

Saam-Mail User Guide

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Publication Date: November 2nd, 2022.

Document Version 1.0

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1. What is Saam-Mail?

Saam-Mail was designed primarily for sending fully verified, error corrected forms over ham radio peer to peer or peer to group. Saam-Mail has multiple optimizations and supports many techniques that make the communications resilient even in the most challenging conditions.

Saam-Mail is designed to run as an add-on program to either JS8Call or fldigi. The program is very flexible and has been tested with twenty eight fldigi modes and four JS8Call modes varying from very narrow bandwidth JS8 slow mode at 25Hz to high bandwidth 2600Hz wide PSK modes. Saam-Mail is also open source and cross platform allowing it to be used on many computing platforms. It has been tested with the raspberry pi 4b and the Beelink minicomputing platforms, both of which use very little electrical power and are ideal for off-grid and/or mobile setups.

2. Downloading Saam-Mail

The application repository is at <https://github.com/gh42lb/Saam-Mail>. This repository contains all the necessary files. The most straight forward way to download these is to click on the green 'Code' button then to select the 'Download ZIP' file option. This will download the latest Saam-Mail files to your computer. If you prefer you can also download the files individually. The above repository is the only approved repository for the Saam-Mail application.

There are three options for download which depend on the chosen computing platform as follows:

1. Download the windows binary file called Saam-Mail.exe from the github repository (link above). The windows binary can be run on the windows platform and has been tested on Windows 10.
2. Download the raspberry pi binary file called 'Saam-Mail' from the github repository (link above). The raspberry pi binary has been tested extensively on the raspberry pi 4b using the standard raspbian OS.
3. Download all of the .py files from the github repository (link above). You will also need to install the following modules: PySimpleGUI, sys, threading, json, random, getopt, datetime, socket, time, select, calendar, gps, crc. This can be done using pip3 command for any missing modules e.g. pip3 install pysimplegui. Please note saam_mail is available for python 3 only.

If you have not already done so, you will also need to download the templates. These files can easily be identified as they end with .tpl

There are currently two template files which should be downloaded as follows:

1. ICS_Form_Templates.tpl
2. standard_templates.tpl

I. OK. So I've Downloaded Saam-Mail Now What?

Congratulations!

There are a couple of configuration steps required after which Saam-Mail can be started and you can be on the radio transferring forms to a receiving station.

3. Fldigi and JS8Call Configuration

Saam-Mail is run in conjunction with either Fldigi or JS8Call.

I. Saam-Mail Fldigi Configuration

If your station is already setup for digital radio, Saam-Mail should work with fldigi out-of-the-box. Saam-Mail uses the xmlrpc fldigi external API to send and receive messages.

To specify the operating mode you can use the --opmode= command line option (i.e. --opmode=fldigi), however, fldigi mode is the default so it is currently not necessary to specify this if you are running Saam-Mail with fldigi.

To change to xmlrpc port used to communicate with fldigi, use the --fldigi= command line option as follows:

```
--fldigi=127.0.0.1:7365
```

the above option will open xmlrpc port 7365 to the fldigi instance running on the local computer 127.0.0.1

To connect with an fldigi instance on another computer over a local network, this can be done as follows:

```
--fldigi=192.168.53.1:7362
```

The above option will open xmlrpc port 7362 (primary xmlrpc port in fldigi) to the fldigi instance running on the computer with the ip 192.168.53.1

Currently Saam-Mail supports one instance of fldigi.

II. Saam-Mail JS8Call Configuration

To use Saam-Mail in conjunction with JS8Call there are first a few configuration steps needed in JS8Call as follows:

1. On the 'Mode' menu, the 'Auto Reply' option should be checked. This option is necessary for the proper functioning of text transfers between Saam-Mail and JS8Call.
2. On the 'File/Settings/Reporting' tab find the API section and set as follows:
 - TCP Server Hostname: 127.0.0.1 Enable TCP Server API – Checked
 - TCP Server Port: 2442 Accept TCP Requests - Checked
 - TCP Max Connections: 1 (if using Saam-Mail only) or 2 (if using Saam-Mail and JS8Net concurrently)

When you are ready to send a communication with JS8Call you will need to set the appropriate mode in JS8Call as required (Slow, Normal, Fast, Turbo) and make sure the TX button at the top right of the JS8Call screen is enabled.

4. Starting Saam-Mail

The application currently supports one instance of Fldigi or JS8Call operating one radio. Testing has shown that it is possible to run fldigi and js8call at the same time side by side on the raspberry pi but this is not currently a supported mode of operation.

I. Saam-Mail using Fldigi

Running the application in fldigi mode is done with the use of the opmode command line parameter:

```
saam_mail --opmode=fldigi
```

Upon startup the main window will display controls that are specific to the fldigi mode of operation.

II. Saam-Mail using JS8Call

Running the application in JS8call mode is done with the use of the opmode command line parameter:

```
saam_mail --opmode=js8call
```

Upon startup the main window will display controls that are specific to the js8call mode of operation.

III. Saam-Mail Configuration

Once Saam-Mail is up and running, go to the 'My Info' tab and fill out the information as it relates to your station.

The call sign and group name are required fields and must be filled out in order to use the application. The remaining fields are not as critical however if you wish to use the advanced features of the Dynamic Content Macros these should also be filled out.

5. Sending Your First Form with Saam-Mail

I. Choosing the Form to Send

Click on the 'Compose Msg' tab. In the 'Category' table select 'GENERAL' and to the right of that select the 'BULLETIN' form.

II. Selecting the Recipient Stations

To the left of the 'Category' table there is a table listing the Callsigns heard. One or more of these can be selected and this will automatically complete the 'To:' field with a semicolon delimited list of recipient station call signs.

Alternatively, The recipient station call sign can be entered manually in the 'To:' field. If there are multiple recipient station make sure the call signs are separated with the ';' semicolon character.

Now click on the 'Compose' Message' button. This will open a new popup window showing the blank form ready to be filled in.

III. Filling In the Form

i. Form Top Section

The top section of the form shows the following information:

1. Form: This is the name of the form selected in the previous step.
2. MSGID: This is the automatically generated ID that will be used to identify the form. The ID is generated from the sending station call sign and the UTC time to the nearest second that the 'Compose Msg' button was pressed.
3. Priority: This field sets the priority of the message.
4. To: This field contains the list of call signs that were set in the previous step. If you wish to make any changes this can be done by editing this field.
5. Subject: This field is the subject of the message communication similar to the subject field on an email.

ii. Main Form Section

The main form section is the actual bulletin form. Go ahead and fill out the fields as appropriate. When finished, click on the 'Post To Outbox' button at the top of the screen. If you wish to cancel the form, go ahead and click the 'Cancel' button.

IV. Sending the Form

Towards the top left of the main application there is a field labelled 'Connect To:'. If this field is empty it will be flashing red and green. Fill out the field by specifying the call sign of one of the stations that you will be sending the form to. Each of the recipient stations will also need to fill out this field but they should specify your station call sign as they will be connecting to your station to receive the form.

Now go ahead and click on the 'Out Box' tab. In the main table you should see the form that you posted to the outbox listed. If you select the message by clicking on it, you will also see a text representation of the form appear in the preview window that is toward the lower part of the page.

There are several buttons on the 'Out Box' page which function as follows:

1. View: Clicking on the view button will open a non-editable full color representation of the bulletin form message that you selected above. You can use this to review the message prior to sending. When done, click on the close button to take you back to the 'Out Box' tab.

2. Copy: Clicking on this button will copy the message to the clipboard. This can be used to export the form message to another application such as an email application or winlink or pat winlink or any other application that accepts cut and paste text. The copied message has two parts as follows:
 - The first section of the copied message is the text representation in human readable form that can be used to review the information.
 - The second part of the copied message is at the bottom of the text where you will see 'SAAM-MAIL-EXPORT=' followed by the actual communication itself. This export string can be used either separately or in conjunction with the first part described above to export to another application. The form can be imported into Saam-Mail by clicking on the 'Clipboard Import' button towards the upper part of the main screen. The import button will import the message by using only the SAAM-MAIL-EXPORT= string and place the message in either the inbox if it was addressed to the station or in the relaybox if not.
3. Edit: Clicking the edit button will open an editable version of the form with a new message ID. If you wish to make changes you can do so on this form and when done post it to the outbox. Please note that both the original message and the revised message are both contained in the outbox. If you wish to delete one of these you can select it and click the delete button.
4. Delete: clicking on the delete button will delete the selected message from the outbox.
5. Delete All: Clicking 'Delete All' will delete all of the messages in the outbox.
6. Ready?: This will send out a transmission to the recipient station detailed in the 'Connect To' field to ask if they are ready to receive the message. This is an optional step.
7. Send: Clicking the send button will send the message.

Go ahead and click the send button. If everything is setup correctly, you will see the text sent to fldigi or JS8Call and the process of transferring the form starts. You will also see 'In Session' start to flash at the top right of the main form. This indicates that a message transfer session is in process.

V. Advanced Send Message Options

Immediately below the row of buttons on the 'Out Box' page you will see a row of options that can be used to fine tune the communications as follows:

1. Pre-Message: This checkbox is used to enable the pre-message option. Currently this is used to send out a stub message for any messages that are waiting to be sent in your outbox. This part of the message is post only and is verified by validating the checksum. It is very useful to communicate to the group if there are any messages pending and waiting to be sent out. If there are multiple pending messages, a single message is chosen at random. Higher priority messages are given a higher probability of selection by the selection algorithm.
2. Repeat Message: This option appears only in the fldigi operation mode. It is used to send one or more additional copies of the message and to interlace these duplicate fragments with the original message. This communication technique is described further in the communication techniques section.
3. Repeat Fragments. This option appears only in the js8call operation mode. It is used to repeat up to the first 3 fragments of the message up to three times. These fragments typically contain the message id and receive list.
4. Include Template: This option will send a copy of the form template used to create the message alongside the content of the form message itself. This can be used by the receiving station to view the message if the receiving station does not have a copy of the form template.
5. Fragment Size: This specifies the number of characters in each message fragment. The default is 30 characters. This can be adjusted depending on band/propagation conditions and also depending on the underlying fldigi or JS8call modulation used. In general, if conditions and modulation mode result in minor errors and a small number of re-transmits, then larger fragment sizes can be used. Conversely if conditions and modulation mode result in a large number of errors and re-transmits, then a smaller fragment size would be more appropriate.

Also above the tabs in the main area of the form you will see additional options as follows:

1. **Fldigi Mode:** When running in the fldigi opmode, you will see a list of available fldigi modes listed in this combobox dropdown. The modes are listed from 1 to 28 in the order of speed with mode 1 being the fastest and mode 28 being the slowest. These modes specify the underlying fldigi modulation mode that will be used for the message transfer. The modes available can be filtered by selecting different option on the 'Span' combobox dropdown.
2. **Channel:** This dropdown lists the channels that are available. There are 16 channels that correspond with 16 different offsets in the passband. Each Channel is 125Hz wide. 125Hz is the bandwidth of the narrowest fldigi mode available so if the selected modulation mode is 125Hz wide then all 16 channels are available for use. If the modulation mode uses a wider bandwidth such as 500Hz then this would effectively mean that there are 4 Channels available: i.e. 1, 5, 9 and 13. The other aspect of the channel is that it ensures both the transmit and receive stations stay on the precise offset which is required for reliable signal decodes in fldigi. Channel is also present when running in the js8call mode and performs a similar role. The Channels and offset values are identical in js8call mode and fldigi mode.
3. **Send To:** This dropdown gives a list of radios at your QTH that the message can be sent to. Currently there should be only one rig (radio) listed in this dropdown which will be the one configured for use with Saam-Mail.
4. **Span:** This dropdown gives options that can be used to filter the fldigi modes available by bandwidth. For example 'HF – 500' will filter out any modes that have a bandwidth higher than 500 Hz on the Fldigi Mode dropdown.

6. Advanced Features

I. Dynamic Content Macros

Dynamic Content Macros are used to pre-fill parts of the form message during the compose message phase of the process. The Dynamic content macros relate to the individual fields on the 'My Info' tab as well as providing hooks to the current date and time in local time as well as UTC or Zulu time. The current list of available dynamic content macros is as follows:

1. %CALLSIGN%
2. %OPERATORNAME%
3. %OPERATORTITLE%
4. %INCIDENTNAME%
5. %DATE%
6. %TIME%
7. %DATETIME%
8. %LOCALTIME%
9. %ZULUTIME%
10. %UTCTIME%
11. %UTCTIME%
12. %GROUPNAME%
13. %GPSLAT%
14. %GPSLONG%
15. %GRIDSQUARE%
16. %QTHLOCATION%

II. Winlink Integration

On the 'Winlink' tab there are two tables, one for the winlink inbox and one for the winlink outbox. In order to setup the integration with winlink you will need to enter the location of the winlink inbox folder in the 'Winlink Inbox:' entry field and also the location of the winlink outbox in the 'Winlink Outbox:' field. Once this information has been entered, click on the 'list' button and this will show all the winlink inbox and outbox messages.

Now select a message from either the winlink inbox or the winlink outbox then click edit. This will open a window that contains the information from winlink. You can now fill out the rest of the fields and click post to outbox and it will be posted to the Saam-Mail outbox ready to send

Please note: The Winlink integration tab is able to read both winlink messages on a windows platform as well as pat winlink messages on a non-windows platform.

7. Critical Message Communication Techniques

These techniques are used for the transfer of fully verified error corrected messages as would be the case for critical messages.

I. Single Station to Single Station (Peer to Peer)

Sending a verified, error corrected message from one station to another using the peer to peer approach is done simply by specifying only a single receive station in the 'send to' list when the message is composed.

Peer to peer communications of forms is optimized for shorter message length, faster transfer speeds and increased resilience to adverse band conditions.

II. Single Station to Multiple Stations (Peer to Group)

This can be achieved by entering a list of recipient stations in the 'To:' field when composing a message. All specified receiving stations will need to be on frequency and listening for the incoming message.

During the send process, the station sending the form will verify with each receiving station in turn that they have received the message in full without error and if not will re-transmit any missing parts. At the end of this process each receiving station should have a fully verified, error corrected copy of the original message.

Please note: during the re-transmit phase, the sending station will make multiple attempts to resend the missing parts upto a preset number of retries before moving to the next station on the list. If the message cannot be transferred within the specified number of retries, there are additional options available to complete the message transfer process as follows:

1. Following completion of the transfer session, any station that has not received a fully verified, error corrected copy of the message can send out a pull request to the sending station to pull the message.
2. The sending station can make additional attempts at sending the message to the stations that did not verify during the original session using the message push approach.
3. The receiving station can request missing fragments from a relay station.

Please note, if there are a large number of receiving stations specified (i.e. more than 10 or so) on the receive list, then this technique can still be used however another technique may be more appropriate such as that discussed in the next section.

i. Reducing Re-Transmits: Duplicate Fragments

This can be done by sending additional copies of the full message (full set of fragments) or sending additional copies of specified fragments such as the first 3 which contain message ID and receive list.

1. Sending Multiple Copies of the full message. This option is currently available only with the fldigi opmode. The additional message copies are interlaced with each other to increase resilience to any impacts to the send stream. Sending multiple copies of the message may be a good strategy if there are a large number of receiving stations as the extra time to send an extra copy could well be less than the time required to go station by station and re-transmit when only a single initial copy is sent out.
2. Sending additional copies of first 3 fragments. This option is currently available only with the JS8Call/JS8 operating mode. The purpose for doing this is to ensure the first three fragments that contain the most critical information are sent several times. Once received, these initial fragments will provide key information such as message ID and recipient list that the receiving station can then use to determine if a full copy is required and if so to have the message ID that can be used to request the full copy.

ii. Pulling Missing Fragments

This technique can be used if the message transfer was not successful during the original transfer session. There are two approaches to pulling any missing fragments as follows:

1. Request missing parts from sending station. The station that sent out the original message is known to have a full copy of that message so the process is quite simple. If you have a message in the inbox or relay box that shows 'partial' then you can send a request to the sending station by selecting the message in the table in the inbox or relay box and then clicking the 'Request Msg' button. This will pull the message from the original sending station and attempt to provide a fully verified, error corrected copy of the message using a similar process as before.
2. Request missing parts from a relay station. In order to use this approach you will first need to send out a query to determine if there are any other stations on frequency that have a copy of the full message or specified missing fragments. This can be done by selecting the message in the inbox or relay box then click on the 'Query Msg' button. This will send a query to the group of stations with the message id. If a relay station has a copy and replies back to confirm, then you can initiate the pull request in the same manner as step 1 above, the only difference is that you will change the 'Connect To:' field to be the call sign of the relay station. Then click 'Request Msg' button and the transfer of missing fragments will begin.

iii. Send then Pull

This technique could be used for a large number of stations. The technique involves sending the message to the group then having members of the group request any missing parts using the pull technique. For this process to be effective it would make sense to send multiple copies of the message in the initial send to reduce the number of missing fragments at the receiving stations.

iv. Pending Messages Notification

Notifying one or more stations of pending message can be done by using the pre-message option. This will send notification for any messages waiting in the outbox or the relaybox. The notification is achieved by sending (posting) a very short check-summed message that contains the message ID and the receive list only. This is sufficient information for any station that receives the stub to determine if they wish to pull the rest of the message.

v. Requesting Message from Stub

1. Inbox. Any station that receives a stub notification message will have a message appear in the inbox or in the relay box with the word 'stub' in the 'completion' column. Any stub message can be selected and then the 'Request Msg' button pressed to initiate the transfer for the full message.
2. Relay Box. If the stub message appears in the relay box, a similar technique can be used as described above. When complete the full message will show 'Verified' in the 'completion' column. Verified messages also appear with a green coloring in the messages list.

III. Receiving Multiple Simultaneous Messages (Group to Peer)

The key aspect to Group to Peer communications has to do with the technique of simultaneous parallel communication.

This enables a modem application to be able to listen to multiple different offsets relative to the given frequency at the same time. This technique is used extensively in the WSJT-X and JS8Call applications for FT8 mode and JS8 mode respectively.

If the modem has this ability to listen to multiple channels simultaneously then Saam-Mail is able to utilize this for receiving messages using the passive receive approach from multiple stations simultaneously.

This could be very useful if there is a large amount of message traffic going back and forth between stations. In the event that some parts of the message are not transferred successfully during this passive mode message transfer, the receiving station can initiate a pull request to the sending station or to a relay station as described in the earlier sections.

Please note: Due to current limitations, Group to Peer communications are only available using JS8Call.

IV. Multiple Stations to/from Multiple Stations (Group to Group)

The key aspect to Group to Group communications also has to do with the modem application being able to listen to multiple different offsets relative to the given frequency at any time. Additionally there will be multiple sending stations spanning one or more groups as well as multiple listening stations also spanning one or more groups. In this way, group to group communication is now possible.

Please note: Due to current limitations, Group to Group communications are only available using JS8Call.

8. Saam-Mail Station Roles

In any given situation stations are often assigned a different role for facilitating message transfers. Saam-Mail is very flexible and integrates with multiple other platforms to allow use of a wide variety of communication techniques. Saam-Mail offers additional capabilities that enhance the lineup of techniques available.

Some of the different station roles that can be used in conjunction with Saam-Mail are as follows:

1. Message relay station for store and forward
2. Communications hub station
3. AdHoc mesh node station
4. Message Repository station

These different roles are described in the following sections.

Please note: During a disaster situation the internet may not be reliable. If portions of the internet are still usable then the internet based modes described in the following sections might still be viable. However, when utilizing internet based communication during a disaster receiving a confirmation reply via the same communication channels will be necessary to gauge the effectiveness of that particular mode of operation. This would apply to internet connected gateways, regular email and other internet based techniques.

I. Message Relay Station: Store and Forward

When a station is operating as a message relay the following Saam-Mail features can be used

1. Relay Box. The relay box will store any messages received by the station that do not include the relay station in the receive list. To forward a message that is stored in the Relay box, select the message in the relay messages table then click on the 'Add to Outbox' button. This will queue the message up in the outbox. Now specify the station you wish to send the message to in the 'Connect To:' field then click on the outbox tab, select the message that you just queued and then click send.
2. The relay station can listen for requests directly to pull a specific message with a given message ID or requests for which stations have copies of a given message stored. A relay station can respond to both of these requests and either initiate a send or respond to a pull request.

II. Communications Hub Station

A hub station typically receives messages from one or more sources and then sends these out.

The Saam-Mail features used by a hub station include:

1. Saam-Mail has the ability to export Saam-Mail messages so that they can be sent via other applications. Any messages can be exported into an export format by clicking on the copy button. This will produce a text version of the message along with a SAAM-MAIL-EXPORT= tag at the end that contains all the necessary information to reproduce a full copy of the message in Saam-Mail. Any messages received that contain a SAAM-MAIL-EXPORT= tag can be copied to the clipboard and then imported directly into Saam-Mail by clicking on the 'Clipboard Import' button. The message will then be added either to the inbox or the relay box and from there it can be posted to the outbox for sending out via Saam-Mail.
2. Winlink. To utilize this feature follow the section that describes winlink integration in the advanced features section. By using this approach, messages can be sourced from winlink or pat-winlink and sent out via Saam-Mail. Additionally any winlink messages received that contain a SAAM-MAIL-EXPORT= tag can be imported directly using the clipboard as described above then sent out.
3. Email. Similarly any emails received by the hub station that have the SAAM-MAIL-EXPORT= tag can be processed in a similar manner to the above.
4. Voice. Stations receiving message via voice can use the 'Compose Msg' tab to create a message then post to the outbox to be sent out via Saam-Mail.

III. AdHoc Mesh Node Station

An AdHoc mesh node could utilize a combination of all the features described above. In addition the following Saam-Mail features may also be utilized:

1. Send Saam-Mail messages to a Winlink gateway. This can be achieved by using the Saam-Mail export function as described above. Copy the Saam-Mail message to the clipboard using the 'copy' button and then paste this into a new winlink email. This can then be sent out to a winlink gateway using winlink.
2. Sending via email. In a similar manner a message can be created in email using the same cut and paste approach then sent out over email.

IV. Message Repository Station

A message repository station could be used to store many messages that can be queried and pulled by any other station. There will typically be two types of message in this category as follows:

1. Messages addressed to a group: By using this approach group messages can be stored and retrieved by any member of that group. This could be a very usefull method to disseminate information to a group of stations.
2. Individually addressed messages: This is similar to the relay role described above. These types of messages are available for any station to pull as required.

9. Transferring Forms in Real Time During a Net

Saam-Mail can be used in conjunction with a digital net either using the same digital mode (single mode) of data transfer or using a different digital mode (mixed mode communications). Having a digital net running at the same time that forms are being transferred is a way to coordinate the message traffic and enables more efficient message transfer.

I. Single Mode Digital

An example of this would be running a JS8 net and using Saam-Mail to send forms over JS8. The advantage of JS8 is the narrow bandwidth of the JS8 modes allows for many stations to be present on frequency at the same time. When distributing communications to many stations simultaneously the multiplier effect of having them all on frequency and listening at the same time makes this a highly efficient mode for transferring messages to groups of stations.

II. Multi-Mode Digital

Multimode digital requires the ability to use two digital modes at the same time. Only one of the modes is used to transmit a message at any given time. When multiple modes are used it is possible to receive and decode the different modes of communication simultaneously. This provides additional flexibility.

Although this is experimental, I have confirmed that this is quite possible at least on the raspberry pi 4b. In order to use this approach there are several pre-requisites as follows:

1. Configure JS8Call to use the digital interface directly. I use a signalink and the JS8 audio settings are configured to point to the `alsa_input.usb-BurrBrown_from_Texas_Instruments_USB_AUDIO_CODEC-00.analog-stereo` and `alsa_output.usb-BurrBrown_from_Texas_Instruments_USB_AUDIO_CODEC-00.analog-stereo` devices.
2. Configure fldigi to use the default input and output.
3. Set the audio popup menu at the lower right of the raspberry pi screen to USB AUDIO CODEC for both input and output.
4. You must be using a VOX based setup either through a vox setting on your rig that detects audio signals and engages ptt accordingly or you can use an external device such as the Signalink for this purpose.

Using the above setup I have confirmed that it is quite possible to run both JS8Call and fldigi at the same time and for both applications to decode in real time on the pi. Performance also appears to be acceptable.

Using this approach, multiple JS8 signals and a single fldigi signal can be received and decoded simultaneously. It would also be possible to use either JS8 or fldigi to transmit to other stations using a single digital mode such as fldigi for example to verify accurate message receipt. As soon as the message is transferred then both stations will continue to receive any transmissions for a net or other activity that may be going on either on JS8 or fldigi.