

Dots don't matter in Gmail (But what about other email?)

1. GMAIL:

Dots **don't** matter in Gmail addresses.

If someone accidentally adds dots to your address when emailing you, you'll still get that email. For example, if your email is johnsmith@gmail.com, you own all dotted versions of your address:

john.smith@gmail.com

jo.hn.sm.ith@gmail.com

j.o.h.n.s.m.i.t.h@gmail.com

Note: If you use Gmail through work, school, or other organization (like yourdomain.com or yourschool.edu), dots do change your address. To change the dots in your username, contact your admin.

2. Other EMAIL

Dots absolutely matter for almost all other major email providers. While Google handles dots by completely ignoring them in consumer @gmail.com addresses, most other email platforms treat a dot as a distinct and unique character.

Major Email Providers Where Dots Matter

If you modify the dots in these services, you change the email address completely:

- **Microsoft Outlook / Hotmail:** johnsmith@outlook.com and john.smith@outlook.com are **two completely separate accounts** owned by different people.
- **Yahoo Mail:** johnsmith@yahoo.com and john.smith@yahoo.com are completely separate.
- **Apple iCloud:** A dot creates an entirely different username.
- **ProtonMail:** Dots are recognized as unique characters, meaning variations belong to different mailboxes.

The Major Exception: Google Workspace

Even within Google's own ecosystem, dots matter if you use a paid **Google Workspace account for work or school** (e.g., johnsmith@yourcompany.com). On custom domains, your system administrator can configure john.smith and johnsmith to be distinct individuals.

Summary Comparison

Email Service	Do Dots Matter?	Example Result
Consumer Gmail (<code>@gmail.com</code>)	✗ No	<code>j.o.h.n.s.m.i.t.h@gmail.com</code> goes to <code>johnsmith@gmail.com</code> .
Google Workspace (Custom Domain)	Yes	<code>john.smith@company.com</code> is different from <code>johnsmith@company.com</code> .
Outlook / Hotmail	Yes	Sending to the wrong dot variation delivers to a stranger or bounces.
Yahoo Mail	Yes	The platform views the dot as a hard coded character.
Apple iCloud	Yes	Strict character matching is required for delivery.

If you are looking for ways to create variations of your address on these other platforms, look up "**plus addressing**" instead (e.g., `johnsmith+shopping@outlook.com`), which is widely supported across modern providers.

At trick with dots to catch spammers:

"Dot Variant Strategy" or a form of "Email Tagging."

Here is how you can structure this specific concept for your students:

How the "Dot Variant Strategy" Works

Because Gmail ignores dots, `johnsmith@gmail.com` can sign up for services using variations like `j.ohnsmith@gmail.com` or `john.smith@gmail.com`. [1]

1. **The Signup:** The student registers for "Website A" using `j.ohnsmith@gmail.com`.
2. **The Leak:** Website A leaks or sells their user database to a third-party marketer.
3. **The Catch:** The student receives a spam email from an unknown company, but notice it is addressed to `j.ohnsmith@gmail.com`. They now have definitive proof that Website A was the source of the leak.

Key Lesson Plan Points & Caveats

To ensure your class fully understands the topic, you should highlight two critical limitations of this strategy:

- **Gmail Exclusive:** Remind students this *only* works if they use a consumer Gmail account. If they try this with Outlook or Yahoo, the verification email from the website will bounce or go to a stranger.
- **Easy to Bypass:** Sophisticated spammers know this trick. They often use simple code to automatically strip all dots from Gmail addresses in their lists before sending spam, which can blend the tracking attempts back into one clean inbox.

A Better Alternative "Plus Addressing"

"Plus Addressing" (or sub-addressing).

- **The Method:** Students add a plus sign (`+`) and any keyword after their username (e.g., `johnsmith+netflix@gmail.com` or `johnsmith+school@outlook.com`).
- **The Benefit:** It works on **Gmail, Outlook, and iCloud**.
- **The Catch:** It is much harder for spammers to automatically strip out without risking breaking non-Gmail addresses, making it a highly visible tracker. [2]