

7 Ways to Organize Your E-Mail

With meetings and the general chaos of a normal work day, your E-Mail Inbox can quickly get cluttered. An unorganized mailbox can make it difficult to find the E-Mail you need and know where to get started. This messy situation can be remedied. Microsoft Office Outlook offers great tools that help you organize your messages in meaningful, easy-to-control ways. Whether you're already using 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, which comes as part of Microsoft Internet Explorer. Or maybe you have Windows Vista and are using the new Windows Mail. Both programs have an interface that's similar to Outlook, but don't offer the same breadth of tools for E-Mail management. Find out more about Outlook Express and Windows Mail.

This article shows some tools in Outlook that you can use to manage your E-Mail. You can use one of these tools—or a combination of tools—to help shrink your Inbox and make it easier to find the information you need.

1. 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 group messages in folders:

1. In the Outlook Navigation Pane, click **Mail**.
2. In the **Mail Folders** section (called the **All Mailbox** section in Outlook 2003), right-click one of the folders and click **New Folder**.
3. Type a name for the folder.
4. Select where to place the folder. You can set it apart as its own folder, or list it among your other Inbox folders.
5. Move the desired message into the new folder.

2. Create Search Folders to find messages fast

Search Folders are a quick and convenient way to look at predefined collections of E-Mail 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.

Creating Search Folders in both Outlook 2003 and Outlook 2007 is easy:

1. In **Mail**, on the **File** menu, point to **New**, and then click **Search Folder**.
2. Opt whether you want to use a predefined Search Folder or create your own.
3. Follow the instructions on the screen.

3. Sort messages quickly

You can find messages in mailbox folders more quickly by changing how they're sorted in your E-Mail folders. For example, you can arrange your E-Mail by date, sender, file size, or even by conversation, which pulls up all messages by the subject line.

To change message sorting in Outlook 2007, select the **Arranged by:** tab at the top of your mail folder then click your view option.

Change message sorting in Outlook 2003, click **Mail** in the Outlook Navigation Pane; on the **View** menu, point to **Arrange By** and then click a view option.

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.

5. Reduce unwanted E-Mail with junk filters

Keep distracting and unwanted messages out of your Inbox by using Outlook Junk E-Mail filters. These filters send E-Mail flagged as junk to a separate mail folder under your Mailbox. You can review the contents of this folder to ensure no legitimate messages have been sent there, and if so, you can adjust the filter to avoid flagging such messages in the future.

6. Lay on the color

One quick easy way to distinguish between E-Mail messages is to color code them. By using color, you can quickly identify messages from certain contacts by customizing your Inbox to automatically color messages. For example, it's an easy way to identify important messages from a key customer, your manager, or an important contact. Even better, it's quick and easy.

To color-code messages in Outlook 2007:

1. On the toolbar, click **Categorize**.
2. Click **All Categories**.
3. In the **Name** list, select the check box for the category whose color you want to change.
4. Click the arrow next to **Color**, and then click the color that you want.

To color-code messages using Outlook 2003:

1. In Outlook Navigation Pane, click the **Mail** category.
2. Select an E-Mail message from a contact.
3. On the **Tools** menu, click **Organize**.
4. Under **Ways to Organize Inbox**, click **Using Colors**.
5. Select the color you wish and click **Apply**.

7. Flag for follow up

You can flag E-Mail messages, tasks, and more with colored Quick Flags 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.

Flagging messages in Outlook 2007:

In Outlook 2007, flagging performs the same functions as in previous versions—only it's done a little differently. Previously, you could choose from different flag colors, but now they are not associated with colors by design. That way, you can determine the colors that make sense to you.

Flagging messages in Outlook 2003:

You can use the six colored message flags to identify items for different kinds of follow-up. For example, use the red flag to mark messages that require immediate attention and the blue flag for messages to read later. You can even create a customized Quick Flag toolbar in Outlook that matches your needs.