# Various Email Clean-Up Strategies

## A couple things to keep in mind:

* Email is not an approved storage location for records. Email messages, or information contained within them, that are considered to be College records must be identified and stored in a separate system such as a shared workspace folder on the N:\ drive. You can find more information about email as records on the [FAQs about RIM](https://www.lcc.edu/its/records-management/faq.html) webpage.
* In Outlook, when you scroll to the bottom of the list of emails in a folder you will most likely see a message that says “*There are more items in this folder on the server. Click here to view more on Microsoft Exchange.*”



Be sure you click the link to bring up all the items before you sort.

## Various Strategies for Cleaning Up Emails:

These aren’t steps, they’re different strategies that might work for you in cleaning up your emails. Read through them and see if there’s one (or more than one) that would work for you.

(Source: [The complete guide to cleaning up your Outlook, Gmail or Apple Mail inbox](https://www.mailbutler.io/blog/email/spring-clean-email-inbox-declutter/) on Mailbutler.io)

### Strategy 1: Move all your emails into one organizing folder

The first step is simple: start fresh. Drag and drop everything to a temporary folder where you can then sort out the mess. Why not just use the inbox, you ask? Well, this way, any emails you receive during your clean up won't interrupt your cleaning process.

### Strategy 2: Picture your ideal inbox, then go through the cleaning in one go

* First, picture your ideal inbox. What kind of emails will you be keeping? What's important enough to keep in your email folders?
* Then, imagine the peace of mind and the relief of stress that will naturally come after you've achieved this.
* Holding on to these thoughts, commit to cleaning in **one fell swoop**.

The key to successfully cleaning up your inbox is to complete this in one go and not wait until you feel like picking up the task again, because let's face it - it's now or never. (Tomorrow will be too late!)

### Strategy 3: Ask the five-year question

The five-year question encourages you to think more deeply about your relationship with emails. What value do they actually bring you? How do they help you achieve your goals?

* For each email folder ask yourself the following question:
"When was the last time I needed an email that was five years old?"
* If your answer is "never," continue to lower it to "four years," "two years," etc. until you reach a time range of emails you’re comfortable with storing, knowing they serve a purpose in your work.
(The answer might be different for different email folders depending on the role those emails fill in your work life.)
* The next step is simple: make a bold move and delete (or perhaps save as a PDF or .pst file on your H:\ drive) everything from before your time range.

### Strategy 4: Trim down your email folder system

"Out of sight, out of mind" is a famous saying that can easily lead you down the wrong path when it comes to organizing your emails: the more layered and complicated your folder system is, the more spaces you are creating in which to bury emails you should simply delete.

A Fast Company article suggests **organizing your emails by deadline instead of by subject**. The article sums up [the only five email folders you need](https://www.fastcompany.com/3067012/the-only-five-email-folders-your-inbox-will-ever-need). These include:

* Inbox - The most important folder you can have! Messages should be kept here for a short amount of time before being replied to or organized into a new folder.
* Today - A folder for everything which requires a reply on the same day.
* This week - For all the emails which need to be responded to within a week.
* FYI - Emails that contain information you may need to reference but don't necessarily require a response.
* Monthly/Quarterly - An optional folder for emails that require responses within a month or a quarter.

The most important thing to remember is to keep your inbox manageable. Keep your filing system as minimal and simple as possible, and remove any folders within folders that can be easily merged, as well as folders for email topics (meetings, individual projects, etc.). All of these folders can be consolidated or removed and turned into 'today' or 'this week' folders.

### Strategy 5: Pick one or two email keywords to help your cleaning process

Instead of deleting emails without a clear target, an easier and more effective strategy is to split the cleaning process into bite-sized chunks. One great method of breaking down the cleaning process is to target one or two common keywords, sender addresses, or names, and filter them in search.

For example, start with the following ideas and keywords:

* Any “no-reply” email addresses
* Sale
* Reminder
* Invite
* Release
* Update
* Automatic

Search for these keywords to create smaller batches to clean-up. This method helps you to systematically go through the same types of emails in smaller batches, making the cleaning process more manageable.

### Strategy 6: Look for newsletters you've been continuously ignoring

Most of us are signed up for a ton of useless newsletters which simply take up space in your inbox and steal time from your day.

* From your most recent emails, look for a few newsletters that you have been ignoring for a while.
* Ask yourself, do they offer value that works towards your goal and vision?
* If the answer is no, give your silent gratitude (or not, if you never asked to receive them) and unsubscribe from them all in one go.

### Strategy 7: Delete emails you can’t take action on anymore

Email struggle is real: we’ve all procrastinated on replying to an email, or panicked because we completely forgot to follow up after weeks have passed by. What we shouldn’t do is continue fostering this avoidance.

* Start from the bottom (oldest) to the top of your un-responded-to emails.
	+ If this consists of emails you have forgotten from years ago, don’t panic - it’s highly unlikely your contact is still expecting a reply at this point.
* Take a deep breath, remove them and let go of your email guilt (or, if you're certain a reply is necessary, send your reply now).

### Strategy 8: Go through your read emails from the bottom

[**SIDE TIP**: Every glance at an unread email drains a bit more energy out of your day - which is why it's better to block out spaces in the day to work on emails, rather than being repeatedly distracted by them throughout the day.]

Every time you look at an email you read but ignored enables your dirty habit of letting emails clog up your digital space. Tackle your read emails, starting from the bottom.

A few simple questions can help you evaluate the relevance of your inbox emails to your work life:

* Is this an email that belongs in one of my folders, and thus can be moved?
* Is this an email I’ve already replied to, and thus can be archived/deleted?
* Has this email been unattended for so long that there’s no point to reacting now, and thus can be archived/deleted?
* Has this email already served its purpose, and thus can be archived/deleted?

If the answer is ‘yes’ to any of these questions - go ahead and clear them out of your inbox!