

# Fight Spam with a Disposable Email Address

If you have ever visited a website that demanded your email address to make a purchase, create an account or gain access to information, you might be opening your inbox to a flood of spam. A free, disposable email address provides a handy solution to this problem.

## How Do Disposable Addresses Work?

It seems everyone wants your email address: Facebook, your bank, your healthcare account, your favorite retail stores, Amazon, or EBay. It's no wonder that your spam filter is so busy, but you probably do wonder which of the many entities that have your email address gave, sold, or lost it to spammers. Disposable email addresses can help you tell who the untrustworthy contacts are.

A disposable email address is a temporary or anonymous email address that can forward mail to your permanent address. Ideally, any replies you send are relayed back through the disposable email address to the original sender, who never learns your permanent address. If unwanted emails suddenly start arriving through the disposable email address, you can stop it by deleting or filtering that address.

If you like, you can have one disposable email address for every entity that requires an email address. Then if spam starts coming from a given disposable email address, you can be pretty certain who's responsible.

It's possible that a spammer just randomly generated an email address that matched one of your disposable email addresses, but it's much more likely that the entity to which you gave the disposable email address shared it, willingly or by theft. Having narrowed down the security leak to one entity, you can investigate and decide whether to give that entity another disposable email address or steer clear of it.

## Plus Addressing and Gmail

There are several ways to create disposable email address on your own; some are a lot more work than others. A favorite is "plus addressing" with Gmail, which lets you make up a disposable email address on the spot for whoever wants it. Here is how plus addressing works, and some limitations on this technique.

Let's say your email address is `yourname@gmail.com`. Add a "+" sign and any string of characters between "yourname" and the @ symbol, for example, `yourname+ChaseBank@gmail.com`. Now give that address to your online Chase Bank account. Repeat the process for Amazon, newsletter subscriptions, online

stores, websites that make you supply an address to continue, etc. All mail sent to your plus addresses will go to your yourname@gmail.com inbox.

If you start getting unwanted emails at the plus address, just create a Gmail filter to send them to the Trash. For extra points, create a filter to funnel the mail from each plus address to its own Gmail folder. Note that this trick works well for automated systems that send to you, but can be defeated by humans who are clever enough to remove the "plus" portion of the address. Also, when you reply to a message sent to one of your plus addresses, the From line will be your standard Gmail reply address, not the plus address. Not all websites will accept a Gmail address with a plus sign, but it works most of the time.

The plus sign trick also works with Outlook.com (formerly Hotmail) but Yahoo uses minus signs and makes the process a bit more difficult.

### **On Your Cox Account**

Another option, if you have a Cox account, for example, and receive your email there, is to create email aliases. You may have up to 10 aliases as a Cox subscriber.