
Configuring Spam Filter Settings for Your PhD E-Mail

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This tutorial explains how to configure the spam filter for your e-mail account at PhD Computing.

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1. Logging into Web Mail

The spam filtering settings for your account are configurable through our Web Mail interface.

1.1. Getting to the WebMail Main Screen

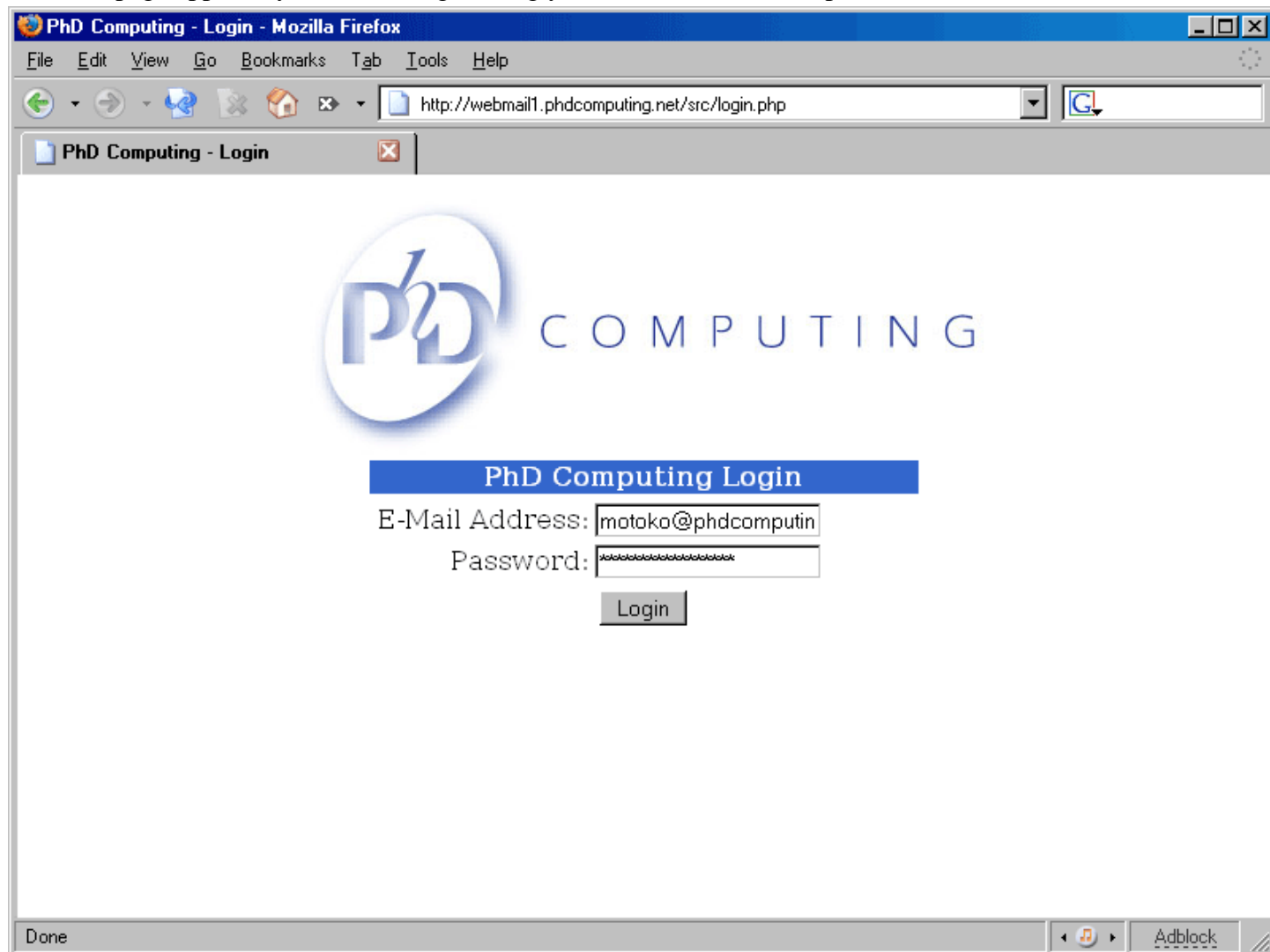


Note

This tutorial was written using the webmail interface for our current e-mail system. If you are still using the old system, replace the link <http://webmail1.phdcomputing.net/> with <http://webmail.phdcomputing.net/>. If you are unsure which system you are on, you can contact PhD Computing and we can let you know.

To connect to the Web Mail interface, open a browser (Internet Explorer, Netscape, Safari) and go to <http://webmail1.phdcomputing.net/>.

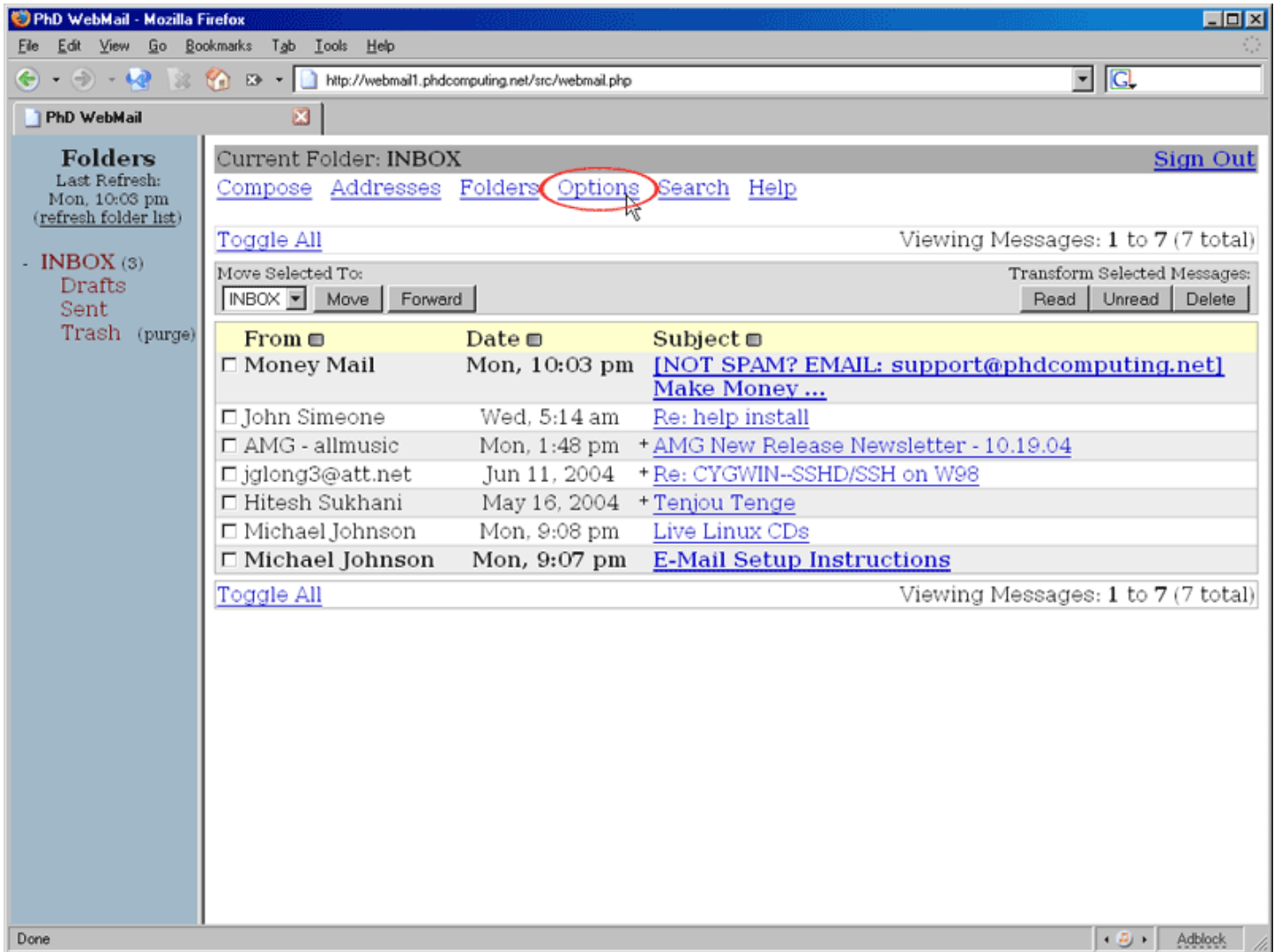
Once the page appears, you need to login using your e-mail address and password.



2. Setting your Options

2.1. The Options Section of Web Mail

Once you have logged in successfully, you will be at the mail screen of WebMail. To make any changes, you need to go into the Web Mail options section. To go into this section, you click the link labeled Options at the top of the screen. The link is circled in the graphic below.



2.2. Navigating the Options in Web Mail

The Options section lets you set up how Web Mail will work for you and other configuration options. The two sections we are interested in are Personal Information and SpamAssassin Configuration.

Configuring Spam Filter Settings for Your PhD E-Mail

The screenshot shows the PhD WebMail interface in Mozilla Firefox. The browser's address bar displays the URL <http://webmail1.phdcomputing.net/src/webmail.php>. The interface includes a navigation menu with links for [Compose](#), [Addresses](#), [Folders](#), [Options](#), [Search](#), and [Help](#), along with a [Sign Out](#) button. On the left, a 'Folders' sidebar lists 'INBOX (3)', 'Drafts', 'Sent', and 'Trash'. The main content area is titled 'Options' and contains several configuration sections:

- Personal Information** (highlighted with a red circle): This contains personal information about yourself such as your name, your email address, etc.
- Display Preferences**: You can change the way that SquirrelMail looks and displays information to you, such as the colors, the language, and other settings.
- Message Highlighting**: Based upon given criteria, incoming messages can have different background colors in the message list. This helps to easily distinguish who the messages are from, especially for mailing lists.
- Folder Preferences**: These settings change the way your folders are displayed and manipulated.
- Index Order**: The order of the message index can be rearranged and changed to contain the headers in any order you want.
- SpamAssassin Configuration** (highlighted with a red circle): Here you may define your own white/black lists and customize your spam scoring rules.
- SpellChecker Options**: Here you may set up how your personal dictionary is stored, edit it, or choose which languages should be available to you when spell-checking.
- NewMail Options**: This configures settings for playing sounds and/or showing popup windows when new mail arrives.

The status bar at the bottom of the browser window shows 'Done' and an 'Adblock' extension icon.

3. Editing your Personal Information

Before you can set your spam settings, you need to fill in the personal information the settings require. To edit these settings, choose Personal Information from the Options section.

You only need to fill in the top two items for configuring your spam filter settings. Please make sure your e-mail address is filled in correctly, or your custom settings will not work.

The screenshot shows the 'Options - Personal Information' page in a web browser. The browser's address bar shows the URL 'http://webmail1.phdcomputing.net/src/webmail.php'. The page has a navigation menu with links for 'Compose', 'Addresses', 'Folders', 'Options', 'Search', and 'Help'. A 'Sign Out' link is also present in the top right corner. On the left side, there is a 'Folders' sidebar with a 'Last Refresh' timestamp of 'Mon, 9:25 pm' and a list of folders: 'INBOX (3)', 'Drafts', 'Sent', and 'Trash'. The main content area is titled 'Options - Personal Information' and is divided into several sections:

- Name and Address Options:** Contains input fields for 'Full Name' (filled with 'Motoko Aoyama'), 'Email Address' (filled with 'motoko@phdcomputing.net'), and 'Reply To'. There is also a large empty text area for 'Signature'.
- Multiple Identities:** A link labeled 'Edit Advanced Identities' with a note '(discards changes made on this form so far)'.
- Timezone Options:** A dropdown menu for 'Your current timezone' set to 'Same as server'.
- Reply Citation Options:** A dropdown menu for 'Reply Citation Style' set to 'No Citation', and two input fields for 'User-Defined Citation Start' and 'User-Defined Citation End'.
- Signature Options:** Radio buttons for 'Use Signature' with 'Yes' selected and 'No' unselected.

The browser's status bar at the bottom shows 'Done' on the left and 'Adblock' on the right.

4. Configuring the Spam Filter Settings

4.1. Understanding the Spam Filter

Before making any adjustments to your settings, it is important to understand how the Spam filter works. This section will explain the settings and the background information you need to set the spam filter to what you need.

4.1.1. The White/Black List

The most basic feature of the spam filter is a white/black list. You can put individual addresses or full domains on the list, either allowing them to bypass scanning, or to prevent you from getting e-mail from them.

The whitelist is a very handy feature. If e-mail from someone you know keeps being caught as spam, you can add their e-mail address to your whitelist, preventing the spam filter from examining e-mail from them in the future.

You will not likely have to use your blacklist. Please remember that most spammers use random e-mail addresses, and that a blacklist will not be effective because of this. You should only blacklist e-mail addresses that regularly send e-mail you do not want.

4.1.2. Spam Scoring

Our spam filter assigns a numerical score for each e-mail that it scans. This score shows how much similar to spam the e-mail is. A positive number means the e-mail has features that make it similar to spam. A negative number means the e-mail has features that make it similar to a legitimate e-mail. Each test it goes through adds or subtracts points, resulting in a final number.

The filter has two things it can do to e-mail. It will mark an e-mail as possible spam if it reaches a certain positive score number, and, if it reaches a higher score, will discard the message. You can control which scores are used for these behaviors.

Please remember that a higher score means the e-mail is more like spam, so if you set higher numbers for your score, more spam-like e-mail will get through. Setting lower numbers will tighten your settings, allowing less spam-like e-mail to get through. Remember that too low of a number will block good e-mail, and too high of a number will allow spam through. You will need to experiment with the scores to get the numbers right for you.

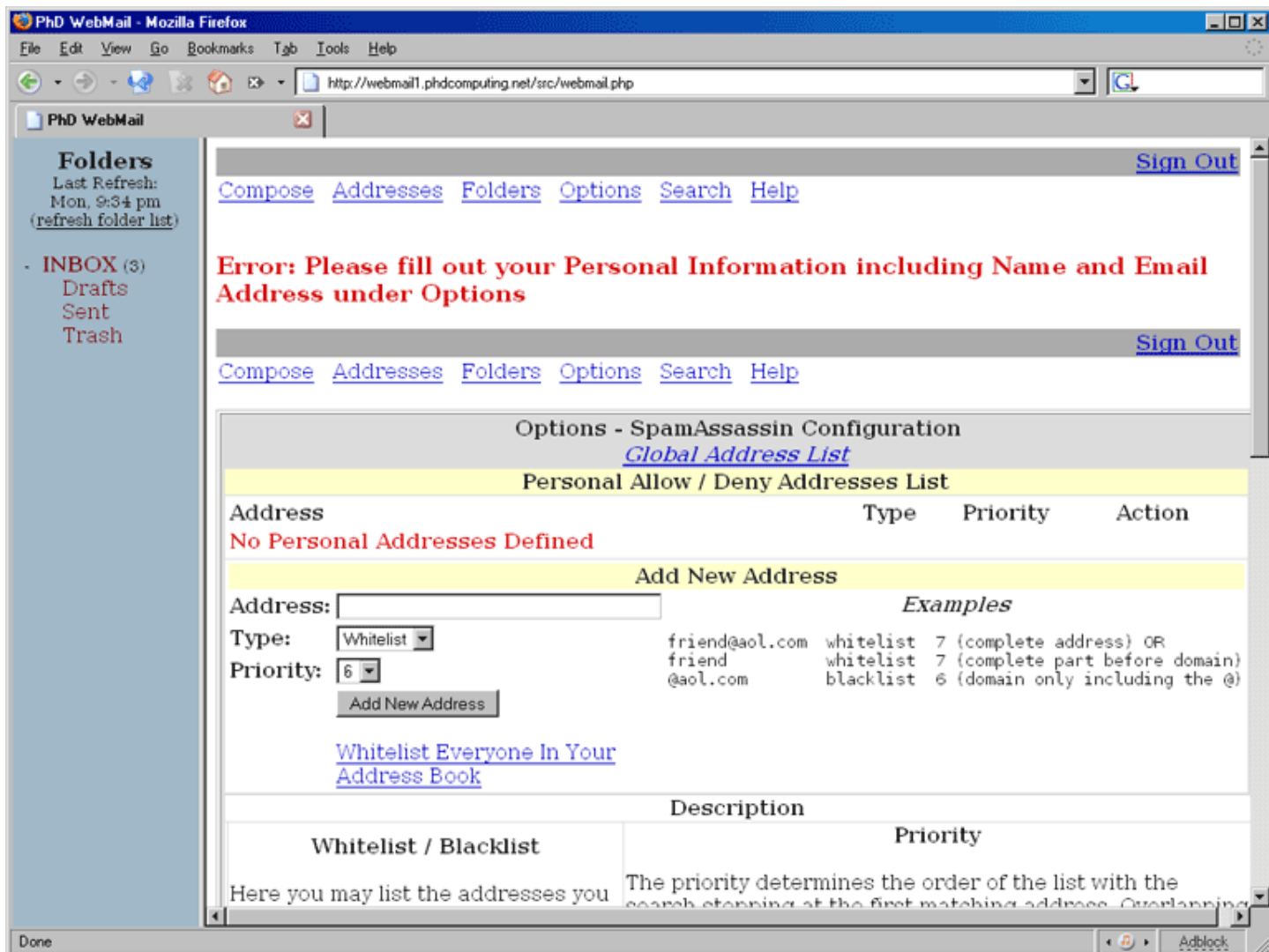
4.2. The Spam Filter Configuration Page

The SpamAssassin configuration page is the section where you will be able to make any the changes to the spam filter that you need. There are a lot of options on this page, so please read the sections carefully.

To change your spam filter settings, choose SpamAssassin Configuration from the Options section.

If you forgot to enter in the personal information the filter needs, you will see a screen like the below image. Notice the red "Error" text at the top of the screen. If you see this, please confirm you have completed the steps in the "Editing your Personal Information" section of this document.

Configuring Spam Filter Settings for Your PhD E-Mail



Once everything is ready for configuring the spam filter, the configuration page will look like the image below.

Configuring Spam Filter Settings for Your PhD E-Mail

PhD WebMail - Mozilla Firefox
 http://webmail1.phdcomputing.net/stc/webmail.php

PhD WebMail [Sign Out](#)

[Compose](#) [Addresses](#) [Folders](#) [Options](#) [Search](#) [Help](#)

Options - SpamAssassin Configuration

[Global Address List](#)

Personal Allow / Deny Addresses List

Address	Type	Priority	Action
No Personal Addresses Defined			

Add New Address

Address:

Type:

Priority:

Examples

friend@aol.com	whitelist	7	(complete address) OR
friend	whitelist	7	(complete part before domain)
@aol.com	blacklist	6	(domain only including the @)

[Whitelist Everyone In Your Address Book](#)

Description

Whitelist / Blacklist	Priority
<p>Here you may list the addresses you wish to protect and those you wish to block. Please keep in mind that spammers often have throw-away or fake addresses so blacklisting these is pointless. The listed addresses appear in the same order as they will be applied by the mail server. Please read the section on priority to understand why this is important.</p>	<p>The priority determines the order of the list with the search stopping at the first matching address. Overlapping addresses should be listed from specific to general. E.g. if you want to allow one person from aol to mail you and block everyone else you would use two rules. The higher priority one set to whitelist friend@aol.com and a lower priority one set to blacklist @aol.com. The server will match the specific higher priority address first and end the search. Addresses that are whitelisted for the whole company appear above with the lowest priorities.. your settings can always override the global ones.</p>

Message Scoring Policy

Your Current Policy	Tag Level	Kill Level
Default	6	12

Predefined Policies <i>(Click To Select)</i>	Tag Level	Kill Level
Heavy Filtering	5	10
Default	6	12
Default - Tag, But Never Block	6	999
6.5/7.8	6.5	7.8
Permissive	10	20
Never Tag and Never Block	999	999

Define Custom Policy

Custom Policy

Policies	Description Tag Level	Kill Level
<p>You may select from one of several predefined scoring policies or you may define your own. Each email is assigned a numerical score based on the characteristics it shares with those common to spam.</p>	<p>The tag level is the numerical score required to identify a message as being spam. This will cause *SPAM* to be added to the subject line and the X-Spam-Flag header to be set to YES.</p>	<p>The Kill Level is the numerical score required to prevent delivery of a message at the server. This level should be higher or equal to Tag Level and high enough to avoid catching legitimate email. As your custom whitelist grows you should adjust these two levels to tag and block more spam.</p>

Done AdBlock

In this dialog, each major section is divided by a colored heading. Each of the headings is explained below.

4.2.1. Personal Allow / Deny Address List

Any e-mail addresses that you have added to be blocked or allowed will appear in this section. You will see the address, what type of entry it is (blacklist or whitelist), the priority it has, and any actions you can perform on the entry (Edit or Delete).

4.2.2. Add New Address

This section allows you to add new e-mail addresses to your whitelist and blacklist.

The e-mail address can be a whole address or part of an address (such as a domain). Using something like "john@express.com" will only affect mail from that specific address. If you want the entry to work for all mail from express.com, you would want to enter "@express.com".

The type entry lets you choose which list you want the address on. Whitelist makes the entry above be never considered spam. Blacklist will make the entry above always be considered spam.

Priority lets you choose how the rules affect each other. A lower number does not count as much as a higher number.

Using different priorities let you make up some complicated rules. For example, adding "belanna@aol.com" to the whitelist with a priority of 8 and "@aol.com" to the blacklist with a priority of 7 makes the spam filter consider an e-mail from belanna@aol.com valid mail, but e-mail from any other aol.com address is considered spam.

4.2.3. Message Scoring Policy

This section allows you to customize the scores used to determine what mail is considered spam.

Please make sure you understand how the point system works before changing the scoring rules. Using the wrong settings can either block valid mail, or be ineffective.

If you want to turn off all filtering, select the "Never Tag and Never Block" setting.

You can also create your own score levels in the custom policy section if the presets are not to your liking.