About Cron

Cron is a utility that automatically launches applications or documents at times you specify. For example, if you have a mail program that you want to set up to check for mail every hour, you can use Cron to launch it for you.

How to use Cron

• Place the "crond" application wherever you normally keep applications. I use a "Utilities" folder, the same place I keep Disk First Aid and stuff.
• Place the CronMgr control panel in your Control Panels folder. You can do this by dragging CronMgr on to the System Folder and the Finder will put it in the Control Panels Folder for you. (Actually, CronMgr can be anywhere, but the Control Panels folder is a handy place for it.)
• Open up the CronMgr control panel. Make sure that the "Currently Running" and "Launch at Startup" boxes are checked.
• Make Aliases of documents or applications you want to have executed periodically. For me, it's usually documents that direct their respective applications to do some predetermined function (like a script).
• Put the aliases inside the "Cron Preferences" folder. This folder is inside the "Preferences" folder inside the System Folder.
• Rename the aliases to specify when you want them executed. The name of the alias is identical in syntax to the UNIX crontab time specifier. If you don't know the syntax, see the section below.

That's it -- if cron is already running, it will immediately start launching things at their respective times.

Cron Alias Names

The syntax for Cron Alias names is somewhat cryptic -- it is identical to the UNIX crontab syntax for specifying times. The General format is:

Minute Hour Date Month Dayofweek, where:

Minute is 0-59, (the minute of the hour)
Hour is 0-23, (the hour of the day)
Date is 0-31 (the day of the month)
Month is 1-12 (the month)
Dayofweek is 0-6 (Sunday-Saturday)

Each field can specify a single value. That is, if you want something to be executed on the hour, your minute field would be 0.

Each field can be specify multiple values by placing the desired numbers separated by commas (no spaces!). That is, if you want something to be launched on both the hour and the half-hour, your minute field would be 0,30.

Each field can specify a range of values by placing the desired numbers (inclusive) separated by a dash (no spaces!). That is, if you want something to be launched during the hours of 8 AM and 5 PM, your hour field would be 8-17.

Each field can be a combination of single values and value ranges. That is, if you want something to be executed on the hour, on the half hour, and every minute from 45 to 50 minutes after the hour, your minute field would be 0,30,45-50.

Each field can also specify any value by placing an asterisk (*) in the field. If you don't care what day of the month it is, your month field would be *.

There is a special case of Cron Alias Names. If you name an alias "Now" and place it in the "Cron Preferences" folder, Cron will launch that alias on the next minute, and then delete the alias on the next minute.

Examples of Cron Alias Names

0 * * * * would launch every hour on the hour.
30 * * * * would launch every hour on the half-hour.
5,35 * * * * would launch at 5 minutes and 35 minutes after every hour.
0 8-17 * * * would launch at 8:00 AM, and every hour on the hour until (and including) 5:00 PM.
0 8-17 * * 1-5 would launch every hour from 8 to 5, but only on Mondays through Fridays.
0 0 1 * * would launch at midnight on the first day of every month.
5,35 8-17 * 12 2,4 would launch at 5 minutes and 35 minutes after every hour from 8 AM to 5 PM, every Tuesday and Thursday in December.

Cron puts a file in the "Cron Preferences" folder that is named "Min Hour Date Month Day" so that you can remember the sequence without having to look it up all the time.

General Stuff

Crond is a faceless background application. CronMgr is a Control Panel. They were both developed using THINK C version 5. They require System 7 or greater.