

## **Email Etiquette**

Email has become our most common communication tool. Our ability to interact effectively using email has brought some positive change but also its share of challenges and pitfalls.

### **Use email wisely**

Email creates a paper trail that is there for anyone and everyone to access, and it's this wonderful but potentially dangerous capability you should always consider before sending an email. Could this end up being an issue for me further down the line? Would I be happy for my boss to see this? Would HR or lawyers find this of interest?

Relationship building is the basis of most working relationships and it's now well documented that using email as a replacement for personal interaction is likely to produce inferior results. Try to think bigger picture and decide what form of communication best suits your situation and your recipient.

### **Decide what you want to send to who**

It's usually advisable to use the 'Reply' button and retain the original message at the bottom of your reply, so that you have a communication trail.

If the message you are replying to was originally sent to multiple people, consider if all recipients need to see your reply. If they don't, avoid using this option and simply reply to the sender. It's frustrating when you receive multiple emails a day that are irrelevant to you and waste your time.

### **REPLY TO ALL and FORWARD**

It is very easy to be so busy that you lose sight of who the recipients are to your email and inadvertently write things or pass on information that were not meant for that person. This has happened to many people and can be the beginning of major problems. If you reply to all or forwarding on an email, always take the time to check that the content of the entire email is suitable for all of the recipients.

**Things to watch out for**

Attachments	Consider that very large documents may block a recipient's mailbox. In addition, people checking their emails via personal handheld devices may not be able to open attachments.
Priorising	It's advisable to avoid using the High Priority option except in important situations, otherwise your reader might start to ignore your flag at a time when you need a fast response.
Security	You can use options such as encrypting to add a level of security but you should always assume that email is not confidential. Some employers filter and read employee emails, and many assistants have access to colleague's passwords. If your message/content is highly confidential consider a meeting or letter by courier.
Efficiency and ease of access	To make it easier to find things you might like to set up folders for the people or companies you deal with or have categories. If you make it a habit to file a message once you have actioned it, it will also keep your inbox clutter free. Consider doing this instead of printing items and filing in hard copy. Check with your manager to see if there are any specific requirements for filing.
Alert	You can set a message to alert you when it has been delivered, and when it has been read. This is a useful tool when you need to be sure a document has been received and read.

**Content and presentation**

Salutations	It's usually best to address an email in the same way you would address the person if you met them face to face. When you know someone well "Hi John" is fine, but if you would say, "Hello Mr Smith", you should probably address your email Dear Mr Smith. Try to put yourself in the recipient's shoes so you are not inadvertently thought to be too familiar or disrespectful.
Content	If you want your email to be read, keep it relevant and concise. The longer the message, the less chance there is your recipient will read it all.

<p>Formatting, spelling, grammar &amp; punctuation</p>	<p>Keep formatting simple and avoid over punctuating. With business communication you should avoid the over use of exclamation marks. It's good to develop the habit of using spell check before you push send. Poorly worded content and sloppy presentation can give a bad impression and make communication more difficult or ineffective.</p> <p>Be careful when you use capitals to emphasise a point as it can come across in the same way as shouting, and may be perceived to be aggressive or offensive.</p>
<p>Tone and manner</p>	<p>This is such a critical area it is well worth taking the time to put yourself in the recipient's shoes and run over the tone and manner of your message. Humour and sarcasm can be misinterpreted as rudeness, when in written form. Informality can also be misinterpreted as a lack of care, particularly if you don't know the person well or the person is used to a more formal and professional style.</p> <p>Email is one way of marketing yourself and building a reputation. Use it to your best advantage by creating a professional and positive image of yourself.</p>

**Getting personal**

Different companies have different rules about personal emails so it's always advisable to check your company policy. Some companies don't permit any personal email traffic; others are okay with a small amount.

Sending or receiving pornographic or other offensive material is never acceptable at work and can have serious consequences, especially as bugs are more prevalent in these types of files. If you are sent this type of material, it's important you delete it immediately and, if you know the person, request that they don't send further emails.

It's also worth remembering that even if you use your personal email account to send or receive material from a work computer, it is still traceable back to the workplace. If in doubt, seek guidance.

**Send in haste, repent at leisure**

Email allows you to respond quickly to incoming messages which is great most of the time. If you receive a message which angers or frustrates you, it may be tempting to fire off an angry reply - don't. It's always best to wait at least an hour (sometimes 24 hours or longer) before responding, if indeed you need to respond at all. By all means write a response to help you get

your thoughts down but put it in your draft folder (no address on) or write it in a word document. You can send it at a later date, if necessary.

A battle of words is usually very unwise (even if it makes you feel better, albeit briefly) and may well breach your company internet and email policies. Most policies stipulate that messages must not be of a harassing, defaming, inflaming or offensive nature.

## **Time management & storage**

Make sure you are the boss of your email and it doesn't become your boss. Email is not an interactive conversation; you don't need to respond to every email the second it pops into your mail box. This can fragment your day to the point that you become ineffective. Ideally you should set aside regular times to check your inbox, for example, first thing in the morning, at lunchtime, and mid-afternoon. Turn off the pop-up function if you can't help being distracted.

## **Signing off**

When completing your message it's always advisable to include your full name, title, and contact details at the bottom, so that the recipient can contact you if they wish. It's usually possible to set this up as a template so that it automatically appears when you type an email.

## **Check before you send**

Once your email is crafted, put yourself in the shoes of the reader and read it through one more time. If it is well set out, easy to understand, and you know it will be well received, send away. If you are unsure, rework it or ask a colleague to read it through before you send it.