7 STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING EMAIL

We know students get a lot of email. It's important to have a system for email so you don't miss important messages from instructors, advisors, the university, etc. An email organization plan can save you time and energy and reduce stress. Check out these strategies to help you zero your inbox!

1

Find an organizational system that works for you. Some people prefer a detailed folder system based on topic, while others prefer a simplified system based on what response the email needs. Take time to experiment and figure out what works best for you.

EXAMPLE 1: Create folders or Outlook categories based on topic.

- BI 213
- OSU
- Work
- WR 222

EXAMPLE 2: Create folders or Outlook categories based on email status and next steps.

- **Inbox:** Emails requiring response (e.g., responding to an instructors' question about an assignment).
- **To-Do:** Emails associated with tasks to complete (e.g., register for summer term).
- **Follow-Up:** Emails delegating action to another person or only relevant at a future date (e.g., registration for fall opens in 1 week).
- **When Time:** Emails which don't require response but have content to review when time permits (e.g., research article of interest).

2

Use rules. Once you create a rule, it automatically carries out the organizational task—like moving all Canvas notifications to a "Canvas" folder. Some email clients call this "filters." In Outlook, you can begin to create rules by
- right-clicking on the message in your inbox and selecting "Rules," or
- using the *Rules Wizard*: select "File" and choose "Manage Rules & Alerts," or
- selecting "Home" and then selecting "Rules" from the *Move* section

3

Mark emails as read/unread. An unbolded preview indicates an email has been read. Only mark email as "read" if you have read it and decided what folder to move it to or what action is required. In Outlook, you can
- **right click** on a message to mark the email as read or unread, or
- **hover** your cursor over the left side of the email as it appears in the results box; the message box will shade blue, a darker-blue bar will appear on the left side, and clicking on the wider width version of the bar will mark the message unread

4

Flag messages for follow-up, and then move emails out of your inbox. Flagging an email creates a task in your to-do bar (a to-do list built into Outlook). You can turn the to-do bar on/off by selecting View-->To-Do Bar. Tip: If you can complete the task/response in under 2 minutes, do so immediately to limit your task list.

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5

Set specific times to read and respond to emails just like you would for other important tasks. It may help to set up 2- 3 short time blocks (e.g., 15-30 min) throughout the day and to set an additional time weekly to delete/archive old email. If possible, avoid checking email constantly, as this can increase stress and distractions.

TO DO TUESDAY:
- ☑ 8:30 - 8:45 AM: Check email
- ☑ 9:00 - 10:50 AM: WR 222
- ☑ 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM: walk
- ☑ 12:00 - 12:30 PM: Lunch
- ☐ 1:15 to 1:30 PM: Check email
- ☐ 1:45 - 4:00 PM: BI 213 work
- ☐ 4:30 - 5:00 PM: Check email

6

When you need to focus on other activities, turn off email notifications to reduce distractions. This is less a strategy about managing your email and more a strategy about not letting your email manage you. In addition to shutting off notifications, you can also close-out your email client in order to focus your full attention on the task at hand. Then, when you're finished with your activity, remember to turn email notifications back on!

7

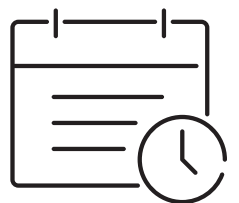**Plan to incorporate email into your other time management tools.** For example, you might include email time on your weekly calendar or flag emails and note the follow-up tasks in your weekly to-do list.

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TO DO WEDNESDAY:
- ☐ Research courses
- ☐ Print tentative schedule
- ☐ Questions about major/minor reqs?

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