

Email Tips

Adapted from



and Courtesies

compilation by Mark Potter

,Have you ever received emails that made you say Ouch, Huh, or Enough Already? We might accept them as a regrettable hazard of modern life, but we can avoid sending them ourselves. Here are some tips and courtesies compiled from several sources:

Use the telephone. For subjects that are complex, confidential, or have emotional content, a phone call is better than email and a face-to-face meeting is best.

Remember the Audit Trail. If an email gets written, it will probably be captured somewhere for posterity. Don't send an email if you are not prepared to have it go public.

Use the Correct 'Reply' Option. Generally it's adequate to respond to the sender alone. Use the "Reply All" function only when it truly adds to the discourse. Everybody does not need to read all the email on a given topic – especially if your response is a "Thanks for the information" or "Count me in" type of response.

Create Meaningful Subject Lines. Meaningful subject lines are helpful for finding old messages and getting your messages read in a timely way. For example, "School Board Meeting on March 23" is more helpful than "Meeting." If you're emailing to somebody who does not know you, your subject line should include meaningful information, so your message won't be treated as junk mail.

You can use the subject line for your complete message if it is short. "Reminder, NLD meeting is Tuesday at 10 at the Chapel. EOM" EOM tells the reader that the subject line is the "end of message" or the entire message.

Minimize Attachments. Embed content in the text of your email if possible.

Attachments are time-consuming to read and increase the chances that your email will be ignored. You can also embed the information, such as an agenda, and attach the document for people who want to print or save the information.

Be Brief. We are all bombarded with daily emails, and there's a tendency not to read long emails. Don't let your message be ignored because it is too long.

Be informal, not careless. Punctuation, rules of capitalization, and sentence structure make our writing easier to understand, thus easier to read.

Make it personal. This means using the person's name in a salutation as in "Dear Kelsey" and closing with a "Thanks" and your own name. This is conventional, but not boring.

Minimize use of hot symbols. Hot symbols inject an emotional tone, which can spiral quickly. Hot symbols are: 1) ALL CAPS 2) !!!!!!! 3) Any message sent or labeled "High Priority", "Urgent", or "Important".



Read before pressing Send. It will give you a chance to do a spell and grammar check and spot errant wording that might offend. It will also give you a chance to confirm that your email is being sent to the correct recipients. Especially with “contacts” and “auto fill in,” it can be easy to mistakenly send an email to the wrong person with a similar name.

Slow Down. We all tend to rush through our emails. Sometimes it is better to take a breath, or sleep on it, before responding.

Forward with Permission. Never forward another person’s email opinion or observations without checking with the sender first.

Beware of Blind Copies (BCC) and Public Distribution Lists. By definition BCCs are deceptive. Legitimate uses of BCC are 1) for sending a broadcast to many people when it is not important for recipients to know who else received the broadcast; or 2) to protect personal privacy by not divulging email addresses. When using a ‘public’ distribution list, be sure you know who is on the list and keep in mind the maxim “Use the Correct ‘Reply.’”

Use Mark as Unread.

Many email applications allow you to return an email you have read to unread. If you have read an email but want to return to it to respond or take an action, mark it as unread so it will continue to be highlighted in your inbox. Otherwise, it may get lost in all your other read mail!

Protect Privacy. Some people are protective of their email addresses and will share them selectively. Don’t violate a person’s privacy if they haven’t already shared their email with your group of recipients.

Manage Your Correspondents’ Expectations about How You Use Email. If you do not check your email queue regularly – at least every two (2) days – let your correspondents know so they won’t rely on email to share important or time-sensitive information.

Make it Legal. For those in government service – both volunteer and paid roles – it is important to conduct business legally. If a quorum is being contacted, it is usually permissible to transmit factual information – but not opinion – via email as long as it is not discussed via email. The information should subsequently be included in discussions that take place in posted meetings. Opinions should not be expressed via email and decisions should not be made via email. If an urgent decision is needed, it must be confirmed and documented in the next meeting.