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Welcome to Take Control of Apple Mail, Fourth Edition, version 4.1, published in November 2018 by alt concepts inc. This book was written by Joe Kissell and edited by Dan Frakes.

This book helps you understand the most effective ways to use Apple’s Mail app in macOS 10.14 Mojave or 10.13 High Sierra, and iOS 12 or iOS 11, including customization and troubleshooting. It also helps you manage your incoming and outgoing email efficiently.

If you want to share this ebook with a friend, we ask that you do so as you would with a physical book: “lend” it for a quick look, but ask your friend to buy a copy for careful reading or reference. Discounted classroom and Mac user group copies are available.

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Basics

To review background information that might help you understand this book better, such as finding System Preferences and working with files in the Finder, read Tonya Engst’s book *Take Control of Mac Basics*.

What’s New in Version 4.1

Version 4.1 is a relatively minor update that covers what’s new in Mail in macOS 10.14 Mojave (see *Mail Changes in Mojave*) and iOS 12 (see *Mail Changes in iOS 12*). In particular, the following topics are either new or significantly revised:

- Explained where to find the new preference for toggling Dark Mode in Mail; see *Hidden Interface Elements*
- Added a *Filing* topic to explain how to move or copy messages, including the use of Mail’s suggested mailboxes
- Added a *Continuity Camera* topic describing how to add photos and scans from your iOS device to a Mail message
- Included a tip about moving messages to Favorite folders using the keyboard; see *Favorites Bar*
- Provided more detail about showing messages from VIPs in all mailboxes or only from your inboxes; see *VIPs*
- Thoroughly overhauled the *Use Third-Party Plugins* discussion to cover the new ways of dealing with plugins in Mojave, and adjusted the list of *Noteworthy Plugins* to reflect current names and compatibility
- Added a sidebar *The Not-Junk Previous Recipient Problem* to describe an old and confusing Mail behavior
- Expanded the chapter on encryption to include a section *About the EFAIL Vulnerability*
• Mentioned the new color picker in Markup for iOS 12 in Add an Inline Drawing

What Was New in the Fourth Edition

The fourth edition brought the book up to date with the numerous changes in Mail running under macOS 10.12 Sierra or 10.13 High Sierra, and iOS 11 (see Mail Changes in High Sierra and Mail Changes in iOS 11). Along with hundreds of small changes in the book, major revisions included:

• Added detail to the Master Mail Concepts chapter:
  ‣ Updated Gestures to cover the Magic Mouse
  ‣ Explained new behaviors and options in Full-Screen Mode
  ‣ Updated Addressing to explain the new way Mail chooses From addresses
  ‣ Updated the descriptions of Markup (for macOS Mail) and Handoff (cross-platform) to reflect their current capabilities

• In the Customize Mail chapter, added new topics on Tabbed Windows and Message Filters

• Revamped the topic Use Third-Party Plugins to remove plugins that are no longer available (or just not very useful anymore) and add Mailbutler and Universal Mailer

• Compressed and modernized the chapter Use Gmail with Mail

• Made a variety of updates in the Find Your Messages chapter, including a new sidebar About Top Hits, and descriptions of Mail’s current behavior with automatic tokens in Use Suggestions and Tokens and search terms in quotation marks in Search for a Phrase

• Developed the Take Control of Your Inbox chapter more fully:
  ‣ Updated the description of how Mail handles spam in Train Your Junk Mail Filter
Greatly expanded the topic Back Up and Restore Your Email

Added a new topic about how to Import Email from another app, including a sidebar Moving from Another Mac

Enhanced the Become a Better Correspondent chapter:

In Choose Formatting Wisely, added a tip about backing out of bulleted or numbered lists

Added instructions in Sending Attachments on a Mac for avoiding inline attachments if that’s your preference

Updated Sending Attachments in iOS to mention Mail Drop

Made a number of improvements to the chapter Sign and Encrypt Messages, including a new sidebar about ProtonMail and Mail

Updated procedures and removed outdated advice in the chapter Fix Mail Problems, and added a new topic, Deal with Recovered Messages

Made big improvements to the Use Mail in iOS chapter, including:

Updated iOS Mail vs. macOS Mail to reflect the current truth, and added a sidebar About Three-Pane View for users of the 12.9-inch iPad Pro

Expanded the topic formerly called “15 Things Every iOS Mail User Should Know” to 18 Things Every iOS Mail User Should Know by adding Add an Inline Drawing, Use Drag and Drop, and Leave a Mailing List; also updated the remaining 15 things, with especially important modifications in Change Account Settings, Handle Attachments, and Manage Notifications, plus new sidebars Use 3D Touch Gestures and About Suggested Destinations in iOS
Introduction

If Apple Mail is your email client of choice under macOS 10.13 High Sierra or later, or iOS 11 or later, this book will help you get more out of it. You’ll understand the app better, learn useful tricks and techniques, and even become a more effective correspondent. I hope and expect that by the time you finish this book, you’ll be a happier Mail user.

And yet, I must be candid: I’m a lot less happy with Mail than I used to be. In the previous edition of this book, which covered Mail in 10.11 El Capitan and iOS 9, I praised Apple for having made significant improvements in Mail compared to earlier versions. Mail in El Capitan, especially, was more reliable, faster, and easier to use than its predecessors, and I thought that presaged even greater things to come.

But I didn’t update this book at all for 10.12 Sierra and iOS 10, and waited more than six months to release an update covering High Sierra. I’d been reluctant to revise this book because the reason I wrote Take Control of Email with Apple Mail back in 2004 (and eight subsequent editions under various titles) was to help Mail users solve problems and eliminate frustrations. Unfortunately, in recent years, Apple hasn’t merely removed useful features, added bugs, and made irritating changes to Mail’s user interface. In revising Mail’s infrastructure, Apple has also made it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to solve problems—and often there’s nothing I can do about it.

I can’t tell you how many times someone has begged me for help with a Mail problem, and all I could do was say, “It’s not you. It’s Apple. This isn’t a problem you can solve. I’m so sorry.” I know a lot of people are frustrated with Mail—I’m one of them!—but when it comes to bugs, missing features, and inexplicable behavior that’s new in recent versions of Mail for macOS, I’m struggling as much as you are.

Earlier this year I was optimistic that Apple was finally going to show Mail the love it deserved, but Mojave and iOS 12 didn’t bear that out. Perhaps that’ll change in the future; in the meantime, I’ll help you as much as I can. In this book, I explain how features are supposed to...
work and describe the best ways to accomplish common email tasks. I also help you to avoid, fix, or work around as many problems as I can. And I tell you what I’ve done to make Mail work better for me (often through the use of third-party plugins).

It’s worth asking here why, if Mail is so irritating, I don’t simply switch to some other email app and recommend that others do the same. That option is always on the table—I’ll switch the minute there’s a different tool that meets my email needs better than Mail. The thing is, even with all its flaws, Apple Mail still works better for me than any alternative I’ve tried so far. Given the way I’ve customized my settings, and the third-party plugins I’ve added, I haven’t yet found another app that gives me all the capabilities I’ve come to depend on in Mail. It’s like that favorite pair of jeans that you still wear despite the odd tear or stain. I hope you’ll feel the same way after reading about the many ways you can improve on Mail’s out-of-the-box state.

Meanwhile, Mail under iOS, while less powerful, is remarkably good and getting better all the time. The biggest issue with iOS Mail is that, like most mobile email clients, it still lacks many of the useful features found in the desktop version, which means iOS users will need to develop a strategy that takes those differences into account.

Regardless of whether you use macOS, iOS, or both, this book is about how to do useful things with Mail—how to bend Mail to your will (to the extent possible) and feel as though you are genuinely in control of your email. But this isn’t a comprehensive reference guide: I’ll largely ignore basic tasks that you either know how to do already or can figure out easily by consulting the Help menu. I’m assuming you already know your way around an email client and mainly want guidance with less-than-obvious tasks and features.

Several chapters apply equally to Mail in macOS and iOS, but most of the book focuses on Mail on the Mac, which is only right, since it has far more features (and problems) than the iOS version. The final chapter, Use Mail in iOS, covers the differences between the two platforms as well as the special strengths, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies in the iOS version of Mail.
You can jump directly to any topic of interest, but I suggest starting with the first few chapters to get a solid foundation. Chapters are marked with [macOS] and/or [iOS] to show the platforms they cover.

**Understand what you’re dealing with:**
- Discover Mail’s new features and design changes. Read Learn What’s New in Mail. [macOS/iOS]
- Get a grip on POP, IMAP, SMTP, Exchange, and more as you Learn About Email Protocols. [macOS/iOS]
- Make sure you understand account-setup details and how Mail deals with common tasks. See Master Mail Concepts. [macOS]

**Find the ideal Mail setup for your needs:**
- Tailor Mail to your needs and tastes with settings, shortcuts, plugins, and more as you Customize Mail. [macOS]
- Take Mail even further. See Extend and Automate Mail. [macOS]
- Gmail user? You’re in for some weirdness, so there’s a whole chapter just for you: Use Gmail with Mail. [macOS]

**Become a better Mail user:**
- Search like a pro. Read Find Your Messages. [macOS]
- Manage incoming and saved messages as you Take Control of Your Inbox, and then learn the best ways of sending and replying to email in Become a Better Correspondent. [macOS/iOS]

**Handle exceptional tasks:**
- For enhanced privacy, Sign and Encrypt Messages. [macOS/iOS]
- Perplexed by an error message or other misbehavior in the Mac version of Mail? Read Fix Mail Problems. [macOS]
- Make the most of Mail on your iPhone, iPad, or iPod touch. See Use Mail in iOS. [iOS]
Learn What’s New in Mail

The versions of Mail in Mojave, High Sierra, iOS 12, and iOS 11 contain new features and design changes since the previous edition of this book (including some that made their first appearance in Sierra and iOS 10). Skim over this chapter to see which of these changes may be important to you.

Mail Changes in Mojave

The Help > What’s New in Mail? command lists a few of the changes in Mail for Mojave:

• There’s a new Emoji 😄 button on the toolbar of the new message window that you can use to quickly insert emoji. (I have nothing further to say about this button in the book.)

• If you have both a Mac running Mojave and an iPhone or iPad running iOS 12, you can use Continuity Camera to insert photos taken with your iOS device into Mail messages on your Mac in real time; see Continuity Camera.

• A new Move 🔄 button on the toolbar shows you suggested locations for moving messages based on your past behavior; see Filing. (This feature existed in High Sierra, but was more hidden; now it’s easier to find.)

• If you’re using Mojave’s Dark Mode, you can optionally configure Mail to show your messages with a dark background, too; see Hidden Interface Elements.

The Help window doesn’t mention the following changes, however:

• The mechanism for enabling or disabling plugins is completely different—and far more complicated than it used to be; see Use Plugins in Mojave.
• Mail no longer offers a Stationery feature to use predefined templates for your outgoing messages. (Although this feature is still present in the High Sierra version of Mail, I don’t cover it in this book.)

• Mail now stores messages in a series of folders inside ~/Library/Mail/V6 (whereas High Sierra used a folder named V5).

In addition, Mojave incorporates changes in macOS High Sierra 10.13.5 and later to address the so-called EFAIL vulnerability; see About the EFAIL Vulnerability.

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**Mail Changes in High Sierra**

You can be forgiven for thinking the High Sierra version of Mail looks virtually identical to the Sierra version, as the new features in Mail for High Sierra are pretty minimal:

• **Full-screen changes:** When Mail is in full-screen mode, opening a separate message window (including when you create a new message) switches Mail into Split View so you can see your message list on the left while reading or composing a message on the right. See Full-Screen Mode.

• **Top Hits:** Searches in Mail now show what Apple thinks are the most likely matches at the top, though I can’t recall a single time this has identified the message I was searching for. See the sidebar About Top Hits.

• **Text background colors:** Rich text messages can now contain text with different foreground and background colors, a feature I’m pretty sure no one ever asked for. See Choose Formatting Wisely.

• **More efficient storage:** With High Sierra’s new default file system, APFS (available only on Macs with SSD startup volumes), Apple claims that Mail requires 35% less storage space.

Click here to buy the full 232-page “Take Control of Apple Mail” for only $14.99!
Learn About Email Protocols

The word “protocol” may sound complicated, but it’s just a way of describing how your email program (in this case, Mail) talks to a mail server. If you know a few basics about email protocols, you’ll have an easier time understanding Mail’s interface and solving problems.

Although you may not be aware of it, most email accounts involve two separate systems—one for receiving and another for sending—and these often use entirely different servers. You probably use the same username and password for each, but behind the scenes, each account may function as two separate accounts:

• Your incoming account fetches email from your mail server and delivers it to you using a mail delivery protocol—such as POP (Post Office Protocol) or IMAP (Internet Message Access Protocol). Just ahead, I explain more about POP and IMAP, I discuss common IMAP and POP Misconceptions, and I offer guidance if you’re still using POP and want to Switch from POP to IMAP (you probably do). I also mention a few important points about iCloud and Gmail accounts, both of which also use IMAP.

• Your outgoing account uses a mail transfer protocol called SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol) to send email from your machine to your mail server, and then (usually through a number of intermediate steps) to the recipient’s mail server.

Microsoft Exchange accounts are a bit different. They act like IMAP accounts in many ways, but use a single—and an entirely different—protocol for receiving and sending mail, as well as calendar items, contacts, and other information.

Note: In this book I refer to IMAP (including iCloud and Gmail) accounts and Exchange accounts, which manage and work with messages on the mail server, as server-based accounts to distinguish them from POP accounts, which store all retrieved messages locally.
In this chapter I also discuss the concepts Fetch, Push, and IMAP IDLE, which apply to multiple account types and affect how rapidly your email client can find out about new messages.

## POP

A POP account works like this:

- First, your client (that is, your email program) asks the server for the list of messages in your Inbox.

- Then, depending on your client’s capabilities and settings, it downloads either all the messages, just the messages you select, or all messages under a specified size, to your local device.

- Finally (and optionally), your client instructs the server to delete the server copy of some or all of the messages.

The server doesn’t keep track of whether a message has been downloaded, read, or deleted; only your client knows this, and the assumption underlying the protocol is that you want to read, organize, and store your mail on a single device, using the server only as a conduit to receive your mail. If you want to store any messages in mailboxes other than your Inbox, when you create those mailboxes in your email client, they’re stored locally (not on the server); the messages you move to these mailboxes are thus also stored locally.

You can usually set your client to leave messages on the server (rather than delete them immediately after retrieving them) and then check your email with a different client (or on a different device), but all those messages will appear to be “new” and unread on every other client or device. This, among other reasons, makes POP a poor option if you work with email on multiple computers and devices.

In addition, although iOS supports POP, iOS Mail doesn’t let you create new mailboxes to file messages locally. That means an iOS device doesn’t work well as the sole device used with a POP account, and because POP works best when used with a single device, this mismatch of capabilities makes POP less than ideal for an iOS device.
As I said in the Introduction, this book isn’t about basics, as such. However, as I’ve corresponded with many Mail users over the years, I’ve discovered that there are certain concepts that Apple hasn’t made self-explanatory, and that therefore tend to trip people up. In order to understand and act on much of the rest of this book, you need to grasp a few concepts that are, perhaps, unnecessarily confusing. In this chapter I walk you through the ones I consider most important.

Most of the items in this chapter pertain only to the Mac version of Mail, but if you’re an iOS user, be sure to read Special Mailboxes, much of which is also applicable to iOS.

### Account Setup

Setting up new accounts in Mail has gotten easier in recent versions, especially if you’re using one of the major email providers Mail already knows about (iCloud, Exchange, Google/Gmail, Yahoo, and AOL)—almost the entire procedure is automated. However, there are still a few gotchas, especially if you’re using a different provider.

### Pick a Preference Pane

For starters, there are two places where you can add, edit, or remove accounts: in Mail > Preferences > Accounts (or, just for adding accounts, the shortcut Mail > Add Account) and in System Preferences > Internet Accounts (which you can also reach from within Mail by choosing Mail > Accounts).

Why two places, and when should you use which?

- The reason for the System Preferences > Internet Accounts pane is twofold. First, many account types (including iCloud, Exchange, and Gmail) include more features than just email, and affect more apps than just Mail, so Internet Accounts provides a central location where you can enable or disable individual data types like Mail,
Calendars, Contacts, and Notes for each account. Second, some account types (like Twitter and Facebook) are used by macOS but not by specific, built-in apps, and so it makes sense to provide one central location to set up all these accounts.

- The reason for the Mail > Preferences > Accounts pane is, of course, to make it more convenient to add an email account when you’re already working in Mail—and because you may need to configure any of numerous email account settings that are specific to Mail, and that therefore would be inappropriate for Apple to put in System Preferences.

You can add a new account to Mail in either place, and after you do so, both locations will reflect that account. Beyond that, the System Preferences > Internet Accounts pane gives you less control over the minute details of email account settings than Mail’s Accounts pane does, although there are a couple of things you can do only in Internet Accounts.

Here are the specifics:

- **Mail > Preferences > Accounts**: Visit this pane to edit outgoing (SMTP) servers, add secondary From addresses, change the behavior of Special Mailboxes, and adjust details such as whether to download attachments or use an IMAP path prefix.

- **System Preferences > Internet Accounts**: Use this to enable or disable account features such as Calendars and Contacts, to delete any accounts synced via iCloud, or to set up internet accounts that don’t involve Mail.

**Tip**: Even though Mail should, and usually does, configure all your settings correctly automatically, somethings things go kerflooey. So Apple offers a simple web-based tool that lets you enter your email address and—if your provider is among the most common ones—displays basic settings for your account such as the IMAP and SMTP server names, server ports, and authentication methods.
Customize Mail

Mail isn’t the fanciest or most powerful email client for the Mac, and many people have dismissed it as being too unsophisticated for email power users. I agree with that sentiment to a point—in its default configuration, Mail isn’t a fantastic email program. However, you can customize Mail in many ways, including by adding plugins that both dramatically increase its capabilities and modify standard behaviors to become much more useful. The result is that with a bit of effort, you can turn a so-so email client into a deluxe and highly optimized tool.

In this chapter, I acquaint you with some of the most important ways to customize Mail that don’t require any additional software. I don’t list every single option, nor do I go into tremendous detail, but I want to make sure you’re aware of what so many Mail users aren’t—you don’t have to live with the stock version of Mail, and you can improve your enjoyment of the app a great deal with a bit of grooming.

Note: Later, in Extend and Automate Mail, I discuss third-party plugins, AppleScript, Automator, and other ways of enhancing Mail.

Sidebar

The sidebar is the area on the left of Mail’s main window that contains all your mailboxes. Don’t see it? Choose View > Show Mailbox List. Prefer to keep it hidden? Choose View > Hide Mailbox List. (Apple seems to think Mail is easier to use when the sidebar is hidden, but for most people with multiple accounts or more than a few mailboxes, the sidebar is indispensable.)

You can also rearrange items in the sidebar by dragging them to new locations, with certain limitations:

- Top-level categories with titles in bold (such as Mailboxes, which contains your Special Mailboxes; Smart Mailboxes; and individual
accounts) can be reordered—for example, you might want to show your smart mailboxes at the top of the list and your special mailboxes at the bottom.

- Within the Mailboxes category, the order of (unified) special mailboxes is fixed; for example, Drafts always appears above Sent. However, you can reorder accounts within a unified special mailbox. For example, if your Gmail account is listed before iCloud under Sent, you can drag iCloud above Gmail—and that modified order will be reflected under all your unified special mailboxes.

- You can reorder the mailboxes within any given account.

- You can click Show or Hide next to a sidebar category to expand or collapse its contents (see Hidden Interface Elements), but you can’t manually hide the categories themselves. On the other hand, Mail automatically hides the names of accounts that have no sub-mailboxes beneath them.

Mail used to have a Mail Activity pane at the bottom of the sidebar. It’s gone now, but an abbreviated version (Figure 10) appears briefly in the same location when Mail is performing a background task that takes more than a moment.

Figure 10: This mini activity monitor appears at the bottom of the sidebar when Mail is busy doing something in the background that might take a while. Notice the thin blue progress bar at the top.

Toolbars

The toolbar is the area at the top of a window (just below the window’s title, if it has one), that contains a series of buttons and other controls. Mail has three different toolbars, one for each type of window:

- **Viewer window**: Mail’s main window, which Apple calls the Viewer window, lists your messages and shows their contents. It
Extend and Automate Mail

In my opinion, the best thing about Mail is its extensibility. If I had to use the plain, unadorned version of Mail as Apple provides it, my productivity and happiness would decrease significantly—and I’d probably switch to another app in short order. But with the addition of a few third-party plugins and other tools, Mail becomes vastly more versatile and powerful.

In this chapter I want to introduce you to some of the many ways you can extend Mail’s capabilities. First, I’ll show you over a dozen plugins that can add or modify features. For anyone who needs to save and search messages outside Mail, I next turn to apps that can Archive and Search Messages, and then tell you about utilities to Remove Duplicate Messages. I wrap up the chapter with an introduction to the ways you can Use AppleScript and Automator to automate Mail.

There’s a lot of information in this chapter, and I don’t want you to think you need each product I mention. (In fact, some of them would overlap and possibly conflict with each other.) Rather, my intention is to acquaint you with a representative sample of the possibilities.

Joe’s Favorites

If you’re curious which of the tools from this chapter I use myself, here’s my list of personal favorites:

✦ AppleScript
✦ DEVONthink (see Archive and Search Messages)
✦ GPG Mail
✦ MailSuite (in particular, Mail Act-On and MailTags)
✦ Mailbutler
Use Third-Party Plugins

Scores of third-party Mail plugins exist. These enable you to change unwanted behaviors, add new features, and enable significant new customization options. For example, plugins can stop spam, encrypt email messages, offer advanced message filing options, change the way attachments are handled, and much more.

I’m not going to list every one of those plugins here (although I will mention some places you can look to find more of them). The ones I’ve selected for this book include those I use myself, ones recommended by friends and colleagues, and others that seemed especially useful or interesting (even if I have no need for them myself).

But before we discuss particular plugins (see Noteworthy Plugins), I must say a few words about how you install and enable plugins in general.

Use Plugins in Mojave

In Mojave, Apple changed both the mechanism for enabling or disabling Mail plugins and added confusing hoops the developer (and you) must jump through to make them work.

Grant Full Disk Access as Needed

First of all, most Mail plugins now require an external helper app (typically, one that runs in the background—either all the time, or just when Mail is open) to do the heavy lifting. That app, in turn, could require access to all your Mail files (which, of course, may contain sensitive information), and although the app can display an alert informing you of this fact, you’ll have to grant permission manually.

If a plugin (or any other app or utility) needs access to your files, it will generally notify you in some way. There’s no single system-wide alert for this purpose, but when installing a plugin, you may see a dialog such as the one in Figure 18.
Use Gmail with Mail

If you have a Gmail account and want to use it in Mail under macOS, this chapter is for you. I cover the ways Gmail in Mail differs from Gmail on the web, the ways Gmail differs from other IMAP providers, how best to configure Mail to use a Gmail account, and how to avoid common problems. All of this, I hope, will help make your experience of using Gmail in Mail as good as it can be.

**Note:** Everything in this chapter applies equally to standard Gmail accounts and to Google Apps accounts with a custom domain name.

If you don’t use Gmail (or don’t want to use Mail to access Gmail), there’s nothing to see here. Move right ahead to Find Your Messages.

Understand How Mail Works (or Not) with Gmail

If you’re accustomed to Gmail’s web interface, you may expect it to work similarly in Mail. On the other hand, if you’re used to using Mail with other IMAP accounts, you may expect Gmail accounts to behave the same way. In both cases, the reality will differ quite a bit from your expectation, and you’ll have an easier time using the combination of Mail and Gmail if you know more up front about how the two systems try (and sometimes fail) to work together. I’ll start by reviewing the basics of how Mail interacts with Gmail, then discuss Gmail on the Web vs. Gmail in Mail, and finally turn to Gmail vs. Other IMAP Providers.

**Note:** Although Mail can also access Gmail via POP, I recommend against it and don’t cover it in this book. Among other issues, with POP, Mail can’t see archived Gmail messages or messages you’ve sent from your Gmail account using the web interface.
Years ago, I used Gmail as my main email provider, and after quite a bit of experimentation, I figured out a rather involved way to make Mail behave the way I wanted it to with my Gmail account. Then, with Mac OS X 10.9 Mavericks, Apple made a bunch of changes to the way Mail worked with Gmail that were supposed to solve problems (and prevent the need for the complex procedures I’d worked out) but actually made the situation much worse. After some drama, Apple eventually set things right, and now—to the extent that these two quite different ways of approaching email can be reconciled—Mail usually works pretty well with Gmail accounts.

**Note:** Although I still have a Gmail account, I almost never use it, and it’s certainly not my main account. At the time I stopped using Gmail as my main provider, I described my decision in *Why (and how) I’m saying goodbye to Gmail*. Nowadays, I have additional reasons to avoid Gmail, including a fundamental dislike of Google’s business model. But that’s me.

In general, you’ll get the best results if you have Mail and Gmail configured in the way they expect (see *Set Up Mail to Use Gmail*). But since your options for configuring the way Mail works with Gmail are more limited than in years past, if you follow the instructions in this chapter and still can’t get the results you want, I’m afraid my only advice is to ditch either Mail (in favor of Gmail’s web interface or a client designed expressly for Gmail) or Gmail (in favor of a conventional IMAP or Exchange provider).

**Gmail on the Web vs. Gmail in Mail**

Gmail started as a web-only email system; POP and IMAP access were tacked on later. As a result of its web focus, Google designed Gmail to handle email in a fundamentally different way from conventional email servers. Although I don’t care for Gmail’s model, I understand why a lot of people prefer it—but unfortunately, it’s a way of looking at email that Mail can’t entirely replicate. Here are some of the key differences:

- **Labels vs. mailboxes:** On the Gmail website, you can apply descriptive labels to each message to help you find messages with
macOS’s Spotlight search feature automatically indexes all your Mail messages for super-fast searching, and you can search for them either within Mail or using the system-wide Spotlight menu.

You can search using natural language rather than relying on special keywords or formulations. However, if you want to do complex searches, you can. With a flexible system of search tokens (which I explain in a moment), Boolean searches, and other options, you can find almost any message you can describe.

And, you can even save a search by converting it into a smart mailbox, as I describe at the end of this chapter, in Work Smarter with Smart Mailboxes.

Perform a Natural Language Search

Here’s a novel idea: when you’re searching for email, just describe what you’re looking for in your own words. You can use plain English (or plain whatever-language-you-speak) in Mail’s Search field, as well as in system-wide Spotlight searches, to find email messages.

There’s no rulebook, no list of approved words or phrases. You just describe what you want. Here are some examples:

- emails from John Smith
- messages to John Smith
- messages with “split pea” in the subject
- email with “split pea” in the body
- email from John Smith in the last week
- mail from Morgen including photographs
- mail I ignored from Adam
• unread messages from this week
• messages from bruce about security

There are countless other ways to search using natural language, but the point is: don’t try to outthink Spotlight. Just ask the question that you’re thinking.

Having said that, I should point out a few things I’ve noticed about natural-language searches in macOS Mail:

• **Results aren’t always exhaustive.** For example, if I ask for unread messages, Mail shows me only *recent* unread messages. You should not assume that because a message doesn’t show up in a natural-language search, it doesn’t exist.

• **Mail doesn’t care about your wording.** Notice how, in the examples above, I interchangeably used *email, emails, mail,* and *messages.* Mail knows those all mean the same thing. So, don’t get hung up on picking exactly the right term.

• **Mail is smart, but it can’t read your mind.** If you search for messages from “Bob,” you may have a particular person in mind, but Mail doesn’t know *which* of the many Bobs in your saved mail you’re interested in. Be more specific if the results aren’t what you want.

• **Searches may take a while.** Although Mail starts returning search results immediately, it continues to search until it’s gone through all your mail; sometimes that can take a while. So if you don’t see the messages you’re looking for right away, give it a few seconds (or more).

If a natural-language search doesn’t turn up what you’re looking for, you can always fall back to the old-fashioned way. For starters, you can perform a conventional search (discussed next); for even greater power, you can Search for a Phrase, Use Boolean Expressions, or Search by Date Range. And, even in a natural-language search, you can use the techniques discussed later in this chapter to narrow the search field.
Take Control of Your Inbox

Does your Inbox contain hundreds of messages? Thousands? Tens of thousands? If so, you may find it nearly impossible to tell which messages you’ve dealt with and which still require action, and finding a particular message in that long list may be a daunting challenge. You need to take control of your Inbox!

Although everyone’s different, I’d like to offer some suggestions that will help you manage the flow of incoming messages. I don’t particularly care whether you do things my way, but please think carefully about the types of messages you receive and come up with a plan to deal with them that works for you.

I begin this chapter with a series of pointers that apply equally to macOS (and other desktop platforms) and iOS. Then I discuss specific approaches for each platform in Develop an Email Strategy. I also talk briefly about how to Back Up and Restore Your Email and how to Import Email.

Take Responsibility

The first step to taking control of your Inbox is recognizing that you, and only you, bear the responsibility for making your own email manageable. If you feel overwhelmed by email, don’t point the finger at email as a medium—or at Apple Mail, your email provider, or your correspondents. You can make email work for you, but as with a diet or fitness program, it requires time, effort, and perhaps discomfort on your way to success. No app, service, or technique can do all that for you magically, even though such things can certainly help a bit.

As I said in my TidBITS article It’s Not Email That’s Broken, It’s You, email as such isn’t the problem, but rather the bad habits many people have gotten into when it comes to dealing with their email. Perhaps your mother, like my mother, was fond of saying, “This room isn’t
going to clean itself up!” By the same token, I can assure you that elves will not appear overnight and answer all your delinquent email, file it away for you, and leave you with an empty Inbox. If you want to feel in control of your Inbox, that’s going to require some reflection, experimentation, and changes in habit.

So, although I can’t solve this problem for you, I can offer some tips and suggestions that, I hope, will point you in the right direction. That’s what the remainder of this chapter is about.

**Consolidate Your Accounts**

Since you’re reading this book, I assume you have at least one email account. Maybe you have two (personal and work)—or maybe, like me, you have more than a dozen. My excuse is that I need to have accounts for almost every major type and provider for testing purposes because I write about email. But I know lots of people who accumulate accounts (especially free accounts) for no particular reason and then end up wasting time and effort checking, managing, and maintaining them all.

So, allow me to make a few suggestions to make your life simpler and to make Mail in macOS and iOS work better.

Begin by choosing one account to be your primary personal email account. (Of course, you may need to keep work email separate, and that’s entirely reasonable.) Then, rather than send out change-of-address notices to anyone who might have each of the other addresses—assuming you can even remember who has which one—visit the web interfaces for all other accounts, set them up to forward incoming messages to your central account, and disable those accounts in Mail on your Macs and iOS devices.

Once you’ve performed this one-time procedure, your correspondents can keep using your old addresses, but you benefit by having just one place to check for incoming mail and one place to store the messages you want to save. Having fewer accounts to check will make Mail peppier, too.
Become a Better Correspondent

In the previous chapter, Take Control of Your Inbox, I looked at the ways you can improve your management of incoming email. In this chapter we look at the flip side: handling outgoing email. I felt it was important to spend a few pages on this topic, because anyone who doesn’t exercise care in sending email becomes part of the problem for other people dealing with their incoming mail.

Lots of people are bad at email—you can probably think of a few examples immediately—and I want to make sure you’re not one of them. But even if you’re fantastic at sending email, I hope the points I make in this chapter help you to set a good example and teach other people how to improve their email skills.

Don’t Be Part of the Problem

The most common mistakes people make when sending email aren’t premeditated or malicious; they’re simply a matter of not thinking things through—of not looking at email from the recipient’s point of view. If your guiding principle is to send only email messages you’d be happy receiving yourself, you’re already well on your way to being a better correspondent.

But what counts as email courtesy isn’t always obvious, so let me offer several specific tips:

• **Use Bcc for lists:** When my son was in preschool, I used receive email messages a few times a month sent to all the parents by a member of the parents’ association. And all 108 addresses were in the To field, which meant I had to scroll past them when viewing the messages on my iPhone before I got to the message body. It also
meant I knew every other recipient’s email address, which not everyone is comfortable sharing publicly.

When sending a message to multiple people—especially a long list, and even more especially when they don’t know each other—put your own address in the To or Cc field, and put all the recipient addresses in the Bcc (blind carbon copy) field (see Message Header). That way, each recipient’s address is hidden from the other recipients. And they’ll thank you for it.

• **Be careful with Reply All and Cc:** Suppose you’re the recipient of a message sent to multiple people, and their addresses are in the To or Cc fields. You might be tempted to click Reply All out of habit, but please think before you do. Does everyone else on that list really need to hear what you have to say, or just the sender? Or perhaps a subset of the recipients? You can individually delete email addresses when replying to all, and more often than not, replying to everyone on a long list amounts to unwanted clutter for most of them.

Similarly, think before adding someone as a Cc recipient. People regularly Cc me on complaints, bug reports, and other matters that vaguely involve a book or article I’ve written, but really: I don’t need to be involved, and I assure you that putting my name on a message you send to Apple (or whomever) won’t lend it any more weight. Ask yourself whether the potential Cc recipient truly needs to be involved in a discussion.

• **Don’t forward nonsense:** Jokes, funny animal pictures, political screeds, and other such stuff that gets endlessly forwarded is nearly as bad as spam. You can’t stop someone from sending this material to you (although you can ask politely), but you can certainly make sure you’re the last link in the chain. Seriously, no matter how funny or apt you find one of these generic messages, your friends and family don’t need to read it.
Sign and Encrypt Messages

Back in Signatures, I explained how to add a signature to the end of each message with your contact information, a quote, or other content. But a message can also have a digital signature, a (normally invisible) string of characters that confirms to the recipient that the message truly comes from the address it appears to come from, and that the message contents haven’t been altered in transit.

In addition, Mail can encrypt messages, scrambling their contents so that only someone with the necessary key (presumably, the recipient) can view their contents, thereby ensuring private communications.

In this chapter I discuss if and when you should use digital signatures and encryption, how they work behind the scenes, and how to go about signing and encrypting messages in Mail.

Learn When and Why to Sign or Encrypt Messages

Let me start with the essential question of whether, or under what circumstances, you should even think about signing or encrypting messages. It’s not something everyone needs to do, and if you never need to do it, you need not bother reading the rest of this chapter. But the need could arise at some point—and even if you don’t need to sign or encrypt, you may find that there are some benefits to doing so.

**Note:** One could argue that even though most email doesn’t need to be encrypted, using encryption routinely (even when not needed) is a smart idea. If you encrypt only certain messages, that could suggest to an attacker that you have something to hide, and that those encrypted messages are where it’s hidden.

Most of us are accustomed to thinking of email as being private. One person sends a message and someone else receives it; as long as no
one is looking over either person’s shoulder or snooping on their computers when they’re not around, we presume that whatever was in that message is known only to the sender and recipient.

Indeed, that’s how things work most of the time, just as with paper letters: Most of the time no one except the intended recipient opens a letter to see what’s inside. But mail theft, tampering, accidents, and honest mistakes do occur. It sometimes happens that a person who shouldn’t see what’s inside an envelope, does. And when the contents of that envelope are highly confidential, sensitive, or valuable, someone else reading your mail can become a serious problem indeed.

Email is no different. It should be private, but it isn’t always. Each message exists not only on the computers of the sender and recipient, but also (at least temporarily) on each party’s mail server. In addition, a message may pass through any number of intermediate servers and routers, and may be backed up along the way in the data centers of one or more ISPs. In any of these places, a message could be read by an employee of the ISP, and it could be intercepted in transit by a hacker—or a government agency—during its journey from sender to recipient.

(“Doesn’t SSL encrypt my messages?” you may ask. SSL secures a message only between Mail and the incoming or outgoing mail server, but doesn’t prevent someone from reading that message while it’s on a mail server, or during other legs of the delivery process.)

Because so many millions of email messages are exchanged every day, the probability that any particular message you send or receive will be read by someone who shouldn’t see it is incredibly small—but not zero. So, consider what would happen in one of these situations if the wrong person read email you sent:

• You need to email your accountant detailed information about your income, expenses, and taxes.

• You need to provide someone with your credit card number, social security number, or other sensitive information by email.
As I said earlier in this book, the macOS version of Mail (at least in its Sierra, High Sierra, and Mojave incarnations) has a number of reliability and behavior problems, and many of them are things you can’t fix, because you didn’t do anything to cause them—only Apple can fix them. So, although I can’t offer solutions to every problem, I’ve compiled solutions to some of the most common (and serious) problems in the pages ahead, including difficulties receiving and sending mail, problems with damaged mailboxes, and misbehaving Spotlight searches.

Although some of this information may provide useful background for resolving iOS Mail issues too, the specifics are different; see Troubleshoot iOS Mail Problems for help with Mail in iOS.

**Fix Incoming Mail Problems**

If Mail cannot download incoming messages, the cause may be anything from an incorrect setting in Mail, to a server problem, to a loss of internet connectivity. Work through each of the following sections until you resolve the problem.

**About the Activity Window**

To check what Mail is doing behind the scenes, choose Window > Activity. A small floating window appears, displaying detail about each activity Mail is performing. If there’s only one activity (and I’ve never seen more than two at once), the mini activity monitor at the bottom of the sidebar shows the same information. Unfortunately, the Activity window no longer lets you cancel tasks, as was the case in Yosemite and earlier.

For these two reasons, there’s little point in using the Activity window anymore—just look at the mini activity monitor in the sidebar.
Try Connection Doctor

To open Connection Doctor, choose Window > Connection Doctor. In the Connection Doctor window, Mail lists each incoming and outgoing email account you’ve configured—even those you’ve temporarily disabled. It attempts to log in to each account, and if it fails with any of them, it shows an explanation of why it failed. These explanations aren’t always helpful, but they often give you a good starting point in debugging problems, and are written in refreshingly plain English. If the Connection Doctor window suggests a specific fix, try that first. Otherwise, proceed with the following steps.

Username and Password Errors

If you enter your password in Mail > Preferences > Accounts (or in System Preferences > Internet Accounts), macOS stores the password in your keychain (which is usually what you want). If, for security reasons, you prefer for Mail to prompt you for your password each time you connect, leave the Password field blank.

Sometimes, even after successfully checking your email many times with the password you entered, Mail displays a dialog claiming that the mail server has “rejected” your password. Worse, you may re-enter your password—and even select “Remember this password in my keychain”—but find that another error message pops up as soon as you click OK. This annoyance may be due to any number of causes, but most have simple solutions.

If Mail suddenly begins prompting you for your password repeatedly when checking incoming mail (after retrieving it correctly earlier), try these steps in order until the problem goes away:

1. Click Cancel, and then check your email again in a minute or two. Sometimes the problem goes away on its own—most likely because the problem was on the mail server’s end or with the connection to the server. (If your account is offline, choose Mailbox > Take All Accounts Online.)
Use Mail in iOS

So far, the bulk of this book has been about Mail on a Mac. Although I’ve mentioned iOS Mail from time to time (and some of the things I’ve discussed apply equally to both platforms), Mail in iOS has enough unique characteristics that it deserves its own chapter. As was the case for macOS Mail, I’m not going to cover every feature here. Instead, I want to point out the most important things you need to understand in order to use iOS Mail effectively—especially aspects of Mail that are unclear, obscure, or otherwise confusing.

I begin with a list of the key differences between iOS Mail and macOS Mail. Then I move on to 18 Things Every iOS Mail User Should Know and wrap up with how to Troubleshoot iOS Mail Problems.

iOS Mail vs. macOS Mail

Mail in iOS shares a great deal in common with Mail on a Mac, so anyone accustomed to one platform should be able to pick up the other easily. Naturally, the iOS version makes accommodations for smaller screens, a touch-screen interface, and the numerous iOS user interface conventions that differ from those of macOS. I won’t spell all those out here, but I do think it’s worth pointing out several key differences in functionality—as well as a few similarities you may not have noticed.

Here’s what you should know about the iOS version of Mail:

- **No rules or spam filtering:** If you want to sort messages or weed out junk mail automatically, it’s best to set these tasks up on your mail server. (See Use Rules and Control Spam, respectively.)

- **Push (but no IMAP IDLE):** Mail in iOS supports push delivery of messages from iCloud, Exchange, and Yahoo IMAP accounts—and push works even when Mail isn’t open (see Fetch, Push, and IMAP IDLE). However, IMAP servers that offer only IMAP IDLE as a way of “pushing” messages don’t give you push delivery on
an iOS device. As a result, Mail in macOS is likely to display messages from such servers before Mail in iOS.

Push delivery, where applicable, works with your Inbox and—for iCloud and Exchange accounts only—with other mailboxes you explicitly set up (see Change Account Settings).

In addition, note that even with iCloud and Exchange accounts, although Mail pushes new messages to your device immediately, it does not push changes made on other devices, such as moved or deleted messages. So, if your iOS Mail icon says you have one unread message, and you delete that message on your Mac, the “1” badge won’t disappear right away; you may need to open Mail to force it to resynchronize its Inboxes.

- **Limited mailbox syncing:** Related to the last point...whereas the macOS version of Mail caches complete copies of all messages in all IMAP and Exchange mailboxes, syncing them in the background, iOS Mail doesn’t (which is a good thing, because that would chew up lots of cellular bandwidth and storage space).

  Instead, for IMAP accounts, Mail syncs only the Inbox in the background. For Exchange accounts, you can specify how far back to sync email messages (from a day to a month, or all messages), and as I mentioned in the previous point, you can select, for iCloud and Exchange accounts, which mailboxes should have their messages pushed to your device. As for any other mailboxes, Mail syncs them only when you tap on them to display their contents.

  This may be significant if you use server-side filters or rules to sort your messages into mailboxes, because mailboxes other than Inbox won’t indicate that they contain any new, unread messages until you manually select them.

- **Autocomplete for multiple addressees:** If you regularly send messages to the same set of addresses (for example, your spouse and your mother), Mail notices this and offers the combination of addresses as an option when autocompleting a partial address (in my example, when you start typing your spouse’s name, your
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Joe Kissell is the author of more than 60 books about technology. As of May 2017, he also became the publisher of Take Control Books, when alt concepts inc.—the company he runs along with his wife, Morgen Jahnke—acquired the Take Control series from TidBITS Publishing Inc.’s owners, Adam and Tonya Engst.

Joe is also a contributing editor to TidBITS and a senior contributor to Macworld. Before he began writing full-time in 2003, Joe spent nearly eight years managing software development. He holds a bachelor’s degree in Philosophy and a master’s degree in Linguistics.

In his rare non-work hours, Joe likes to travel, walk, cook, eat, and practice t’ai chi. He and Morgen live in San Diego with their sons, Soren and Devin, and their cat, Zora. To contact Joe about this book, send him email and please include Take Control of Apple Mail in the subject.

Shameless Plug

On my site Interesting Thing of the Day, which I recently resurrected after many years, I write about all sorts of interesting topics—including food, history, language, science, technology, and much more. I’d be delighted if you stopped by for a visit! You can also sign up for joeMail, my free, low-volume, no-spam mailing list, or follow me on Twitter (@joekissell). To learn more about me personally, visit JoeKissell.com.
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*Take Control of the Mac Command Line with Terminal:* Master your Mac’s command-line interface and learn basic Unix skills.

*Take Control of Your Digital Legacy:* Make sure your important digital information is preserved for future generations.

*Take Control of Your Online Privacy:* Learn what’s private online (not much)—and what to do about it.

*Take Control of Your Paperless Office:* With your Mac and a scanner, you’ll clear the chaos of an office overflowing with paper.

*Take Control of Your Passwords:* Overcome password overload without losing your cool.