

# E-MAIL ETIQUETTE TIP SHEET

## 33 Tips for Building Relationships through More Professional E-mail



### Write Constructive, Helpful Messages

1. 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. Avoid using 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.

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

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12. Do not use e-mail to discuss confidential information. Never send classified information electronically.
13. Adhere to your company’s e-mail policy. If you send inappropriate messages, you and your company could face legal action and have to pay 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 respond with a confirmation.
18. Think before you send. 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.
19. 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 it. Make sure the person you are copying knows why he or she received the copy. Avoid copying to escalate an issue.

**The average worker  
in corporate America receives  
hundreds of e-mail messages a day.**

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Despite its popularity, people point to e-mail as one of the major causes of work-related stress.

20. Don't leave out the message thread when it is helpful to your reader. Including the thread saves readers time and frustration in looking for previous related e-mails. However, keep the subject lines relevant to the message.
21. Limit the volume of e-mail. When you are caught in a series of e-mail messages, know when to cut the thread and pick up the phone.

### Organize Your Message for Results

22. 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.*
23. 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.
24. 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.
25. 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.
26. Include an action step. Clearly spell out what action or next steps you want the reader to take.

### Write Clear and Concise Messages

27. 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.*
28. 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.
29. 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.
30. Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph. When making several points, use bulleted or numbered lists.
31. 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.

Use e-mail as a tool to build effective workplace relationships.

### Additional Tips

32. 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.
33. 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.

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