

Managing your e-mail: How to avoid going over quota

The College's computer servers are a shared resource with a limited amount of capacity. Just as in other areas of life at St. Norbert College, all members of the College community are expected to be respectful of the needs of other members of the community, and to use these resources fairly and responsibly.

In the context of computer servers, the term "quota" refers to the portion of the storage space allocated to each individual. On the Zimbra server, each individual has a default quota of 300MB. This quota includes everything you have stored on the Zimbra server: e-mail (**all** of your folders, not just your Inbox), address books, task lists, and briefcase files. If you exceed your quota, e-mail messages sent to you will be returned to the sender and you will not receive those messages.

Quota warnings

When you reach 85% of your quota, the Zimbra server will start sending you messages to warn you. Those messages are from the "postmaster" and have the subject line "Quota warning." With the default quota of 300MB, the warnings start when you reach 255MB and continue every 2 hours until you reduce your space usage to below 85%. If you receive these messages from the server, then you need to clean out your mail or briefcase files in order to free up some space.

How much space are you using, and what's using it?

In the Zimbra web interface, in the upper right corner below your name, you will see a quota bar that indicates how much of your space you're using on the Zimbra sever. Hold your mouse over that bar to see a pop-up indicating exactly how much space you're using. To see the sizes of individual folders, hold your mouse over them. To see the sizes of individual messages, just look at the Size column. Click on the "Size" heading at the top of the Size column to sort the messages by size.

Bytes & kilobytes & megabytes, oh my!

The terminology for file sizes can be confusing, so let's try to put it in perspective. To start with, 1MB (megabyte) = 1000KB (kilobytes). Short, plain text e-mail messages are 1-2KB, and longer ones are 5-10KB. E-mail messages with formatting (bold, colors, etc.) are larger. So the default SNC e-mail quota of 300MB (300,000KB) is enough for between 30,000-300,000 regular messages! So how could anyone ever run out of space, right? One word: attachments. Messages with attachments are exponentially larger than plain text messages. A one-page Word document with no pictures will be 25-50KB, a two-page Word document with pictures will be around 250KB, and longer documents and other types of files like PowerPoint, PDF, pictures, etc. can range anywhere from a few kilobytes to many megabytes. When cleaning out mail folders, always look for messages with attachments, especially large ones.

Strategies for managing e-mail

Here are some strategies to help you manage your e-mail & reduce the amount of space it uses on the server.

If you don't need it...

Only keep what you really need. That sounds obvious, but many people keep lots & lots of things that they don't need and never even look at. If you've been keeping messages from a certain mailing list or newsletter, but you never seem to have time to read them, you know deep down that you never will (would they even be relevant anymore?). If you never read them, unsubscribe! And obviously you don't need to keep all of those old messages about long-ago sales at various stores & web sites, Facebook notices, etc.

Getting rid of attachments

Sometimes you may have messages whose attachment(s) you've already saved somewhere (like on your J drive), but you don't want to delete the message because there's something in the body of it that you still need to keep. In these cases, you can delete the attachments from a message but still keep the message itself, which can really help save a lot of space. Just click on the Remove link next to the attachment name, then click Yes to confirm. Note that once you click OK, you can't undo it.

Get a personal account

We highly recommend getting a separate personal e-mail account for your non-SNC related mail. These days most people get lots of e-mail from stores, web sites, and online services like Facebook, in addition to friends and family who often send pictures and the ever-present “funny stuff.” Although it’s okay to use your SNC account for some personal e-mail, remember that the College’s computer resources are provided to support the educational mission of the College. If personal items are contributing to your quota problems, then you need to redirect some of that mail elsewhere. You may already have another account from your Internet service provider that you can use, and there are lots of free e-mail services, such as Gmail, which gives you tons of storage space.

Junk/spam folders

If you have filters that direct mail into a “Junk” or “Spam” folder, remember to regularly check that folder for false positives (legitimate mail) and empty it out. In the Zimbra web interface, don’t bother with the Junk button, because all that does is moves the messages to the Junk folder, and you then have to delete them from there. If any spam gets past the anti-spam server and lands in your Inbox, just delete it.

Avoid duplication

In back & forth e-mail exchanges, the replies usually contain the message that’s being replied to. Because of this, the last message in the exchange may contain the text of all of the previous messages (or at least the important parts). In these cases, you can delete all of the earlier messages & keep only the last one.

Clean up & take out the trash

The Zimbra web interface keeps the last 10 days’ worth of messages in the Trash folder, but you can delete them to free up space if needed. To do so, just right-click on the Trash folder and choose Empty Trash.

Sometimes if you delete and/or move a lot of messages using a program or device other than the Zimbra web interface, things can get out of sync. When working on cleaning out your mail folders, periodically stop and empty the Trash/Deleted folder and log out or close your e-mail program. This forces the program to refresh/synchronize with the server.

Using Local Folders (other e-mail programs)

If you still have problems staying within your quota even after following all of the above advice, you might want to consider moving some of your folders from the server to your Local Folders, which are stored on your computer’s hard drive (C drive). To do this you must use an e-mail program that would be locally-installed on your computer, such as Thunderbird, Eudora, Mail, Zimbra Desktop Client, etc. (available options vary by operating system). Anything stored in Local Folders will only be available from that computer, so do this with things that you know you’ll only need when in your office, things you’re keeping “just in case” you ever need them again, and things that aren’t that important, like your humor/jokes folder (how often do you really go back & look at those?).

Procedures for moving message to Local Folders will vary by program. Note that these programs are not supported by Technology Support Services, but we *may* be able to answer some questions about them.

Archiving by date

Another strategy that some people use is to archive older message by date. So for instance if a folder contains several years’ worth of messages, you could move all but the most recent year to Local folders. For instance, on the server you could have an “SNC” folder, and then under Local Folders you could have “SNC 2011,” “SNC 2010,” etc.

Assistance and questions

If you have any questions or need more information, contact the Help Desk at (920) 403-HELP (4357) or helpdesk@snc.edu. The Help Desk is for St. Norbert College account holders only.