Read Email Faster with Outlook Reading Pane and Other Productivity Tips

Far more than just an email program, Microsoft Outlook delivers essential tools to help users make the most out of their time at work. By adjusting options for the Outlook reading pane, folder pane, and to-do bar, users read email faster and see at a glance upcoming appointments, frequent contacts and key tasks.

Typically, when users open Outlook, they see the folders pane on the far left, followed by the message preview area, and reading pane if displayed. The optional to-do bar shows on the far right. Because everyone works differently, Outlook includes several options to customize that dashboard.
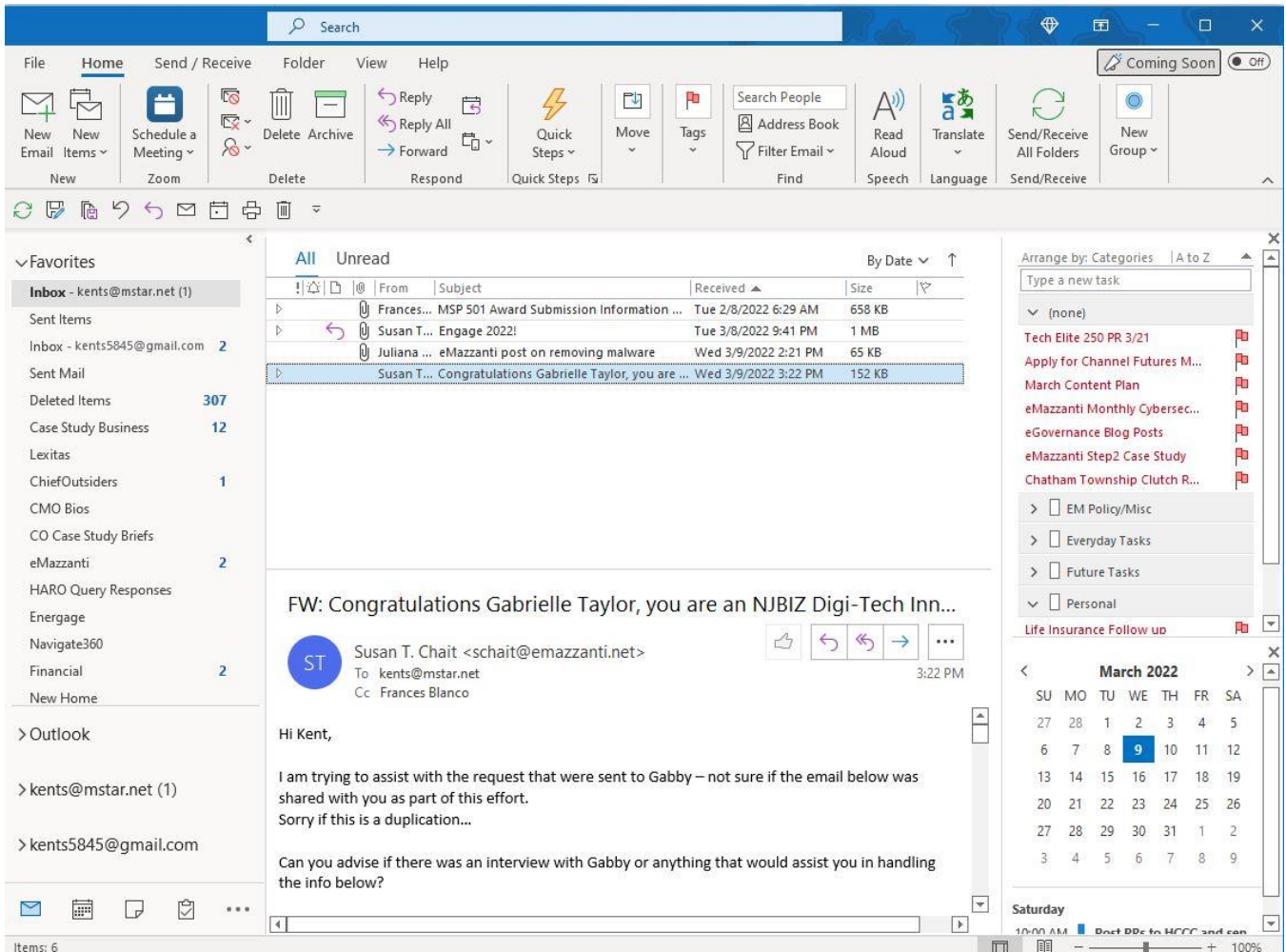
For instance, you can specify how email folders display, thus minimizing distractions and improving productivity. You can also choose if and how to display the reading pane and what items show in the to-do bar.

Read Email Faster with the Message Reading Pane

Outlook provides an optional Message Reading Pane that displays the full email selected. Using it saves time because you don't have to open any emails to see what's in them. So, you just look and then delete, and the next one pops into the reading pane. Repeating the process gets you quickly through a long Inbox. It's a big timesaver!

To read email faster, just click View > Reading Pane, then choose to display the reading pane to the right of message preview or below message preview.

In addition, the message preview pane displays to the right of the folder pane, showing items in the selected folder. By clicking View > Message Preview, users can specify whether the preview shows just the subject line or up to three lines of the message.

Adding Priority Folders to the Top of the Outlook Folder Pane

The folder pane displays on the far left of the screen. Outlook includes several options that allow users to tweak the display to help them work more efficiently. For example, by default, the top of the folder pane displays Favorites, and you can customize this section to show priority items.

- **To add an email folder to the Favorites section** – Right-click the folder and click Add to Favorites on the context menu that appears. Or just drag the folder to the Favorites section. You can choose to add folders to Favorites for key customers, current projects or other priorities.

- **To remove an email folder from Favorites** – Right-click the folder and click Remove from Favorites.

Using Search Folders and Rules to Streamline Email

Outlook search folders and email rules provide additional tools for improving productivity. For instance, search folders provide a handy way to easily locate emails from a specific user or about a specific topic. And once users create a search folder, they can add it to the Favorites section as described above.

To create a search folder:

1. On the Folder menu, click New Search Folder.

2. In the dialog box, you can choose from several options, including mail from specific people, mail with specific words or mail with attachments.

3. Depending on the option selected, enter information in the Customize Search Folder field. For example, if you selected "mail from specific people," specify the email addresses to search for. Then click OK.

Similarly, Outlook rules help users declutter their Inbox by diverting emails of lesser priority. For example, you can create a folder to hold emails on which you are only included as a CC. Then you can add a rule to automatically send items "where my name is not in the To box" to the new folder.

Customizing the To-Do Bar to Drive Productivity

On the to-do bar, you can choose to display a snapshot of key productivity items. For instance, you can show your calendar and upcoming appointments, as well as tasks and favorite contacts.

To define how the to-do bar displays, click View > To-Do Bar. Select the options you want to display. You can choose to display people, tasks and/or calendar, and they will appear in the order you select them. You can further customize the People and Tasks section of the to-do bar, as follows:

- **People** – The contacts you have designated as favorites appear in the People section. To add a contact to this section, use the Search bar at the top of the box and search for the person. Then right-click the person's name and click Add to Favorites. To remove a person from Favorites, right-click their name and click Remove from Favorites.

- **Tasks** – By default, tasks display in ascending order by due date. To change the display order, click Arrange By at the top of the task list in the to-do bar. On the context menu, click Arrange By and choose from among the following sort criteria: categories, start date, due date, folder, type and importance.

Read Email Faster and More Time-Saving Outlook Tips

Outlook provides numerous options to help you work smarter. For additional Outlook tips, contact the email experts at Messaging Architects. With deep expertise in Outlook and email migrations, our consultants will help you unlock powerful features to drive collaboration and productivity.