

7 ways to organize your email

With meetings and the general chaos of a normal work day, your email Inbox can quickly get cluttered. An unorganized mailbox can make it difficult to find the email you need and know where to get started. This messy situation can be remedied. Microsoft Outlook offers great tools that help you organize your messages in meaningful, easy-to-control ways. Whether you're using [Outlook 2010](#), [Outlook 2007](#) or still using [Outlook 2003](#), you'll be able to stay on top of your mail.

Not using Outlook at all? Perhaps you're using [Outlook Express](#), or you're using [Windows Live Mail](#) or [Windows Live Hotmail](#). These programs offer some features similar to those described here for Outlook, but they don't offer the same breadth of tools for email management. Use the [Microsoft Outlook Connector](#) to add your Hotmail account to Outlook, and then you can use these tips to organize your Hotmail also. Or read about the [Hotmail features](#) that can help you organize information in your Hotmail system. For instance, you can combine mail from your other email accounts, like Gmail and Yahoo! Mail, so that you can receive, read, and respond to all your email in one place.

You can use one or more of the tools covered in this article to help shrink your Inbox and make it easier to find the information you need.

1. Sort messages quickly

Outlook 2010 has a great new feature for organizing messages by date and arranging them by Conversation. Using this feature, messages that share the same subject appear as Conversations that can be viewed expanded or collapsed by clicking the icon to the left of the Subject line. The messages within each Conversation are sorted with the newest message on top. When a new message is received, the entire Conversation moves to the top of your message list, making tracking email threads a snap.

To turn on Conversations, on the **View** tab, in the **Conversations** group, select the **Show as Conversations** check box. You can reduce the size of a conversation with Clean Up, which deletes duplicate messages in the conversation. On the **Home** tab, in the **Delete** group, click **Clean Up**, and then click **Clean Up Conversation**.

In all versions of Outlook, you can find messages in mailbox folders more quickly by changing how they're sorted in your email folders. For example, you can arrange your email by date, sender, file size, or level of importance.

Change message sorting:

- In [Outlook 2010](#)
- In [Outlook 2007](#)
- In [Outlook 2003](#)

2. Group similar messages in folders

By creating new mail folders you can group messages related to each other. For example, you can group messages by topic, project, contact, or other categories that make sense to you. You can even create a folder for all the messages from your manager or that include tasks that you have to complete.

- To create a new folder in Outlook 2010, on the **Folder tab**, in the **New** group, click **New Folder**.
- To create a new folder in Outlook 2007 and Outlook 2003, on the **File** menu, point to **New** and then click **Folder**.

3. Create Search Folders to find messages fast

Search Folders are a quick and convenient way to look at predefined collections of email messages. They don't actually store any messages themselves, but instead are virtual folders that offer a view of all the messages stored in your mailbox depending on the attributes you've defined. Outlook provides default Search folders—such as Unread Mail—but you can also create your own. For instance, you can use Search Folders to help you find all the information related to a particular project, an important client, or an upcoming conference.

Create a Search Folder in Outlook 2010:

- In **Mail**, in the **Folder** tab, in the **New** group, click **New Search Folder**.

Create a Search Folders in either Outlook 2003 or Outlook 2007.

- In **Mail**, on the **File** menu, point to **New**, and then click **Search Folder**.

In all versions of Outlook, specify whether you want to use a predefined Search Folder or create your own custom folder, and then follow the instructions on the screen.

4. Route mail efficiently using mailbox rules

By creating rules for Outlook, you can automatically perform actions on both incoming and outgoing messages based on the criteria you establish. For instance, you can automatically forward to your manager all messages sent by a certain person as soon as they arrive, assign the category Sales to all messages you send that have the word "sales" in the Subject line, and much, much more. Routing mail efficiently not only organizes your mail for you—but also frees up your time from performing routing tasks.

Create and manage rules:

- In [Outlook 2010](#)
- In [Outlook 2007](#)
- In [Outlook 2003](#)

5. Reduce unwanted email with junk filters

Keep distracting and unwanted messages out of your inbox by using Outlook Junk Email filters. These filters send email flagged as junk to a separate mail folder under your Mailbox. You can

review the contents of this folder to ensure that no legitimate messages have been sent there, and if they have, you can adjust the filter to avoid flagging such messages in the future.

Learn more about the Junk Email filters:

- In [Outlook 2010](#)
- In [Outlook 2007](#)
- In [Outlook 2003](#)

6. Assign a color category

Assign a color category to a group of interrelated email messages, as well as to other items in Outlook such as notes, contacts, and appointments, so that you can easily identify and organize them. For example, keep track of all the messages, meetings, and contacts for the Morris project by creating a category named Morris Project and assigning items to it.

Create and assign color categories:

- In [Outlook 2010](#)
- In [Outlook 2007](#)
- In [Outlook 2003](#)

7. Flag for follow up

You can use the Flag for Follow-Up feature to flag email messages, tasks, and more to help classify them or mark them for action. Flags can remind you to follow up on an issue, indicate a request for someone else, or set a reminder for a message or contact. Best yet, they make organizing your mail folders a breeze, because you know exactly what to do—and when to do it. Note that when you create a task and set a due date, the task is automatically flagged, so that you don't let that due date slip past you.

Flag messages:

- In [Outlook 2010](#)
- In [Outlook 2007](#)
- In [Outlook 2003](#)