

Email Communication



Email is one of the most common forms of writing in the workplace and in academia. This handout is designed to provide general tips for improving email communication.

Email Communication

While email is a convenient way to communicate, it may not always be the best tool for the job. Consider the following when deciding whether or not to send an email:

- As an online medium, email can be transmitted quickly and well beyond the intended audience, so beware of sending material you consider private since email creates a written record of communication.
- Some conversations are best held in person. Avoid dealing with controversial, emotional, overly complex, or personal issues via email. Never write anything in an email that you would not say in person.

Audience and Tone

Remember you are writing to readers, so consider the following in terms of audience and tone:

Identify Your Audience

- Only send information to those who need it. For example, when only the sender needs a response, email them individually instead of hitting the *reply all* button.
- Know that when you mark a message as high priority, you are demanding the attention of your reader. Be respectful of readers' priorities and workloads by only using this feature when necessary.

Tailor Your Word Choice and Formality

- Select words and a level of formality that reflect your relationship with your audience. An email sent to a friend or family member will differ from an email sent to an employer or coworker.
- Avoid jargon or slang in favor of more professional and clear language.
- Email comes without nonverbal cues (e.g., facial expressions, gestures, intonation), so there is a higher risk of miscommunication. Read your email aloud to make sure your message is clear and respectful.
- Revise and edit your writing to enhance your credibility.
- Use a professional email address for professional communication.

Email Organization

An email should be organized into the following sections in order to improve communication:

Subject Line

The subject line sets the tone for the email and provides a succinct overview of the main message. The subject line also provides a first impression, so use the space wisely and never leave it blank.

Salutation

In professional emails, always greet and address your reader with the correct title (e.g., Dr., Ms., Mr.). If you have an established relationship with the reader, using only their first name may also be appropriate.

Main Message

Keep your message clear and concise. When writing a more developed email, lead with the purpose for your communication, provide needed context, use paragraph breaks to separate ideas, and either state the desired outcome of your message (e.g., requesting a response or action) or identify the next step you will take. Keep the paragraphs and overall message short and scannable. Essentially, the reader should be able to easily identify the information you are providing and what you want them to do with that information.

Closing

As with any conversation, provide a sense of closure and end your email respectfully. This may be as simple as thanking the reader for their time and consideration of your request. Closing an email properly also includes using an appropriate signoff (e.g., sincerely, best, thank you, with regards, etc.). If you do not have a standard signature block that includes additional contact information, you may provide that information in the closing.

Signature and Sign Block

Always include a signature. Consider using a sign block to provide additional contact options and context (e.g., your title or position).

Attachments and Links

Label your attachments clearly and professionally. In the body of the email, notify readers of attachments and your reason for providing them. Introduce or provide context for links, and make sure links work.

Responding to Email

Part of being professional in your communication is responding to emails in a timely manner. Even if you cannot complete an assignment or provide a full response to an email, you should still reply, and update the sender on the status of the task or assignment.

Professional Email Examples

Review the two example emails to better understand the principles of email etiquette addressed in this handout.

Ineffective Professional Email Example:

From: giggleduck4ever@personalemail.com
To: coworker@business.com
Subject: Hey

I need the report by 5pm. Thnx.

D

Effective Professional Email Example:

From: professional@email.com
To: coworker@business.com
Subject: Report Data for Tomorrow's Presentation

Ann,

I am preparing our presentation for tomorrow morning and am hoping to include data from your report. Would you mind sending me a copy of your completed report? I'll be in my office until 5 p.m. tonight. Thank you for your help on this assignment. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Best,

Daniel Lee
Presentation manager, Company Name