



The "Four D's for Decision Making" model

The "Four D's for Decision Making" model (4 D's) is a valuable tool for processing e-mail, helping you to quickly decide what action to take with each item and how to remove it from the Inbox.

Decide what to do with each and every message

How many times have you opened, reviewed, and closed the same e-mail message over and over? Some of those messages are getting lots of attention but very little action. It is better to handle each e-mail message only once before taking action—which means you have to make a decision as to what to do with it and where to put it. Under the 4 D's model, you have four choices:

1. Delete it
2. Do it
3. Delegate it
4. Defer it

DELETE IT

Generally you can delete about half of all the e-mail you get. But some of you shudder when you hear "delete." You're hesitant to delete messages for fear you might need them at some point. That's understandable, but ask yourself honestly: What percentage of information that you keep do you actually use?

If you do use a large percentage of what you keep, then what you're doing is working. But many of you are keeping a lot more than you use. Here are some questions to ask yourself to help you decide what to delete:

1. Does the message relate to a meaningful objective you're currently working on? If not, you can probably **delete it**. Why hang on to information that doesn't relate to your main focus?
2. Does the message contain information you can find elsewhere? If so, **delete it**.
3. Does the message contain information that you will refer to within the next six months? If not, **delete it**.

4. Does the message contain information that you're required to keep? If not, **delete it**.

DO IT (in less than two minutes)

If you can't DELETE IT, then decide, "What specific action do I need to take?" and "Can I DO IT in less than two minutes?" If you can, just DO IT.

There is no point in filing an e-mail or closing an e-mail if you can complete it in less than 2 minutes. Try it out and see how much mail you can process in less than 2 minutes. I think you will be extremely surprised and happy with the results. You could file the message, you could respond to the message, or you could make a phone call. You can probably handle about one third of your e-mail messages in less than two minutes.

DELEGATE IT

If you can't DELETE IT or DO IT in two minutes or less, can you DELEGATE IT?

If you can delegate it, do it right away. You should be able to compose and send the delegating message in about two minutes. Once you delegate the action, delete the original message or move it into your e-mail reference system.

DEFER IT

If you cannot DELETE IT, DO IT in less than two minutes, or DELEGATE IT, then the action required is something that only you can accomplish and that will take more than two minutes. Because this is your dedicated e-mail processing time, you need to DEFER IT and deal with it after you are done processing your e-mail. You'll probably find that about 10 percent of your e-mail messages have to be deferred.

There are two things you can do to defer a message: turn it into an actionable task or turn it into an appointment. When you're using Outlook, you can DEFER e-mails with actions by dragging the message onto your Task List to turn it into a task. Name the task to clearly state what action is required so that you don't have to reopen the e-mail message. The result is a clearly defined list of actions in your task list that you can prioritize and schedule to complete on your Calendar. Or you can turn the message into a meeting request by dragging it onto your Calendar.

Do it daily

Using the 4 D's model on a daily basis makes it easier to handle a large quantity of e-mail. Our experience shows that on average, people can process about 100 e-mail messages an hour. If you receive 40 to 100 messages per day, all you need is one hour of uninterrupted e-mail processing time to get through your Inbox. Our statistics show that of the e-mail you receive:

- 50 percent can be deleted or filed
- 30 percent can be delegated or completed in less than 2 minutes

- 20 percent can be deferred to your Task List or Calendar to complete later

Of course, if you have a backlog of hundreds of messages, it will take time to get to the point where your daily routine keeps you up to date. It's important to get that backlog down, so I would suggest setting chunks of time aside to work through it. Then you can really enjoy processing your messages every day using the 4 D's

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