Email providers: which one is right for you

Four common email services, compared in plain terms.

Gmail — Free

Google's free email service, built to work across phones and computers.

Pros: Works on iPhone, Android, Windows, and Mac. Strong search and spam filtering. 100 GB is available for $1.99 a month; 2 TB is $9.99 a month.

Cons: The free inbox includes ads. The 15 GB is shared, so files and photo backups use the same space as email.

Best for: Most people, especially anyone who already has a Gmail address or uses Google services.

Proton Mail — Free

An email service built around privacy, with a free option and no advertising.

Pros: Encrypted: messages are scrambled so even Proton cannot read them. Based in Switzerland and protected by Swiss privacy laws. No ads on the free or paid plans.

Cons: The free 1 GB is much smaller than Gmail or Outlook.com. Searching inside old messages is not as strong as Gmail's.

Best for: People who care about privacy, dislike inbox ads, or want a clean private address.

Mail Plus has 15 GB and costs $3.99 a month when billed yearly, or $4.99 month to month.

Outlook.com — Free

Microsoft's free email service and a natural fit with Windows.

Pros: Works well with Windows and Microsoft Office. Includes a calendar and free web versions of Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Includes spam and malware filters.

Cons: The free inbox includes ads. Email storage and OneDrive storage are separate amounts, which can be easy to mix up.

Best for: Windows users and people who regularly use Word, Excel, or other Microsoft services.

AOL Mail — Free

The long-running free email service many people have used for years.

Pros: AOL Mail is still active and free. Existing @aol.com addresses still work.

Cons: It is not our recommendation for a brand-new address. Current free storage and whether new addresses are available were not confirmed in our research.

Best for: Anyone who already has an AOL address and wants to keep using it.