# Too Many Outlook E-mail Messages

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The popularity and use of e-mail has skyrocketed in recent years to the point that many busy people receive dozens of messages each day. This can cause a daunting task for those returning from extended vacations.

Fortunately, Microsoft Outlook® has several tools that enable one to quickly move through lots of e-mail messages. It should be possible to render huge piles of unread messages into a manageable number in minimal time.

Before you leave for vacation set up some rules on incoming mail to route the flow. E-mail that has a consistent element, such as sender or subject line, is great material for the Rules Wizard. For instance, find e-mail that falls into one or another of a few categories: messages to work team, project status reports, and so on. Each of these types of messages has a certain subject line that will be on the message each time it's sent. For example, weekly status messages might always start with the same few words or be from the same sender.

If you forget to set up any rules before you leave for vacation there’s a new feature in Outlook 2002 that can save you. It's a handy addition to the Rules Wizard called Run Now, which lets you set up a rule and then apply it to the messages already in your Inbox, or in any folder you want.

By analyzing e-mail for consistent elements, you will be able to create rules and run them on your Inbox folder to automatically delete mail or move it to other folders. Set up rules based on subject line, sender, and even whether a message contains a specific word or sentence. Using the power of rules, you can dramatically reduce the number of e-mail messages.

If there are still to many messages to work through, organize them so you can look for other patterns. By clicking on a column heading, you can instantly sort by that column. For example, clicking the **From** column heading and scrolling through the list, sorts alphabetically by sender's first name. Sorting by sender lets you look for names that appeare many times in a row. When you find a bunch of junk mail from the same sender, click the first message in the list, press SHIFT, and click the last message in the list. Outlook automatically selects all messages in between, making it easy to delete them all at once.

Then try to sort mail by conversation. On the **View** menu, pointed to **Current View**, and then click **By Conversation Topic**. This puts all the replies to a message thread under the original message. You can then delete all but the final message in the thread - which is the most recent one - and just read that one, or even delete all of the messages in the thread if

wanted.

Finally, try switching the view back to regular view, Messages, and use the preview pane to quickly scan the remaining messages. The preview pane (**View** menu, **Preview Pane** command) lets you see the contents of each message without opening it. You should now be able to read and deal with the remaining messages.

By using rules, sorting by using the column headings, viewing by conversation threads, and using the preview pane you can manage to work through many e-mail messages in substantially less time! But try to remember to set up your Rules Wizard before any major vacation to save yourself time and hassle when you return.