

Thunderbird Tips & Tricks


This handout is based on Thunderbird version 2.0. If you have an older version (see Help – About Mozilla Thunderbird), you can update it by going to <http://www.mozilla.com>.

Customizing your message display

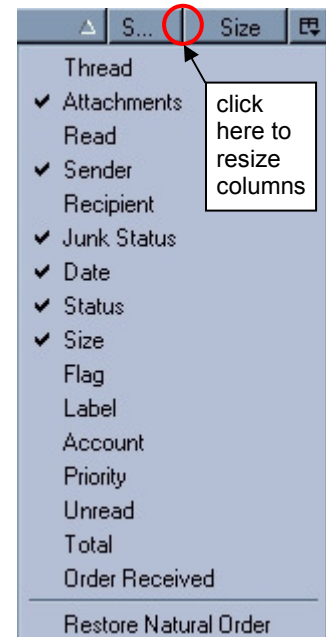
Change the size of the panes

Thunderbird has 3 panes: the folder list on the left, the message list on the top right, and the message pane on the bottom right. To make the folder column wider or narrower, or make the message list longer or shorter, just put your cursor over the bar in between the columns, and when your cursor turn into a double arrow (↔, ↑↓), click and drag the bar.

Display more/less information about messages

By default, the message list pane displays columns for the subject, sender, and date of each message, as well as a few other columns. To view a list of other message properties which can be displayed (shown at right), click on the  button to the right of the column headings. Those with checkmarks next to them are currently being displayed. To add or remove one, just click once on it to check or uncheck it.

Once you've displayed the desired columns, you can resize them by placing your cursor on the dividing lines between the column headings (shown in picture at right) and dragging to the left or right. The columns can also be rearranged by dragging the column headings themselves to the left or right.



Sort messages

You can sort the messages in any folder by any of the available message properties (Date, Sender, Subject, Size, etc.), regardless of whether or not it is displayed. To sort by one of the columns already displayed, simply click on that column heading. Click on the same column heading a second time to reverse the order. The column heading with the arrow/triangle is the one currently being used. To sort by one of the message properties that is not currently displayed, go to View – Sort by and choose the desired item.

Advanced sorting: Grouping and threading

Several more advanced sorting options are available from the View menu under Sort by. The best way to understand these options is to try them; they're just different viewing options and can easily be undone.


- The “Threaded” option puts all messages and replies (those with “Re: <subject>”) together by subject. This may be useful for extended discussions where people have replied back & forth several times.
- The “Grouped By Sort” option puts all messages together by whatever criteria is currently being used to sort. For instance, if messages are sorted by Date, and “Grouped By Sort” is selected, the messages will be put into groups of Today, Yesterday, Last Week, and Old Mail. Each of those headings will have a plus sign next to it which is used to expand the group to view the individual messages.

Searching for messages

To search for messages in the current folder, type the search criteria in the search box in the upper right. Click on the magnifying glass icon to change the search criteria. A similar search box is available in the Address Book window. When you do a search, the message list will change to display only those messages that match your search criteria. To clear the search and return to the list of all messages, click the “X” button that appears in the search box (not shown). To do a more complex search using multiple criteria, right-click on the folder you want to search in (or, to search all folders, right-click on the account name at the top of the folder list) and choose Search Messages.



See how big your messages are

If the Size column is not already displayed, click on the  button to the right of the column headings (shown on pg. 1) and choose Size. You'll see a column showing the size of each message in kilobytes (KB). To sort the messages by size, click on the column heading that says "Size"; click it again to reverse the order.

Managing your e-mail

Filtering messages into folders

You can create filters to have Thunderbird automatically move messages that meet certain criteria to another folder or delete them. (Be very careful with filters that automatically delete messages, as it's possible to accidentally delete legitimate mail.) If you do this, you have to remember to periodically check and clean out the folders into which you're filtering messages. To create a filter:

1. Go to Tools – Message Filters.
2. Click the new button.
3. Give the filter a name, e.g., if you're filtering mail from a certain person, use the person's name.
4. In the drop-down box that says "Subject," choose the criterion by which you want to search. Again, if you're creating a filter for mail from a certain person, choose "From."
5. The center drop-down box says "contains" by default, which is what you'll probably use for most filters. Click the drop-down box to see the other options and choose one if necessary.
6. In the blank box to the right of the "contains" box, type the criteria by which you want to filter, e.g., the e-mail address of the person from whom you want to filter e-mail.
7. To add another criterion to this same filter, click the "+" button to add another line. Repeat steps 4-6.
8. In the bottom section, choose what you want the filter to do with the messages that meet the criteria specified above. You will see from the drop-down box that there are many options, but the most common one is probably "Move Message to." If you choose "Move Message to," use the next drop-down box to choose the folder to which you want the message(s) moved.
9. Click OK to complete the filter, then close the Message Filters window or add more filters if desired.

Using the Junk Mail Controls

With Thunderbird's built-in junk mail controls, you can train it to identify spam for you. When a message is identified as junk, a flame icon will appear next to the message (if you don't see it, you may need to display the Junk Status column using the procedure described on pg. 1). To mark a message as junk, click on the Junk button or on the dot in the "Junk Status" column. If Thunderbird incorrectly identifies a message as junk, click on the Not Junk button (that button only appears when you're on a message that's already marked as junk) or on the icon in the "Junk Status" column. Once messages are marked as junk, go to the Tools menu and choose Delete Mail Marked as Junk in Folder to delete them. You can also have Thunderbird automatically delete messages that you manually mark as junk, which saves a step (under Tools – Options – Privacy – Junk).

You can have Thunderbird automatically move all message it identifies as junk to a folder, but then you must remember to check that folder for legitimate mail & clean out the junk (Tools – Options – Privacy – Junk).

Saving space on the server

Get rid of attachments (but keep the messages)

Sometimes you may have a message whose attachment(s) you've already saved somewhere (like on your J drive or C 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. Did you know that you can delete the attachments from a message but still keep the message itself? This can really help save a lot of space! In Thunderbird (v. 1.5 and later), just right-click on the attachment name and choose Delete, then click OK to confirm.

Using Local Folders

Do you have e-mail messages or folders that you're keeping *just in case* you ever need them again? Do you have things saved that aren't really important, like all those jokes you get from your friends? Those types of

things are perfect candidates for Local Folders. Local Folders work just like regular folders, but they're stored on your computer's hard drive (C drive) instead of on the mail server, so they don't take up any of your quota space. The only down side is that Local Folders are on a specific computer, so anything stored in them will only be available from that computer.

To move a folder from the server to a Local Folder, just drag it 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). To create a new local folder, right-click on the "Local Folders" heading and choose New Folder.

If you have trouble living within your quota on the mail server, using Local Folders is probably the easiest thing you can do to free up the most space. If you have trouble with your Sent folder taking up too much space, you can have Thunderbird automatically save your Sent mail under Local Folders, but then you'd only be able to get at it from your office computer. 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" and click OK.

Misc. tips

Just drag it!

Not only can you move messages to different folders by dragging them, but you can also add attachments to messages by dragging them onto the header area of the message (where the From, To, & Subject lines are).

Right-click

In Thunderbird, there are usually several ways to accomplish a task, many of which are found on the right-click menus. Try right-clicking in various places (on messages, on folders, etc.) to see the available options.

Quickly add someone to your address book

To add an address to your address book quickly, just right-click on the address in the message window – either on the "From" line or anywhere in the body of the message – and choose Add to Address Book.

Use nicknames in your address book

If you assign a nickname to someone in your address book, when you type that nickname on the "To" line of a message, the address with that nickname will be the first thing on the list of choices Thunderbird brings up from your address book. All you have to do is type the nickname and press Enter.

Compact your mail folders

Periodically compacting folders allows all of the files on the mail server to be updated and synchronized. Sometimes if you delete &/or move a lot of messages, things can get out of sync & problems can arise. To do this in Thunderbird, go to File – Empty Trash, and then File – Compact Folders.

I wish I could...

If there's something that you wish Thunderbird could do, or do differently, there may be an "extension" that does it (you may want to ask the Help Desk first to make sure Thunderbird can't do it). Extensions are small add-ons that add new functionality. They can add anything from a toolbar button to a completely new feature. To get them, go to Tools – Add-ons and click the "Get Extensions" link in the bottom right corner. You will be taken to the area of the Mozilla web site where you can browse or search the available extensions and download them. Contact the Help Desk if you need assistance.

Assistance and Questions

If you have any questions or need more information, please call the Help Desk at (920) 403-HELP (4357), contact us via e-mail at helpdesk@snc.edu, or stop by the Help Desk in Cofrin 101. The Help Desk is for St. Norbert College students and employees only.