Minimizing the Size of Your Email Inbox Using Thunderbird

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The purpose of this document is to instruct and inform the reader on how to create and manipulate folders within the Mozilla Thunderbird email application.

1 Background

Much like your mailbox at home, incoming electronic mail messages (email) are delivered to an 'inbox'. As email comes in at a much quicker rate than your mail from the postoffice (affectionately called 'snail mail') it is much more critical to sort good email from bad email on a timely basis. Unfortunately, this can become a very tedious and time consuming task when you are getting hundreds of emails per day. It can also be damaging because you may also lose important and legitimate mail while in the process of deleting so many spam and junk messages. This document describes ways to make this process more streamlined.

2 Folders

Like your 'snail mail', it is important to categorize and separate your email. This can be done by creating various folders for various purposes. Folders are created in a simple way and can easily be renamed and configured. Folders are not only a convenient way for filing email, but also makes it safer for your important messages. The reasons for this are:

1. Your inbox is much more dynamic than folders. Every time you remove a message; every time you get a new message; your inbox is being written and rewritten. This is prone to error.

2. Your inbox is physically on the mail server machine. To back it up, it must be copied to the machine that has the tape drive on it. Then it gets written to tape by that machine. This process is also subject to error.

Folders, on the other hand, are located in your home directory, which already physically resides on the tape-bearing machine.

3. Folders tend to be much smaller than inboxes. In the two processes described above, the chance of error goes up with size.

3   Thunderbird folders

To create and file messages into folders,

1. open the application Mozilla Thunderbird

2. type in your security password to gain access to your email

3. after the program has finished downloading any new mail, right click on the text `youraccount@math.unm.edu` (never `local folders`)

4. from the dropdown menu that comes up, click `New Folder...` and type the name of what you want the folder to be called in the `New Folder` window that pops up

5. click OK, and the resulting newly created folder should now be under `youraccount@math.unm.edu`

Tip: you can further configure this folder by right clicking on it, and selecting properties from the dropdown menu. From the `Folder Properties` window you can

- rename the folder under the `General Information` tab

- configure how long messages last under the `Retention Policy` tab

- select whether or not this folder is available for offline use under the `Offline` tab

It is recommended that you leave all other settings on their default.

4   SPAM control

The bane of all forms of communication, SPAM is a growing nuisance and threat to computing. At this time we have only modest SPAM protection, however we are in the process of greatly reducing the amount of SPAM coming in. SPAM is typically only tagged by our email server, and is delivered with the tag ***SPAM added to the header. There are several ways to filter spam tagged in this way, two of which are described below. These filtering methods will automatically put tagged spam in a folder for you, allowing you to verify that these messages are not legitimate, and to get rid of them en mass.

5 SPAM Filters using Procmail

This is the recommended way of filtering spam. Using this method, tagged spam is moved into a folder called `Junk` before it is delivered to you. If you are **not** forwarding your email to another site, it is easy to set this up by logging into any department UNIX machine and running a script

```
% /math/common/scripts/nospam
```

If you **are** forwarding your email, you can still filter the tagged SPAM that would come to your deparment email. Please contact us if you wish to do so. After that, all your tagged SPAM will go into a `Junk` folder. You probably should check this folder from time to time to make sure no valid messages got tagged. After that, if you would just like to empty the Junk folder, the easiest way is to run the command

```
% cp /dev/null  /mail/Junk
```

This will truncate the file. It may take a little while for Thunderbird to recognise that the folder has been emptied.

6 SPAM Filters within Thunderbird

Using this method, Thunderbird will sort out the tagges spam after it has been delivered to you. If you always use Thunderbird, this method may work for you.

1. with Thunderbird open, find and click on the `Tools` button near the top of the application

2. under the drop down menu that comes up, click on `Message Filters...`, The `Message Filters` window should popup

3. in this window, click on the `New` button, and another window called `Filter Rules` will popup

4. from this window, you will notice two panes: A top pane titled `For incoming messages that:` and a bottom pane titled `Perform these actions:`

- It is important to realize that the top pane will be used to refer to the type of messages you want an action performed on, and the bottom pane is used to describe what action will be performed.

- It is also important to realize how configurable filters are. By experimenting with the dropdown menus under both panes, you can get a good idea of how creative and dynamic the whole process can be. You can always

keep things simple, however, by just making a couple filters to have messages place in certain folders. Rather than taking the time to explain all of selectable settings, I will provide a rough example of how a filter may be made.

- You may notice the + and - Signs next to the dropdown menus in both panes, these allow you to have multiple actions performed on multiple types of messages. This way you can have more than one action to a type of message (ex: you can move a message and also have it marked as important under one filter) or have multiple types of messages to a single/number of actions.

6.1   Basic Example

Let's say that you have created a folder called `From Students` under your account, and you want all incoming mail from students to be filtered into this folder. You let all your students know that every time they message you, they need to put (student) in the subject field of their email or bad things will happen.

- in the `Filter name` textbox at the top of the window, type `Student Mail`.

- in the top pane of the `Filter Rules` window, in the third textbox all the way to the right, type (students).

- in the bottom pane of the `Filter Rules` window, under the second (right most) dropdown menu, you will select the `From Students` folder you created.

- click Ok, and confirm the new `Student Mail` filter you just created in the `Message Filters` window.

Your students' mail should now be consistently filtered directly into your `From Students` folder instead of your inbox.

7   Questions

Please direct questions to

help@math.unm.edu

and we will do our best to get back to you in a timely manner.
Thank you.