
What is e-mail?

E-mail, or electronic mail, is a method of exchanging messages on the Internet. Overall, the idea of e-mail, (also sometimes written email,) is very similar to the post offices in the real world.

In the real world, to send a letter, you need to write the letter, address an envelope, put it in your mailbox, and allow the postman to pick it up. From there, it goes to the post office, which transfers it to another post office, where it is delivered to the address you wrote, and the recipient takes it from the mailbox.

E-mail is actually very much the same, but without the cost of postage or use of paper. You type your message, explain to the computer whose e-mail address it should be sent to, and it goes to your “outbox.” The mail gets sent to your e-mail provider, who forwards it to the other party’s e-mail provider, who then places it in the in-box of the person on the other end.

How do I get e-mail?

In order to send and receive e-mail, you will need *an e-mail address*. There are two different sources from which you might get an e-mail address:

- 1) Your Internet Service Provider. (ex: Comcast, AOL, Verizon, your employer)
- 2) A website on the internet that offers it. (ex: Yahoo, G-mail, Hotmail)

If you are using an e-mail address from your ISP, you will almost assuredly need to use a program specifically designed for handling e-mail, most frequently Microsoft Outlook. Once set-up, that program will remember your log-in and password and download your e-mail onto your computer. (You will usually get a notice when you have a new mail waiting.) While this method is usually faster to use, the downside is that you are effectively stuck using the same computer for all your e-mail. It is also slightly more susceptible to viruses.

The “webmail” style of e-mail is accessed directly through the World Wide Web. Just open your web browser and go to the website that handles your e-mail. At that point, you will need to enter your log in and password. All the e-mail you receive is kept on your e-mail provider’s website rather than sent to your computer. (So it is more like a P.O. Box than a street mailbox.) Webmail is *slightly* more cumbersome, but it also is accessible from any computer with Internet access, which sometimes makes it more convenient.

We will use the webmail style of e-mail in the Computer Lab, from Yahoo!, but generally all the material in this class other than the sign-up process is going to be the same for everyone.

So what is an e-mail address? Is that different from a web address?

The web addresses you are used to seeing by now typically look like “www.somewhere.com”. The e-mail address will have the same ending, but rather than www, it will have your *username* and the “at” symbol. For example, “billgates@microsoft.com”.

The simplest way to distinguish an e-mail address from a web address is the presence of the “at” sign.

For “billgates@microsoft.com”, microsoft.com is considered the **domain name**. Microsoft’s e-mail computers, also known as servers, would handle e-mail for everyone at Microsoft, including one user named billgates. Although in this case, the username is the same as the person’s name, a username does not have to be the person’s actual name. For example, “honeybuns@verizon.net” is another perfectly valid e-mail address.

Getting an e-mail address

The first step to using email is setting up an e-mail address. Yahoo mail is free and usually fairly easy to use, so that is a good place to start. **Open Internet Explorer and go to www.yahoo.com. From there, locate the “Mail” button and click on it.**

This will take us to a new screen for logging into e-mail. But since you don’t have an e-mail address already, you will need to **click on the words “Sign up”**.

Yahoo mail may be free, but they still need to know some things about you. **Fill in your name, your gender, your birthday, and your postal code (zip code) Do not press enter at any time; simply click into each new section.**

The next three lines are for your username (Yahoo ID) and password. When you click into the Yahoo! ID and Email box, Yahoo will generate some suggested ID’s based on your name. We recommend that you choose one of the suggested ID’s by **clicking on it**. (Note: Yahoo will for the first time start offering free e-mail accounts under two new domains: ymail and rocketmail. Both ymail.com and rocketmail.com already lead to the Yahoo Mail landing page; if you register your free e-mail account under one of these two new domain names, you’ll get the exact same features as you would with “standard” mail.Yahoo.com.)

If you choose to create your own user name, your e-mail address will be whatever-you-just-picked@yahoo.com. Keep in mind that millions of these addresses already exist just from Yahoo, and that Yahoo also filters out some new names that look too much like other usernames or names that seem inappropriate. As a result, your first pick might not be available. **Type something** in the Yahoo ID blank and click on the button to the right labeled, “Check” You might be lucky and get a username that is available, or you might have to try again. **If you absolutely cannot think of anything else, type your first and last name without a space, and add a number onto the end if you have a common name. When you find an available username, your cursor will move to the password box.**

Then create a password. It needs to be at least six letters or numbers. Your password should be something you will recognize, but not your name or username. **Type your password on the line for Password, (it will appear as dots so nobody looking over your shoulder will see it) and then type it again on the Re-type Password line.**

You should write down both your username and password. Keep your password in a safe place (like your wallet) until you have it memorized. If you forget your username, you will not be able to access your mail. If you lose your password, it is a lot of trouble to get back in. **(Write down your username and password right now.)**

However, there is a way to recover both your username and your password, which involves the Security Questions in the next section. **Leave Alternate Email blank. Choose a question from each dropdown list for Security Questions, and type the answer to it on the next line. Be sure to pick questions to which you definitely know the single right answer. Both security questions must be chosen and answered.**

To recover a forgotten ID or password, go to Yahoo's website, and click on the Mail button. Click on the words "Forgot your ID or password?" and you will be directed through a series of questions based on what you are entering on this registration form and your Security Question. If you give them the correct answer, they will change your password to let you re-enter your e-mail profile or mail you your username. The question they ask you, and the correct answer, are what you have just entered.

The final item in the form is the squiggly letters box (called a Captcha code). Yahoo wants you to retype the letters that appear in the text box above it. The reasons for this are complicated, but are related to hackers who use a computer to make hundreds of free e-mail addresses which they can send junk mail and advertisements from. Their computers can't read those letters, so it can't complete the sign-up process by itself. All you need to know is that you have to **type the letters in the box. Do not worry about remembering these letters later.**

At this point the form is complete. If you can agree to be a reasonable adult about the use of your e-mail, **click on the Do You Agree? check box at the bottom of the page. Then click the Create My Account button.** You should then be linked to a screen that indicates your registration is complete. **Print this page and keep in a safe location. Print from the file menu. Do not press the Print Account Details.** It contains your userID, security questions and answers.

Whew. Finally.

Click "Continue" Do not select the button to install Yahoo Toolbar. When your email window opens, a series of explanatory boxes will pop up outlining features of the Yahoo!Mail window. **If you do not wish to read these boxes, x- out of the second box that appears. To progress through the series, click on "continue" or "next" until you reach the box with the "Get Started" button. Clicking there will return you to your email window. Click on the words "Mail Classic" and then click on the "Switch to Yahoo Mail Classic" button.** (In the computer lab, we use and support the use of this viewing window). **Finally, locate your name in the upper-right part of the screen and click on "Sign out."** (Note: just clicking on the X button does not sign you out.) **Once you have signed out, press the X button to close the window.**

Logging into e-mail

The first thing that you need to know is how to log into your email account. **Open Internet Explorer. Go to www.yahoo.com, click on the Mail button, and locate the two blanks for Yahoo ID and Password. Type in your ID and password, (you do not need @yahoo.com on the end for your ID, since Yahoo knows this part; however, if your ID is @ymail.com or @rocketmail.com, you will have to type the complete ID) and click on the Sign In button.** If you are working in the Computer Lab, you should not click on the checkbox for Keep Me Signed In.

Reading new mail

In the middle of the screen, it will say “You have 1 unread message(s): Inbox (1).” **Click on the button on the left side of the screen that says Check Mail.** This will take you to your in-box, which will list any e-mails you have received.

The inbox lists all mail you have received and not deleted. There should be one new message. The sender should be Yahoo!, the subject should be Welcome to Yahoo!, and the date or time sent. This is useful information to you for recognizing which e-mails are important. There is a lot of junkmail on the Internet, even more than in the real world since junkmail senders don't have to pay for printing and postage on the internet. **To read your new message from Yahoo, click on the subject, Welcome to Yahoo!**

Scroll down to look at the message. Then scroll back up near the top where you can see the headings. The top section of the actual e-mail will list the date the e-mail was sent, whom it was from, what it was about (subject,) and whom it was sent to. You will see your own e-mail address there; however, sometimes there will be other e-mail addresses besides your own, which indicates that this message was sent to multiple people. It is also important to note that most e-mail does not look fancy like this one does. E-mail is normally just plain text.

Sending new mail

At the top, next to the Check Mail button, is another button marked Compose. Click on the Compose button. The new screen that appears will be for sending your own e-mail. *(Note: On some e-mail services, this button will say “New Mail” rather than “Compose”.)*

On the To: line, you will need to enter an e-mail address. **If you are working on this guide independently in the Computer Lab, type your own e-mail address in its entirety.** (This direction sounds weird, but you can actually send mail to yourself. You will want an e-mail to open in the next section to practice with, so this is an easy way to also be sure you will receive a new e-mail.) **On the subject line, type something that will tell the reader what this e-mail will be about, so they have reason to look at it. In this case, use “My First Email”. Next, click in the large white box below that and type your message. You can type whatever you like for your message.**

Finally, locate a button marked Send. There is one at the top and one at the bottom of the page. **Click on Send.** The computer will notify you that the e-mail has been sent to your target.

Replying to mail

Return to your in-box by clicking on Check Mail. Open an e-mail you have received other than the one from Yahoo by clicking on the subject of the e-mail. If you do not have another e-mail, you will need to get somebody to send you one, or send one to yourself.

Press the Reply button above the e-mail. This will take you to a screen that looks very much like the Compose screen. In fact, it is the Compose screen, but some information has already been filled in. The address field will have the source of your original e-mail, and the subject and original e-mail will be in the subject and body sections...with two slight exceptions.

The subject line will now start with Re:, which stands for REgarding. That is the quick cue that this is a reply to a previous e-mail. Also, the body has some kind of indicator that the lines from the original mail are quoted, usually a vertical line down the left in Yahoo's mail. Typically, you will write your own message above or below this area, and leave the old message for reference. **Once you have added the message you want to add, press the Send button.**

Deleting mail

There are two ways to delete mail. If you are already viewing an e-mail, there is a delete button along the strip at the top where the reply button is located. However, the easier way is from within the in-box.

Go to your in-box, and notice that each message has a checkbox on the left side. **Click on the checkmark to select the e-mail(s) you wish to delete, and then press the delete button at the top.**

You should delete any e-mail you have read, unless you have specific reason to want it later. Your in-box is supposed to only be for new messages. Do not allow hundreds or even thousands of old e-mails to build up because they were never deleted.

Introducing folders

For organizational purposes, e-mail will use several different folders. The in-box is the folder you have used, but there are several others.

- The outbox is the holding bin for new messages until they go out. Yahoo users will not have an outbox because it sends immediately.
- The sent folder is a record of everything that you have sent.
- The drafts folder is for e-mails you were writing, but needed to stop and save before sending them.
- The trash folder is for deleted mail. Depending on your e-mail provider, the trash may empty itself routinely, so the main purpose of the trash folder is to recover something deleted accidentally.
- The spam folder is a secondary inbox. Yahoo's servers will inspect your new mail to decide if it looks like a real mail or junk mail. The incoming mail that it decides is junk mail will go to your spam. Yahoo is not always right, so it is good to check your spam occasionally, but normally you will just empty this folder.

You can also make your own folders. **Next to the list of folders, click on Add.** You will get a dialog box asking you for a name. **Type the name, press OK,** and you will then have a storage folder you can move e-mails to that you wish to keep. (This is done by checking the e-mails in the inbox just as you did when you were deleting them, only this time, you click on the “Move” button instead.)

Sending Attachments

Another comparison to real mail is the act of sending a package. In the computer’s case, the term “package” refers to another file you want to send with the e-mail. We call those *attachments*.

To send an attachment, **begin composing a new e-mail. Fill out the header information, and put a message in the body. (Again, if you’re working by yourself, send the e-mail to yourself.) Before you press Send, click on the button above the body marked “Attach Files.”**

The new screen that appears will ask which files to attach. Since the text boxes want the name and location of the file in computer-ese, **click the browse button to search for the intended file instead. Choose one of your files from a previous class, and press the Open button in the corner.** This will fill out the line you browsed on. You can add up to 5, or even more, files to a single e-mail if you like, but for now just **click on the “Attach Files” button to go forward with attaching the file you chose. After a moment, the computer will have finished uploading the files to Yahoo, and will return to the compose window.**

At this point, note that just above the body is a small paper clip with the filename next to it, and the size of the file. This means your file is indeed attached, and when you press the send button, the file will go out with your message. **Press Send.**

Receiving Attachments

Receiving attachments is not much more difficult than receiving an e-mail either, with one slight possible exception. When you see an e-mail in your inbox with a paper clip next to it, that is an indication to you that this e-mail has an attachment. E-mails with an attachment, will offer an option to view, open, and/or save the file that has come with the message.

Open an e-mail with an attachment. If you do not have one already, send yourself an e-mail with an attachment. (Note: If you have sent yourself an e-mail with an attachment, it may be in your spam folder instead of your inbox). The actual attachments are listed in the light gray bar right above the body of the e-mail.

Some attachments can be previewed. If you have a document file attached, you can **click on the word “preview” to get a quick glimpse at what is in the document.** Previewing cannot be done with all file types. **Press the back button to return to your e-mail.**

If you **click on the actual filename,** you will be given the option to download that file. Click on “Download attachment” to get a dialog window to Open or to Save. Clicking on open will immediately cause the computer to attempt to open that file. Clicking on save will prompt the computer to ask you where to save the file. **Click on save, and save the file onto your flash drive.**

Cautions about file attachments

A virus is a computer program that is meant to cause harm to your computer. Typically there are only two ways to get a virus. It is possible to get a virus from visiting suspicious websites, but the more frequent source of viruses is from e-mail attachments.

However, not all e-mail attachments are bad! The trick is in learning when an e-mail is likely to be a virus. While viruses usually have a file extension of .exe, the simplest rule to follow about e-mails is: **When you don't know the person sending the e-mail, or the e-mail doesn't seem to be about anything and has an attachment, don't open the e-mail. Just delete it.** If you follow this simple rule, you should probably never have to deal with viruses.

Exiting your e-mail

If you are using Yahoo or another web-based e-mail service, you will need to sign out. In the upper-right corner of the main window, there should be the words "Sign Out." **Click on Sign Out, and then close the window.**