

August 24, 2010

By Katherine Murray

When oh when oh when will we ever feel that we are back in control of our Inboxes? It seems that the faster technology moves, the more mail pours in on us from all sides. We get messages from colleagues and peers, from family and friends, from causes and social media sites. Much of this stuff we need to know, of course. But it doesn't need to take up permanent residence in our Inboxes. Here are some practical ways to use Outlook 2010 features to bring your Inbox back under control.

1: Use Conversation view

Conversation view is a new feature in Outlook 2010 that threads together all e-mail messages in a particular conversation among two or more people. The conversation includes sent and received messages so that you can easily see the whole conversation at a glance. Turn on Conversation view by clicking the View tab and clicking Conversations. Choose Show Messages In Conversations to get started. You can also set other options, such as Always Expand Conversations, in the Conversations list to set up the conversation display the way you want it.

2: Ignore threads that annoy you

Have you ever been cc'd on a conversation that made your eyes roll up in your head? Or perhaps two team members are debating the use of the serial comma and you really have other things you need to focus on today. You can ignore a conversation and remove yourself from receiving further posts in that particular thread. Click the last message in the thread you want to ignore. Then, in the Home tab, click Ignore in the Delete group. A message box appears telling you what to expect (**Figure A**). Click Ignore Conversation to complete the job.

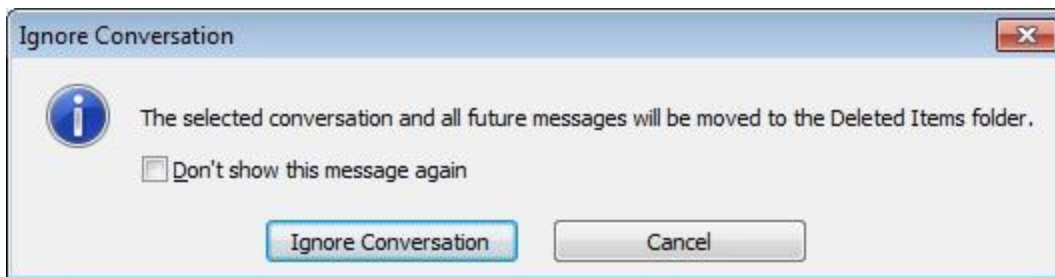


Figure A

3: Automate message management with Quick Steps

[Quick Steps](#) are a new feature in Outlook 2010 that enables you to automate mail management tasks with a single click of the mouse. You can use the Quick Steps that come with the program -- Add To Calendar, To Manager, Done, Team E-mail, and Reply & Delete -- to instantly send messages where they need to go. You can also create your own Quick Steps by clicking the More button in the Quick Steps gallery and choosing Create New.

4: Build your junk mail file

This may seem like a no-brainer, but it is important to right-click any junk message you receive, point to Junk, and click Block Sender. Over time, this creates quite a file of spammers and other unwanted senders you can immediately cut right out of your Inbox real estate. Nice.

5: Make your peace with AutoArchive

Those of us who like to have quick access to important messages may not be too comfortable letting Outlook wrap old messages up in a bundle and tuck them away in an archive file on our computers or the company server. But if you're game, AutoArchive can help you keep your Inbox uncluttered. By default, AutoArchive is turned off. You can enable the feature and tailor your settings by clicking the Folder tab and clicking AutoArchive Settings in the Properties group. In the AutoArchive tab, select the Archive This Folder Using These Settings option and enter the age of items you want to archive, where you want the older items stored, and whether you want the removed items to be deleted from your Inbox. After you make your choices, click OK to save the changes.

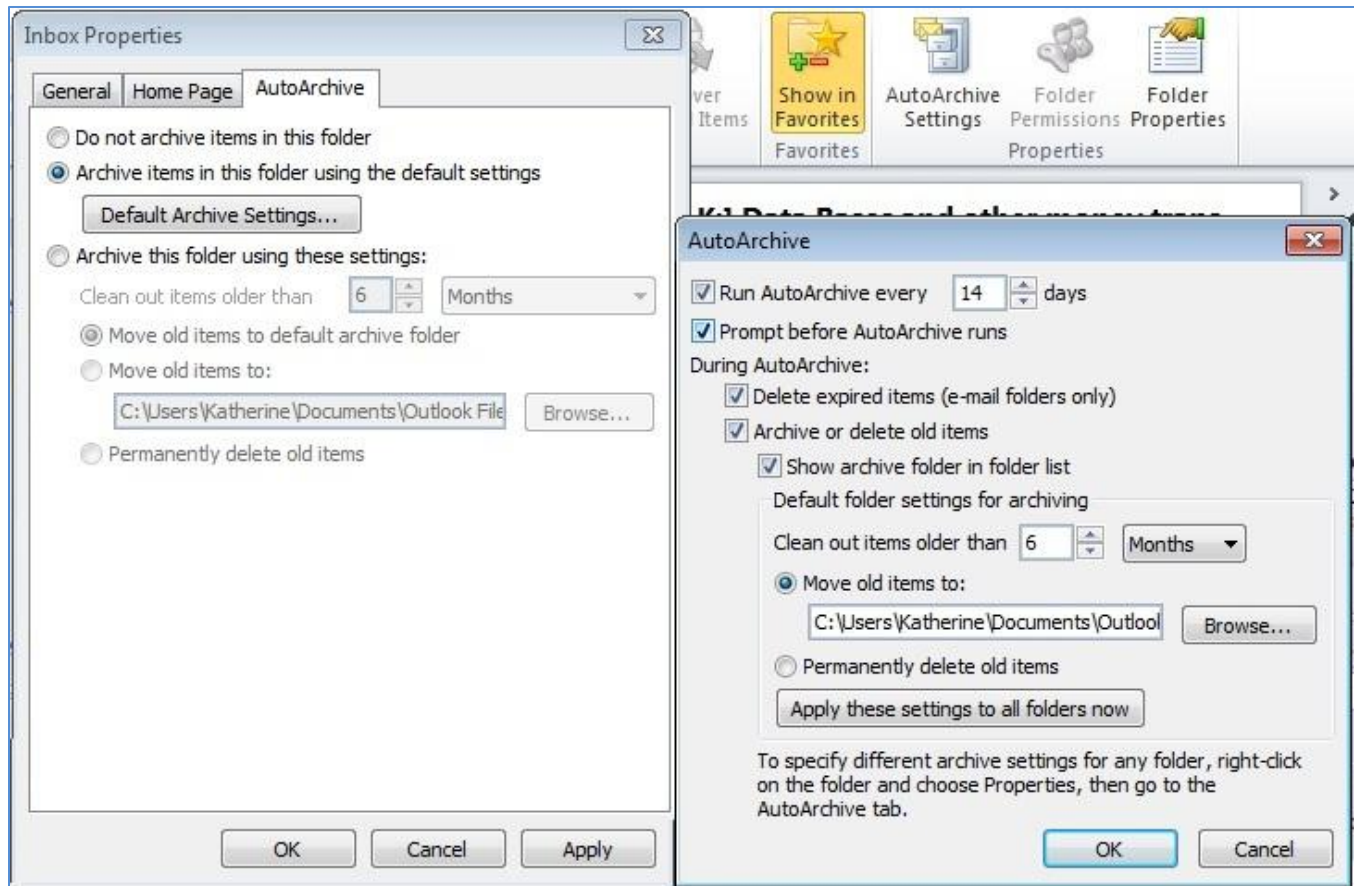


Figure B

6: Who makes the rules around here?

Sometimes rules aren't such a bad idea, especially if you manage huge volumes of email and you need to organize what you receive by client, project, or contact. You can easily create rules that file your messages for you so that you can read them in detail when you get a chance or put your fingers on the one you need quickly when you go searching for it. Start by clicking the message from the sender you want to create a rule to manage. Then, click Rules in the Move group of the Home tab and choose Create Rule. Enter the desired conditions (Who is the message from? What's in the subject line?) and choose what you want Outlook to do with it. Click OK to create the rule, and Outlook will start carrying out your wishes with the very next email message you receive.

7: Get rid of those invitations

Outlook includes a number of options that make it easy for you to tailor how mail behaves after you receive it. Some messages you really don't need to leave in your Inbox forever. Case in point: meeting invitations. You can tell Outlook to automatically delete any message you respond to by displaying the Outlook Options dialog box (click File, click Options, and click the Mail tab). Scroll down to the Send Messages area and click the Delete Meeting Requests and Notifications From Inbox After Receiving check box. Click OK to save the change.

8: Clean everything up

So do you have a clean Inbox? One where you can go directly to a message you're looking for without a lot of searching and scrolling? Do you organize your messages by folder and discard the ones you don't need right away? I thought so. Me neither.

Outlook includes a few cleanup features that can help you create some breathing room in your Inbox once again. The tool gives you three choices for the item you want to clean up. You can clean up the selected conversation, clean up the current folder, or clean up folders and subfolders (which means everything). When you click the tool, Outlook lets you know that it's going to delete redundant messages and put them in your Deleted Items folder. You can change that by clicking Settings and entering the settings you're most comfortable with. Click OK to clean up your selection and gain a little more room for incoming mail.

9: Search smart using filters

People shy away from Outlook filters because they think they are too much trouble to use properly. But actually, the opposite is true. If you consider the time you spend pushing PgDn and scanning the various messages looking for that one you need, you know that any tool that helps you cut to the chase is a good thing. The filters in Outlook help you find messages that meet specific criteria. For example, you can instantly display only messages that have attachments, messages you sent to a specific person, messages with the word "petunia" in the body of the message, and so on. Once you create this focused subset of messages, you can do what you like with them -- delete them, put them in a folder that won't clog up your Inbox, or print them and hang them on your cubicle wall (but *why?*). You'll find the filters in the Filter E-mail tool in the Find group of the Home tab. You can click More Filters to display the Search Tools contextual tab so that you can see all the filters together in convenient spot.

10: Combine and conquer

Okay so it may *seem* counterintuitive, but it actually saves you time to bring all your different Web-based email accounts into Outlook 2010. You can easily set up your accounts by clicking the File tab and choosing Add Account in the top of the center column in the Info tab of Backstage view. Follow the prompts to get the email working properly. This will create a new email folder for your Web-based account. So anytime you check email (or Outlook does it automatically), all accounts are checked and you never have to go out to the various sites, enter your email address and password, and do the checking yourself. Yes, it could give you more messages to deal with. But after reading through the other nine tips in this article, you have a handle on how to do that, right?

Katherine Murray is the author of *Microsoft Office 2010 Plain & Simple* (Microsoft Press, 2010), *Microsoft Word 2010 Plain & Simple* (Microsoft Press, 2010), and *Microsoft Word 2010 Inside Out* (Microsoft Press, 2010). You can reach Katherine through her blog, [BlogOffice](#) or by emailing kmurray230@sbcglobal.net.

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- [10 tweaks to make Office 2010 work the way you want](#)
- [10 ways Backstage view helps streamline tasks in Office 2010](#)
- [10 great new features in OWA 2010](#)
- [Five tips for adding social media to Outlook 2010](#)
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Version history

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