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## A List of Hacker News's Undocumented Features and Behaviors

Hacker News, a simple link aggregator owned and operated by Silicon Valley startup incubator Y Combinator, has had many positive effects on SV startups and engineers as a whole. On Hacker News, users receive Karma whenever another user upvotes a submission or comment they made, which incentivizes positive contributions to the community.

However, in maintaining its simplicity, many new features and behaviors added over the years on Hacker News are not fully documented other than the occasional comments from staff. This list details some of the hidden norms about Hacker News not otherwise covered in the Guidelines and the FAQ, along with a few bonus features outside of typical HN usage. If there is anything missing/incorrect from this list, feel free to file a GitHub issue/PR.

*This list has no affiliation with Hacker News, Y Combinator, or any YC-backed company.*

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## Undocumented Features

### Moderators

Hacker News currently has one full time moderator: Dan Gackle (dang), and formerly Scott Bell (sctb). Their comment replies provide a pseudo-log of Hacker News moderation.

Dan is very responsive when contacted at [hn@ycombinator.com](mailto:hn@ycombinator.com), and is the best option for resolving any issues on Hacker News.

### Downvoting Comments

All comments start with a score of 1 point (but in order to prevent bandwagoning, the comment score is not visible to users other than the author). After users reach **501 Karma**, they gain the ability to downvote another comment. Downvoted comments (i.e. with a score < 1) reduce their placement on the comment thread and will appear desaturated to other users deemphasize them. There is no upper limit on the score of a comment, but the minimum score is -4 points. Additional downvotes after that still subtract points from the user's Karma, but the comment won't go below -4. You cannot downvote comments which are direct replies to your own comment, and you cannot downvote **24 hours** after the original comment was made.

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\* -2 points by minimaxir 55 days ago [-]

A classifier that *flips a coin* would probably have higher accuracy.

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▲ minimaxir 55 days ago [-]

A classifier that *flips a coin* would probably have higher accuracy.

Complaining about being downvoted is discouraged and usually results in even more downvotes.

If the comment desaturation makes Hacker News difficult to read, you can click on the comment's timestamp to go to its page where the comment will no longer be faded, or you can install the CSS extension discussed [here](#).

### Flagging/Vouching

If a user has **31 Karma**, they can flag submissions. Although submissions cannot be downvoted, flags act as a “super” downvote and enough flags will strongly reduce the rank of the submission, or kill it entirely (flagging is supposed to be used for submissions which break the site guidelines, but that isn't always the case in practice). A submission that's flagged to death will have a [\[flagged\]](#) tag. Comments behave similarly.

A [\[dead\]](#) submission (that does not also show [\[flagged\]](#)) is killed by a moderator or by the software. They will only be shown to users who have [showdead](#) enabled in their profile. A submission can simultaneously be [\[flagged\]](#) and [\[dead\]](#).

If a user has **31 Karma**, they can also vouch for a [\[dead\]](#) submission/comment. A vouched submission/comment has its rank restored (and potentially improved as the vouch can counteract the effects of flags).

### Top Bar Color

If a user has **251 Karma**, they can set the color of the top bar in their profile settings. The default is #ff6600. The Y Combinator logo will change its color to match the top bar.

Here's the list of colors from users who have recently posted.

### Merry Christmas!

During Christmas (December 25th) UTC, the Hacker News front page will have a Christmas theme, with a dark red top bar, and alternating red and green submission ranking numbers.

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## Anti-Voting Manipulation

The FAQ states “users should vote for a story because they personally find it intellectually interesting, not because someone has content to promote.” Indeed, Hacker News utilizes a voting ring detector which will prevent caught submissions from hitting the front page. Due to sites like Product Hunt normalizing the asking for upvotes or other engagement via social media, the implicit asking of upvotes is also done for Hacker News, usually due to ignorance of the Hacker News rule against it. There are very few good reasons to draw attention to a Hacker News submission immediately after it has been submitted.

One popular “trick” for obfuscating voting manipulation on Hacker News is to link to the Hacker News’s /[newest](#) page of new submissions (instead of a direct link which would otherwise make voting manipulation obvious), and asking friends to upvote the submission from that page. This trick doesn’t actually work.

## Flame-War Detector

The FAQ notes that submission rank is impacted by “software which downweights overheated discussions.” A good rule of thumb for this effect is when the number of comments on a submission exceeds its score. Moderators can overrule the downranking for appropriate, not-actually-a-flame-war discussions.

## Second-Chance Pool

Moderators will sometimes rescue a post which didn’t receive a lot of upvotes and reset the submission time on the post. (This is also one of the reasons why the FAQ discourages deleting submissions).

Relatedly, moderators can also invite users via email to resubmit a post which didn’t get much traction.

Posts benefiting from this program are visible at <https://news.ycombinator.com/pool>.

## Edit/Delete Time Limits

After a post or comment is made, it can be edited by the author **within 2 hours**. A post/comment can be deleted by the author within those two hours, **but only if it has no replies**, in order to prevent discussion from being lost. In that case, the post/comment **cannot be deleted** (This can result in a

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fake [\[deleted\]](#) edit if a person wants to remove their comment in the limit but can't). Users can upvote posts from any time as a “bookmarking” feature.

Moderators can change the title of a submission at any time.

If you need something deleted but you can't, you'll have to message [hn@ycombinator.com](mailto:hn@ycombinator.com).

### **Unvote Time Limits**

After a user votes on a post or comment, it can be unvoted **within 1 hour**. After that time, the vote becomes permanent.

### **Comment Collapsing**

Comments can be collapsed by clicking the [\[+\]](#) icon to improve readability. [\[flagged\]](#) comments are sometimes collapsed by default, and moderators can set a comment to automatically be collapsed if necessary (e.g. meta-discussion).

When a comment thread is collapsed, the [\[x more\]](#) number on the right indicates the total number of hidden children comments.

### **Shadowbanning**

Both users and domains can be shadowbanned, where all posts/comments by that user / submissions to that domain will be instantly [\[dead\]](#) and cannot receive votes/comments (but can still be vouched). For accounts with a substantial history on Hacker News, moderators will give warnings before a ban.

A good way to tell if a user/domain is banned is to either have another user with [showdead](#) enabled check for a series of [\[dead\]](#) content from that source, or view those submissions in Private Browsing/Incognito mode to see if they appear.

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45. [dead] IoT platform wars: The battle for the 4th enterprise platform (linkedin.com)  
1 point by jesusrmv on July 12, 2016 | past | web
  46. [dead] 5 Key Points About the GE-Microsoft IOT Partnership (medium.com)  
1 point by jesusrmv on July 12, 2016 | past | web
  47. [dead] Deep learning is coming to a chip near you (cio.com)  
1 point by jesusrmv on July 11, 2016 | past | web
  48. [dead] Some Thoughts About Private Blockchains (medium.com)  
1 point by jesusrmv on July 11, 2016 | past | web
  49. [dead] Dumb Money Is Hurting the Blockchain (medium.com)  
1 point by jesusrmv on July 7, 2016 | past | web
  50. ▲ The Five Tribes of Machine Learning (linkedin.com)  
1 point by jesusrmv on July 6, 2016 | past | web
  51. ▲ The Case for and Against Deep Learning Chips (medium.com)  
2 points by jesusrmv on July 6, 2016 | past | web
  52. ▲ 5 capabilities that should be in the next version of your favorite IoT PaaS (cio.com)  
1 point by jesusrmv on July 5, 2016 | past | web
  53. ▲ The Five Tribes of Machine Learning (medium.com)  
1 point by jesusrmv on July 5, 2016 | past | web
  54. ▲ The X with Machine Learning Business Model (linkedin.com)  
3 points by jesusrmv on July 1, 2016 | past | web

Users/domains are usually shadowbanned for breaking HN rules/spam. If you feel you are unfairly shadowbanned, contact [hn@ycombinator.com](mailto:hn@ycombinator.com).

### Hidden Reply Links

If the comment depth is 3 or more, reply links are withheld until the comments age a while. The amount of aging is a function of the depth. You can get around it by clicking on the comment's timestamp to go to its own page.

### Green Usernames

Accounts which are less than **2 weeks** old at time of submitting/commenting will appear with a green username.

### Thin Black Bar

Occasionally, there will be a thin black bar at the top of the top bar, in memoriam of a significant figure in the tech/science community dying. A Hacker News submission about the death will usually be on the front page at that time.

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## Behaviors

### Implicit Downranking of Politics

The Guidelines state that *most* political discussion is *probably* off-topic. However, the line between technology and politics is blurred, especially as of recently. Most tech related submissions with a hint of political partisanship will quickly be flagged to death by users (or die a slow death due to the inevitable flame war).

dang has commented about this issue many times over the years.

### Implicit Downranking of Topics Around Diversity and Inclusion

Likewise, topics around diversity and inclusion in tech have gained lots of visibility over the past few years. However, despite these discussions not being off-topic, they tend to be flagged to death by users regardless. Unfortunately. (Moderators occasionally unkill such threads if they see it in time, although it rarely sticks).

### Implicit Downranking of Posts Without URLs

Posts without URLs get penalized. If you post with a link and then add the text as a first comment you have more visibility.

### Paywalls

Many news websites have started implementing a paywall for their content, which has caused conflict with Hacker News's "original source" rule.

As a result, submissions which link to paywalled sites tend to get many comments complaining about paywalls, which are off-topic.

### Perceived Favoritism Toward YC Companies

YC Companies get two notable benefits on Hacker News; they can post jobs ads to the front page (which start off at Rank #6, cannot be voted/commented on, and have a fixed decay rate), and the ability to do a Launch HN when their startup launches out of a YC batch.

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Currently, there is no evidence that non-job submissions about a YC startup receive preferential treatment on the front page, or kill submissions critical of a YC startup. In fact, the moderators have stated that they explicitly avoid killing controversial YC posts when possible.

Additionally, founders of YC companies see each other's usernames show up in orange, which — although not an explicit benefit — does allow fellow YC founders to immediately identify one another in discussions.

### **Downranking of Tutorials**

HN submissions which are tutorials are downranked by moderators, as they gratify intellectual curiosity less.

### **Bonus Features**

#### **Hacker News Classic**

Hacker News allows people to use the old front page ranking algorithm, which only counts votes from early users. Early users are defined as being created before Feb 13, 2008.

#### **Hacker News Wayback**

Hacker News allows users to see what the front page looks like at any point in time, representing a weighted view of the submissions from that 24 hour period. You can also do a wayback view for any user at their registration date by clicking their registration date in their profile.

#### **Hacker News on BigQuery**

If you want to gather large amount of Hacker News data for data analysis/machine learning, you should use the Hacker News dataset on BigQuery, which has submission and comment data up to November 2022 and is much more pragmatic to use than manually scraping data from the Hacker News API.

#### **Hacker News Lists**

Hacker News maintains a list of useful links that allow for primitive filtering by certain types of content. These currently include:



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- /leaders — View a list of users with the most karma
  - /front — Filter front page submissions for a given day (e.g. 2016-06-20), ordered by time spent there
  - /best — View the highest-voted recent links
  - /active — View the links with the most active current discussions
  - /bestcomments — List the highest-voted recent comments
  - /highlights — List curated high-quality comments
  - /noobstories — Show submissions from new accounts
  - /noobcomments — List comments from new accounts
  - /pool — Links selected for a second chance at the front page
  - /shownew — View new Show HN links
  - /invited — List of stories deemed interesting whose author was invited to repost in order to give them a second chance because they didn't catch interest at the first submit. More information here: <https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=20508960>
  - /shownew — View new Show HN links
  - /asknew — Latest Ask HN (text) posts
  - /whoishiring — Monthly “Who Is Hiring” threads
  - /launches — Launches of YC startups

### **Public URLs with user-generated content**

- <https://news.ycombinator.com/active>
- <https://news.ycombinator.com/ask>
- <https://news.ycombinator.com/asknew>
- <https://news.ycombinator.com/best>
- <https://news.ycombinator.com/bestcomments>
- <https://news.ycombinator.com/classic>
- [https://news.ycombinator.com/favorites?id=\[name\]](https://news.ycombinator.com/favorites?id=[name])
- [https://news.ycombinator.com/favorites?id=\[name\]&comment=t](https://news.ycombinator.com/favorites?id=[name]&comment=t)
- [https://news.ycombinator.com/front?day=\[day\]](https://news.ycombinator.com/front?day=[day])
- [https://news.ycombinator.com/from?site=\[domain\]](https://news.ycombinator.com/from?site=[domain])
- <https://news.ycombinator.com/highlights>
- [https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=\[id\]](https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=[id])
- <https://news.ycombinator.com/leaders>
- <https://news.ycombinator.com/newcomments>
- <https://news.ycombinator.com/newest>
- <https://news.ycombinator.com/noobcomments>
- <https://news.ycombinator.com/noobstories>

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- [https://news.ycombinator.com/over?points=\[score\]](https://news.ycombinator.com/over?points=[score])
  - <https://news.ycombinator.com/show>
  - <https://news.ycombinator.com/shownew>
  - [https://news.ycombinator.com/submitted?id=\[name\]](https://news.ycombinator.com/submitted?id=[name])
  - <https://news.ycombinator.com/submitted?id=whoishiring>
  - [https://news.ycombinator.com/threads?id=\[name\]](https://news.ycombinator.com/threads?id=[name])
  - <https://news.ycombinator.com/topcolors>
  - [https://news.ycombinator.com/user?id=\[name\]](https://news.ycombinator.com/user?id=[name])
  - [https://news.ycombinator.com/vouched?id=\[name\]](https://news.ycombinator.com/vouched?id=[name])
  - [https://news.ycombinator.com/flagged?id=\[name\]](https://news.ycombinator.com/flagged?id=[name])
  - <https://news.ycombinator.com/highlights>
  - <https://news.ycombinator.com/pool>
  - <https://news.ycombinator.com/invited>

### **Official RSS feeds**

- <https://news.ycombinator.com/rss> maps the frontpage.
- <https://news.ycombinator.com/showrss> maps the Show HN page.

### **Hacker News Search**

HN Search provides real-time full-text search for Hacker News. The web app is open source and powered by Algolia Search.

### **Filter Out Posts Below X Points**

Want to catch-up on the best submissions over the last few days? Filter out all posts below a certain threshold with the [over?points=100](#) URL parameter. Examples:

- over 100 points
- over 200 points

### **To-Do**

- Add more images/citations

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## **Maintainer**

Max Woolf (@minimaxir, minimaxir on Hacker News since 2012)

*Max has no affiliation with Hacker News, Y Combinator, or any YC-backed company.*