

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 server-based folders, not just your Inbox), address books, task lists, and briefcase folders. If you exceed your quota, e-mail messages sent to you will be returned to the sender. You will not receive those rejected messages unless the sender sends them again when you are not over quota.

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 would start when you reach 255MB and continue every 2 hours until you reduce your space usage. 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

In the Zimbra web interface, in the upper left corner under the Zimbra logo, you will see your name and 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.

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.

Junk/spam folders

If you're filtering 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.

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 never even look at. If you've been keeping messages from a certain mailing list/listserv or newsletter, but you never seem to have time to read them, you know deep down that you never will (and if you did, would they even be relevant anymore?).

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. To set Thunderbird to empty the Trash automatically, go to Tools – Account Settings. On the left side, click on Server Settings. Check both “Clean up (“Expunge”) Inbox on Exit” and “Empty Trash on Exit.” Click OK.

Sometimes if you delete &/or move a lot of messages, things can get out of sync & problems can arise. When working on cleaning out your mail folders, periodically stop and empty the Trash/Deleted folder, compact the folders (if your e-mail program offers that option), and log out of your e-mail. This allows all of the files on the mail server to be updated and synchronized. To do this in Thunderbird, go to File – Empty Trash, and then File – Compact Folders.

Getting rid of attachments (Thunderbird)

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. With Thunderbird v. 1.5 and later, you can delete the attachments from a message but still keep the message itself, which can really help save a lot of space. In Thunderbird, just right-click on the attachment name and choose Delete, then click OK to confirm. Note that once you click OK, you can't undo it.

Using Local Folders (Thunderbird)

Probably the easiest thing to do to save the most space on the server is to move some of your folders from the server to your Local Folders, which are stored on your computer's hard drive (C drive). Anything stored under 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 jokes folder (how often do you really go back & look at those?).

To do this in Thunderbird, just drag the folder from the top section (which is on the mail server) down to the “Local Folders” heading and it will be copied there. When it's done copying, check to make sure all of the messages were successfully copied (click on the new local folder), then delete the original folder from the server in the top section (right-click on the folder & choose Delete Folder). You can have Thunderbird automatically put your Sent mail under Local Folders, but again, then you'd only be able to get at it from your office computer, not from home. To do this, go to Tools – Account Settings. On the left side, click on Copies & Folders. On the right side, at the top, under “When sending messages, automatically: ...Place a copy in: ...“Sent” Folder on:”, change the drop-down box to “Local Folders.”

Archiving by date (Thunderbird)

Another strategy that some people use is to archive some older things 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 2008,” “SNC 2007,” 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 students and employees only.