

Behind the Scenes at SAS-L

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Abstract. Only tangentially is this about the SAS-L that provides the robust discussions of so many aspects of SAS® Software. Instead, this will focus upon the things that are seldom, if ever, seen.

Because the author had a page to place in the *Proceedings* (in place of the regular Abstract), this will follow a Question-and-Answer approach, and is not intended to substitute for the handout that will accompany the presentation.

Q: Where is SAS-L located?

A: SAS-L is a Listserv®-based discussion group; it resides on servers at the University of Vienna, Marist University, Virginia Polytechnic University and the University of Georgia. It is a "peered" list, so what is posted to one, is posted to all. A bi-directional connection is maintained at UGA between SAS-L and the newsgroup comp.soft-sys.sas.

Q: Why so many sites?

A: "Peering" was more common through the mid-90's as a way of accommodating the mail without overloading the net.

Q: How much mail traffic is there?

A: Daily posts to SAS-L now frequently exceed 100. (I know this because the Listserver "holds" SAS-L once that number is reached. It wasn't *that* long ago that the number I used was 50.)

Q: If someone is having problems with SAS-L, should they contact you?

A: The Listowner at their site is probably the best person to contact. The conventional name used for this person is:

`sas-l-request@site_address`

This should map to their real address. In a pinch, though, any SAS-L listowner can probably help.

Q: And removal from SAS-L?

A: The listserver removes some subscribers automatically if it receives too many bounces on delivery attempts to an address. I do much the same on bounces not intercepted by the Listserver. There are several reasons for the bounces:

- The mailbox is full.
- The address is not valid. In this case, a mail server may not be functioning properly, the address may have changed or the person just isn't there anymore.

There is nothing to be done about a full mailbox, so I just delete the subscription. I try to wait a bit with the "invalid address", as it

may just be a server problem, and soon remedied. Other causes of bounced mail include:

- Mail returned by the mailer. This may happen because a "mail loop" has been detected (machine **a** sends mail to machine **b** which sends mail to machine **c**. Machine **c** is supposed to send the mail to machine **d**, but sends it to machine **a**.), or is thought to exist (the mail passes through too many intermediate steps – these are called "hops").
- Inclusion of valid **RFC822** mail headers with a correct address for SAS-L in the *body* of mail being send. Some mailers will include some of the RFC822 mail headers in a reply (where it is not supposed to be done). Here are some RFC822 headers:

```
Reply-To: SAS-L <SAS-L@LISTSERV.UGA.EDU>
Sender: "SAS (r) L" <SAS-L@LISTSERV.UGA.EDU>
From: SAS-L < SAS-L@LISTSERV.UGA.EDU >
```

When mail is forwarded, it usually has these. It should not have them on a "reply" (yes, I know some mailers do anyway). A

subscription might be deleted because of the first (if it went on for some time), but not for the second. The Listserver itself rejects instances of the second case because it *looks* like a loop (but a bit different than that described earlier).

Q: What about the SAS-L archives?

A: Please place (date) bounds on your searches. These archives are very heavily used and the failure to use date bounds is a source of problems for our systems support personnel and for everyone who uses the Listserver. When dates are not used, all the archives are scanned. The result is usually far more than was needed or wanted. Some thought is being given to ways of forcing the use of dates. Currently, the archives begin in 1996. (about 10 years after SAS-L was started).

Q: Are there any plans to enlarge the archives to include the earlier years?

A: We have talked about it, but the prospect of unbounded searches of the extra 10 years ...

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