A Kick-Butt Cheatsheet

— for —

Getting Your Email Inbox Calm and Under Control

Courtesy of Shawn Blanc and The Sweet Setup team. Enjoy!

thesweetsetup.com

About The Sweet Setup

Our goal is to help you make the most of your time and attention.

And we do this in all sorts of ways...

By spending our time researching the very best apps for your Mac, iPad, and iPhone. And by write about tips and strategies for using those apps.

As a result, we know a lot about workflows, staying focused, and best practices. That's why we're visited by over half-a-million readers every single month.

In this free guide we'll help you get control of your email inbox.

A calm inbox that is under control is one where the messages that matter are right where you expect them while the rest are out of your way.

After working through this cheatsheet your will have a calmer inbox that's under your control (instead of the other way around).

Enjoy...

Shawn Blanc
Founder, The Sweet Setup

Distraction is the enemy of creativity.

It deadens our ability to accomplish anything of import. And worse, it lulls us into a feeling of engagement, of busyness, that feels productive even as it destroys any possibility of meaningful productivity.

If we let our lives be run by endless inputs — by pings and buzzes and status updates — we will never create anything of value. We make great things when we exert our unwavering attention over time on completing a single task. Value simply cannot be created in an instant, nor can it be created in tiny little five- to ten-minute bursts of focus in between checking your Twitter feed.

Value emerges as the product of focused work...

— Jocelyn K. Glei, *Unsubscribe*

How to Use This Cheatsheet

1. Read through the first few pages to get an understanding of the types of email senders and messages.

2. Print the final two pages of the worksheet or open it up on your computer.

3. Open up your email inbox.

4. Go through *all* **the emails you've received in the past week**. This should include all newsletters, receipts, notifications, personal emails, work emails, etc.

5. For each email you've received in the past week, list it in the appropriate box of the worksheet.

6. Once you have a list of all your emails and a general idea of how urgent and/or important they are, consider which ones you can unsubscribe from and which ones you can set up automated rules for in order to filter them out of your inbox automatically.

4 Classes of Senders

Class A	Personal, one-to-one
Class B	Unsolicited, one-to-one
Class C	Newsletter or other sort of mass communication
Class D	Automated from a company, business, etc.

Not all incoming emails are equal. A personal, one-to-one email (from a friend, family member, co-worker) is going to be of much more value than an automated email from Amazon confirming your order. Likewise, even the same sort of email — a request for help — if it comes from someone you *don't* know, it's not going to be as important as a request from someone you *do* know.

As you take control of your inbox it can be helpful remember that there are different classifications of senders. In short, every incoming email does not hold the same weight of importance.

5 Types of Emails

There are 5 types of emails (and I'll explain them more in a minute):

1. Urgent Emails
2. Important Emails
3. Emails You Enjoy Getting
4. Emails You Get by Default
5. Emails you're not longer sure why the heck you're still subscribed to them
6. Bonus: Emails that make you say *Ugh!*

For types 1, 2, and 3 the goal is to make sure these don't fall through the cracks and are easy to find when the time comes to process them.

For types 4 and 5 (with the bonus of type 6), the goal is to get as many (if not all) of these out of your inbox as possible, if not unsubscribing from them altogether.

The nature of your email inbox is to treat *all* incoming messages as urgent and important. In fact, the email inbox hasn't changed at all in the decades that email has been a thing.

The email in your inbox could be an order confirmation from Amazon about that half-gallon tub of coconut oil or it could be a time-sensitive message from your boss at work — the email inbox treats all incoming messages as the same.

There are some apps and services which attempt to "auto-filter" your emails for you. I personally have had varying levels of success with these. Sometimes they filter things correctly, but not always. And I've found that emails I consider important, the auto-filtering service may think is worthless; and vice-versa.

That's why — every once in a while — it's worth it to take a look at the emails you're getting and make sure they're emails that you need and want to be getting. Choose for yourself what is worth your time and attention.

My aim here is to help you take a step back and answer this question: Of the emails you get on a regular basis, which ones are important and which ones aren't?

It's a mountain of a question unless you've got an easy-to-use, systematic approach to it...

Understanding The Emails You Get (and What to Do With Them)

The following is a brief breakdown of what each type of email is and what you can do about it to help relive some stress and allow yourself to check your inbox a bit less frequently.

Type 1: Urgent Emails I Need to Read Right Away

The (hopefully) rare occasion that you receive information or correspondence that only happens via email and when you get an email like this it's urgent and needs your attention as quickly as possible.
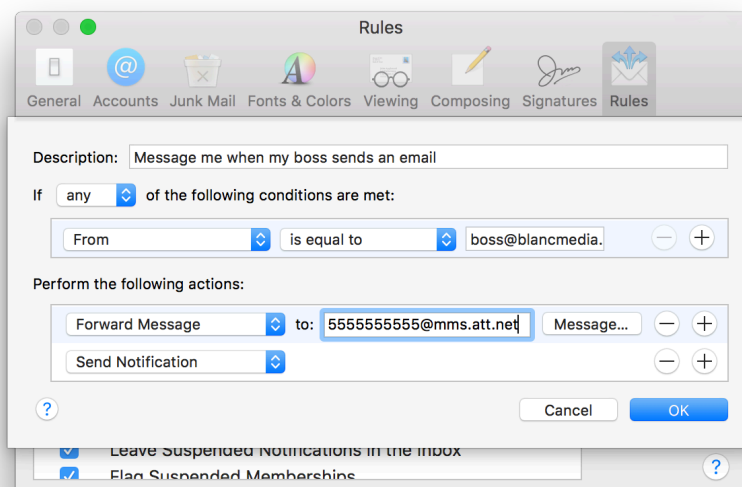
Example

Your boss emails you about a meeting that's happening in an hour from now.

What To Do

Aside from asking your boss to text or call you instead, there are a few tricks you can set up:

* With iOS and MacOS you can create VIP senders, and whenever you receive an email from of these emails then you'll get a notification about it.

* If you can't do that, then alternatively you can set up a custom rule in your inbox that forwards the email to your cell phone's "email-to-text-message" address.

Example rule in the MacOS mail app, where an incoming email from "the boss" is forwarded as an SMS message.

Pro tip: you can even add some customized text to the front of the message.

Type 2: Important Emails (that aren't urgent in the moment)

This is information / correspondence that only happens via email. And while it's not urgently time-sensitive, it's not something you want to let fall through the cracks. This is where most email correspondence (should) fall into.
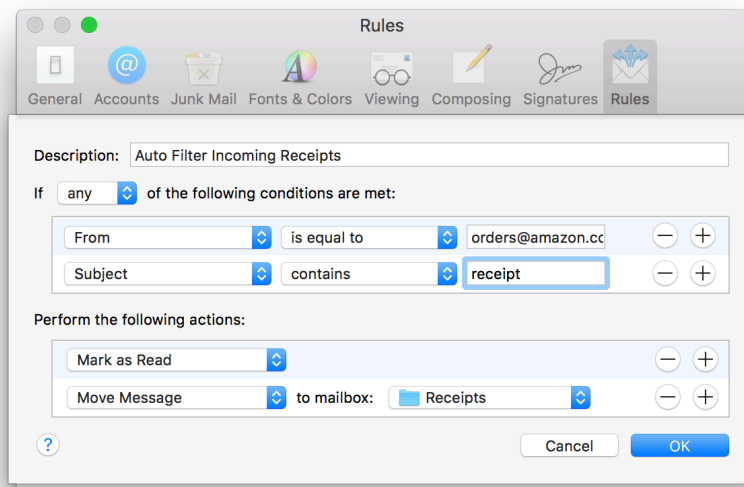
Examples
* Personal emails from friends, family, co-workers, et al.
* Purchase receipts, order confirmations, travel information, etc.
* Reminder emails about upcoming events, expiring billing information, etc.

What To Do

For the types of emails that you need to read and possibly reply to or act on in some way, then let them go to your inbox so you can process them.

For the types of emails you need / want to get (such as purchase receipts, order confirmations, etc.) you could set up custom filters and rules so that these emails are automatically moved into a folder. Thus, they're still there in your email, but they're not in your inbox. (See the screenshot below.)

Example rule in the MacOS mail app, where all incoming emails from Amazon as well as all incoming emails that contain the word "receipt" in the subject line are marked as read and then moved into a receipts folder.

Type 3: Emails I Want to Read and Enjoy Getting

These are the newsletters and emails that you enjoy getting, but they're not urgent by any means. You can read them on your own time.

Examples

Newsletters and other types of one-to-many email correspondence.

What to Do

If you only get a few, you may be happy to let them come to your inbox. But, even still, why not set up a filter so they are automatically moved into a separate folder you can check on your own time?
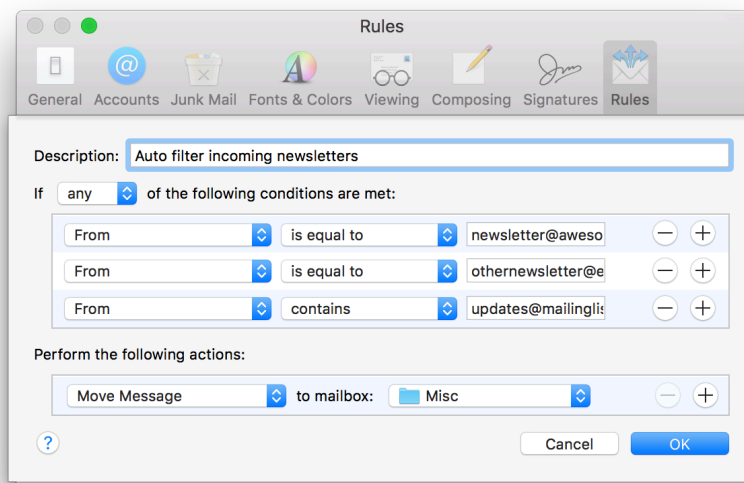
Example rule in the MacOS mail app, where incoming emails from specific newsletters that you specify are moved into a specific folder for you to read later.

Type 4: Emails I get by default, but that aren't important enough to exist in my inbox

We often get emails that contain the same information that we could find somewhere else if/when we need it. Thus, consider if you truly need to get an email notification about it, or if you could turn off those notifications

Examples

* Emails from Twitter / Facebook / Pinterest / Instagram letting you know that somebody followed you or replied to you or liked the picture of that sandwich you had for lunch.
* Emails from your online e-commerce store letting you know about a new order (if your online store processes orders automatically, do you really need to know about each new sale?)
* End-of-week summary emails for services you use.

What to do

Consider if you're getting helpful, timely, and valuable information from these incoming emails. If not, then go to the source and turn off as many of these emails as you have the guts for.

Type 5: Meh — Emails I'm no longer sure why I'm still subscribed to them

These are emails you're allowing into your inbox *just in case*. They were interesting at some point, and every once in a while you might get something useful out of them, but honestly these messages are not something you anticipate, and you probably wouldn't even notice if you stopped getting them.

Examples

Newsletters, notification emails, summary emails.

What To Do

Unsubscribe from them! Don't just delete them perpetually.

Bonus: Type 6: Ugh!

These are emails you didn't ask for, didn't sign up for, and wish they would go away.

Examples

* Someone cold-emailing you with a pitch or an idea or wanting to connect about something.
* A company giving your email address to someone else.

What To Do

Just delete them and move on. Not every incoming message you get — *especially* unsolicited ones — requires the time and attention it takes for you to give a personal reply.

Categorize Your Own Emails

On the following 2 pages you'll find the cheatsheet for categorizing your current deluge of incoming emails.

The best way to go about this is the following:

1. Either print the next two pages of the worksheet or open it up on your computer.

2. Open up your email inbox and go through **all the emails you've received in the past week**. This should include all newsletters, receipts, notifications, personal emails, work emails, etc.

3. For each email you've received in the past week, list it in the appropriate box of the worksheet.

4. Once you have all your emails mapped out, refer back to the previous pages for suggestions and tips on what to do with those emails.
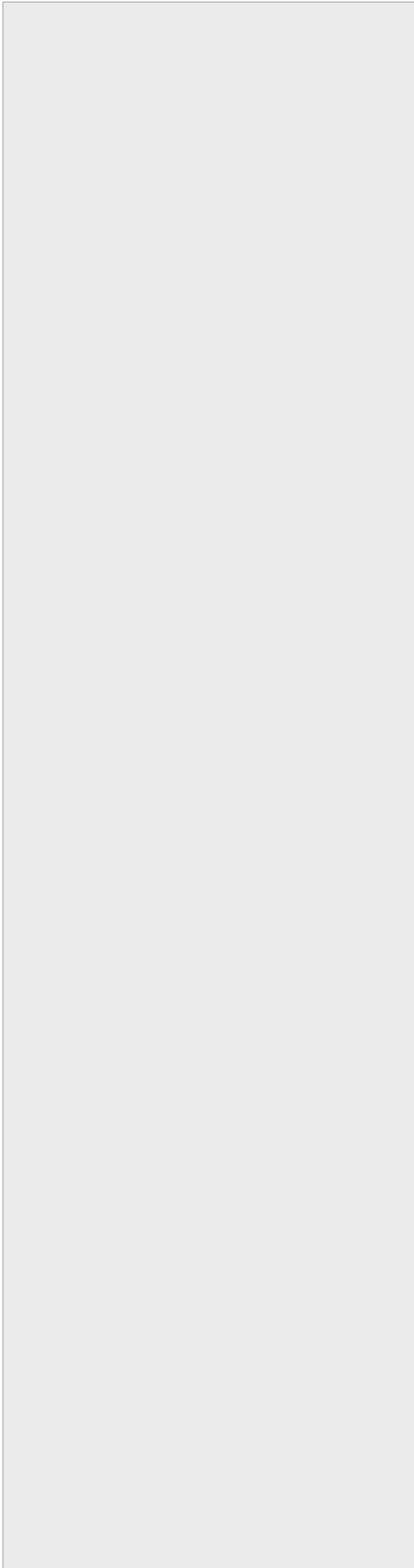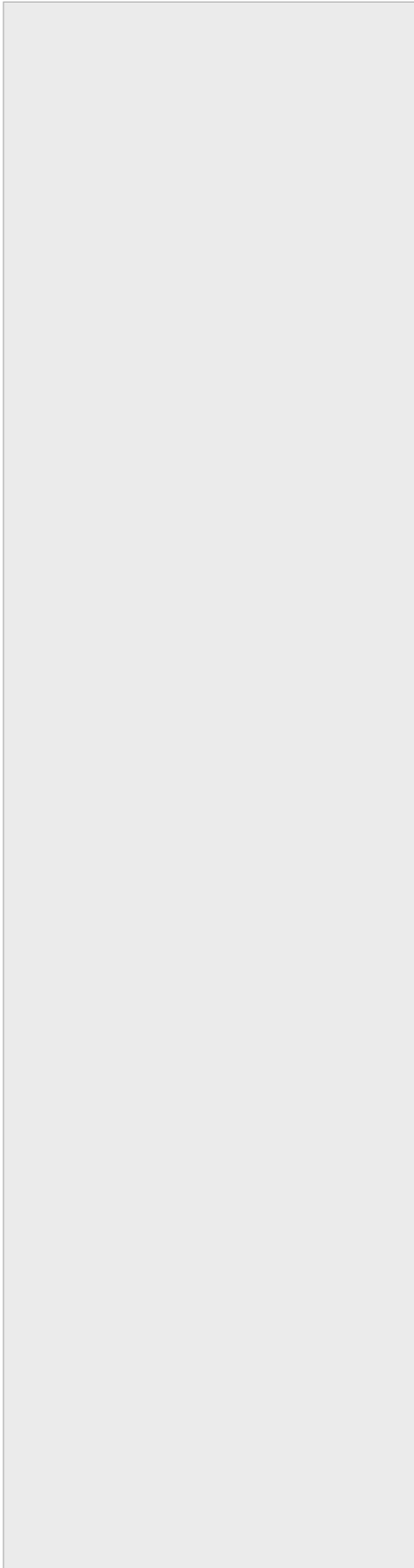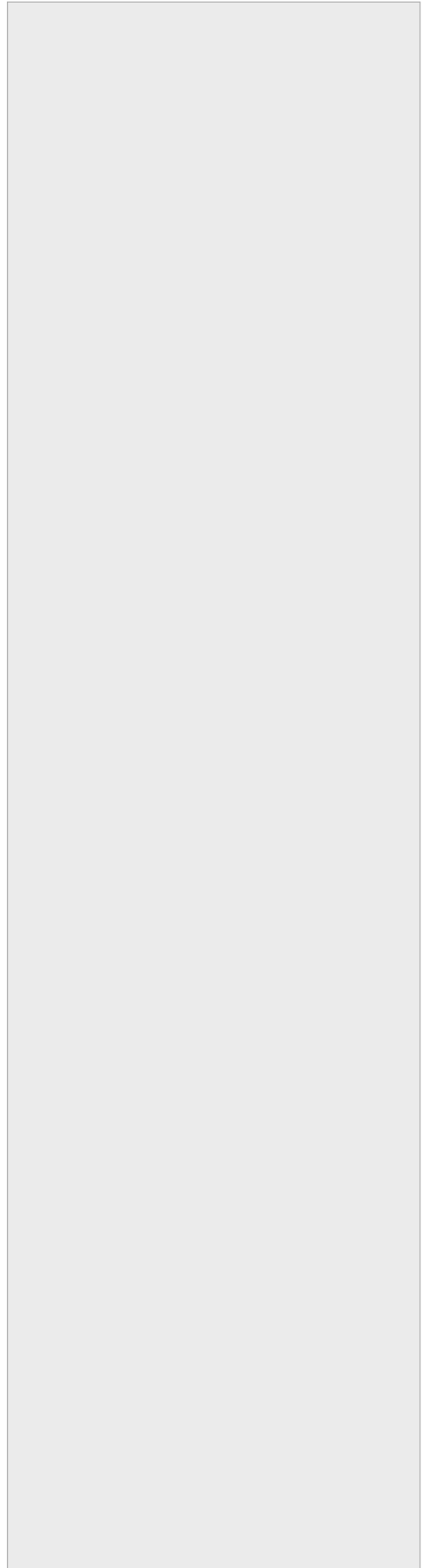
Your results should lead to: (1) a better picture of all the emails you get and what you can do about the ones you don't want; and (2) a calmer inbox.

Good luck and godspeed.

Type 1: Urgent Emails **I Need to Read Right Away**	**Type 2: Important Emails** **That Aren't Urgent**	**Type 3: Emails I Want** **to Read and Enjoy Getting**

Type 4: Emails I get by default, but don't need to go to my inbox

Type 5: Emails I'm no longer sure why I'm still subscribed to them

Type 6: Ugh!