

E-mail Etiquette Guidelines

35 Tips for Building Relationships through More Professional E-mail



Benefit from a Positive Tone and Good Etiquette

1. Set limits to reduce volume. Decide if e-mail is your “best” choice for communicating.
2. Never send an e-mail when you are angry. Write it, then put it aside for at least one hour and reread it before sending it.
3. Don’t use e-mail for reprimands or criticism. Have a face-to-face conversation to handle sensitive or delicate matters.
4. Use positive language such as, *I appreciate, I look forward to, thank you.*
5. Eliminate negative words and phrases such as, *You failed to, you claim, lack of, never.*
6. Be constructive by stressing what you can do to help someone, not what you can’t do.
7. Avoid an impersonal or legal-sounding tone such as *pursuant to, please be advised, in view of the foregoing.*
8. Keep the tone business-like, yet conversational. Use the “human” voice—*I, you, we*—to establish a friendly tone. Don’t get too casual or overly formal.
9. Avoid excessive technical jargon. Readers appreciate a simple conversational tone that they can read and understand quickly.
10. Do not overuse abbreviations and emoticons. Your recipients might not be aware of their meanings, and they are generally not appropriate for professional use.
11. Avoid humor and sarcasm, especially with global audiences. Tone can easily be misinterpreted in e-mail.
12. Do not use e-mail to discuss confidential information. Never send classified or sensitive information electronically.



Does your company have an e-mail policy in place to ensure “safe and productive” e-mail practices?

13. Don’t send or forward e-mails containing libelous, defamatory, offensive, racist, or obscene remarks. Sending these kind of messages can result in you and your company facing legal action and paying enormous penalties.
14. Do not write in all capital letters. **WRITING IN CAPITALS LOOKS AS IF YOU ARE SHOUTING.** It is difficult to read and might trigger an unwanted response in the form of a flame mail.



Be a Credible Sender

15. Beware of large attachments. Sending large attachments can annoy readers and even bring down their e-mail systems. Try to compress attachments and send attachments only when they are necessary.
16. Avoid using **URGENT** and **IMPORTANT** in a subject line. Write a descriptive, informative subject line instead.
17. Do not request delivery receipts. This will almost always annoy your recipient. If you want to know whether an e-mail was received, ask the reader to confirm or send a follow-up e-mail.
18. Do not recall a message. Most likely, your message has already been delivered and read. It is better to send a new e-mail acknowledging your mistake.
19. Do not overuse *Reply to All*. Use *Reply to All* only if you really need your message to be seen by each person who received the original message.
20. Protect your recipients’ privacy by using the *bcc* field. Some people place all the e-mail addresses in the *To* field. There are two drawbacks to this: (1) the recipient knows that you have sent the same message to a large number of recipients; and

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(2) you are publicizing others' e-mail addresses without permission. Instead, place all addresses in the *bcc* field. Or if you have Microsoft Outlook and Word you can do a mail merge and create one message for each recipient. For more information, consult the *Help* feature in Word.

21. Use the *cc* field sparingly. Using the *cc* field means the recipient should be aware of the message but is not required to act on the message. Make sure the person you are copying knows why he or she received the copy.
22. Don't leave out the message thread. Click *Reply* instead of *New Mail*. Including the thread saves readers time and frustration in looking for previous related e-mails.
23. Do not forward chain letters. These messages waste time and bandwidth. In addition, chain letters often violate company e-mail policies.



Organize Your Message for Results

24. Write a descriptive subject line that is meaningful to the recipient. Be specific about your topic and actions needed. For example: *Employee Communication Surveys Due Tomorrow*.
25. Give readers an early payoff. Your readers are busy—don't make them dig for information. State the purpose of your message in the first paragraph to capture your readers' attention.
26. Be concise and to the point. Do not make e-mail longer than it needs to be. Because reading e-mail is harder than reading printed communications, long e-mails can be very discouraging to read.
27. Anticipate any questions your recipient may have—if you do not answer all potential questions in your message, you will receive more e-mails regarding unanswered questions, incomplete requests, and unclear instructions.
28. Include an action step. Clearly spell out what action or next steps you want the reader to take.

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Keep Your Writing Style Simple

29. Use the active voice. For instance, *We need you to work overtime on Saturday* communicates better than *It has been determined that you will work overtime on Saturday*.
30. Avoid long sentences. Keep your sentences to a maximum of 15 to 20 words. E-mail is meant to be a quick medium and requires a clear, concise writing style.
31. Use accurate spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Read your e-mail before you send it. E-mails with excessive errors make a bad impression and prevent you from conveying a clear, professional message.
32. Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph. When making several points, use bulleted or numbered lists.
33. Be cautious with formatting. Remember that when you use formatting in your e-mails, the sender might not be able to view formatting, or might see different fonts than you had intended.



Bonus: Timesavers

34. Use templates for frequently used responses, such as directions to your office or how to subscribe to your newsletter. Save such information as response templates and paste them into your message when you need them.
35. Answer swiftly. When possible, respond within 24 hours. If the e-mail is complicated, send an e-mail back saying that you will reply shortly. This usually encourages people to be patient.



Questions & Quandaries . . .

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