

On Email

By Jane Daugherty

Email! It's become the most pervasive method of communication in our society. For many of us, it's not only our preferred way to be contacted, but it's also the most consistently successful way to contact us. I, for instance, ignore several phone calls every day that come to my cell phone, and I thank the technological powers that be on a regular basis for the miracle of caller ID. However, if any individual sends me a personal email, it will not be ignored. I am sure to respond automatically and as quickly as possible.

Email (originally shorthand for *electronic mail*) however, is a service that is still brand new to many people. For those who are currently coming to the realization that computers and the internet are not going to go away, and that we must adapt to the electronic environment or perish, email is only one of many hurdles that are faced in the process of becoming digitally literate-- or at least becoming more comfortable in a screen mediated environment.

Fortunately, email is free and relatively easy to navigate. Unfortunately, many people make email harder than it needs to be by relying on other people to set up email accounts or services for them. This can lead to a lot of confusion and a lot of things being made more difficult for the user than they need to be.

If you are confused about why your email is set up a certain way, or if you set up an email address long ago and don't remember your password, or if you have regular issues accessing your messages, here's a quick and dirty solution-- ditch that email and start over. I realize that this runs contrary to the ideas that many of us hold dear about perseverance and avoiding wastefulness, but in this case, it's not worth the effort. Go with something free and easy, and take control of your email situation.

Setting up an email address is pretty simple, and Google's free email service, Gmail, is the best one out there. Google is the company that is behind Google, the search engine-- the one with the colorful logo that knows what you're trying to search for. Google, the company, came out with Gmail, their free, web-based email service, in 2004, and it's been setting the standard for ease-of-use and free available features ever since.

To sign up, go to www.gmail.com, or use Google, or Bing, or Yahoo, to search for "gmail," and it should be the first website on the list. On that page, click on the big red button that says "Create an Account." The next page will have a form on it to fill out. When filling in the boxes, follow the directions for each step exactly. A couple of pointers for this process:

- Write down your preferred email address before you get started. The best possible email address that you can ever use is `yourname@gmail.com`. Try for that first. At some point you will regret reserving "pRettyiestKittyKat69sparkles@gmail.com" instead

of your name.

- Write down at least eight letters and numbers that you will remember. This will be your password. Try to use both letters AND numbers, and maybe a character key, too.
- Use your mouse or the Tab key to move between the boxes, or fields, on the form. If you try to use the Enter key to move between fields instead of using your mouse or the Tab key, you will continually re-submit the form. It is important that you do NOT use the Enter key until you are completely finished with the form.
- You've probably encountered the picture of strangely mangled, colored letters that you are required to type to confirm something if you've ever tried to submit a form online before. If you haven't, you're lucky. These weird letters are called a Captcha, and they're meant to determine that you are not a robot. You're not a robot, are you?

When you're all done, click "I accept. Create my account." If you've done everything correctly, you should be taken to a page with a blue button on it that says "Show me my account." If you haven't, then just be patient with yourself, and review the form in front of you. If you see any red letters anywhere, pay attention to those-- that's where you went wrong. You'll also have to re-enter that password, so you'll be glad you wrote it down to begin with.

After this process is finally complete, make sure you understand-- yourname@gmail.com is your email address now. When someone asks you for your email address, you'll tell them this. If someone gives you their email address and it doesn't include some version of "somethingsomething@somewhere.com," then it isn't a complete email address. Email addresses have no spaces in them; they always have an @ symbol in the middle; and they always have a period and a .com, .org, .uk, or .something at the end. If you don't have this whole combination, or if the address has spaces in it, it won't work properly, and your email will not be delivered.

When trying anything new online, take notes-- either with a pen and paper next to the computer, or in a separate document on the computer if you're that tech savvy. Make sure you have all of your passwords stored somewhere along with their login ID's and what service they access. And be patient, with yourself and with the computer! The more you do, the more confident you'll become, and the more you'll be able to do.