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When you forget
that anonymity is
asymmetric

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Anonymous Questions (and Answers)

- A facility to allow students to ask course-related questions of staff without revealing their identity:
 - Increases the number of questions asked
 - Encourages students to ask questions they fear might be seen as "dumb"
 - Engages a different group of students from email, or forum-based (i.e. attributed) mechanisms
- Questions are answered by the appropriate staff member and responses are made available to all students.

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Anonymous Questions at Kent

- My department has been using various anonymous question mechanisms for almost 10 years. From the original cardboard box to the current web-based system with keyword indexing and RSS feed generation.
- Other staff use (attributed) email for questions and Usenet newsgroup postings for (anonymised) responses, but students had abandoned Usenet for IM, which was not routinely used by staff, nor archived for students.
- If they wanted a one-to-many, non real-time, archived mechanism, it was going to have to be anonymous questions .

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When good ideas go bad

- All was quiet, and civil, until a piece of coursework proved to be more difficult than expected.
- A number of problems became apparent:
 - There's no opportunity for dialogue
 - Staff can't easily tell how many students are having problems
 - Filling in a web form can be an alternative to thinking
 - As question volumes increase, archive use decreases
- Students are truly anonymous, and empowered to express their frustration
- Responses from staff are unsigned, but not at all anonymous
- Despite being published to all students, responses are seen as directed at an individual. Publication may even make it worse.

Question: If I can't book a ticket, should I still try and check-in?

Answer: What with?

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