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Generated on 21/10/2026 15:56

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POP or IMAP: which to choose, and what you lose by picking wrong

E-mail

CODE	VERSION	COUNTRY · LANGUAGE
RLX-INT-KB-968	v2026.09.28	International · English

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https://www.my.mozout.com/knowledgebase/968

POP or IMAP: which to choose, and what you lose by picking wrong

E-mail Created on **September 10, 2026** Updated on **September 28, 2026** 4 min read



Every time you set up e-mail in an app, it asks whether you want **POP** or **IMAP**. Most people pick at random and only learn the difference months later, when mail goes missing on one device. The right answer is almost always the same.

If you would rather not read the rest: choose IMAP.
It is the right answer for practically everyone. There is only one reason to prefer POP, and it is explained further down.

The difference, in one sentence

IMAP leaves the mail on the server and shows it to you. **POP** brings the mail down to the device and, typically, takes it off the server.

	What happens
IMAP	The server is in charge. Whatever you delete, read or file into a folder shows up on **every** device and in webmail too. The messages stay on the server
POP	The device is in charge. It downloads the messages and from then on has them only there. Deleting on the computer does not delete on the phone, and webmail stops showing them if they are set to be removed

Why IMAP is the right choice

These days almost everyone reads mail in more than one place - the office computer, the phone, and webmail when on someone else's machine. IMAP is the only one that keeps all three telling the same story.

1. Delete on the phone, it disappears on the computer.

2. Create a “Clients” folder and it appears everywhere.

3. Change computers and lose no history at all - it is all on the server.

When POP still makes sense

Two situations, and genuinely only two:

Situation	Why
You want a copy off the server	POP brings everything down to the computer. It works as your own archive - but note that a copy on a single computer is not a real backup
The mailbox is filling the plan	Set to remove from the server, POP frees space. It is a patch: the durable fix is tidying the mailbox or having more space

> **The risk of POP, put plainly.**
> If it only exists on your computer and that computer is lost, breaks or is stolen, **the mail goes with it**. There is no copy on the server to restore from. That is the underlying reason we steer people away from POP unless they know exactly why they want it.

The settings, on both sides

If you are setting it up by hand, these are the values. Always use the secure connection - the left-hand column.

With SSL (use this)	Without SSL
IMAP: port 993	IMAP: port 143
POP: port 995	POP: port 110
SMTP (sending): port 465	SMTP (sending): port 587

The **username** is always the full address (*you@yourdomain.com*), never just the part before the at sign. The **server** is *mail.yourdomain.com*. And the password is the mailbox one, which is not your cPanel password nor your My MozOut one.

For step-by-step in your app, see the guides: **Android**, **iPhone and iPad** or **Thunderbird**.

Moving from POP to IMAP without losing anything

Do not delete the old account first.
If you were on POP, the messages you downloaded may exist **only** on your computer. Deleting the account before copying them deletes them for good.

1. **Add** the account again, now as IMAP, alongside the old one. Keep both at the same time.
2. Drag the old messages from the local folders into the IMAP account's folders. As they land, they upload to the server.
3. Confirm in webmail that they are there - see **how to access your webmail** - and only then remove the POP account.

Mind the space.
Years of mail uploading at once can fill the mailbox. Move it in batches and keep an eye on the quota.

A recent change that confuses a lot of people

Google announced the end of *Gmailify* and of the **"Check mail from other accounts"** option in Gmail - the feature that fetched mail from an external mailbox into Gmail over POP. New users could no longer enable it from early 2026, and existing connections are being switched off through the year.

This does not mean POP is over.
It is easy to read the news and conclude that Outlook or your phone will stop working. **They will not.** What is ending is a feature *inside Gmail*. Connecting Outlook, Thunderbird, Apple Mail or your phone to your mailbox over POP or IMAP carries on exactly as before.

If you used that Gmail feature, see what to do in **using your e-mail inside Gmail**.

NEED A HAND?

Not sure what you lose by moving from POP to IMAP?

Ask us first →

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RLX-INT-KB-968 · v2026.09.28 · Generated on 21/10/2026 15:56