PacNOG I Workshop

The Exim Mail Transfer Agent
A brief introduction

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http://www.exim.org/

Configuration file

- Exim uses a single runtime configuration file, which is divided into a number of sections
- The first section contains global option settings
- The other sections start with "begin *sectionname*"
- They are optional, and may appear in any order
- Comments, macros, and inclusions are available
- Option settings can refer to auxiliary data files, for example, a file of aliases (usually **/etc/aliases**)

Changing the runtime configuration

- Edit **/usr/local/etc/exim/configure** with your favourite text editor
- New Exim processes will pick up the new file right away
- You need to SIGHUP the daemon to restart it

```
kill -HUP `cat /var/spool/exim/exim-daemon.pid
============= or =============
ps auxw | grep exim (find lowest pid)
kill -HUP pid`
```

- Check the log to see if it restarted successfully

```
tail /var/spool/exim/log/mainlog
```

Configuration file sections

- Global options
  - General and input- related options
- Address rewriting rules
  - Specify rewriting of envelope and header addresses
- Retry rules
  - Control retries after temporary failures
- Router configuration
  - Specify recipient address processing
- Transport configuration
  - Specify how actual deliveries are done
- Authenticator configuration
  - Specify SMTP authentication methods
- Access Control Lists (ACLs)
  - Define policy for incoming SMTP

Default configuration file layout

Global option settings

`begin ACL`
Access control lists

`begin routers`
Router configuration
`begin transports`
Transport configuration

required for SMTP input

required for message deliver

`begin retry`
Retry rules
`begin rewrite`
Rewriting rules
`begin authenticators`
Authenticator configuration

Examples of common global options

- SMTP input limits

```
smtp_accept_max = 200
smtp_accept_queue = 150
smtp_accept_reserve = 10
smtp_reserve_hosts = 192.168.0.0/16
smtp_connect_backlog = 100
```

- Overloading

```
queue_only_load = 5
deliver_queue_load_max = 7
```

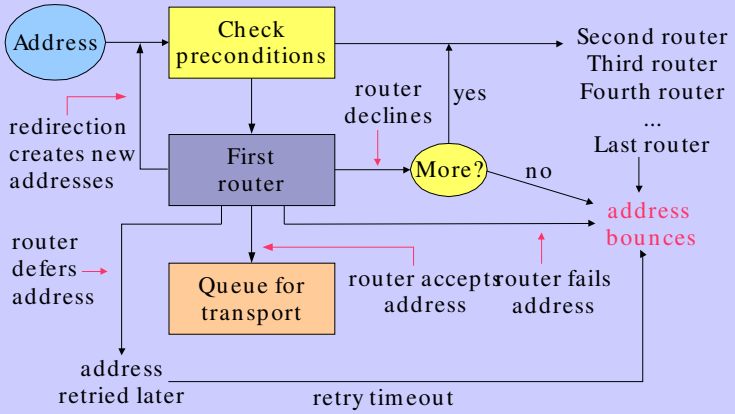
- Message size limits

```
message_size_limit = 10M
bounce_return_size_limit = 65535
```

Exim 4 routers

- Exim contains a number of different routers
  Example: the *dnslookup* router does DNS processing
  the *redirect* router does address redirection
  (aliasing and forwarding)
- The configuration defines which routers are used, in which order, and under what conditions
  Example: routers are often restricted to specific domains
- The same router may appear more than once, usually with different configurations
- The order in which routers are defined matters

Exim 4 routing



Simple routing configuration

- Check for non-local domain: run *dnslookup* router
  - Accept: queue for smtp transport
  - Decline: "no_more" set => address bounces
- Check for system aliases: *redirect* router
  - Accept: generates new address(es)
  - Decline: passed to next router
- Check for local user forwarding: another *redirect* router
  - Accept: generates new address(es)
  - Decline: passed to next router
- Check for local user: run *accept* router
  - Accept: queue for appendfile transport
- No more routers => address bounces

Exim transports

- Transports are the components of Exim that actually deliver copies of messages
  - The *smtp* transport delivers over TCP/IP to a remote host
  - The *appendfile* transport writes to a local file
  - The *pipe* transport writes to another process via a pipe
  - The *lmtp* transport does likewise, using LMTP
  - The *autoreply* transport is anomalous, in that it creates an automatic response instead of doing a real delivery
- LMTP = *Local Mail Transfer Protocol* (rfc 2033/3848)
- The order in which transports are defined is unimportant

Default routers (1)

- The first router handles non-local domains

```
dnslookup:
  driver = dnslookup
  domains = ! +local_domains
  ignore_target_hosts = 127.0.0.0/8
  transport = remote_smtp
  no_more
```

- The precondition checks for a nonlocal domain
- Silly DNS entries are ignored
- If the domain is found in the DNS, queue for **remote_smtp**
- Otherwise, **no_more** changes "decline" into "fail"

Default routers (2)

- The second router handles system aliases

```
system_aliases:
  driver = redirect
  allow_fail
  allow_defer
  data = ${lookup{$local_part}lsearch{/etc/aliases}}
  user = mailnull
  group = mail
  file_transport = address_file
  pipe_transport = address_pipe
```

- Alias file lines look like this

```
Postmaster:     pat, james@otherdom.example
retired:        :fail: no longer works here
root:           localuser
majordomo:      |/usr/bin/majordom ...
```

Default routers (3)

- The third router handles users' *.forward* files

```
userforward:
  driver = redirect
  check_local_user
  file = $home/.forward
  no_verify
  no_expn
  check_ancestor
  file_transport = address_file
  pipe_transport = address_pipe
  reply_transport = address_reply
  condition = ${if exists{$home/.forward}
{yes} {no} }
```

Default routers (4)

- The final router handles local user's mailboxes

```
localuser:
  driver = accept
  check_local_user
  transport = local_delivery
  cannot_route_message = Unknown user
```

- Recap - an address is routed like this:
  - Remote address => **remote_smtp** transport
  - System alias => new address(es), fail, defer
  - User's *.forward* => new address(es)
  - Local user => **local_delivery** transport
  - Unrouteable address => bounce
- This is just one out of many posssible configurations

Access control lists

- ACLs are relevant only for SMTP input
  - But they do apply to local SMTP (**- bs** and **- bS**)
- For incoming SMTP messages
  - **acl_smtp_rcpt** defines the ACL to be run for each RCPT
    - Default is “deny”
  - **acl_smtp_data** defines the ACL to be run after DATA
    - Default is “accept”
- Tests on message content can only be done after DATA
- Other ACLs can be used for AUTH, ETRN, EXPN, VRFY

A simple ACL

```
acl_smtp_rcpt = acl_check_rcpt

begin acl

acl_check_rcpt:
  accept   local_parts = postmaster
           domains     = +my_domains

  require  verify      = sender

  accept   domains     = +my_domains
           verify      = recipient
```

- Implicit “deny” at the end

Named item lists

```
domainlist local_domains = @ :pacnog.school.fj
hostlist   relay_hosts   = 202.62.122.0/27
```

- Abstraction: list is specified in one place only
  References are shorter and easier to understand
- Optimization: matches in named lists are cached
  Example: several routers testing the same domain list
- A named list is referenced by prefixing its name with +
  `hosts = 127.0.0.1 : +relay_hosts`
- A named list can be negated
  `domains = !+local_domains`
  This is not possible with macros

ACL statements

- Each statement contains a verb and a list of conditions
  verb condition 1 (one per line)
  condition 2
  ...
- If all the conditions are satisfied
  accept Allows the SMTP command to proceed (else may pass or reject - see next slide)
  deny Rejects (else passes)
  require Passes (else rejects)
  warn Takes some warning action (e.g. logs or adds header)
  Always passes

ACL modifiers

- **message** defines a custom message for a denial or warning

```
deny    message  = You are black listed at \
                   $dnslist_domain
        dnslists = rbl.mail-abuse.org : ...
```

- **log_message** defines a custom log message

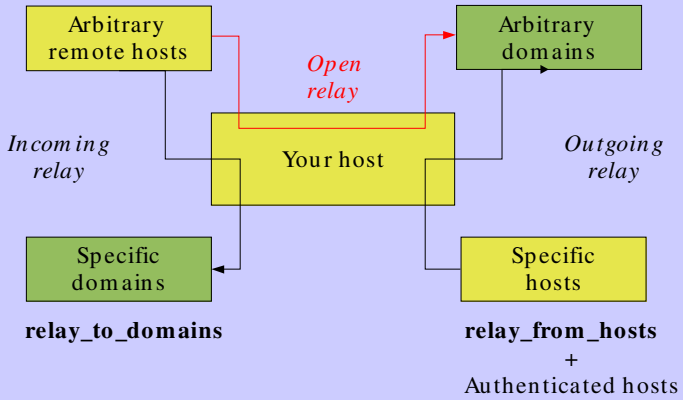
```
require log_message = Recipient verify failed
        verify      = recipient
```

- **endpass** is used with the **accept** verb for a 3- way outcome

```
accept  domains  = +local_domains
        endpass
        verify   = recipient
```

Above **endpass**, failure causes the next statement to be

Good and bad relaying



Message filtering

- Exim supports three kinds of filtering
  - User filter: run while routing ("***.forward** with conditions*")
  - System filter: run once per message
  - Transport filter: external program added to transport
- User and system filters are run for each delivery attempt
  - If delivery is deferred, filters run more than once (updates while in queue)
- User and system filters use the same syntax
  - System filter has some additional commands (**fail**, **freeze**)
  - They can be enabled for redirection filters
- Exim also supports a ***local_scan()*** function

User filter example

```
# Exim filter
# Don't touch bounces
if error_message then finish endif
# Throw away junk
if
  $h_subject: contains "Make money" or
  $sender_address matches \N^\d{8}@\N or
  $message_body contains "this is spam"
then seen finish endif
# Auto-reply
if personal alias ph10@cam.ac.uk then
  mail subject "Re: $h_subject:"
  file $home/auto-reply/message
  log  $home/auto-reply/log
  once $home/auto-reply/once
endif
```

Filter commands

- **deliver** does "true" forwarding (sender does not change)
- **save** delivers to a named file
- **pipe** delivers via a pipe to a given command
- **mail** generates a new mail message
- **logwrite** writes to a log file

- **deliver**, **save**, and **pipe** are significant by default
  - Can be made not significant by **unseen**
- **logwrite** happens during filtering
- The others are just set up during filtering and happen later
  - The result of **pipe** is not available during filtering

- Sysadmin can lock out a number of filter facilities
  - **save**, **pipe**, **mail**, and **logwrite** commands

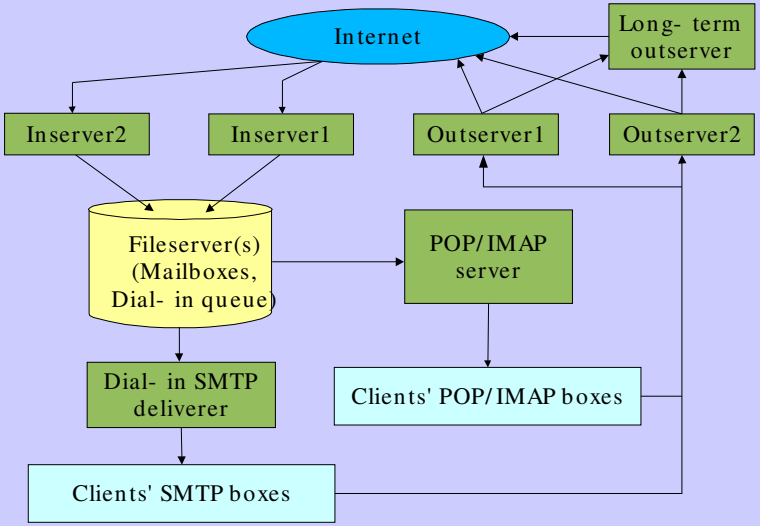
The system filter

- Runs once per message, at every delivery start
  - Use **first_delivery** to detect very first time
  - Can see all recipients in **$recipients**
- Can add to recipients or completely replace recipients
  - Non-significant delivery adds, significant delivery replaces
- Can add header lines that are visible to the routers, transports, and user filters
- Can remove header lines
- Can freeze message or bounce it

- Set up by

```
system_filter = /etc/exim/sysfilter
system_filter_file_transport = address_file
system_filter_pipe_transport = address_pipe
system_filter_user = exim
```

Large installations

- Use a local name server with plenty of memory
- Exim is limited by disc I/O
  - Use fast disc hardware
  - Put hints on RAM disc
  - Set **split_spool_directory**
  - Use multiple directories for user mailboxes
- Avoid linear password files
- Use maildir format to allow parallel deliveries (file per msg)
- Plan to expand “sideways” with parallel servers
  - This also helps add more disc access capacity
- Separate incoming and outgoing mail
- Keep output queue as short as possible
  - Use fallback hosts and/or **$message_age** for several levels

Separating mail functions