"Help Gmail Help You"

How many times have you been lost amidst your thousands of e-mails in your inbox? If your answer isn’t “once or twice”, then I may have some tips for you. This article is mainly intended for SL teachers’ needs regarding the frequency and intensity of e-mail usage; which, is a lot!

I intend to highlight features of Gmail (on a browser) that I find most useful. In order of the article; I will talk about the appearance of the inbox, using labels, marking messages important, adding messages to your “task” list and using the search box to the fullest. At the end, I will add a couple of relevant and irrelevant techy bonus tips. I may have gotten a little carried away, enjoy!

THE INBOX: Categories or not to categories

A while back, Gmail introduced the “Categories” tabs. If you haven’t changed the settings yet, you will see the tabs as: Primary-Social-Promotions-Update-Forums

10 seconds after seeing this layout, I was on Google trying to find out how to get rid of them. I like to feel more in control of my inbox, i.e., I want to decide which messages are important or which ones are social. If you, too, aren’t a fan of this outlook, here are just two of the alternative ways of seeing your inbox. Trust me, there is at least one that you will like better.

To begin, you need to go to settings. The icon is on the top right corner of the page:

Next, click “inbox”, and the first dialogue box under the tab is the inbox type. I’ll talk about two of them.

1. **Unread First**: This option will give you your unread mail on top of the page. So, if you like to keep some of your messages unread when you need to pay attention to them at a later time, you may find this option very useful. Give it a try!
2. **Priority Inbox**: This is the option I’ve been using for a while. This allows you—like the name suggests—prioritize what you want to see and in what order. Here’s how mine looks like:

In this case, I want easy access to my OLSP messages, so I assigned OLSP label as the second part I want to see—right after unread messages.

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**LABELS: Tag, you’re it!**

The menu on the left hand column features your labels, among other things. This has by far been the most useful Gmail feature for me.

Over the years, I adopted a “create a label” as you go along style. What I mean is; if you are creating your first ever label, I recommend starting with a general one, because Gmail enables you to nest one label under another. For instance if you start with “2017-18” as a label, you can later add “Fall, Spring or Summer” under it. And, in turn, Route X, Y...etc
Here’s my left column, and some of my many labels:

Creating a new label: Select the message you want to label, then go to the label icon on the top of the page:
To add some color to things: Color coding the labels makes things not only pretty, but also really easy to see. The default color is grey for all labels, which doesn’t help much. So, if you click on the little grey box next to the label name on the left column, then click on “label color” you can choose the color combination you want for each label.

Once you start using labels, you may soon realize there are one too many of them. In my case, I have labels dating back to 2012 (the year I started working at Sabanci). Instead of deleting the emails, I simply hide the labels.

To hide a label, you need to go to settings; after you click on “labels”, you will see that it gives you a show-hide option.

Applying a label to a message can be done without opening the message too. Just select the said message, click on labels and choose the label you want. If you have too many labels (like I do), you may prefer typing the name of the label. When you start typing, the label you want will show.
IMPORTANT: stars and other cute little things

One tiny, yet powerful, feature of Gmail is the colorful little marks you can leave next to your messages. They look something like this:

![Image of Gmail interface showing stars and other indicators]

To set them up, and choose which ones you think you’ll use, you go to the “general” tab under settings. You will see them under “stars”:

You just need to hold and drag them around until you got what you want under “in use”

You’re all set! You can change the symbol you want on a particular email by clicking on the empty star next to the sender’s name: (Just keep clicking until you get to the symbol you want to use)

On a similar note; if you see are seeing tiny little arrows next to the email sender’s name, it means the “personal level indicators” are turned on. I personally, don’t like them so, mine are turned off. You can set this under general settings too.
**TASKS: Add to tasks, because you probably don’t have enough**

If you like “to do” lists, you will enjoy the “add to tasks” option in Gmail. Select the message that you will need to go back to, under “More” on the row on top, just click “Add to Tasks”. After that, you can choose if you want to add a due date or not. It’ll even let you go to the relevant email with just one click.

My task list looks something like this:
Something I came across quite late is that little arrow next to the search box in Gmail. When you are looking for a message based on only the name of the sender, you will get quite a few messages; basically any message that includes that person’s name. So, instead try this:

Now, you get this:

With this many options, you will save a lot of time and frustration. For instance when you remember the subject but not the sender, or vice versa, or when you can only remember a few words from a message, the detailed search box is a life saver.

Thank you for reading so far, now here are a few bonus tracks:

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Track 1: Shortcuts

Type “?” when on browser, this will give you a list of shortcuts you can use. It’s hard to remember them all, but I will touch on a few that I find useful.

Isn’t that exciting? The list keeps going if you move the page down.

Here are my favorites:

c to compose
g then t to go to sent items
g then i to go to inbox
g then s to go to starred messages
CTRL ENTER sends the message you are typing

If you feel you can use any or all of these, you need to set “keyboard shortcuts” as “on” under general settings.
Track 2: A Hidden Gem in your laptop: Snipping Tool

Click the windows icon, start typing snipping tool. This is one of the easiest ways to take screenshots of any size and shape, and write on them.

Once you have the image you want, just click on Save, and choose JPEG as format for easier access.

Track 3: Alternative Back up with Google Drive Desktop client.

If you download and save google drive for desktop, without needing to do anything extra, your desktop will be backed up on Google Drive. And when you go to drive.google.com, you will see everything saved under “My computer”. It’s pretty cool.

Enjoy!

References:

