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how to merge emails in outlook

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How to Merge Emails in Outlook: A Step by Step Guide

Outlook is one of the most powerful email clients in the world, offering a wide range of tools to keep your inbox tidy. Yet, even the most organized users can end up with duplicate messages, scattered replies, and disjointed conversations. Merging emails—whether you're consolidating a thread, combining attachments, or simply grouping related messages—can bring clarity and efficiency to your workflow. In this comprehensive guide, we'll walk you through every method you need to know, from built in features to advanced VBA scripts, and show you how to keep your mailbox clean and productive.

Why Merging Emails Matters

Before diving into the technical steps, let's explore why merging emails is a valuable skill:

- Improved Organization: A single conversation thread is easier to track than dozens of fragmented messages.
- Reduced Clutter: Removing duplicates frees up space and makes searching faster.
- Enhanced Collaboration: Teams can follow a unified thread, ensuring everyone sees the same information.
- Time Savings: A consolidated view means you spend less time opening multiple messages.

Built In Outlook Features for Merging

1. Conversation View (Threading)

Outlook's Conversation View automatically groups messages that share the same subject line and reply chain. To enable it:

1. Open Outlook and go to the View tab.
2. Check the Show as Conversations box.
3. Choose All Folders or This Folder Only based on your preference.

Once activated, related emails will collapse into a single expandable thread, making it easy to review all replies at once.

2. "Move to Folder" and "Copy to Folder"

If you want to merge emails into a specific folder, simply select the messages and use the **Move to Folder** or **Copy to Folder** options. This doesn't merge the content, but it groups the emails for easier access.

3. Use Search Folders to Create Virtual Merges

Search Folders let you view a dynamic collection of emails that meet certain criteria—such as all messages from a particular sender or with a specific keyword. To create one:

1. Right click Search Folders in the navigation pane.
2. Select New Search Folder.
3. Choose a predefined option or click Custom to set your own filters.
4. Define the criteria and click OK.

The resulting folder displays all matching emails, effectively merging them in a virtual sense.

4. Combine Attachments into One Email

When you receive multiple messages with the same attachment, you can merge them into a single email with all files attached. Here's how:

1. Select all the relevant messages.
2. Drag the attachments from the message list onto your desktop or a new email draft.
3. Compose a new email, attach the files, and send.

This method keeps the content consolidated while preserving the original attachments.

Using Rules to Automate Email Merging

Outlook Rules can automatically sort and group emails as they arrive. While Rules don't merge message bodies, they can place related emails into the same folder or assign them the same category.

1. Navigate to the File menu and select Manage Rules & Alerts.
2. Click New Rule and choose Apply rule on messages I receive.
3. Set conditions such as From people or public group or Subject contains.
4. Choose actions like move it to a specified folder or assign it a category.
5. Finish the rule wizard and activate it.

Over time, this rule will create a natural merge of related emails within your chosen folder.

Third Party Add Ins for Advanced Merging

For users who need more sophisticated merging capabilities—such as merging email bodies or consolidating threads—there are several reputable add ins available:

- Outlook Merge & Export – Combines selected emails into a single PDF or Word document.
- Mail Merge Toolkit – Allows you to merge email content and attachments into a unified file.
- Duplicate Email Remover – Detects and consolidates duplicate messages.

These tools often provide a "Merge" button that automatically concatenates email bodies, preserving formatting and attachments. Always verify that the add in is compatible with your Outlook version and that it respects your organization's security policies.

Using VBA to Merge Emails Programmatically

For advanced users or IT professionals, Visual Basic for Applications (VBA) offers the flexibility to write custom scripts that merge emails in a variety of ways. Below is a simple example that concatenates the body of selected messages into a new email.

Step by Step VBA Example

1. Press Alt + F11 to open the VBA editor.
2. Insert a new module via Insert > Module.
3. Paste the following code:

```
Sub MergeSelectedEmails()
    Dim olApp As Outlook.Application
    Dim olNs As Outlook.Namespace
    Dim olSel As Outlook.Selection
```

```
    Dim olMail As Outlook.MailItem
    Dim olNewMail As Outlook.MailItem
    Dim combinedBody As String

    Set olApp = Outlook.Application
    Set olNs = olApp.GetNamespace("MAPI")
    Set olSel = olApp.ActiveExplorer.Selection

    If olSel.Count = 0 Then
        MsgBox "Please select at least one email to merge.", vbExclamation
        Exit Sub
    End If

    Set olNewMail = olApp.CreateItem(olMailItem)
    combinedBody = ""

    Dim i As Integer
    For i = 1 To olSel.Count
        Set olMail = olSel.Item(i)
        combinedBody = combinedBody & vbCrLf & "----- Email " & i & " -----" & vbCrLf
        combinedBody = combinedBody & olMail.Subject & vbCrLf
        combinedBody = combinedBody & olMail.SenderName & vbCrLf
        combinedBody = combinedBody & olMail.ReceivedTime & vbCrLf & vbCrLf
        combinedBody = combinedBody & olMail.Body & vbCrLf
    Next i

    olNewMail.Subject = "Merged Emails"
    olNewMail.Body = combinedBody
    olNewMail.Display
End Sub
```

After pasting, close the editor, select the emails you want to merge, then run the macro via **Alt + F8** and choosing **MergeSelectedEmails**. The script creates a new email with the combined content.

Security Note

Running VBA scripts can pose security risks. Ensure you trust the source of any script and that your macro settings allow execution. In corporate environments, consult your IT department before enabling macros.

Merging Emails in Outlook Web App (OWA)

While OWA doesn't provide as many advanced features as the desktop client, you can still consolidate conversations:

1. Open the Settings gear icon and choose View all Outlook settings.
2. Navigate to Mail > Conversation.

3. Toggle Show messages from the same conversation in a single view.
4. Apply changes.

This setting enables a unified thread view similar to Conversation View in the desktop app.

Common Problems and How to Fix Them

1. Duplicate Emails Persisting After Merging

Duplicate messages often arise from server sync issues or rules that re download the same mail. Try the following:

- Run Scanmail or Scanpst.exe to repair your PST file.
- Check your Rules for any that might be creating copies.
- Clear the Junk Email folder and set proper filters.

2. Conversation View Not Working

If threads aren't grouping correctly:

- Verify that Show as Conversations is enabled.
- Ensure that the Conversation Settings are set to Show as Conversations in all folders.
- Restart Outlook or clear the Outlook cache by deleting *.ost files.

3. Merged Email Body Losing Formatting

When merging manually, HTML formatting can break. To preserve formatting:

- Copy the body as Rich Text or HTML rather than plain text.
- Use the Insert > Attachments feature to embed original messages as .msg files.
- When using VBA, set olNewMail.BodyFormat = olFormatHTML before assigning the body.

Best Practices for Maintaining a Clean Outlook After Merging

- Use Categories and Flags: Color code emails by project or priority to keep merged threads organized.
- Archive Regularly: Move older merged conversations to an Archive folder to keep the inbox lean.
- Set Up Auto Archive Rules: Automate the movement of emails older than a certain date.
- Delete Unnecessary Attachments: After merging, remove redundant files to free up space.
- Leverage Search Folders: Keep a dynamic view of all emails related to a particular topic.

Conclusion

Merging emails in Outlook is more than a neat trick—it's a productivity boost that keeps your inbox organized, reduces clutter, and ensures you never miss a critical detail in a conversation. Whether you're using Outlook's built in Conversation View, creating custom rules, employing third party add ins, or writing your own VBA scripts, the tools are at your disposal to tailor the experience to your workflow. By combining these techniques with best practices for categorization and archiving, you'll maintain a streamlined inbox that supports efficient communication and collaboration.

Take the time to experiment with the methods above, find the workflow that suits you best, and enjoy a cleaner, more organized Outlook experience.

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