What the Tech?!: Google Mail
by Joe McCormick

If you want to stay in touch online with friends, family, or work contacts you're most certainly going to need an e-mail account. E-mail allows you to send text, graphics, and basically any kind of document across the Internet. There are a few choices, however, when it comes to selecting your e-mail provider. For this article, I'm going to show you how to set up an account with Google.

I like Google's e-mail service because you don't just get e-mail. When creating an account with Google you get instant access to the many free Google services: Mail, Docs, Blogger, and Talk, just to name a few. For the technology-bound student, it's hard to pass up a Google account.

Creating your Google account is easy. You'll want to navigate to the website mail.google.com/mail/signup which will instantly take you to the account application. If English is not your native language use the drop-down box at the top right of the page and select one that works for you.

Start by filling out your name and the desired login name you'd like to use. Luckily, Google will let you use some punctuation marks (. - _) in your e-mail name. If the name you want isn't available try adding in punctuation: "john-smith" for example.

Next we get to create our password. If you read "What the Tech?!: Passwords" you already know what you need to do here. But just as a reminder, this password will be guarding some potentially important information so feel free to make use of the "Password strength" indicator that Google has provided.

A good piece of advice is for your e-mail password to be different and more complex than any of the other passwords you use online. This way if someone breaks into your Facebook account, for example, they won't be able to reset your password by e-mail because, hopefully, your e-mail password is different and more complex. The only requirement is that the password be at least 8 characters long.

Next we see two check boxes: "Stay signed in" and "Enable Web History." There's no fooling around here, checking "Stay signed in" will keep you signed-in until you either sign-out or clear your browser's history/cache, even if you restart the computer. "Enable Web History" is a bit more important to pay attention to. Checking this will allow Google to store search-related information for use in future searches and let you view a history of your searches and pages visited through Google. You can also view trends in your web activity and see "personalized predictions" when typing in search queries, all based on your search history. The collection of this information can be paused, deleted, or disabled at google.com/history if you change your mind.

Now we get to some common application information: security question, recovery e-mail, location, birthday and the word verification. Google lets you pick from a few security questions, but you can also make up your own; be sure it's something that only you know and is easily remembered. If you've setup your SLCC student e-mail account, it's a great one for your recovery e-mail which is useful if you forget your Google password and need to reset it. Pick your location and birthday, then scroll down to word verification.

Word verification was designed so computer programs couldn't easily create their own accounts on the Internet. Don't worry about upper and lower-case, just type in the letters you see. If you fail, they'll give you a new one. If you can't read it, click on the disabled icon and Google will read it to you.

Finally, don't skip out on the "Terms of Service." Google wants to tell you that, among other things, they will use your mailbox content to populate advertisements within the Mail application. In my opinion these ads aren't intrusive, but they do help fund Google and allow us to use the service. If you don't read the TOS you could be waving some rights that you don't want to, so be aware.

When you're done click "I accept. Create my account." and you will be taken to a page reminding you of some of the neatly-interactive features of Google Mail like archiving, video chat, and labels. When you're ready, click on "Show me my account" and you'll be taken to your inbox! Enjoy!