

Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft 365

One mailbox system established on desktop and optimized for Outlook mobile.

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 Start on desktop

- Use New Outlook for Windows or Outlook on the web with the intended Microsoft 365 mailbox.
- Folders and message locations sync through Microsoft 365; Favorites and swipe choices are app-level conveniences.

02 Reset the backlog

- Use search, Advanced Search, or Filter to isolate a reviewed date range.
- Archive verified batches. Use Sweep only for predictable low-value sender noise, never for important customers, employees, or vendors.

03 Create folders and Favorites

- In the folder pane, create 1 | Action, 2 | Waiting, and 3 | FYI as top-level folders in the correct mailbox.
- Right-click or drag each folder into Favorites and order them after Inbox.

04 Use Outlook tools wisely

- Use Move only for remaining Action, Waiting, or FYI attention.
- Use flags for urgency, Schedule or Snooze for a specific future moment, and categories only for limited context.
- Focused and Other are two Inbox views. Check both or turn Focused Inbox off if one list is clearer.
- Keep rules narrow. Do not automate responsibility decisions.

05 Optimize Outlook mobile

- Choose iPhone or Android in the interactive walkthrough so the current navigation matches your device.
- Open the same Microsoft 365 account, confirm the three folders, and add them to mobile Favorites where supported.
- In Settings > Mail > Swipe Options, use Archive on one side and Schedule or Flag on the other.
- Use Move for unfinished attention, Archive for completion, Flag for urgency, and Schedule for a specific future time.

Practice the decisions

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

Shipping confirmation with nothing left

Archive.

A short reply you can finish now

reply, then Archive.

A 30-minute customer request you owe

1 | Action.

A supplier owes a revised quote

2 | Waiting.

A report intentionally saved for Friday

3 | FYI.

A request due today that takes longer

flag it and move it to Action.

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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