectory (if applicable). As an example, if you are looking for one of my FAQs on microcontrollers, look in

/pub/usenet-by-group/comp.answers/microcontroller-faq. There you will find three entries: 8051, 68hc11, and primer.

You can also search for FAQs by working your way through the newsgroup hierarchy. Look in the directory /pub/usenet-by-hierarchy and you will find a subdirectory for each newsgroup category (news, comp, rec, alt, ...). Then just keep working your way down the hierarchy by entering the appropriate subdirectory to find the FAQs that you are looking for. For example, to find my FAQs on microcontrollers, look in /pub/usenet-by-hierarchy. Go into the comp subdirectory, and then go into the answers subdirectory. All of the FAQs posted to [comp.answers](#) will be listed under this directory.

Instead of searching through the archive, many of the periodical postings on USENET are listed in the [news.lists](#) newsgroup under the heading:

"List of Periodic Informational Postings, Part * *"

These lists are archived at /pub/usenet/news.lists with the archive names:

"List_of_Periodic_Informational_Postings,_Part_*_*"

If you do not have access to anonymous ftp, you can also send e-mail to mail-server@rtfm.mit.edu to get FAQs by e-mail.

Initially, try a message with no Subject: and just the following lines in the body:

```
help
end
```

One useful command is the index command. This returns a list of the contents of a particular directory. Some examples of how to use this command are:

```
index
index usenet-by-group
index usenet-by-group/news.announce.newusers
index usenet-by-group/news.answers
```

Be warned that [news.answers](#) has a LOT of information in it. The directory listing that will be sent to you by Email will be LARGE.

Another main FAQ archive is <http://ftp.faq.s.org/faqs/> which contains the same FAQs as the rtfm site.

1.5.4) World Wide Web

The following sites have converted some or all of the FAQs into HTML making referenced links much easier to follow.

<http://www.faq.s.org/faqs/>
<http://www.cis.ohio-state.edu/hypertext/faq/usenet/FAQ-List.html>
<http://www.cs.ruu.nl/cgi-bin/faqwais>
<http://www.intac.com/FAQ.html>
http://www.lib.ox.ac.uk/internet/news/faq/by_group.index.html
<http://www.ucsal.f.ac.uk/cgi-bin/faqsearch>
<http://www.superb.net/FAQ/>
<http://www.landfield.com/faqs>

The World Wide Web uses hypertext links, contained in HTML (HyperText Markup Language) documents, to join pieces of information located either at the same or different sites. The links are in the form of URLs (uniform resource locators), a standard way of coding the

location of hypertext information.

Check with your system administrator or on-line service for more information on how to access the World Wide Web.

1.5.5) Collections and Compilations on CD-ROM

This is a controversial subject among FAQ maintainers. Even my mentioning this subject puts me in danger ;-). Many FAQ maintainers (such as myself) object to the practice of some firms grabbing everything available from the USENET archives (including many copyrighted FAQs), putting it on a CD-ROM, and then selling it.

In some ways, the idea of a FAQ being distributed in a CD-ROM collection isn't necessarily evil. After all, the main idea behind writing the FAQ in the first place is to share information with others. The CD-ROM is another way to share this information. It even gives access to those who don't have access to the Internet.

On the other side of the coin, you'll find many FAQ maintainers who think that the whole idea of restricting the distribution of FAQs (theirs in particular) is misguided. That's fine - the owner of a FAQ can set whatever conditions for distribution that they want.

The basic objection to the use of FAQs without the permission of the author, is one of control over copyrighted material. The FAQ maintainer works hard at compiling and maintaining the FAQ. The issue is not one of greed, since it is clear that the FAQ maintainer wants to share with others. It just isn't fair for someone else to make a buck at it.

Some FAQ maintainers are fussy about the most recent information being available. A FAQ on a CD-ROM is out of date - PERIOD. The only place to get a FAQ, and be sure that it is up-to-date, is from the appropriate USENET group (or archive). It should be the right of the FAQ maintainer to decide what to do with the FAQ.

Finally, the practice of using copyrighted works without permission is illegal. Most FAQ maintainers have a copyright statement, along with the phrase "all rights reserved", appended to their FAQ. Therefore, the FAQ maintainer, and no one else, has the right to do whatever (s)he wishes to do with the FAQ.

If you come across such a FAQ (with the appropriate copyright statements) in a commercial collection, please notify the company you purchased it from that what they are doing is illegal. It would also be appropriate and appreciated if you would notify the author of the FAQ that his/her FAQ is illegally being sold.

Many popular magazines have advertisements for collections on CD-ROM of Internet/USENET archives. I cannot verify whether they adhere to the proper legal practices in the compilation and distribution of the contents of their collections. I'm not even sure if I (personally) agree or disagree with the practice. Please keep the FAQ maintainers' interests (and feelings) in mind.

1.6) What was the first FAQ?

FAQs on the Internet

Eugene Miya is usually credited with being the author of the first FAQ. Although, in his words, "I didn't do the very first FAQ, but I probably did the first one of an informational nature." His article might possibly be the first one that was called a FAQ. Eugene points out that Mark Horton kept an "18 question" periodic post. This was posted to "general", which was later called [news.announce.*](#). It had answers to questions such as "What does 'foobar' mean?" and "What does 'unix' stand for?"

In 1982, while acting as an official NASA presence on the gatewayed ARPAnet mailing list SPACE[-Digest]/net.space news groups, he tired of seeing "dumb answers" to recurring questions. The situation as Eugene saw it was that the answers to these questions were are often poorly thought out, inconsistent, and uninformed. Furthermore, the posters of the questions often weren't trying to find the answers from books, magazines, or other references. They also weren't paying attention to previous answers to these same questions. Rather, they were just taking the easy way out - email the question and wait for the answer.

Eugene therefore decided to start a series of monthly posts in 1983 to rectify this sorry state of affairs. The mechanism of periodic postings was also a way to provide information to those who didn't have access to the archives.

The first posts included the addresses of NASA Centers, some basic references, etc. He also had a yearly posting trying to attract summer hires for the various NASA centers. All of these are still being posted, albeit by someone else now.

Interesting historical note (at least I think so)

While going through some junk (and I have lots of that) I ran across an old Mura, 300 baud, manual modem. Interestingly enough, a one page FAQ dated Dec. 1980 was included with the Owner's Manual. Entitled "Frequently Asked Questions about Public Utilities Charges for Your Muraphone" this FAQ discussed the various charges that the customer might incur from the phone and electric companies as a result of using a Muraphone (Mura's cordless phone). The issues were equally applicable for the use of a modem.

Although not an Internet FAQ, Mura's small insert is of interest due to the use of the name "Frequently Asked Questions" way back in 1980.

How far back?

If anyone is aware of an Internet FAQ predating Mark Horton's or a non-Internet FAQ predating Mura's, please send details to me at russ@shani.net.

1.7) So what IS a FAQ?

From their humble beginnings as a way to prevent stupid questions from being asked on the newsgroups (yeah, I'm sure this really helped!), FAQs have become a form of contemporary literature - an art form spawned from the Internet. Today you'll find FAQs popping up just about anywhere - that is, anywhere there are frequently asked

questions, and frequently answered answers. Anyone can write a FAQ, many people read them, and everyone benefits. Can't beat that with a stick.

2) WRITING A FAQ

2.1) Who may write/compile a FAQ?

Anyone - no rule exists about who may or may not compile/write a FAQ. If there is a need for the information contained, your FAQ will be appreciated.

2.2) Why write a FAQ?

The Internet (and USENET) is frequently referred to as the Information SuperHighway. You can argue the merits of this analogy, but you can't deny that there's lots of stuff out there. The big problem is finding it - and I mean BIG PROBLEM. It might be more accurate to refer to the Internet as "the large, multi-storied, over-crowded, Information Parking Lot." And the attendant is away!

One thing that I've discovered in the short time that I've been on the Internet, is the willingness of those who frequent USENET to help others find their way around this great big wonderful mess. A FAQ is a good way to help lots of good folks at the same time. The first FAQ that I wrote was as a result of my search for information on Intel 8051 microcontrollers. I couldn't find anything for a long time. I used Archie, Gopher, and lots of other methods that I either read about or that friends recommended. In addition, I scanned the appropriate newsgroups. However, all that I could find were the same questions that I was asking. I nearly came to the conclusion that the Internet was a waste of time.

After compiling a few facts, I put them together in a small article (under 5K) and posted it to a few USENET newsgroups that seemed to have a reasonable connection to the subject matter. In a short time I was inundated with Email. Readers of my FAQ from all over the world sent additions and corrections for the FAQ, requests to post to other newsgroups, kind words of appreciation, offers of free software and literature, and even a job offer. Today the FAQ is over 100K in size and two other FAQs were born from the leftovers from this first FAQ.

As a result of this modest effort, I have learned a lot. I have more than enough information about the 8051 microcontroller, I learned my way around the Internet, and I have made connections with a number of really nice people. Even more, my FAQ had a snowballing affect. Several other people are now either maintaining or starting FAQs on other microcontrollers. In a short time, if a newcomer to the Internet is looking for information on microcontrollers, a pile of information will be immediately available, without the need for months of searching. Hopefully, the same will be true about the subject(s) that you are interested in.

2.3) What subjects are appropriate?

Just about anything. If you see the same questions always popping up in your favorite newsgroups, a FAQ might be needed. First, look in the USENET archives and ask in the appropriate newsgroups if such a FAQ exists. If there is no FAQ, and you know the answers (or at

least a good number of them), do yourself and everyone else a favor. Compile the questions and answers together in an article, and post it regularly to the newsgroup.

Just as important, make sure that your FAQ is made available to the right audience. This means carefully choosing which newsgroups to post it to. Often, requests from other newsgroups will inform you that others are also interested in your FAQ.

2.4) How important is accuracy?

If you are maintaining a listing of all of the Gilligan's Island episodes (yeah, there is such a FAQ, and it's great!), the chances of causing serious damage to someone are pretty slim.

However, as a purely hypothetical example:

- if you are maintaining a FAQ on the Pentium processor
- you claim that the Pentium is 100% accurate and bug-free
- someone reads your FAQ, bases a project on this information, and encounters a bug that has terrible consequences
- at the least, you will be considered vermin by your dear reader
- at the worst, you might find yourself being sued by same

Some FAQs are in the business of sharing information about different products. This can be a bit touchy when trying to convey quality or usability. Care should be taken when relying on opinions (even, or especially, your own) or hearsay. Try to check out the details the best that you can. You might consider stating if an item is opinion or fact (whatever that is). Be open for suggestions. The inclusion of a disclaimer might be called for, although it really shouldn't be necessary (see section 4.2).

2.5) What is the required format and style for a FAQ?

No format is required. You are free to be as creative as you wish. Keep in mind however, that the FAQ should be readable. Don't just cobble together a document that has no organization or flow.

One common practice is to organize the FAQ as questions and answers, much like this article itself. This fits in well with the name Frequently Asked/Answered Questions. In other cases, it may make more sense to organize your FAQ as a reference. That is, lots of answers without the questions being stated (asked) specifically. Some FAQs can use both of these techniques in the same document. One part of the article can be in question/answer format, while the rest can be a reference.

It is highly recommended that you establish a consistent and easy to read format. For this document I chose to use a hierarchical numbering system, but you may prefer another method (e.g. Roman numeral, Capital letter, number, small letter). Indenting the text also makes it easier to read the document (Ask just about any graphics artist, and they will tell you that white space is important). If you prefer a particular formatting technique, by all means use it. Just please keep in mind that everyone will get more out of your efforts if the result can be easily read.

In addition, a FAQ can be in straight ASCII, or in several other special formats. I prefer using straight ASCII since it is more easily accessible to a larger number of users.

One proposed format is "FAQs: A Suggested Minimal Digest Format".

This article is posted periodically to:

[news.admin.misc](#), [news.software.readers](#), [news.answers](#)

The author is:

clewis@ferret.ocunix.on.ca (Chris Lewis)

This article is also archived as:

faqs/minimal-digest-format

Another format is the html document standard for use on the World Wide Web (WWW). This is becoming a popular way to "publish" information, however there are some disadvantages:

- "webifying" or "htmlizing" isn't necessarily easy
- many people prefer reading a straight ASCII document instead of jumping around
- not everyone has access to the Web (oh yeah? who?)

It is becoming common practice to maintain two versions of a FAQ. One is in straight ASCII and is posted to the appropriate USENET newsgroups. The other version is in html and is made available on a web site, giving the reader easy and instant access to the various site links contained in the FAQ.

Grammar and spelling are also important. Poor grammar can cause ambiguities and make it difficult for the reader to understand what you're trying to say. Spelling mistakes are distracting, and can also create confusion. Although it isn't necessary to work towards a doctorate in English literature, take a few moments to review your work and clean it up.

2.6) What is the maximum size of a FAQ?

FAQs have no size limit, although sometimes a system may impose certain restrictions - 64K is always a magic number. I've also seen 100K used as a limit. In addition to system limits, FAQs that are very large (over 64K) might be difficult to handle. You might consider splitting your FAQ up into pieces, with each piece having its own theme.

Many old USENET sites will not accept articles over 64k. Some on-line services have smaller limits (32k for America Online). FAQ maintainers have to make a trade-off between the universality that they wish their FAQ to achieve, and the convenience of one large article as opposed to several smaller articles.

The trend seems to be towards keeping FAQs in one piece, no matter how large they get. I recently asked the readers of my microcontroller FAQs if they wanted the FAQs split into multiple parts or kept in one piece. Even though two of the FAQs are over 100K, and the third is approaching 100K, the results were unanimously for keeping each of the FAQs intact and in one piece. The convenience of not having to juggle different pieces of the document (both for the author/maintainer and for the reader) outweighs the inconvenience of an occasional newsreader program that can't handle large articles. Also, most on-line services are in the process of removing size restrictions, making the size of the FAQ more dependent on personal taste, and less on "technology" (or the lack thereof).

2.7) What is a header and do I need one?

A header contains descriptive information about your posting. If you post your FAQ by means of a newsreader, a [minimal] header will be supplied automatically. This header is required by the posting mechanism.

Providing additional header information isn't really crucial unless there is a specific need (such as providing a version number). If you are considering submitting your FAQ for *.answers approval, certain header information is required. See section 5 for more details about this. If you aren't worried about approval for now, then you don't need to worry about the header either.

2.8) Additional information

There are several additional sources of information on FAQs and FAQ writing.

The main source of information on FAQs is the collection of documents that have been produced by the [news.answers](http://www.faqs.org) team. If you are considering putting together your own FAQ, these are required reading.

Introduction to the *.answers newsgroups

<http://www.faqs.org/faqs/news-answers/introduction/preamble.html>

*.answers submission guidelines (the bible for getting your FAQ approved)

<http://www.faqs.org/faqs/news-answers/guidelines/preamble.html>

*.answers post-approval guidelines

<http://www.faqs.org/faqs/news-answers/postapproval-guidelines/preamble.html>

A couple of other good sources of information on FAQs:

Infinite Ink's (Nancy McGough) "Finding and Writing FAQs and Periodic Postings"

<http://www.jazzie.com/ii/internet/faqs.html> (primary)

<http://www.best.com/~ii/internet/faqs.html> (mirror)

David Alex Lamb's "FAQ maintenance aids"

<http://www.qucis.queensu.ca/FAQs/FAQaid/>

FAQ author support page

<http://www.landfield.com/faqs/authors.html>

Eugene Miya also has an article "FAQ on FAQs n.g.FAQ" posted to: [news.groups](http://www.news.groups) (hint: the n.g. is short for [news.groups](http://www.news.groups)).

A few other sites of interest:

AOL's Internet Development and Outreach Team has put together a site dedicated to the subject of Netiquette.

<http://www.idot.aol.com/netiquette/>

"Net Lingo" is a site to aid in the understanding of the terms and acronyms found on the Internet.

<http://www.netlingo.com/>

The International Webmasters Association web site

<http://www.irwa.org/>

3) POSTING/DISTRIBUTING A FAQ

3.1) How do I post/distribute my FAQ?

If you only need to post your FAQ to one or two USENET newsgroups (or mailing lists), then you can just manually post it whenever the posting date rolls around. It is also possible to cross post it to several groups at once. Check with your system administrator for more details on how to do this.

Some sites don't keep their news around for a long time, so your posting might disappear from those location sooner than you planned. For this reason, and to allow general access to your FAQ, it is a good idea to archive it somewhere if possible. This might be on a friendly ftp site that agrees to keep the current copy available for ftp'ing, on a mail server, or on your own system (as long as others have some sort of access).

If your FAQ is to be posted to a large number of newsgroups, then it might be a good idea to take advantage of the faq-server set up by the *.answers team. The faq-server can be used to automatically post any periodic posting that is first approved by the *.answers team. It allows automatic posting at set intervals to as many newsgroups as required. A big advantage of using the faq-server is that it is quick, easy, and automatic. Check with the *.answers team for more details on this.

3.2) Where do I post/distribute my FAQ?

Among the many places that you might choose to post or distribute your FAQ:

- Internet Web sites
- USENET newsgroups
- Commercial on-line services (Compuserve, America On Line, BIX, Prodigy, etc)
- Bulletin Board Systems (BBS)
- manufacturers' literature (I have given my permission to several major corporations to include portions of my microcontroller FAQs in various product/technical documents.)
- published works (many authors or publishers like to include portions of the appropriate FAQs in their works, this gives the reader an easy way to find more information on the subject)
- a number of FAQs (as well as other articles that started out as information guides on USENET) are now being made available in print (these range from full-blown works issued by major publishers, to simple pamphlets printed privately)

3.3) How often do I post/distribute my FAQ?

Posting your FAQ once a month should be sufficient. In some special circumstances, you might need to post your FAQ twice a month to keep it available in the newsgroup. Adding an expiration date in the header also helps keep it from being purged too soon. This doesn't always work, since your local system determines when the articles will be purged, and this doesn't always coincide with the expiration date.

4) LEGAL STUFF

4.1) Do I need to copyright my FAQ?

If you invest a lot of time on your FAQ, and most FAQ maintainers do, you might be concerned about protecting your work. Under the Berne Convention (to which the vast majority of "Western" nations are signatories), as soon as something is published, then the writer/producer of the item is held to own the copyright. You can add (C) copyright 1997 if you want, but it is no longer necessary (sort of like chicken soup, doesn't necessarily help, but it couldn't hurt).

Protecting your work with a copyright protects your rights if someone else decides to steal your work and make a buck from it. As mentioned above in section 1.5.5, it is very common for companies to compile information from the Internet, put it on a CD-ROM, and sell it. While copyright protection won't prevent this from happening, it at least makes it illegal and gives you legal recourse if you need.

Check the copyright FAQ for further details. If it is important enough, you should consult with a lawyer experienced in copyright law.

4.2) Do I need a disclaimer?

In this "sue the pants off of anyone that looks at me cross-eyed" world that we live in today, many FAQ maintainers are using disclaimers to protect against possible law suits. If your FAQ contains information that might be used in sensitive applications, and if something were to go terribly (and tragically) wrong, do you think that you would be sued? Does a bear defecate in the woods? See section 2.4 (How important is accuracy?) for more information on this subject.

I'm not a lawyer, so I won't attempt to give definitive advice here (yes, this is a disclaimer), but something such as the following might help cover your tush. Whether it in fact really helps or not, I don't know.

This article is provided as is without any express or implied warranties. While every effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this article, the author/maintainer/contributors <take your pick> assume(s) no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages resulting from the use of the information contained herein.

Another common disclaimer (that you have more than likely already encountered), is that used to disclaim any connection between the author's opinions and those of their employer. If your article is in anyway related to what you do for a living, and if there might be a conflict of interest, it might be worthwhile to include something like this:

The contents of this article reflect my opinions only and not necessarily those of my employer.

5) APPROVAL FOR *.ANSWERS - THE BIG TIME

5.1) Why bother getting a FAQ approved for [news.answers](#)?

When your FAQ is approved for posting to one or more of the *.answers newsgroups ([news.answers](#), [comp.answers](#), [sci.answers](#), etc), it is brought to the attention of those who might not be regular readers of the newsgroup(s) that you usually post your FAQ to. This means that a larger potential audience gets a chance to know about your hard work.

One of the major reasons for getting your FAQ approved by the [news.answers](#) team, is that a FAQ that is posted to one of the *.answers newsgroups is automatically archived. This is important since some sites purge old postings more frequently due to lack of space. The archive makes your FAQ available anytime someone wishes

to ftp it from rtfm.mit.edu (the archive site) or any of its mirrors.

Another important reason to get your FAQ approved, is that you can then use the faq-server to automatically post to whichever newsgroups you want.

Last, and least or most (depending on your personality), there is always the fame and glory associated with being a FAQ maintainer. Once your FAQ becomes widely read and distributed, you will be amazed at how many times your name will be mentioned in postings or other articles.

5.2) How do I get my FAQ approved?

In order to get a FAQ approved for posting to news.answers, you need to submit your FAQ to the *.answers team. For a detailed explanation of what you need to do to make your FAQ *.answers compliant, read the *.answers guideline. Check in news.answers to see if it is posted there under the heading "news.answers submission guidelines". If the document isn't currently available at your site, send a mail message to mail-server@rtfm.mit.edu with the command "send usenet/news.answers/news-answers/guidelines" (without the quotes) in its body. You can of course ftp the document from the same place.

Getting a FAQ approved is easy and doesn't require much on your part. The most important consideration for approval is a proper header. A minimal example follows:

```
From: russs@silicom.co.il (Russ Hersch)
Newsgroups: comp.robotics,comp.realtime,sci.electronics,comp.answers,sci.answers,news.answers
Subject: 68hc11 microcontroller FAQ
Followup-To: poster
Approved: news-answers-request@MIT.EDU
Summary: This article is a collection of information sources on
         the Motorola 68hc11 line of microcontrollers.
```

```
Archive-name: microcontroller-faq/68hc11
Posting-Frequency: monthly
```

This is a real live header taken from one of my FAQs. Another example would be the header to the FAQ you are currently reading. The news.answers guideline document clearly explains the purpose of each line of the header. To make things simple, you can just take the above example and adapt it for your FAQ. Just a few cautions:

- All of the fields in the above header are required and all must be included. There are additional, optional fields which may be included if you want to take the time to figure out what they're used for. Personally, I'm too lazy.
- The Newsgroups line must have one space after the colon. All of the newsgroups must be listed on one line with no spaces or extraneous characters (which is why the Newsgroups line seems to fall off the edge of this document - it is not a mistake).
- Followup-To must specify either "poster" (which directs followups back to the author of the FAQ) as done above or the home newsgroup of the FAQ (which directs followups to the newsgroup). Do not forget this field since responses then might be directed to the news.answers team, and they will not be very happy about that. Do NOT put an E-mail address in the "Followup-To:" field.
- *** IMPORTANT *** The Approved heading is ONLY used when your FAQ is actually approved. When you are notified by the news.answers team that your FAQ has been accepted, then you may add this line to your header. DO NOT include this field until

your FAQ is approved, or you will find yourself in deep doo-doo.

- For a multi-line summary, the second line of the Summary field should start with at least one space.
- One blank line should appear before the Archive-name line.
- Archive-name should be fairly descriptive but short. If you aren't sure about this, take your best shot at it and the *.answers team will adjust it if necessary.

Once you've added the appropriate header to your FAQ, you can submit it to the [news.answers](mailto:news.answers@mit.edu) moderators for approval. Send it to the following address: news-answers@mit.edu. Don't expect an immediate answer as these guys are REALLY busy. They will send you back a letter indicating if your FAQ has been approved, and if not, what needs to be done to get it in order.

If you have any questions, don't be embarrassed to ask the [news.answers](mailto:news.answers@mit.edu) moderators, that's what they're there for. Most of the time the problem is simpler than you think. As you gain more experience, things will become clearer. Send your questions to: news-answers-request@mit.edu.

To get your FAQ approved for posting to *.answers, you need to do the following:

1. Get (as described above) the "[news.answers](#) submission guidelines" article before you do anything. This is a good reference document which discusses many details that I chose not to delve into.
2. Make sure your FAQ is accurate. If you've already been posting it, then your readers have probably already helped you out on this. If you prefer, you can begin by posting the article marked as "DRAFT" a couple of times, to get feedback - then submit it for approval.
3. Make sure that your FAQ is organized so that the material is easily accessible to the reader.
4. Similarly, make sure your FAQ is formatted nicely (proper margins and indentation). This really helps when trying to read it.
5. Prepare a header (as described above) to add to the beginning of your FAQ.
6. Submit your FAQ for approval.
The address for submitting your article:
news-answers@mit.edu - ONLY for submissions (no questions!)
The address for requesting information and for asking questions about the process:
news-answers-request@mit.edu (questions and requests for help)
7. Please be patient and don't ask the moderators about the status of your submission. They are very busy and are not able to deal with "nuisance" mail. Use your judgement - if your teenage daughter was in Kindergarten when you submitted the article, then you might be justified in sending them a note. If she was only in fourth grade, think twice.

5.3) FAQ maintainers

Once your FAQ is approved, you are now included in the fraternity of elite individuals known as FAQ maintainers (FAQers might not be the best term for obvious reasons). Pass out cigars, throw a party, have a beer, and write and tell Mom about it.

So what now? Well, you should prepare yourself for Email. Possibly lots of it. You've now become a "personality" on the Internet (as Jonathan Horen, a good friend of mine put it), and an "authority" on

the subject that your FAQ covers (whether you really are or not). You will more than likely become a central address for those who have questions about the topic that you've addressed in your FAQ. Enjoy yourself - you will end up "meeting" a lot of very nice people from all over the world. These new friends of yours will help you keep your FAQ up-to-date. Everyone will benefit.

It is very likely that you will find yourself very busy maintaining your FAQ. Some FAQs require a lot of attention. Others, once they hit their maturity, just sort of coast for a while. My microcontroller FAQs keep me pretty busy and often keep me from working with the very microcontrollers that I originally set out to do. Since I'm still learning a lot about the subject, I don't mind this too much. However, I would like to apply what I'm learning and actually accomplish something. I wouldn't want anyone to say (to paraphrase an old saying), "Those who can do, those who can't write the FAQ."

5.4) FAQ maintainers mailing list

As a FAQ maintainer, you might want to consider joining the `faq-maintainers` mailing list. This is used for discussing issues related to the `*.answers` newsgroups and the maintenance of FAQs. There is also a `faq-maintainers-announce` list, which is used only for announcements. Subscribers to the `faq-maintainers` list automatically receive messages sent to `faq-maintainers-announce`.

Traffic on the `faq-maintainers` list is sporadic and the topics eclectic. There are times that I feel this mailing list is really useful, other times I have no use for it whatsoever. Sometimes the traffic is heavy and the topics varied, some interesting and some not so interesting (in my opinion). Other times all you can do is scratch your head trying to figure out what's going on. Try it out for yourself and see if you get anything out of it. You can always terminate your subscription if you don't find it useful (don't try asking for your money back though :-).

To subscribe to the `faq-maintainers` mailing list, send email to [<faq-maintainers-request@consensus.com>](mailto:faq-maintainers-request@consensus.com) with "subscribe" (without the quotes) in the Subject. If you have problems, send the command "help".

If you wish to subscribe to just the `faq-maintainers-announce` list, send an Email request to faq-maintainers-request@rtfm.mit.edu with a short message in the body requesting a subscription to the announce list.

If you have problems subscribing or unsubscribing to the `Faq maintainers` mailing list, send email to [<owner-faq-maintainers@consensus.com>](mailto:owner-faq-maintainers@consensus.com).

The `faq-maintainers` lists are not restricted to only those who have [approved] FAQs that are posted to news.answers. Anyone who is interested in the fine points of FAQ writing/maintaining is invited to participate in the discussions. If you are considering putting a FAQ together, even if you don't intend on getting it approved, the `faq-maintainers` list is a valuable source of information, and a good place to ask questions.

6) ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Special thanks to my Mom and Dad (Gloria and Morton Hersch) who never hear from me because I'm always busy with my FAQs. I'm writing a FAQ about myself to send to them, so they'll know what I'm up to.

I disclaim everything. The contents of this article might be totally inaccurate, inappropriate, misguided, or otherwise perverse - except for my name (you can probably trust me on that).

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Russ Hersch - russ@shani.net

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