



Do I even need an inbox at zero?

"Email is like laundry, and your dryer is your inbox," says Laura Mae Martin, executive productivity coach at Google. "You need to pull it all out, sort it into piles. You don't hang one thing, fold one thing, bring a sock upstairs to your drawer." When you empty the inbox, you want to immediately sort email into what you need to do next, in files labeled "to read" or "to answer." "Sorting, reading and answering should all be separate activities. People lose a lot of energy in email when they mix them up." Re-reading email is also a time-suck: "Read it once and deal with it," says Lisa Hendrickson, owner of Call That Girl Tech Support in Pensacola, FL, and an Outlook and email expert. "Don't read it 70 times at the soccer game, not knowing what to do with it." Most important, get in the habit of sorting emails into act-on/answer when you're on your phone.



#WORKLIFE

Tame Your Wild Email Inbox

The math doesn't add up. You have one home, a few kids, a dog...and 46,358 emails in your inbox. Here's how to get it down to zero.

By Rory Evans



My inbox got so big because I'm worried I'll need to find some random message in the future. Can I really just get rid of everything?

If you've archived an email or placed it in the "old inbox" folder, it's simply out of your face—not gone completely. Use the search tool to find the old email you need. Martin points out that you can fine-tune your search with headings like "older_than:" or "has:attachment." If you have a very clear memory of reading an email, but you've searched and searched and still can't find it in any file...check your texts. "It happens all the time—a conversation will continue on three or four different forms of communication," says Adam Alter, associate professor at Stern School of Business at New York University and author of *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*. "It's the perfect recipe for dropping the ball."



My inbox really does have 71,563 emails. I'll be an old woman by the time I sort them one by one!

...for a bulk move, baby. Hendrickson suggests a subfolder called "old inbox." (In Outlook, hit Control-A to grab everything you mouse over, she returns on a movie, pour a glass of wine and do so mindlessly. "It takes just a couple hours to get my inbox body back for summer," she jokes. You can just archive older emails. "Archive is probably the best—and least understood—feature of Gmail," Martin says (use the select-all and move-to options). "An email doesn't have to stay in the inbox or be deleted or get filed. It can be archived and exist in a bucket accessible by search."



Now that my inbox is clean, how do I keep it that way—and keep all the info I need easy to find?

A tidy inbox makes you more motivated to swiftly delete any new nonsense. Do you really think you'll need to revisit that "tx, ttyl" message from your sister? Or the 36-message thread scheduling a dinner party? But if you're going to change the subject of an email—say, you switch from the broader conversation about that dinner party to a side correspondence with a neighbor about dance camp pickup and drop-off—actually click into the email heading and change the subject, so that if you need to find it again, you don't have to sift through all the unrelated messages. Even within a conversation chain, flag or star the messages with the most pertinent info, like the brick-and-mortar address of that dinner, where you'll actually be able to talk to people in (gasp!) person.

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ORDER IN THE BOX If you want a file to appear at the top, put an @ in front of its name. For the bottom, use a z.