

Managing E-Mail

Fortunately, there's not a whole lot you need to do with your Bates e-mail account to keep it running smoothly. But there are a few things that can make your life easier.

Your Inbox, where size matters:

I'll use a physical mailbox as an analogy. If you were to walk to the end of your 500 foot driveway (flashback to my youth), open your mailbox, read your mail and then stuff it back in the mailbox, that would be fine for the first couple of days. Each succeeding day you would pull all the mail out of the mailbox, sort through it to find and read new mail then stuff it all back in. Assuming you had a mailbox of unlimited size, you could continue to do this ad infinitum.

Eventually, however, it would become quite laborious to flip through all that old mail just to find the few pieces of new mail. And it would take lots of time. While a computer's processor can sort through your e-mail more quickly than you can sort through your physical mail, it still takes time. The larger the inbox, the longer the time.

Why? Because each time you open Thunderbird, or any other mail program, the inbox is indexed, starting from the beginning and going to the end. It doesn't know what mail is old and what is new until it searches the entire file. For those of you who maintain very large inboxes (you know who you are), there will be a noticeable lag between opening your e-mail and being able to start scrolling through it.

Some will argue that they need to be able to access mail from years ago and can't possibly delete any of it. While I'm not sure any of us are that vital to the survival of the planet, I'm not suggesting you delete your old e-mail. OK, actually I am, but barring that, there is a simple solution; folders and subfolders.

Folders and subfolders, where size matters less:

Any mail you place in a separate folder or subfolder is ignored by Thunderbird until you open that folder, which means you can have thousands of e-mails sitting in hundreds of folders but as long as your inbox has only a few messages you'll zip through your morning mail before your coffee cools. Well ,maybe you won't but your computer will.

Instructions for creating folders can be found at this Bates Helpdesk link:
<http://www.bates.edu/x166633.xml>

Local Folders, a big no-no:

We've tried hard to move everyone's e-mail up to our server but I still find people who have mail stored under Local Folders in Thunderbird. This mail is at great risk of being lost to a hard drive failure or a mistake on my part if I reimage your computer. If you wish to make the argument that your e-mail is so important that you can't possibly delete

it then how can you justify storing it in a place that is not regularly backed up? Gotcha!!!
So, if your e-mail is worth saving, keep it on the server.

But (you knew there'd be a "but"), if you've got lots of personal e-mails, keep them local and spare our server. Just make sure to back them up regularly.

The Sent folder, where things sent may never leave:

By default, a copy of every message you send is saved to the Sent folder. That's great for referencing past correspondence. Unfortunately, it can also become a black hole, sucking in an infinite amount of e-mails, growing ever larger, until it consumes the known universe. So pick a date, at least once a year, to cleanup your Sent folder. The Helpdesk can assist you in archiving your old mail if you absolutely, positively need to. Personally, I like the delete key for simplifying my life.

Attaching a signature file:

You've seen them on many e-mails. If you want one of your own, check out this Helpdesk link:

<http://www.bates.edu/email-signature.xml>

Your address book, sometimes more valuable than the email-s themselves:

To make a copy of your address book, the simplest thing is to export it. With Thunderbird open, go to your address book and, under **Tools**, choose **Export...** then name the file, such as the current month and year, and save it to an external device. That's it! If you ever need to restore it you simply follow the above steps but choose **Import...** instead. If only everything in life were so simple.

I feel the pulse of the College quickening as students begin to return. Best wishes to all of you as we begin a new academic year.