# Use the "Four Ds for Decision-Making" model

The "Four Ds for Decision-Making" model (4 Ds) is a valuable tool for processing email, helping you to quickly decide what action to take with each item and how to remove it from your Inbox.

The expanded Ribbon in Office 2010 is designed to help you quickly find the tools that you need to complete your tasks. Features are organized in logical groups collected together under tabs. You can also customize the Ribbon to include tabs you personalize to match your own style.
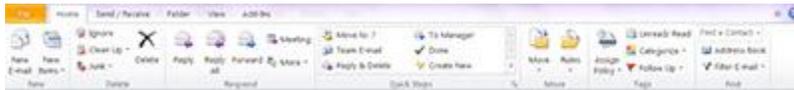
The expanded Ribbon in Outlook 2010 replaces Outlook 2007 menus, giving you easy access to tools on conveniently organized tabs.

The Quick Steps feature, new in Outlook 2010, speeds up managing your email even more. This feature enables you to perform the multi-stepped tasks you use most often, such as moving email to a specific folder or moving a message and replying to it with a meeting request, with a single click. The Quick Steps gallery includes buttons for one-click file and flag, sending messages to your team, and other popular commands. For more information, see Automate common or repetitive tasks with Quick Steps.
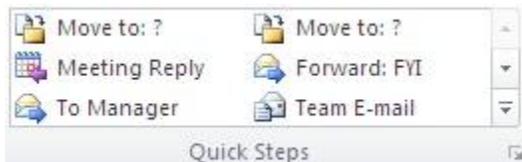
The Quick Steps feature turns your most frequent tasks—whether forwarding messages to your co-workers or copying messages to a specific folder—into one-click operations.

Tip: Learning a few basic keyboard shortcuts in Outlook 2010 can make performing these tasks even easier and faster. Read our article on how to save time with quick computer shortcuts.

Decide what to do with each and every message

How many times have you opened, reviewed, and closed the same email message or conversation? Those messages are getting lots of attention but very little action. It is

better to handle each email message only once before taking action—which means you have to decide what to do with it and where to put it. With the 4 Ds model, you have four choices:

1. Delete it
2. Do it
3. Delegate it
4. Defer it

Delete it

Generally, you can delete about half of all the email you get. But some of you shudder when you hear the phrase "delete email." You're hesitant to delete messages for fear that you might need them at some point. That's understandable, but ask yourself honestly: What percentage of information that you keep do you actually use?

If you do use a large percentage of what you keep, your method is working. But many of us keep a lot more than we use. Here are some questions to ask yourself to help you decide what to delete:

- Does the message relate to a meaningful objective you're currently working on? If not, you can probably **delete it**. Why keep information that doesn't relate to your main focus?
- Does the message contain information you can find elsewhere? If so, **delete it**.
- Does the message contain information that you will refer to within the next six months? If not, **delete it**.
- Does the message contain information that you're required to keep? If not, **delete it**.

Outlook 2010 helps you get rid of the "noise" in your Inbox by providing two new commands: **Ignore Conversation** and **Clean Up Conversation**. If a conversation is no longer relevant, you can prevent additional responses from appearing in your Inbox. The **Ignore** command moves the whole conversation and any future messages that arrive in the conversation to the **Deleted Items** folder.

Easily delete an entire conversation so that no new responses to it will appear in your Inbox.

When a message contains all the previous messages in the conversation, you can click **Clean Up** to eliminate redundant messages. For example, as people reply to a conversation, the response is at the top and the previous messages in the conversation are below. Use the **Clean Up** command to keep only the most recent message that includes the whole conversation. For more information, see Use Conversation Clean Up to eliminate redundant messages.

Cleaning up your conversations makes it easier to stay focused on the task being discussed.

Do it (in less than two minutes)

If you can't delete the email messages, ask yourself, "What specific action do I need to take?" and "Can I do it in less than two minutes?" If you can, just do it.

There is no point in filing an email or closing an email if you can complete the associated task in less than two minutes. Try it out—see how much mail you can process in less than two minutes. I think you will be extremely surprised and happy with the results. You could file the message, you could respond to the message, or you could make a phone call. You can probably handle about one-third of your email messages in less than two minutes.

Office 2010 helps you respond to email messages faster. You can view the availability of a person and instantly reach out to them using a variety of communication methods—all on a new easy-to-access contact card. You can even customize the context menu of the contact card to include tasks you perform most often, saving you more time.

Delegate it

If you can't delete it or do it in two minutes or less, can you forward the email to an appropriate team member who can take care of the task?

If you can delegate it (forward it to another team member to handle), do so right away. You should be able to compose and send the delegating message in about two minutes. After you have forwarded the message, delete the original message or move it into your email reference system.

Defer it

If you cannot delete it, do it in less than two minutes, or delegate it, the action required is something that only you can accomplish and that will take more than two minutes. Because this is your dedicated email processing time, you need to defer it and deal with it after you are done processing your email. You'll probably find that about 20 percent of your email messages have to be deferred.

There are two things you can do to defer a message: Turn it into an actionable task, or turn it into an appointment. When you're using Outlook, you can defer emails that require action by dragging the messages to your Task List to turn them into tasks. Name the task to clearly state the required action so that you don't have to reopen the email message. The result is a clearly defined list of actions on your Task List that you can prioritize and schedule to complete on your Calendar. Or you can turn the message into a meeting request by dragging it to your Calendar.

Tip: Use the To-Do Bar in Outlook 2010 and Outlook 2007 to drag an email message from an email folder to a date on your Calendar or to your Task List. On the **View** tab, in the Layout group, click the **To-Do** Bar. When the bar appears, drag the message to your Calendar or to your Task List. This copies the message to the new location; it doesn't move it out of the original mail folder, so you'll still be able to find what you need. Learn more about managing your Task List in Outlook.

Use the 4 Ds model every day

Using the 4 Ds model on a daily basis makes it easier to handle a large quantity of email. Our experience shows that, on average, people can process about 100 email messages an hour. If you receive 40 to 100 messages per day, all you need is one hour of uninterrupted email processing time to get through your Inbox. Our statistics show that of the email you receive:

- Fifty percent can be deleted or filed.
- Thirty percent can be delegated or completed in less than two minutes.
- Twenty percent can be deferred to your Task List or Calendar to complete later.

Of course, if you have a backlog of hundreds of messages, it will take time to get to the point where your daily routine keeps you up to date. It's important to get that backlog down, so I would suggest setting blocks of time aside to work through it. Then, you can really enjoy processing your messages every day using the 4 Ds.