Tame your Inbox with the four Ds

Once you set up your system, you are ready to begin managing incoming messages. By making your Inbox the central place for receiving important messages, you can go through it with the confidence that each item is something you need to deal with.

For every message in your Inbox:

- If it isn't important, delete it immediately.
- If it can be done in two minutes or less, do it (reply, file, call, etc.).
- If it isn't for you or if you can, delegate (forward) it.
- If you need to do it, but it takes longer than two minutes (including reading), defer (hold off on) it.

If you need it as reference (even if you have decided to defer it), move it into your reference folder. The goal is to reduce the number of times you touch each message.

Delete it

Delete messages that you don't need to read. If it's junk, delete it.

If you never want to receive another message as part of this conversation, ignore it.
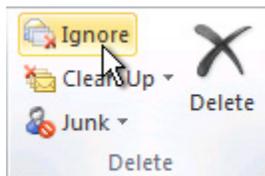
Do it: The 2-minute drill

It's amazing what can be done in two minutes. For example, many messages can be responded to in 2 minutes or less. But if a message takes longer than two minutes to deal with, defer it. To get a sense of what two minutes feels like, try timing yourself.

After you have dealt with the message, do one of the following:

- Delete it if it's something of little consequence.
- File it in one of your reference folders (for example, **1-Reference**) using a Quick Step.

To keep a record of the things that you have done, especially for the purposes of reflection around the time of annual reviews, etc., use the **Done** Quick Step, which also marks messages as completed.

Delegate it

Sometimes you receive a message that is really meant for someone else to deal with. In these cases, reply and include the person to whom you are delegating the message on the **To** line. If you find you are doing this often, consider creating a Quick Step that replies and adds the delegated person to the **To** line.

If you want to follow up later, flag it for yourself before sending. In your To-Do Bar, mark the task with the **@Waiting** category.

Defer it

When to defer a message

Deferring a message means that you will review it later, when you have time.

Reasons to defer a message:

- It can't be dealt with in less than two minutes.
- It will take a while to read.
- It will require a carefully crafted response.
- It requires additional action in another program (for example, "Need to add to <name> document").

How to defer a message: Flag it

When you decide that you don't have time to deal with a message right away, you can flag it:

- If you need to do it today, flag it for **Today** (just left-click the flag).
- If you can put it off for longer, right-click it and flag it for a later date.
- If you will need to refer to the message more than once and you want easy access to it, drag it to the **Later** group in the To-Do Bar. If you don't have a **Later** group, set the flag **Start Date** on the task to 100 years in the future. (Use this flag rarely so that it doesn't become an overpopulated catch-all.)
- If it's something you will need in the short term, flag it **No Date** so that it appears at the top of the To-Do Bar. Use this group sparingly and clear it out regularly, because it's at the top of your task list.

In addition to flagging a message, you can:

- Add appropriate categories.
- Click your **Reference** Quick Step to mark the message as read, if it's not already marked as read and file it to your reference folder (**1-Reference**).

If you find that you are repeatedly applying the same categories and flags, create a new Quick Step that flags, categorizes, and files.

Once an item has been flagged, it will appear in the To-Do Bar. By flagging it and filing it into your reference folder, you have processed it, and now you can move it out of your view. But because it's in your task list, you can move on to your next message, knowing that you will return to your flagged items later.