



CARY COMMUNICATIONS INSIGHTS

How to Clean Up Your Inbox in Outlook

By Karen Bluestein

This covers Outlook instructions. Look for another article to find the Apple Mail instructions. This example pertains to mailing lists you can unsubscribe from, but you can set up additional rules to handle the patterns you see in your own inbox.

If your inbox is packed with newsletters you never read, this workflow helps you clean house fast. With one rule and one Search Folder, you can separate old newsletter emails and delete them in minutes. No third-party tools (or their fees) are required.

This example focuses on mailing lists you can unsubscribe from, but you can tweak the keywords and actions to match the patterns in your own inbox.

Setting up rules can feel tedious at first, but it pays off quickly. Once this is in place, your inbox stays cleaner with almost no effort.

Step 1: Create a Rule to Identify Newsletters

1. Open Outlook.
2. Go to **Home**.
3. Click **Rules > Manage Rules & Alerts**.
4. Click **New Rule**.
5. Under **Start from a blank rule**, select **Apply rule on messages I receive**, then click **Next**.
6. Choose the conditions (pick what fits your inbox best):
 - with specific words in the subject
 - with specific words in the message body
7. In the lower box, click the specific words and add identifiers like:
 - unsubscribe
 - opt out
 - subscription
 - email preferences
 - manage preferences
 - no longer wish to receive

Click **Add** after each, then **OK**.

8. Click **Next**.
9. Choose actions:
 - move it to the **specified folder**
 - assign it to the category
10. Click the specified folder link and create a new folder named **Newsletters to Review** (or Newsletters to Delete if you prefer).
11. Click the **category** link and choose a category color you will recognize easily (for example, Purple).
12. Click **Next**.
13. **Exceptions** (recommended): except if from people or public group (add key contacts so their emails never get swept in).
14. Click **Next**.
15. Name the rule: **Newsletters to Unsubscribe From**
16. Check **Run this rule now** on messages already in "Inbox" if you want to process your backlog immediately.

17. Click **Finish**, then **Apply**, then **OK**.

Step 2: Create a Search Folder That Surfaces Older Newsletter Emails

A Search Folder is the closest Outlook equivalent to a Smart Mailbox. It updates automatically and does not duplicate messages.

1. In the folder list, right-click Search Folders.
2. Select New Search Folder.
3. Scroll down and select Create a custom Search Folder, then click Choose.
4. Name it: Newsletters : Inbox : >30d (or whatever you prefer).
5. Click Criteria.
6. On the Messages tab:
 - In Search for the word(s), enter the same keyword list you used in the rule (start with unsubscribe and add more if needed).
7. On the More Choices tab (optional but helpful):
 - Categories: select the category you used in the rule (for example, Purple).
8. On the Advanced tab (this is the 30+ day filter):
 - Field: Frequently-used fields, choose Received
 - Condition: on or before
 - Value: pick a date that is 30 days ago
 - Click Add to List
9. Click OK, then OK again to create the Search Folder.

Note: Outlook does not offer a rolling “older than 30 days” filter in every setup, so the date threshold may need a quick monthly refresh. If yours supports a built-in Older Mail Search Folder, you can use that instead and layer the category filter via search.

Step 3: Review and Delete in Bulk

1. Open the Search Folder you just created.
2. Skim for anything you want to keep. Move those to a Keep folder or remove the category.
3. Select the rest:
 - Press Ctrl + A to select all messages
 - Press Delete key

Options

- Adjust the cutoff date to 7, 14, 60, or 90+ days depending on how aggressive you want to be.
- Tighten the rule by adding words like newsletter, weekly, digest, update, or sponsored.
- Change the rule action from categorizing to moving messages directly into a folder so your inbox stays calmer.
- Add a second rule for promotions (sale, clearance, promo code, flash sale) so marketing emails land in their own review folder.

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