



Including Email into Your Productivity System

Incorporating email into your productivity system is critical because, for most of us, it is a key source of input. Now that you've thought about your system in terms of categories, and you've figured out how to incorporate each category into your system, let's look at email.

First, you must consider how you will take the items that will come into e-mail and feed them into your overall productivity system. Here are some things to think about:



How will you keep track of these tasks? If your system is a paper system, how will they get transferred to the paper? Or, should they be kept separate?



When will you process these tasks? If you think of email as an input like other inputs, you need to have a time and place that you process the input. Unfortunately, most people let email happen to them. You need to be the one in charge. When will you process your email inbox? Is once per day enough? Three times?



When you process your email, how do you want to distinguish each category? How do you know that this email is going to take time and that email needs to be delegated? I suggest that you use categories, and I've provided some examples of where to find this in a couple of different email systems below.

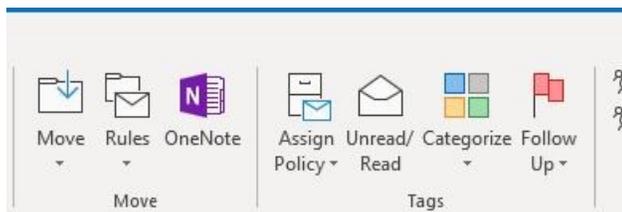


What does your folder structure need to be in order to allow you to easily find reference materials? When you are first starting to do this, I suggest that you keep it simple. Reference materials are just that—reference—and the likelihood that you will need to reference something frequently means that rather than categorizing everything, you can just stick it all into a reference file and search that file when the need arises.

As you think about how you will incorporate email into your productivity system, you may want to use flags to help you track the categories of tasks that you've defined.

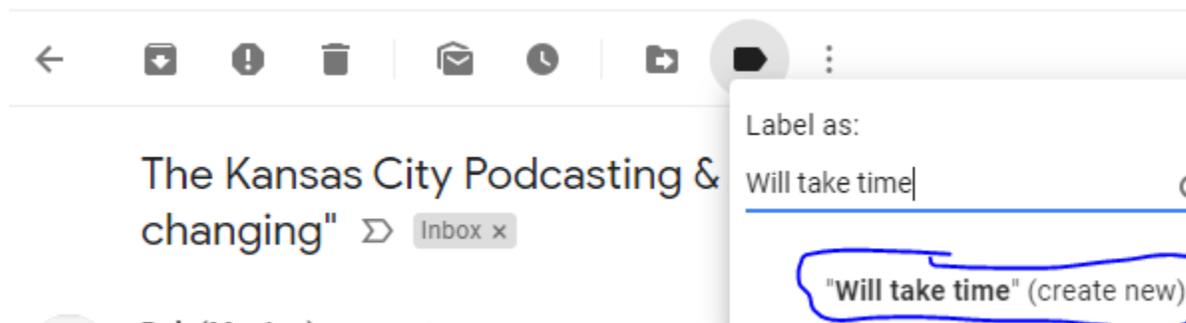
Here is how to use flags in Outlook:

Find Categorize in the menu bar. There are several pre-defined colors that you can rename to whatever label you want to define. Once you've defined it, when an email comes in, you can select a category for each one.



Here is how to use flags in Google:

Google calls them labels, and you can define as many labels as you need. When you are in the email, you simply click on the label icon and select the label that you want to designate. If it is a new label, you would type the label you want to create and select **create new**. For example, in the screen shot below, I'm creating a new label called 'will take time' to assign to this email.



When you want to find emails that fall into a certain label, you simply search for the label.

