Optimizing Outlook Performance

Synopsis: this document will share some tips & tricks for how to get Outlook to perform at its best. If you have a large mailbox, there are certain settings you can change that can help improve performance.

Tip #1: try to keep your Inbox and Sent Items under 5,000 items. When Outlook starts up, the two folders that it synchronizes first are your Inbox and your Sent Items. The more emails that pile up in those two folders, the more Outlook struggles when it starts up. The solution is to keep up with filing your emails. You can have tens of thousands of emails stored in other folders. You can create mail rules to filter automated messages that you receive. If you are not sure how many items you have in a folder, just click on it, and then look in the bottom left hand corner of Outlook:
Tip #2: use cached mode. There are two modes that Outlook can run in: online mode or cached mode. In Online mode, Outlook reads and renders your mailbox directly from the server. If you have a large mailbox, this can cause performance issues when you are on slow networks. In cached mode, Outlook will keep a copy of your mailbox on your computer, which it synchronizes with the server. Cached mode takes a long time to sync the first time, but after that performance is vastly improved because it only has to sync over changes to your mailbox, such as when you receive new emails. Also in cached mode, if for some reason you lose your network connection, you still have read access to your mailbox.

1) To set Outlook to use cached mode, click on File, then Account Settings, then Account Settings:
2) From the Account Settings window, click on Change, or double click on your @odu.edu email address.
3) From the Change Account window, click on More Settings
4) This will bring up a new window. From the General tab, increase the “Seconds Until Server connection Timeout” setting. The default is 30 seconds. I usually recommend 90 seconds or more. I have mine set at 120 seconds, which helps to smooth out the disconnections that Outlook can have if you have poor network connectivity (such as if you are working on a wireless network).
5) Then click on the Advanced tab, and check the box for “Use Cached Exchange Mode”. If you access any shared email accounts, you may also want to check the box for “Download shared folders”, but I would only recommend that if the shared account that you are accessing is large and has a lot of emails in it.
Tip # 3: Fast startup vs. fast connection. There are some additional tweaks to Outlook that can be made, but they involve a tradeoff between Outlook starting up fast, and Outlook synchronizing fast.

First, let me tell you how to get to those settings. From the Exchange settings window (see the steps above), click on the Connection tab, then click on “Exchange Proxy Settings”
From the Proxy Settings window, there is one setting that you can change that can dramatically impact performance.

If you primarily use Outlook remotely over a VPN connection, then make sure that the option for “On slow networks, connect using HTTP first, then connect using TCP/IP” is unchecked.

So what does this setting mean? Well, what this controls is whether Outlook will make a TCP/IP connection or an HTTPS connection to the server. With a TCP/IP connection, Outlook has more bandwidth to the server, so the synchronization is improved. However, if you use this setting, then when you are not on the VPN, and not on campus, Outlook can take a long time to start up. The reason is that Outlook will try to make a TCP/IP connection first, and if you are off campus, this connection will fail, and then revert to an HTTPS connection. This process of attempting to connect and then failing can take a minute or so, depending on the speed of your connection. TCP/IP connections will only succeed while on the ODU campus network, or from the VPN. From all other networks, only an HTTPS connection is available.
If you want Outlook to start faster from off campus, and you do not use the VPN, then make sure that “On slow networks, connect using HTTP first, then connect using TCP/IP” is selected. This setting is optimized for people who connect from off campus, but do not use the VPN.