How to Get Help or Ask for Software

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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
How to Ask for Help

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
How to Ask for Help

**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 \textit{from}
- What OS it runs (at least if it is your desktop/laptop/mobile)
- Which machine and username you were trying to log in \textit{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?
Specific Cases

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.
Specific Cases

Example:

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

```bash
$ 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 this function)
affinity_test.c:17: error: (Each undeclared identifier is reported only once
affinity_test.c:17: error: for each function it appears in.)
affinity_test.c:27: error: 'for' loop initial declarations are only allowed in C99 mode
affinity_test.c:27: note: use option -std=c99 or -std=gnu99 to compile your code
```

```bash
259 (1) $ module list
Currently Loaded Modulefiles:
  1) intel/2017.2
```

Can you help us build it?
Remember:

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