

How to Get Help or Ask for Software

Bjørn-Helge Mevik

Research Infrastructure Services Group, USIT, UiO

RIS Course Week

Where to Get Help

How to Request Software

How to Ask for Help

Specific Cases

Where to Get Help

- ▶ Documentation:
 - ▶ <https://www.uio.no/english/services/it/research/hpc/>
- ▶ Software Requests:
 - ▶ <https://nettskjema.uio.no/answer/66866.html>
- ▶ Help contact points:
 - ▶ Abel: hpc-drift@usit.uio.no
 - ▶ Notur: support@metacenter.no Note: New-ish address!
 - ▶ Colossus: tsd-drift@usit.uio.no, standard request form:
<https://www.uio.no/english/services/it/research/storage/sensitive-data/contact/>

How to Request Software

- ▶ Complete and submit the form
<https://nettskjema.uio.no/answer/66866.html>
- ▶ Requests will be handled on a weekly basis, in some cases directly (esp. wrt. upgrades).
- ▶ **Note that Abel will soon be turned off, so new installs there are not prioritised.**

How to Ask for Help: Mantra



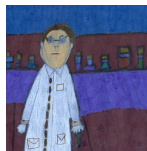
“How can I get them to understand my problem as quickly as possible?”

The Phases of Getting Help

- ▶ Before sending mail
- ▶ Where to send it
- ▶ The email:
 - ▶ Subject
 - ▶ Style and content
- ▶ After getting a reply

Before Sending Mail

Do some research first...



- ▶ Read any relevant documentation (user guide, FAQ, Howto, etc.)
 - ▶ <http://www.uio.no/english/services/it/research/hpc/abel/help/>
 - ▶ <https://www.uio.no/english/services/it/research/sensitive-data/use-tsd/>
 - ▶ The software's documentation
 - ▶ Etc.
- ▶ For general problems, try searching the Net

Where to Send the Mail

- ▶ Use one of the official contact points

- ▶ Don't send email directly to a person

Choose a Good Subject

Use a specific, informative Subject

- ▶ Not so informative:

“Please help!”

“error”

“Software”

“Abel”

- ▶ Much better:

“matplotlib is failing to connect to X rad/abel server for its GTK display”

“sh: /cluster/bin/module_load: No such file or directory”

“Vedr. tilgang til, og installasjon av VASP, på Fram”



Use Terms Correctly

Try to be precise, especially wrt. technical terms. For instance:

- ▶ *node* \neq *cpu*
- ▶ “*Job does not start*” could mean
 - ▶ I cannot submit it
 - ▶ It is still waiting in the queue
 - ▶ The program crashes or hangs when the job is started



Style and Form



- ▶ Try to use clear, correct language.
- ▶ Be polite. Remember that “the receiving end” are people, and that their main task might not even be support.
- ▶ Don't yell. UPPERCASE TEXT “sounds” like yelling. The same does a lot of exclamation marks!!!!

Contents of the Mail (I)

- ▶ Send a new email for each separate problem/question.
- ▶ Be specific. Include “all” details. (But **never** your password!)
- ▶ Use cut'n'paste, if possible. If not, screen shots are ok.
- ▶ *Show* what you did instead of just *describing* it, i.e., show the exact commands/steps that you used.

Contents of the Mail (II)

- ▶ In addition to the commands/steps you used, describe what you want to achieve (i.e., why did you do them?)
- ▶ Describe the symptoms, not your guesses, i.e., show the exact errors or other output you got.
- ▶ If possible, create a reproducible example.

Responding to Replies



- ▶ Read replies carefully, and answer all questions they contain.
Otherwise, we might not be able to solve your problem.
- ▶ Try the suggestions you get, and tell us whether they worked or not.
Otherwise, we will not know if the problem is solved.

Specific Cases

- ▶ Problems logging in
- ▶ Problems with jobs
- ▶ Problems installing or testing software

Problems Logging In

Never send us your password!

Tell us

- ▶ When it happened
- ▶ Which machine you were trying to log in *from*
- ▶ What OS it runs (at least if it is your desktop/laptop/mobile)
- ▶ Which machine and username you were trying to log in *to*
- ▶ Which program/command you were using
- ▶ The error message you got



So, instead of

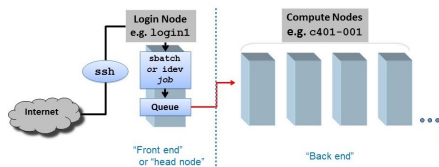
I cannot log in to Abel! My password is "hemmelig".

Try something like

I tried to log in to Abel at around 14:00 today from my desktop machine (varelg.uio.no; a linux machine):

```
$ ssh abel.uio.no  
bhm@abel.uio.no's password:  
Permission denied, please try again.
```

Problems with Jobs



- ▶ Tell us your username.
- ▶ If you have problems submitting a job, show us the command you used, and the error message you got.
- ▶ If there are problems with a submitted job, include the job id.
- ▶ Include the whole error message in the email
- ▶ Tell us where the job script and log file is (Colossus: include them, because we cannot see your files.)

Examples:

I cannot submit my job script:

```
$ sbatch -A nn9998k kort.sm
sbatch: error: Batch job submission failed: Invalid account or
account/partition combination specified
$ hostname
login-0-1.local
$ pwd
/usit/abel/u1/bhm/slurm/testjobs
```

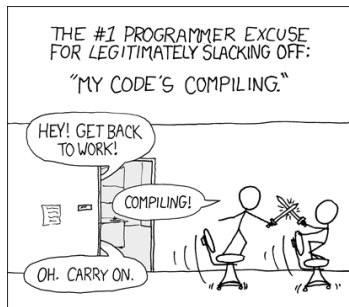
My username is bhm.

or

I submitted a job (jobid 18816535) yesterday, but it is still waiting in the queue. Do you know what is wrong?

Problems Installing or Testing Software

- ▶ Show us the commands you used, and which modules you used: `module list`.
- ▶ Include the whole error message.
- ▶ Tip: use `script` to catch all commands and output
- ▶ Tell us where the files are



Example:

We get an error when trying to compile our program "affinity_test":

```
$ pwd
/usit/abel/u1/bhm/src
$ module load intel
$ gcc affinity_test.c -o affinity_test
affinity_test.c:5:17: error: mpi.h: No such file or directory
affinity_test.c: In function 'main':
affinity_test.c:17: error: 'MPI_COMM_WORLD' undeclared (first use in
affinity_test.c:17: error: (Each undeclared identifier is reported o
affinity_test.c:17: error: for each function it appears in.)
affinity_test.c:27: error: 'for' loop initial declarations are only
affinity_test.c:27: note: use option -std=c99 or -std=gnu99 to compi
259 (1) $ module list
Currently Loaded Modulefiles:
  1) intel/2017.2
```

Can you help us build it?

The End

Remember:

“How can I make them understand my problem as fast as possible?”

