

What is "Spam"?

Simply, "spam" is any unwanted e-mail, generally commercial in nature. You can almost always recognize it from the strange, illogical, and sometimes-absurd subject lines. They will offer items at a price that's too good to be true, items that have no use, or services that are illegal in nature.

How Do I Avoid Spam?

The first step you should take to avoid spam is to set up a second e-mail account to use as a "junk" account. You can sign up for free e-mail accounts from a variety of places (such as [Yahoo](#) or [Hotmail](#)). Use this account when you need to enter your e-mail address on sites, such as when you need to register software you download. Entering in your e-mail address in these places will inevitably get you signed up for mailing lists you don't wish to belong to. By signing up with your junk account, you can be sure that none of this spam will carry over to your original account.

Do your best to refrain from posting your e-mail address on message boards and newsgroups. Spammers are able to send "bots" (tiny programs) out to scour these boards for anything with an "@" symbol in them (which tells them that it's an e-mail address). If you wish to have an address posted on these boards, you have two options: first, use your "junk" account; second, if you are posting with the intent of getting responses and mail from other people, you may still want to use your original account, so instead of listing your e-mail address as normal, try spelling it out, like in this example:

Your Name AT eden DOT Rutgers DOT edu

This will take an extra step for other users to e-mail you, but it should effectively keep the bots from listing your address.

A final option is more specifically for newsgroups. Your newsgroup reader probably allows you to edit how your e-mail address appears when posting messages. You may be able to add extra letters to the end of your address, effectively changing it to something that's not yours in the eyes of the bots. For example, "username@eden.rutgers.eduCATION" is a popular way, as would be "username@aol.comPUTER." Bots have no idea what to do with these addresses, but a person viewing these on the newsgroup will understand what is being done. Most users also add a line to these messages saying "Remove CATION from address to mail me," to help avoid any further confusion.

Both AOL and Outlook Express have these options; consult your e-mail or newsgroup program's help file for further help.

Filtering Software

Special software is also available that will filter out the majority of spam you may receive. This filtering software intercepts your mail before you see it in your inbox, and will delete the messages it sees as spam.

[MailWasher](#) is a popular and free program that you can use to filter your mail. MailWasher has some added features that can also prevent future spam. The program will send a "bounce" message back to spammers, essentially telling them that your e-mail address does not exist and there is no reason to send messages

there, anymore. You can also delete messages before you even download them, giving you one more way to keep a virus from ever coming in contact with your computer.

Other filtering software package are available, too. See [CNET's review](#) of these for more help.

Blocking Senders

If you find that you are regularly receiving spam from a single address, there is a way to block any messages from that address ever reaching your inbox.

In Outlook Express, highlight a message from the sender you wish to block. Select the "Message" menu, and click "Block Sender." Outlook will inform you that the sender has been blocked, and will ask you if you wish to remove all messages from that sender from your computer (you can select either "Yes" or "No").

In AOL, click the "Keyword" button (directly to the right of the address and search bars), and enter "Mail Controls." In the window that comes up, click the "People and Places" tab on the left. You'll have five options presented to you. The best option is the fifth one, which allows you to specify exact addresses to block from sending you messages. Enter in an e-mail address (or entire domain, such as "hotmail.com") and click the "Add" button. You can always come back at any time to select a name and click "Remove." When you're done, click "Next" twice to get to the final screen, and click "Save." Your e-mail controls have been set. AOL may ask if you wish to close the Mail Controls screen; hit "Close."

Now What?

You will inevitably still receive some amount of spam, despite all efforts. The best tool to deal with this remains the "Delete" key. If you are unsure about a message, especially if you are concerned about viruses (be sure to read the virus tutorial), just delete it.