

Original Bboard Thread in which :-~) was proposed

Here is the original message posted by Scott Fahlman on 19 September, 1982:

19-Sep-82 11:44 Scott E Fahlman :-~)
From: Scott E Fahlman <Fahlman at Cmu-20c>

I propose that the following character sequence for joke markers:
:-~)

Read it sideways. Actually, it is probably more economical to mark things that are NOT jokes, given current trends. For this, use :-{

The entire thread is reproduced below. We didn't have formal newsgroup threads in those days, but these are all the messages that mention the need for a joke marker or that use the :-~) symbol.

This was retrieved from the spice vax oct-82 backup tape by Jeff Baird on September 10, 2002. The period covered is 16 September 1982 through 21 October 1982.

Credits: Here is the account by Mike Jones describing how this ancient post was retrieved. It's an impressive piece of digital archeology, with many contributors. I am grateful to Mike, to Jeff Baird, and to all the others who played a role in this effort. It is great that we can view this bit of Internet history once again.

Many people were involved in this computing archaeology success story. I (Mike Jones) kicked off the effort in February 2002 by looking through some old bboard program (Bags) sources, figuring out the filename that the post would likely be found under (/usr/cmu/lib/bb/general.bb), and asking Howard Wactlar, the former CMU SCS facilities director, whether the file could still be restored. Scott Fahlman provided data narrowing the probable span of time during which the post was made. Howard and Bob Cosgrove, the current director, determined that backup tapes from that period (1981-1983) still existed and asked Jeff Baird of the facilities staff to try to find and restore the post. Dave Livingston of facilities located a working 9-track tape drive and a machine to use it on. Kirk Berthold and Michael Riley in CS operations managed retrieving tapes from off-site archival storage. Grad student Dan Pelleg's FreeBSD machine was used to read the 4.1BSD dump format tapes using a compatibility mode in the restore program. (Later in the effort a NetBSD machine was used to do the same thing.) Dale Moore played for the post on Taps-20 backup tapes from CMU-20C. But by all accounts, Jeff Baird should get most of the credit for doing the hard work of locating and retrieving the data. He kept asking for more tapes, reading those that could still be read, narrowing the date range, and sticking with it until the post was found. Thanks all for your efforts to restore this part of computing history, and especially, thanks Jeff!

Note: There apparently were a few posts prior to 16 September (not on the tape that was retrieved) that posed various physics questions about what would happen to various objects in an elevator if you cut the cable. Given the quality of the elevators in Wean Hall (then and now), this was more than idle speculation.

Apparently someone had posed the problem of what would happen to a helium balloon in free-fall, someone else had asked about pigeons flying around in the falling elevator, and someone had then asked what would happen if the birds were breathing the helium...

16-Sep-82 11:51 James Wright at CMU-780D Related question
Of equal interest is how the birds cheeping will sound after they have inhaled the Helium.
=
16-Sep-82 12:09 Neil Swartz at CMU-750R Pigeon type question
This question does not involve pigeons, but is similar:
There is a lit candle in an elevator mounted on a bracket attached to the middle of one wall (say, 2" from the wall). A drop of mercury is on the floor. The cable snaps and the elevator falls.
What happens to the candle and the mercury?
=
16-Sep-82 17:21 Howard Gayle at CMU-780G WARNING!
Because of a recent physics experiment, the leftmost elevator has been contaminated with mercury. There is also some slight fire damage. Decontamination should be complete by 08:00 Friday.
=
16-Sep-82 21:34 Rudy Nedved at CMU-10A Re: WARNING!!
The previous bboard message about mercury is related to the comment by Neil Swartz about Physics experiments. It is not an actual problem.

Last year parts of Doherty Hall were closed off because of spilled mercury. My high school closed down a lab because of a dropped bottle of mercury.

My apology for spoiling the joke but people were upset and yelling fire in a crowded theatre is bad news....so are jokes on day old comments.
=
17-Sep-82 10:35 Neil Swartz at CMU-750R Answer to elevator question
The answer is that the candle goes out due to lack of oxygen. (There are no longer any convection currents to keep feeding it) The mercury forms into an ellipsoid due to surface tension. In balling up it exerts a force on the floor which sends it towards the ceiling. It will bounce back and forth between ceiling and floor until the elevator hits the ground. All of this neglects the friction on the guide rails, vibrations, etc.
Any resemblance of this problem to any real situation is purely coincidence, or in the mind of an operations staff person.

17-Sep-82 10:58 Neil Swartz at CMU-750R Elevator posts
Apparently there has been some confusion about elevators and such. After talking to Rudy, I have discovered that there is no mercury spill in any of the Wean hall elevators. Many people seem to have taken the notice about the physics department seriously.

Maybe we should adopt a convention of putting a star (*) in the subject field of any notice which is to be taken as a joke.
=
17-Sep-82 13:04 Scott Fahlman at CMU-10A Elevators (*)
Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the elevator...

Unfortunately, the center elevator now contains what seems to be the remains of 40,000 two-pound pigeons in an advanced state of decomposition and the right elevator contains a bear of indeterminate color. The left elevator appears to be safe, but when you stand in it for too long, your voice gets squeaky and you start running into the walls, causing the elevator to rise.

Despite the * in the header of this message, this is not a joke and should be taken quite literally. Do not panic -- taking the stairs is good for you.
=
17-Sep-82 14:43 Thomas Rodeheffer at CMU-10A Candles in Zero-G
I seem to recall hearing about an experiment with burning candles in zero-G (skylab?) in which the result was that the candle did NOT go out, even though, as has been noted, you don't get convection currents without gravity. According to what I recall, a candle burning in zero-G doesn't have a real flame, just a globular glowing area around the wick. Supposedly the explanation was that oxygen diffuses towards the wick (and carbon dioxide and water vapor diffuse away) fast enough to keep combustion going. Does anybody remember anything more about this?
=
17-Sep-82 14:59 Joseph Ginder at CMU-10A (**)
I believe that the joke character should be % rather than *.
=
17-Sep-82 15:15 Anthony Stentz at CMU-780G (**)
How about using * for good jokes and % for bad jokes?
We could even use %* for jokes that are so bad, they're funny.
=
17-Sep-82 17:40 Keith Wright at CMU-10A *%##\$ Jokes!
No, no, no! Surely everyone will agree that "s" is the funniest character on the keyboard. It looks funny (like a jolly fat man in convulsions of laughter). It sounds funny (say it loud and fast three times). I just know if I could get my nose into the vacuum of the CRT it would even smell funny!
=
17-Sep-82 17:42 Leonard Hamey at CMU-10A {#} (previously *)
A detailed (i.e. > 1 minute) study of the aesthetic and pictographic effects of the characters available in the ASCII set has led to the following suggestion:

I think that the joke character should be the sequence {#} because it looks like two lips with teeth showing between them. This is the expected result if someone actually laughs their head off. An obvious abbreviation of this sequence would be the hash character itself (which can also be read as the sharp character and suggests a quality which may be lacking in those too obtuse to appreciate the joke.)
=
17-Sep-82 18:52 Jim Crowley at CMU-10A BB Jokes
BB jokes are fine and should not require a marker.
But jokes should not be malicious, obscene, or such that they appear to resemble real warnings to all but a few.
Last nights elevator hoax was a borderline case of this last type.
=
18-Sep-82 20:40 Guy Steele at CMU-10A ! Joke markers again
I hope everyone realized that my previous remark about non-use of joke markers was a joke, and was flagged as such by the absence of a marker. This message is not a joke, as indicated by the exclamation point.
=
19-Sep-82 11:44 Scott E Fahlman :-~)
From: Scott E Fahlman <Fahlman at Cmu-20c>

I propose that the following character sequence for joke markers:
:-~)

Read it sideways. Actually, it is probably more economical to mark things that are NOT jokes, given current trends. For this, use :-{

19-Sep-82 18:56 Jeff Shrager at CMU-10A 38521,03,9(6),9(9),1(5),0
Just signifying that a message is a joke is certainly not sufficient. One can develop a taxonomy of bboard message types along several different dimensions. Also, where a continuum is preferable to a taxonomy (such as where humor value is at issue) one can similarly use a scale to indicate where along that scale this message lies. Suppose that all dimensions are referred to by a ten point scale (we'll use all integers here although one can certainly imagine reals in the case of fine grain continuous scales). Some dimensions will be bitwise encoded as well.
Here is a sample of a coding scheme:

COMMUNITY: (this is a binary scale with a bit position for each department totalling about 32 bits)
TOPIC: (two digits 00-99)
(00) Political, (01) Scientific, (02) Computer, (03) Meta, etc
FLAME VALUE: (continuous 0.0-10.0)
HUMOR VALUE: (0.0-10.0)
BORDOM VALUE: (0.0-10.0)
INFORMATIONAL CONTENT: (-10.0 (for queries) to 10.0 (for their answers))

Note that some of these scales are purely according to the opinion of the author. Thus, we provide, also, a confidence scale: to go along with each continuous scale (to be enclosed in parens after the value).
=
20-Sep-82 08:34 Jaime Carbonell at CMU-10A & # % :-~) ...
To resolve ambiguity, how about a JOKE BB? We can hook up some of that highly-touted write-only memory just for this purpose. While I'm at it, how about a flame BB using the latest cryogenic junction memory (to cool down the contents of the memory, of course).
=
20-Sep-82 16:23 Dave Touretzky at CMU-10A (-: bboard software change
As of October 1st, the General bboard will be renamed the Jokes bboard. Please update your SWITCH.INI file. In the event of a serious notice, we will post it under the name "Sharon Burks". When the bboard contains messages whose total bogosity score exceeds 5000 microLenats, the file will be zeroed so novice bboard players can have a chance to score.
=
20-Sep-82 17:56 15-1xx Labs at CMU-750Y jokes _/_/
We on the gandalf vax have our own code word for a joke. The above symbol is universally known as a smile.

Also, perhaps Jeff could include in his scale a "length to humor ratio", as we seem to notice that the relation between some post's lengths are inversely proportional to their length.

Not Sharon Burks,
'ob and 'im
=
20-Sep-82 22:33 James Driscoll at CMU-10A IC After Dark
The first meeting of the (unofficial) IC mini-course ``Pittsburgh After Dark'' will be this Thursday at 9:00 PM in the CS lounge. The first lecture will be ``Chainside Bar: Taxonomy, Characteristics, and Examples.'' Lab follows lecture. Participants should bring proof of age. New students are encouraged to attend.

|:- (This is not a joke)
=
21-Sep-82 14:27 Wilson Harvey at CMU-IUS (-: Dramatic bb posts :-~)
could be flagged with the above notation. Things like ...

"I was a Teen-age Hacker"

or

"I won't write that subroutine for you. I won't because every part of me wants to."

:-| Seriously, I have found someone's pen in the CS Supply Room. Send me mail to get it back.
=
22-Sep-82 12:43 Robert Thibadeau at CMU-10A Pittsburgh Zoo Options
The zoo is a worthwhile place to visit, but in my three years in Pittsburgh I have watched it deteriorate for lack of funds. Fortunately they have this wonderful 'adopt an animal' program. The adoption can be a day or month. Orangutans eat light at \$.75 a day or \$22.50 a month, and for \$15 a day or \$450 a month you get yourself an entire elephant. Double that and you can probably have his name changed to Clyde. Triple it and I bet they will let you dye him pink. Visitation rights come with any adoption. The flyer is on my office door -- 5321.
=
22-Sep-82 14:14 John Schlag at CMU-750R :-~) Al Elephant (-: I think all the members of the CMU AI community should pitch together to adopt an elephant at the Zoo. Of course, Thibadeau's suggestion of tripling the price should be taken.
=
22-Sep-82 21:26 Masaru Tomita at CMU-10A (-:O) missing picture
The picture of me on the picture board in the CS lounge is missing. One of the members of Tommy's fan club must have taken it. Please note that I have a wife.
=
22-Sep-82 21:31 James Muller at CMU-750Y ?
I propose that the above character be placed in the subject field of all posts which ask questions. ...
=
22-Sep-82 23:29 Ravinder Chandhok :-{ (-:
From: Ravinder Chandhok at CMU-750Y
Perhaps what we really need is a 'bb notation' bboard for such posts that relate to notation and signals.
Ro'
=
23-Sep-82 10:40 Stephen Hancock Jokes
From: Stephen Hancock <SFH at CMU-20C>
With all of this talk about jokes on the BBoard, perhaps we should create a jokes BBoard. This would remove any doubt about whether or not the message is a joke or not. Additionally this would spare us from being forced to page through many jokes when we don't have the time to spare. It would also be nice to be able to decide to read through a number of hopefully good or atleast original jokes on demand.

P.S. My reference to us/we, was how I feel about the topic. However, I believe many other people feel the same way.

=
03-Oct-82 19:36 Scott Fahlman at CMU-10A Rumor of the Week :-~)
The person singing the theme at the start of each Star Trek episode is in fact Slim Whitman.

Special bonus rumor: Slim Whitman has just been hired by Tartan Labs.
=
03-Oct-82 21:47 Wilson Harvey at CMU-IUS For anyone interested ...
I have a picture of ET holding a chainsaw in .press file format. The file exists in /usr/wah/public/etchainsaw.press on the IUS.
=
03-Oct-82 23:43 Guy Jacobson at CMU-780G Holding a chainsaw?? :-~)
Does anyone have a picture of R2D2 holding a seed pointer in TeX format? Or how about a rendering of Yoda with a lathe for use with nofff? Any pointers to digitized images of short, cute aliens holding power tools would be greatly appreciated.
=
So you see, bit-map displays are really quite unnecessary :->

Not long after this, we see that the idea had spread outside of CMU. This message also shows how quick people were to create lists of new smileys. I wonder what ever became of Jim Morris...

Mail-from: Arpanet host CMU-10A rcvd at 10-NOV-82 0826-PST
Date: 10 November 1982 1126-EST (Wednesday)
From: James.Morris at CMU-10A

To: csl^ at PARC-MAXC, isl^ at PARC-MAXC, junk^ at PARC-MAXC
Subject: Communications Breakthrough
Message-Id: <10Nov82 112614 JM90@CMU-10A>

Because you can't see the person who is sending you electronic mail you are sometimes uncertain whether they are serious or joking. Recently, Scott Fahlman at CMU devised a scheme for annotating one's messages to overcome this problem. If you turn your head sideways to look at the three characters :-~) they look sort of like a smiling face. Thus, if someone sends you a message that says "Have you stopped beating your wife?:-~)" you know they are joking. If they say "I need to talk to you :-~)" , be prepared for trouble.

Since Scott's original proposal, many further symbols have been proposed here:

(:-) for messages dealing with bicycle helmets
@= for messages dealing with nuclear war
<:-) for dumb questions
oo for somebody's head-lights are on messages
o><!= for messages of interest to women
~-= a candle, to annotate flaming messages

So you see, bit-map displays are really quite unnecessary :->

IPR2023-00833
Apple EX1008 Page 1