Gmail Smart Features: Not the AI Privacy Invasion Some Have Claimed

November 24, 2025 - You may have seen headlines over the past couple of days warning that Gmail was suddenly scanning emails and attachments to train Googles AI. Those reports spread fast and even some respected security companies repeated the claim. Malwarebytes later corrected their article after a closer review. Once people stepped back it became clear that the original concern did not match reality.

Here is what is really going on.
Gmail does scan the content of your messages but this is not new and it is not being used to train Googles generative AI models. It is the same scanning that Gmail has always used to power everyday tools like spam filtering automatic sorting travel updates and writing suggestions. These features work only because Gmail analyzes what is inside your messages in much the same way that your phone uses text you type to improve autocorrect.

The confusion started when Google changed the wording of these options and moved them to a different spot in the settings menu. The phrase smart features sounded like a new AI system, and with so many products adding AI right now many users assumed Gmail messages might be feeding Google AI models. A lawsuit in California claiming Google gave Gemini access to Gmail also added to the public confusion.

But based on Googles documentation and reporting from several outlets these settings are not new and they do not give permission for Gemini to learn from your private email. They control only the built in convenience, and some safety features that Gmail already had. Google also says these features are supposed to require opt in although some users reported seeing the settings turned on when the new wording appeared.

So what does this mean for you.

It means the situation is more balanced than either extreme of the privacy debate suggests. It is understandable that privacy advocates reacted strongly because vague language from a large tech company always deserves scrutiny. But treating every automated feature as a major privacy risk does not help consumers either. Most people - myself included - make trade-offs every day. Maybe you're comfortable giving up a little privacy for convenience. Maybe you aren't. The key is that you get to decide, with accurate information and clear settings.

It is also worth noting that business users may see this very differently than personal users. Many businesses have strict rules around data and legal compliance. A feature that feels harmless at home may not be acceptable in a work environment where sensitive information is involved.

If you want to review or turn off these smart features here are the steps. You need to check two places.

Step 1 Turn off smart features in Gmail Chat and Meet
1. Open Gmail
2. Select the gear icon in the upper right corner and then choose See all settings
3. Scroll until you find Smart features and personalization in Gmail Chat and Meet
4. Clear the checkbox
5. Save changes if asked

Step 2 Turn off Google Workspace smart features
1. In Gmail settings find Google Workspace smart features
2. Select Manage Workspace smart feature settings
3. Turn off both items - Smart features in Google Workspace & Smart features in other Google products
4 Save again

Step 3 Confirm the settings
Refresh Gmail or sign out and in again to make sure everything stayed off.

Once you disable these options Gmail will stop using message content to provide convenience features. Tools like writing suggestions and automatic sorting may stop working.

In the end there is no universal right choice. These features truly help many people stay organized and there is nothing wrong with choosing convenience. There is also nothing wrong with preferring maximum privacy. What matters is understanding what the features actually do so you can decide for yourself.

That is the real balance most consumers are trying to find.

by Jim Malmberg
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