

WRITING EMAILS & EMAIL ETIQUETTE

Email Etiquette for Business Communication

Email is the most popular of all Internet activities. According to *Information Week*, a business user in the U.S. sends and receives, on average, 171 emails a day - a volume that is expected to double by 2010, according to the Research Group Radicati Group. We love to use email because it is quick and easy. However, for all its great benefits, email poses some risks in how it can be misused. It is important to treat email like any other business communication. Whenever you are writing an email, keep in mind that it can be read by anyone at anytime.

Given the widespread use of email in the workplace, it is important to ensure you follow the basics of email etiquette and avoid some of the common problems and pitfalls. Here is a quick list of tips and suggestions.

Be Brief

- Whenever possible, be concise. Emails are not memos. Get to the point as quickly as possible. Keep sentences short but complete. A long email can be hard to read and discouraging to the reader.
- Place all of the important facts and information at the top of the email. For busy managers and executives, start with a brief summary, followed by more detailed information below.

Avoid Fanning the Flames

- Resist the temptation to fire-off a quick response to an email that has caused you anger or frustration. Take a moment to reread the message from the sender, as you may have misinterpreted the information. It is easy with email to unintentionally read between the lines.
- Draft a response, but don't hit the "send" button, and take time to let yourself cool-down. Then, reread your response again later, after a break, and see whether you still want to send it. Often times you will find yourself rewriting the response once your emotions have settled.
- Do not hide behind email. If an issue has escalated, break the cycle of message and respond by calling or meeting with the person. A personal conversation can go a long way to resolving work conflicts.

Create an easy to read message

Don't Use Social Abbreviations

- In business emails, avoid the use of social abbreviations or emoticons, such as LOL (laughing out loud), hearts or : that may be more commonly used in text messaging. These types of abbreviations are generally not appropriate in a business setting.
- In addition, commonly used text-speak such as "hiya," "r," "plz" and "thanx" presents too casual of a tone and can be off-putting to the reader.

Pay Attention to Tone

- Speaking of tone, pay attention to the tone of your emails. Tone is a hard thing to judge. Always write the email message keeping the reader in mind. Reread the message a few times and make sure it cannot be misinterpreted. You want to come across with either a neutral or positive tone that is courteous, respectful and open. A way to ensure a positive tone is to always think of smiling while you are writing.
- Avoid writing messages in all uppercase letters, because that has come to convey shouting. And don't use all lowercase letters either - it is too informal and inappropriate in the work context. It can also come across like you are mumbling.

Double-Check the Recipient Field

Many of our email programs will automatically populate the "To" field based on a few key letters. When you are working quickly to respond to hundreds of emails each day, take a second to double check the name in the recipient box. There was a recent story in the news about a lawyer who accidentally sent a New York Times journalist confidential information about Eli Lilly. The journalist had the same last name as the intended recipient who worked at Eli Lilly. Make sure your message is going to right person. It can save you a world of grief later.

Formatting

Edit for Grammar and Spelling

The message you send forms an impression of who you are, and we want that impression to be positive. Take the time to check grammar and spelling - it only takes a few seconds to re-read your message. Use that spell checker. That's what it's there for.

Include a Descriptive Subject Line

- A well thought out, descriptive subject line can go a long way. Think of it as a headline for a newspaper article. It should attract your reader's attention and in some cases, it can make the difference that gets your email read. Limit the subject line to 4 to 6 words that accurately describe the topic of your email.
- Feel free to modify the subject line as your ongoing conversation with the recipient changes and moves in another direction.

Limit Use of Forwarding and Cc

- Refrain from routinely forwarding non-business email in the workplace. Not only do you clog-up the system, but it can often be off-putting to the recipient who already has hundreds of business emails to review.
- The "Cc" field in email has been used and abused over the years. Some people have set-up filters in their system just to manage their Cc mail. Be careful and think twice about who you copy on your messages. There is no one right answer here. It is situation specific, but oftentimes

minor issues are inappropriately escalated. Have a discussion with your manager as to what issues are appropriate to escalate so you understand what his or her expectations are.

In Conclusion

Email is a vital form of communication in today's fast paced, global work environment. Taking a few moments to reread your messages to ensure that the tone and wording are appropriate, you have written in a concise and factual manner and the message is going to the intended recipients. These few steps will go a long way toward improving your business communication.