
Gmail: Filters, Labels & Search

How to keep your inbox organised without losing anything



1. What Labels Are

Labels are Gmail's version of folders — but better.

- You create them yourself (e.g., *Jenny Masterson*, *Sue Davies*, *Editor*, *Membership*, *Treasurer*)
- They appear in the left-hand panel
- They organise mail
- Clicking a label shows **all emails with that label**
- One email can have **several** labels (unlike folders)
- They can be nested
- They Sync everywhere (Android, web, iPad, desktop clients)

Think of labels as coloured tags you attach to messages.

✓ What labels *don't* do

- They don't move the message
- They don't hide the message from "All Mail"
- They don't duplicate the message

2. What Filters Are

This is where Gmail absolutely shines.

Unlike Apple Mail rules (Mac-only) or Outlook rules (client vs server confusion), Gmail filters run on the server, meaning:

- They work on every device
- They work instantly
- They work even when your phone is off
- They're reliable
- They're easy to understand

Filters can only be created in Gmail on the web. Not in the Android app.

But once created, they work everywhere.

3. What Filters Do

Filters are rules that run automatically on incoming mail. A filter can:

- Add a label
- Skip the inbox
- Mark as read
- Star it
- Forward it
- Delete it
- Or any combination

Most people use filters to automatically label messages from specific people or roles.

Example:

“Any email from Jenny → add label *Jenny Masterson*”

4. Gmail Search (the search bar at the top)

This is Gmail’s smartest tool.

- Finds emails by name, address, subject, or words inside the message
- Understands aliases (e.g., gmail.com and googlemail.com)
- Finds everything from a person even if their address changes
- Works better than the filter preview

Tip: Search for **from:jenny.masterson** to see all Jenny’s messages.

5. Categories (Primary / Social / Promotions)

These are **Google’s guesses**, not your rules.

- Controlled by Gmail’s machine learning
- Can be turned off
- Not reliable for organising important mail
- Not the same as labels

Tip: Use Labels for organisation — not Categories.

6. Why Filters Sometimes “Miss” Messages

The filter preview in Settings is very literal.

- It only matches the exact text you typed
- It often ignores older messages already in the inbox
- It may not show messages where Gmail has rewritten the address
- But the filter **will** work correctly on new mail

If the preview looks wrong, don’t panic — the filter itself is fine.

■ 7. Best Practice: The Simple Filter

For people with multiple addresses or aliases, use:

From: jenny.masterson. This matches:

- gmail.com
- googlemail.com
- display-name variations
- forwarded mail
- “via” senders
- future aliases

One rule covers everything.

■ 8. Your Workflow (the one you’ve built)

You are using Gmail exactly as intended:

- Create a label for each person/role
- Create a filter that applies that label
- Click the label to see all related mail
- Inbox stays tidy
- Nothing gets lost
- Easy to demonstrate to the club

This is the cleanest, most maintainable setup for everyday users.

★ Club-friendly takeaway you can use

Most people don’t need Gmail on the web every day. Use the Gmail app or Apple Mail for your inbox, and dip into Gmail web only when you want to organise and set things up.