

Delete Emails from the Gmail Server from within Outlook

Notice: This applies only to Gmail IMAP accounts accessed with Outlook. The following instructions and screen shots are for Outlook 2019, but is applicable to many other versions of Outlook.

Warning: This procedure will delete emails from the Gmail server and if you have not saved the emails to a different location from that account's IMAP folders, the emails will be lost. This procedure was designed for those users of a Gmail IMAP account that transfer the emails they want to keep to an Outlook Data File (.pst) which is kept on their HDDs, and want to delete all the emails on the server including the copies of the emails they transferred without having to perform these deletions on the Gmail web site.

Special Notice: If you desire to have all your emails transferred to an Outlook Data File to keep on your HDDs, you should transfer all the emails from the server to your Outlook Data file BEFORE following these instructions.

What

With the default settings for a Gmail IMAP account that is set up in Outlook a user cannot delete emails from the Gmail server except those emails in the Spam folder. Outlook may indicate that an email will be "permanently" deleted, but a copy of all emails not put in the Spam folder remain on the Gmail server. Outlook doesn't even add the Gmail IMAP folder (All Mail) which stores a copy of all non-spam emails to list of IMAP folders for that account. You will need access to Gmail's All Mail folder in order to delete all emails from the Gmail server. The following instructions will make changes to Gmail server and Outlook settings, add the All Mail folder to the list of folders in Outlook, and provide a procedure that will delete any email from the Gmail server from within Outlook.

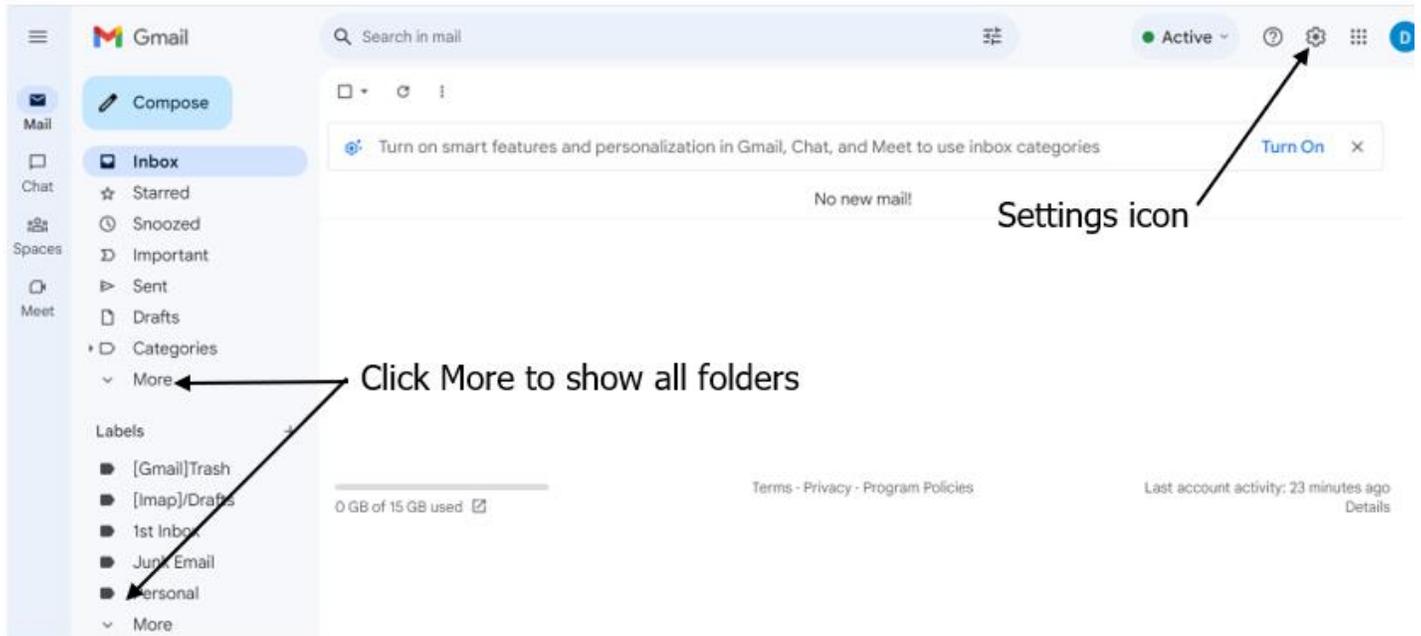
Why

The IMAP mail protocol of keeping the emails on the server so the emails can be accessible to different devices and users may be very functional for business or team usage, but is not so advantageous to an individual user that has been accustomed to keeping the emails on their own HDDs and not keeping any of their emails on the server. An individual user can create their own Outlook Data File to transfer emails that come into the IMAP account Inbox to these Outlook Data File folders. Having a copy of the emails you want safely stored on your own HDDs there is no reason to leave copies of those emails on a mail server. A risk of your emails being compromised no matter how small a risk vs no emails on a server to become compromised is a decision each user has to make. A user can go to the Gmail web site, log into their account to see the IMAP folders, and delete emails from the Gmail server on the web site; but it would be much easier to be able to delete all emails from the Gmail server from within Outlook and not have to use the Gmail web site. Here's how.

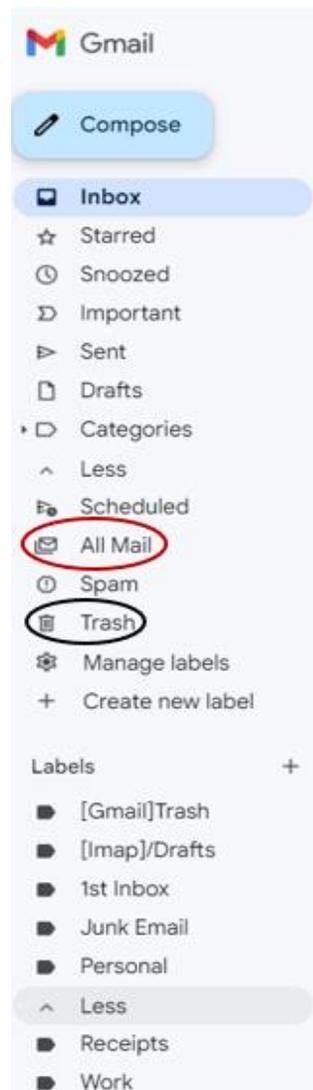
How

Step 1 - Gmail Server Changes

Access your Gmail IMAP account thru the Gmail web site. On a standard setup clicking this [link](#) will open Chrome directly to your account on the Gmail web site as in the image below. If does not open to your account it will open to the login page for Gmail to gain access thru the login page.



Click the down arrow next to both Mores to show all IMAP folders. Note the location of the Settings icon. After clicking More, all the folders will display as shown below.



Note the All Mail folder and the Trash folder.

In order to delete an email from the Gmail server you must follow Gmail's procedure and rules as follows:

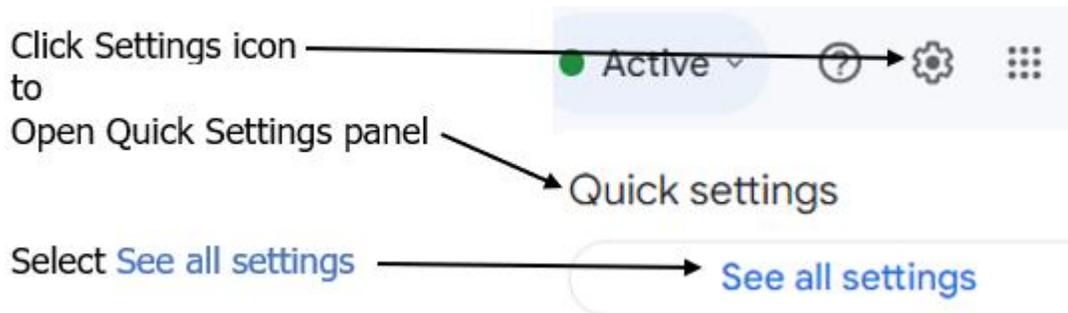
- First delete the email from the standard IMAP folders such as Inbox or Important folders which actually transfers the email to the Trash folder. You can also just Transfer the email to the Trash folder.
- A second copy of all emails (Gmail calls it an archive copy) not in the Spam folder is in the All Mail folder. Deleting an email in the All Mail folder actually transfers the email to the Trash folder. If you "delete" an email archive copy in the All Mail folder that the email has not been deleted from the Inbox folder or Important folder, the email will not transfer to the Trash folder and thus not deleted from the server.
- Delete the email from the Trash folder and the email and the archive copy will be totally deleted from the server.

The above procedure can be easily adjusted to include all emails in a folder including the All Mail folder or all emails on the server. Care must be taken when deleting emails in the All Mail folder as deletion of an email in the All Mail folder will delete the same emails in the Sent folder and any created IMAP folder that you saved emails to such as the Personal or Work folders.

Gmail's default settings make it even harder to delete an email from the server, so while we are at the Gmail web site for your IMAP account we will make some changes to Gmail's settings to make deleting emails easier.

Change Gmail 's Settings

- On your Gmail account web page click the settings icon indicated in the image above to open the Quick settings panel as shown below.



- Select [See all settings](#) to open Gmail's multi page settings as the headers of each tab shown below.



- There will be several changes on different pages of the Gmail settings. Before making a change to a setting, take a screenshot of the current settings to save; just in case you want to change the settings back to what they were.
- From the Settings tabs select *Forwarding and POP/IMAP* to display that page of settings.
- Scroll down to the *IMAP access:* settings as shown in the image below.

Settings

General Labels **Inbox** Accounts and Import Filters and Blocked Addresses **Forwarding and POP/IMAP** Add-ons Chat

POP download: **1. Status: POP is enabled** for all mail that has arrived since 8/6/09

- Enable POP for **all mail** (even mail that's already been downloaded)
- Enable POP for **mail that arrives from now on**
- Disable POP**

2. When messages are accessed with POP archive Gmail's copy

3. Configure your email client (e.g. Outlook, Eudora, Netscape Mail)
Configuration instructions

IMAP access: **Status: IMAP is enabled**
(access Gmail from other clients using IMAP)

- Enable IMAP**
- Disable IMAP

When I mark a message in IMAP as deleted:

- Auto-Expunge on - Immediately update the server. (default)
- Auto-Expunge off - Wait for the client to update the server.**

When a message is marked as deleted and expunged from the last visible IMAP folder:

- Archive the message (default)
- Move the message to the Trash**
- Immediately delete the message forever

Folder size limits

- Do not limit the number of messages in an IMAP folder (default)
- Limit IMAP folders to contain no more than this many messages

Configure your email client (e.g. Outlook, Thunderbird, iPhone)
Configuration instructions

Change to Auto-Expunge off

Change to Move the message to the Trash

- For the *When I mark a message in IMAP as deleted* setting, change to **Auto-Expunge off - Wait for the client to update the server** setting. This change will allow Outlook to delete emails from the server without interference from the Gmail server.
- For the *When a message is marked as deleted and expunged from the last visible IMAP folder:* setting, change to **Move the message to the Trash** setting. This change causes not only the email deleted from the folder being transferred to the Trash folder, but also the archival copy of that email in the All Mail folder is transferred to the Trash folder at the same time.
- Click the *Save Changes* button at the bottom of the page to save your changes.
- Next select the *Inbox* tab to display that page of settings as shown below.

Settings

General Labels **Inbox** Accounts and Import Filters and Blocked Addresses Forwarding and POP/IMAP Add-ons Chat and Meet Advanced Offline Theme

Deselect all categories to go back to your old inbox.

Reading pane: **Enable reading pane** - provides a way to read mail right next to your list of conversations, making mail reading and writing mail context.

Reading pane position

- No split
- Right of inbox
- Below inbox

Importance markers: **Show markers** - Show a marker (i) by messages marked as important.

- No markers**

Gmail analyzes your new incoming messages to predict what's important, considering things like how you've treated similar messages in the past, how directly the message is addressed to you, and many other factors. [Learn more](#)

Change to No markers

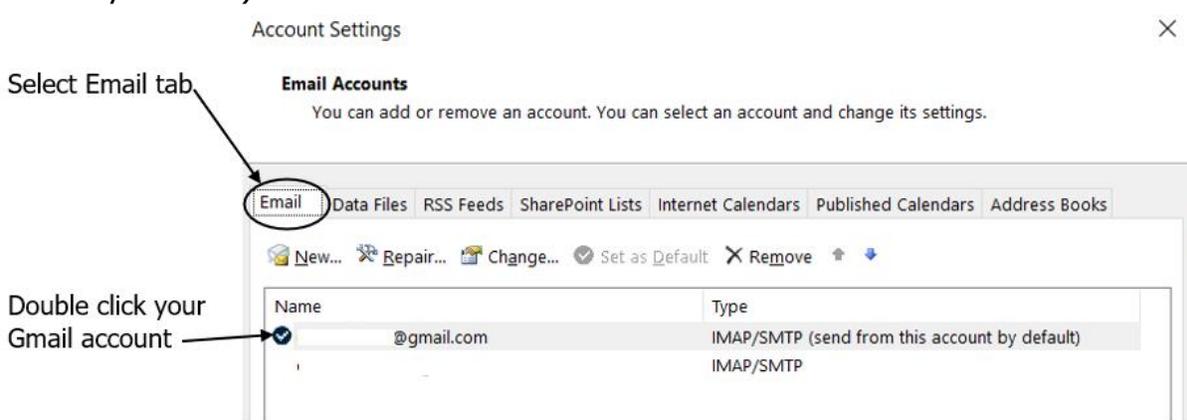
- Scroll down to the *Importance markers:* settings, change to **No markers**. This change will help limit the number of emails placed in the Important folder. This is a Gmail "smart" feature that marks the emails as "Important" and place them in the Important folder based upon your past actions with such emails. Emails in the Important folder must be deleted or transferred in order to be able to delete the archive copy in the All Mail folder. This "smart" feature can result in a lot of your routine emails in the Important folder and thus requiring extra steps to delete emails from the server.
- Click the *Save Changes* button at the bottom of the page to save your changes.

- While at the Gmail web site for your account, select the All Mail folder to see the contents of that folder. If you have never deleted emails from the All Mail folder, then every non-spam email you have received to that account since you started that account will be there. The same emails that Outlook said was “permanently” deleted. For some users this could be GBs of emails. Keep this in mind as we proceed to the next step and add the All Mail folder to Outlook which will have to download all those emails to Outlook in order to sync the All Mail folder. If you already have saved your emails to an Outlook Data File, cleaned out all the standard IMAP folders, and plan to delete the emails on the server; it is best to delete these emails in the All Mail folder on the web site and not have to download GBs of emails that you plan to delete.

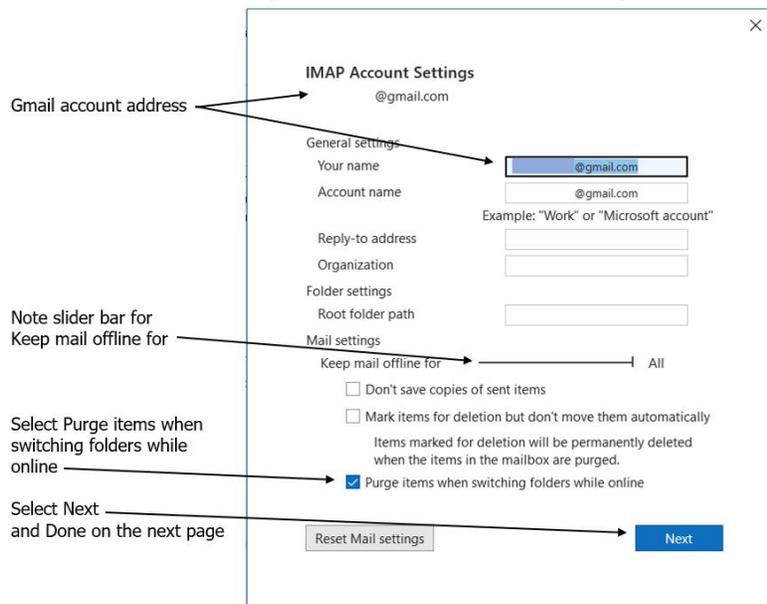
Step 2 - Outlook Changes

Having changed Gmail server settings to turn the Auto Expunge off on the server (Outlook calls Expunge Purge), we need to set Outlook to purge (expunge) automatically as follows:

- Open Outlook. Select *File > Account Settings* > *Account Settings* to open the Account Settings window OR use the keyboard shortcut *Alt + F, I, S, A* (press and hold the *Alt* key, press the *F* key, release both keys, press the *I* key once, press the *S* key once, and press the *A* key once). This will open the Accounts Settings window as shown below: (email addresses removed for security reasons)



- Make sure the Email tab showing your email account(s) is displayed. Place the pointer on the Gmail account and double click to open that account’s settings window as shown below.



- Under the *Mail settings:* section, select **Purge items when switching folders while online.** The change will actually “delete” & purge the deleted items upon leaving a folder. The delete will transfer the email to the Trash folder and the purge will move the copy of the deleted email in the All Mail folder to the Trash folder as well sync those actions on the Gmail server. Deleting emails in the Trash folder will delete all copies of that email from the Gmail server and Outlook.
- Before leaving this settings window, note the sliding bar adjustment setting for the IMAP account by the statement *Keep mail offline for.* This scale is in time and the default is 12 months. If you plan to move all your emails on the Gmail server to an Outlook Data file stored on your HDDs, then move this bar to the far right until the setting says *All* as it does in the image above.
- Once you have the settings changed, click the *Next* button to go to the next page which states that your settings have been updated. Click *Done* to close this window.
- Close the Account Settings window.

The above changes to the Gmail server and Outlook will delete the emails from the Gmail server when you delete an email in a folder, switch folders, and then empty the Trash folder in Outlook (which can be set to Empty upon closing Outlook). However, emails that you transfer to another folder such as your Outlook Data file are not “deleted” so a copy of that transferred email remains in the All Mail folder on the Gmail server and the above changes will not delete those emails from the server. In addition Gmail has some specific rules that prevents some emails from being deleted from the server. In order to delete these transferred emails and be able to delete **all** emails from the Gmail server from within Outlook, the All Mail folder must be accessible from within Outlook and a specific procedure followed in deleting the emails.

The next set of instructions will add the All Mail folder to the folders displayed in Outlook and sync that folder with the Gmail server so what is in that All Mail folder on the web site will be in the All Mail folder in Outlook. If you have a lot of emails in the web All Mail folder, it could take some time to download all those emails to sync with the Outlook folder.

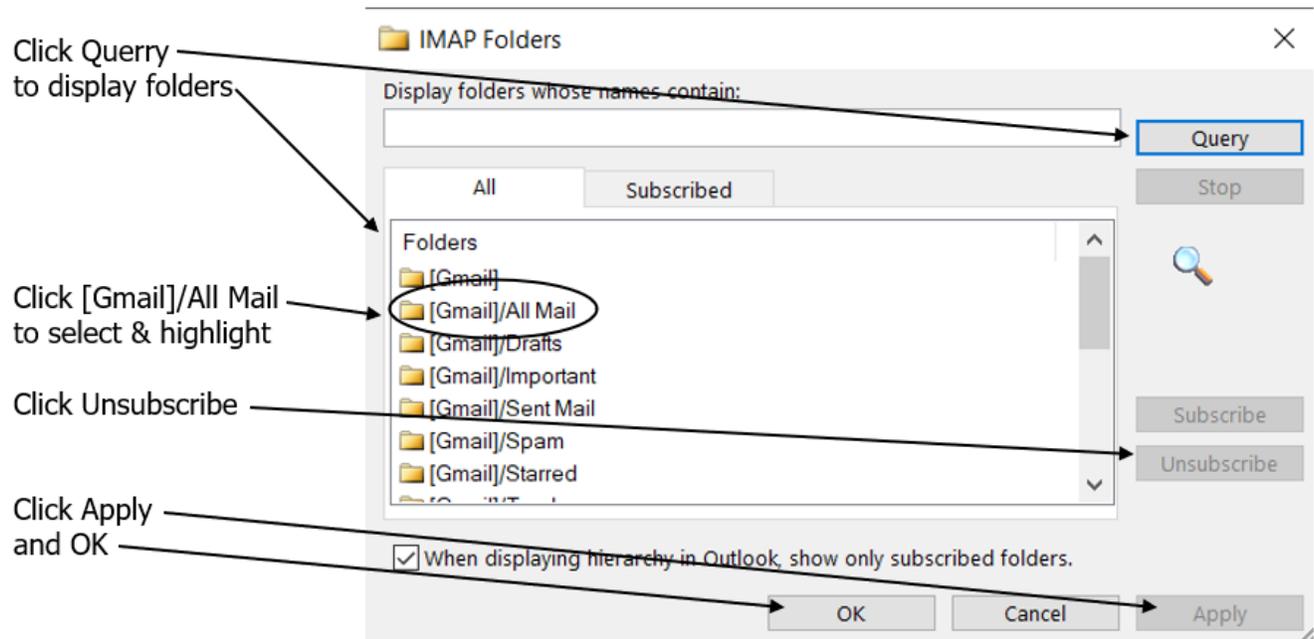
Add All Mail Folder to Outlook

- Open Outlook. In the Navigation pane on the left under the Gmail account address click the arrow next to [Gmail] to expand and show the IMAP folders for the account (if not already expanded) as shown below.



- Place the mouse pointer over [Gmail] and right click. From the context menu select *New Folder* which will place a box under [Gmail] with a flashing cursor awaiting a name for this new folder. Name the folder **All Mail** exactly as is and without any extra text or spaces. Press the Enter key and the new All Mail folder will be in the list of folders.

- Place the mouse pointer over [Gmail] and right click. From the context menu select *IMAP Folders* which will open the IMAP Folders window. Press the *Query* button to display the list of IMAP folders that can be synced as shown below.



- Click the [Gmail]/All Mail folder to highlight it. This will cause the Subscribe and Unsubscribe button to become active. Press the *Unsubscribe* button. Press the *Apply* button to apply that change. The folder icon to the left of the [Gmail]/All Mail folder will disappear. Click the [Gmail]/All Mail folder to highlight it again. Press the *Subscribe* button. Press the *Apply* button and then the *OK* button to close the window. This unsubscribe and then subscribe action is to reactivate the server to a folder that has not responded before (aka: reset the sync).
- Click the All Mail folder in the Navigation pane and the contents of that folder on the server will display in Outlook.

Now Outlook and the Gmail server are all setup to delete any and all emails from the Gmail server from within Outlook....as long as the correct procedure is followed.

Step 3 - Procedure to Delete Emails on Gmail Server with Outlook

- As before you made any changes, you can delete emails in the Spam folder in Outlook which will delete those emails from the Gmail server. The Spam folder is a totally separate folder and not affected by the actions in the other IMAP folders. I keep the Spam folder empty to make it easier to review new emails in the Spam folder in case an email that I want got placed in the Spam folder.
- After cleaning the Spam folder, start with the Inbox for the Gmail IMAP account. Delete or transfer to your Outlook Data file folders the emails in that folder resulting in an empty Inbox folder.
- If you have sent or replied to an email since the last time you deleted all emails in the All Mail folder, that message will be in the Sent Mail folder. If you want to save that sent/reply email you must transfer it to your Outlook Data file as deletion of that email from the All Mail folder will delete that email from the Sent Mail folder and the server.
- Delete or transfer any emails in the Important folder. Leaving an email in the Important folder will prevent that email from being deleted from the All Mail folder and the Gmail server.

- Transfer any emails in any of the IMAP folders that you want to save to your Outlook Data file.
- The emails you delete from the folders are transferred to the Trash folder along with transferring the archival copy of that email from the All Mail folder to the Trash folder.
- The emails that were transferred and some conversation type emails that were deleted will still have an archival copy in the All Mail folder. Highlight the All Mail folder and right click to display the context menu. Select *Delete All* which will open a box stating that the emails will be moved to the Deleted Items folder (which is the Trash folder) which you acknowledge.
- Now that all emails and archival copies of the emails are in the Trash folder, right click and select *Empty Folder*. Acknowledge that the emails will be permanently deleted and the emails will be deleted from Outlook and the Gmail server.
- After moving all emails to the Trash folder and if you have Outlook set to empty the Deleted Items folder upon closing, then closing Outlook will delete the emails in the Trash folder, but the Gmail server won't reflect this deletion until Outlook reopens and the folders sync.

Comments:

If you have a lot of emails stored in IMAP folders and wish to transfer those emails to an Outlook Data file (.pst), the easiest way is to archive the Outlook IMAP file (.ost). The archive file is a .pst file and can be used as your Outlook Data file.

If you do move your files from the IMAP account to your Outlook data file and then delete all those emails from the IMAP account and the server, be sure to Compact your .ost file to get back all that space on your HDD.