

Q. What does it mean to “compact” messages?

A. Compacting e-mail messages is a maintenance routine intended to get rid of wasted space and improve the performance of your mail program. Mail folders are usually one big file that contains all the messages in a specific mailbox, like your In box. As you delete messages from the mailbox, the physical space those messages occupied is not actually freed up until you tell the mail program to compact the mail folders, which readjusts the space and cleans things up.

If you do not compact your mail folders every once in awhile, the message files get bigger and you may notice that your e-mail program is starting to plod or crash.

Programs like Outlook Express, Mozilla Thunderbird or Eudora have a menu option to compact all your mail folders. Some programs will regularly send an alert box suggesting that you compact your mail folders.

To compact your message folders in Outlook Express, go to the File menu to Folder and then choose Compact All Folders. Mac OS X users with Apple’s Mail program can clean up and compact message files by clicking on a mailbox in the Mail window, going to the Mailbox menu and choosing the Rebuild option.