

Quick Guide: Manage your Inbox

How many emails do you receive on an average day? 10? 50? 100? If it takes you 30 seconds just to look at each incoming email you could be spending up to an hour a day even before you action any of them. And then there's the panic that may arise first thing in the morning as you struggle to clear the decks so you can focus on the real work. If this sounds like you, here are the **top ten tips** to help you manage your inbox:

1. **Turn off your flasher/audible alarm.** (Some people turn off the monitor!) That way you are not distracted by incoming emails. But make sure you check emails regularly, eg every 30 or 60 minutes. If you decide the checking interval based on workload and priorities, you will not miss anything.
2. **Remove the preview pane** so that you are not tempted to read every incoming message and so lose concentration and time.
3. **Set up rules by subject or sender** to auto-file, auto-delete, auto-copy or auto-forward. This saves you time to do this manually and leaves fewer messages in your inbox for you to action.
4. **Set up rules to colour code incoming messages** (not to be confused with colour flags). For example, a priority project (subject line) in one colour, or important client (sender) in another. Then you can see quickly what is priority to deal with.
5. **Use the 'reply to' function** (not the 'reply' button!) when you send messages to lots of people on behalf of someone else. That way when the recipients hit the 'reply' button, that 'someone else' gets all the replies instead of you.
6. **Beware who you cc or bcc to.** The more messages you send the more you are likely to receive when they hit the 'reply all' button.
7. **Drag and drop emails to your scheduler or task list** to deal with on a specific day or time. It will not be lost or forgotten; just not in your inbox until you need it.
8. **Get yourself off some circulation lists** or set up a rule to divert these circulars to a "reading" folder.
9. As a last resort, **set up your Out of Office message** for, say, an hour so that you have breathing space before replying, or time to focus on a priority task.
10. **A good rule of thumb:** have only one screen's worth of emails in your inbox. If you have to scroll down to see more, you have too many in your inbox. Ask yourself why it is there: if it is to be actioned, then action it or move it to your task list to action later. Alternatively, delete it, file it or give it away!

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