/etc/aliases is not accessible to normal users. So if you are a normal user and you want to forward email, you’d better use ~/.forward instead

/etc/aliases

# Send root's mail to sean  
root: sean

Even though the root account exists, any mail that was to be delivered to root goes to sean instead.

To forward all of a user's incoming email to a different email address (like Gmail, etc.), you can either create a .forward file in their home directory (that includes one email address to deliver to per line) or you can instead add a line to the bottom your aliases with the username followed by a colon, space, and the desired forwarding address. If you want to forward to multiple addresses, you can – just separate them with commas. Don't include spaces! They will keep it from working.

Here's an example of the .forward file of robert@example.com:

1. vi /home/robert/.forward

[Hide Line Numbers](https://inkplant.com/code/linux-email-forwarding)

1. forward\_1@inkplant.com

2. forward\_2@inkplant.com

[Hide Line Numbers](https://inkplant.com/code/linux-email-forwarding)

Editing the aliases file instead is simpler since you can edit all the users in one spot instead of having to find different files:

1. vi /etc/aliases

[Hide Line Numbers](https://inkplant.com/code/linux-email-forwarding)

1. #forwarding account(s)

2. carl: forward\_3@inkplant.com

3. robert: forward\_1@inkplant.com,forward\_2@inkplant.com

[Hide Line Numbers](https://inkplant.com/code/linux-email-forwarding)

The final step is to update the aliases and then restart your mail program:

That's it. If you send a test message to robert@example.com now, it will forward to forward\_1@inkplant.com and forward\_2@inkplant.com instead, robert@example.com will not receive any email.

**User-Defined Forwarding**

Users can define their own forwarding rules by placing a file called **.forward** (note the leading period) in their home directory, containing the forward instructions.

The instructions in the **~/.forward** file are the same as those in the **/etc/aliases** file. The only difference in the format is that there is no need to specify the aliased user, as it is the owner of the **~/.forward** file. Thus, if user **Isaac** had a **~/.forward** file containing i.smith@example.com, all his email would be redirected to the external address.

One thing to keep in mind is that an alias can refer to other aliases. If Isaac wanted to redirect his mail offsite and keep a copy locally, he would need to escape the local alias to prevent it from being reprocessed as an external redirect:

\isaac  
i.smith@example.com