

Gmail

A desktop setup for labels, Multiple Inboxes, and fast processing.

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 Reset the backlog

- Choose a 30-, 60-, or 90-day cutoff.
- Search with `in:inbox older_than:60d`, verify the results, select every matching conversation, and Archive.
- Protect active projects, legal notices, customer issues, and policy-required messages.

02 Create the three labels

- Create 1 | Action, 2 | Waiting, and 3 | FYI exactly as written.
- These are active attention queues, not long-term filing by project, customer, or topic.

03 Configure Multiple Inboxes

- Go to Settings > See all settings > Inbox and choose Multiple Inboxes.
- Add label:"1 | Action", label:"2 | Waiting", and label:"3 | FYI" as the three sections.
- Place the sections to the right and start with nine conversations per section.

04 Make processing faster

- Optionally enable Auto-advance in Settings > Advanced, then choose the direction in General settings.
- Use Move to when placing a message in a working label. Applying a label alone leaves the message in the Inbox.

Practice the decisions

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

Delivery confirmation with nothing left

Archive.

A yes-or-no reply that takes under two minutes

reply now, then Archive.

A 30-minute approval you owe

1 | Action.

A supplier owes a revised quote

2 | Waiting.

An article intentionally saved for Friday reading

3 | FYI.

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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