

Apple Mail for iPhone and iPad

A mobile-first setup using account-level mailboxes and native Mail actions.

Archive is the normal destination. The three working queues exist only for messages that still require intentional attention.

Use this offline guide alongside the interactive walkthrough. Interface labels can vary slightly by account type, organization policy, and app release.

The Next Concepts Inbox Zero method

Use this same sequence for every message on every platform.

1. Read the message.

Understand what it means before organizing it.

2. If no action is required, archive it.

Archive is the primary and most common destination.

3. If it takes two minutes or less, complete it now and archive it.

Do not create a task queue for work you can finish immediately.

4. Only when attention remains, move it.

Choose 1 | Action, 2 | Waiting, or 3 | FYI.

The four destinations

Archive

Nothing further is required, or the work was completed in two minutes or less.

1 | Action

I owe a meaningful next move that cannot be completed now.

2 | Waiting

Someone else owes the next move.

3 | FYI

Information intentionally retained for later reading or reference.

Most processed email should be archived. Labels and folders are not storage areas; they should contain only messages that still require deliberate attention.

01 Map your accounts

- Identify each iCloud, Gmail, Microsoft 365, Yahoo, or other account you actively process.
- Create a complete three-mailbox set inside each active account. Server-side support and organization policy can vary.

02 Reset a manageable backlog

- Use List View, tap More > Select, choose a reviewed batch, and tap Archive.
- For a very large backlog, use the provider's website or desktop interface for safer bulk processing.

03 Create the mailboxes

- In Mail, go to Mailboxes > Edit > New Mailbox.
- Choose the correct account as Mailbox Location, create the three names, then repeat for each active account.

04 Optimize mobile actions

- Review Settings > Apps > Mail > Swipe Options before relying on a full swipe.
- Use a slow swipe or More for precision. Choose Move Message only when a message still belongs in Action, Waiting, or FYI.
- Use Remind Me for a specific future moment and flags for urgency. Neither replaces the three-mailbox system.

Practice the decisions

Read the scenario, choose the smallest honest outcome, and compare it with the answer.

Delivery confirmation with nothing left

Archive.

A short reply you can finish now

reply, then Archive.

A 30-minute proposal you owe

1 | Action.

A supplier owes an estimate

2 | Waiting.

An article intentionally saved for later

3 | FYI.

A reply tied to a meeting next Tuesday

use Remind Me, then process it when it returns.

Daily rhythm

- Process the Inbox in one or more deliberate blocks. Read, archive by default, finish two-minute work, and move only the exceptions.
- Work 1 | Action during a focused block. Archive messages when the work is complete.
- Review 2 | Waiting before the end of the day and archive resolved threads.

Weekly review

- Action: remove completed work and clarify anything vague.
- Waiting: follow up, archive resolved threads, and return new responsibility to Action.
- FYI: read what still matters and archive anything that no longer deserves attention.
- Review optional rules, flags, reminders, and categories so they remain useful rather than noisy.

Your quick-start checklist

- I understand that Archive is the default and most common outcome.
- I read first and archive when no action is required.
- I complete work that takes two minutes or less and then archive it.
- I use Action, Waiting, and FYI only when intentional attention remains.
- I archive completed messages during daily and weekly reviews.

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