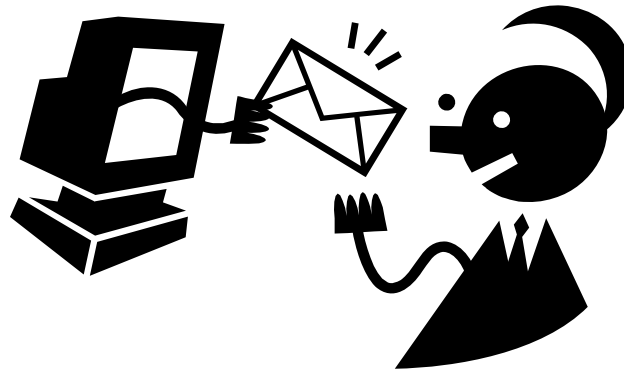
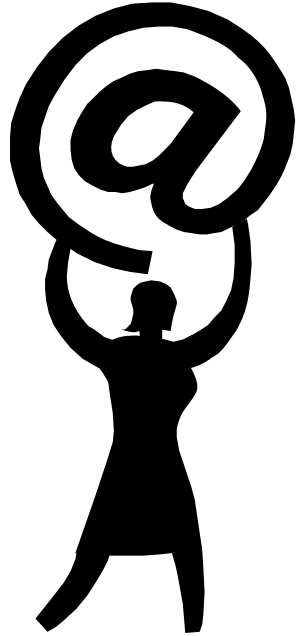


Email Communications



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Overview

Email, how did we ever live without it? Yes, its convenient and very fast but as more and more tasks are shifted to using email rather than good old face-to-face communications, the costs of using, or should we say overusing, email is growing exponentially. Think about it. How much of your day is spent dealing with email?

have you ever received an email and felt a little put off by the message even though it was from a good friend or trusted colleague? Have you ever sent an email that upset or confused someone? What was it like to be in that situation and what did you do to clear up the misunderstanding? It is because of these situations like these that some ground rules on email etiquette were established. As email writers, we should be mindful of them.

Basic Email Etiquette

The Best Email Etiquette is Good Common Sense—use it!

Accentuate the positive!

Use positive language such as, *I appreciate, I look forward to, thank you*. Eliminate negative words and phrases such as, *You failed to, you claim, lack of, never*. Avoid excessive technical jargon. Readers appreciate a simple conversational tone that they can read and understand quickly.

Attachments

Don't send large attachments, especially without forewarning the recipient. Sending large attachments can annoy readers and even bring down their e-mail systems. Try to compress attachments using a program such as WINZIP or convert to a PDF file. Send attachments only when they are necessary.

Subject matters

Avoid using URGENT and IMPORTANT in a subject line. Write a descriptive, informative subject line that is meaningful to the recipient instead. Be specific about your topic and actions needed. For example: *Employee Communication Surveys Due Tomorrow*. Don't be the person who cried wolf by making all emails urgent or important. Overusing "high importance" can also aggravate recipients.

Emailing large groups

Use distribution lists. Some people place all the e-mail addresses in the To field. There are two drawbacks to this: the recipient knows that you have sent the same message to a large number of recipients; and you are publicizing others' e-mail addresses without permission. Instead, place all addresses in the bcc field. If you have Microsoft Outlook and Word you can do a mail merge and create one message for each recipient.

KISS

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. Avoid long sentences. Keep your sentences to a maximum of 15 to 20 words. E-mail is meant to be quick and requires a clear, concise writing style. Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph. When making several points, use bulleted or numbered lists. Your recipients are busy—don't make them dig for information. State the purpose or main point of your message in the first paragraph.

Proof your work

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. We'll explore this further in the section about writing with a professional tone.

Privacy

Never assume that your email messages are private. On the Internet, there is no such thing. Because email travels a complex path through the internet before reaching its destination, the chance of messages being intercepted and read by unintended persons does exist. Also your email may be forwarded to others.

Its fast, but...

Just because email is so fast, don't assume that your email messages will be read and acted on immediately. There may be a significant lag between the time you send an email message and the time it arrives at the recipient's service provider, and the time the recipient reads it. Be patient when expecting a response to an email message, though send a follow-up if you don't hear any word within a reasonable time. If you need to send time-critical information, you may be better served using another medium, such as the phone, face to face, or express mail.

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 and gives you more time for the appropriate response.

Spam & forwards

Do not send unsolicited email, particularly commercial mass mailings. This can be considered spam and is a grave faux pas in the business world. 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 organization facing legal action and paying enormous penalties.

Don't shout

When writing, do not type in ALL CAPS. Type that appears in all capital letters is considered shouting by Internet standards. If you want to emphasize a word or phrase

and are not able to use italics or underlining, highlight it in **asterisks**. Do not write in all capital letters. WRITING IN CAPITALS LOOKS AS IF YOU ARE SHOUTING. It is also difficult to read and might trigger an unwanted hostility in the form of an angry response.

Skip abbreviations and emoticons

You have most likely seen them and probably even used a few of them—and emoticons such as :-)) or ;-< or abbreviations such as **LOL** or **ROTFL**. Your recipients might not be aware of their meanings and they are generally not appropriate for professional use in business correspondence.

Closings

Do write a closing for your message. Beside making it easier for your reader to find the end of the message, the closing seals the tone and serves as a final reminder of the main point or requested outcome. Try an action-oriented closing such as "Thanks for sending me the proposal draft," or "I'll call you on Tuesday to schedule the meeting." Or go for a gracious closing: "Thanks for your help," "Best regards," or "I look forward to meeting you." Use this opportunity to request action or establish a time for response.

Please don't do these...

Don't 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 by telephone or send a follow-up e-mail.

Forget about recalling a message. Most likely, your message has already been delivered and read. It is better to send a new e-mail acknowledging your mistake. Don't be so quick to hit the send button. A minute to look over the email can avoid embarrassment.

Writing with a business tone

Why is it some of us think since email is fast that we should be fast, and often careless, in our email communications? More businesses than ever are using email as the basic form of communications with colleagues and more importantly, with clients and customers. Many of us now receive assignments and updates via email systems. The immediacy of email makes it tempting to treat it as highly informal—leading to uses of sarcasm and flippancy that can be easily misinterpreted as unprofessional behavior. Just because we are using email, we should still follow the conventions for standard business writing. Exercise good grammar, proofread your email, and use the spell checker.

What is Tone?

Tone is the quality in your writing that reveals your attitude toward your topic and reader. Tone comes from your choice of words, the structure of your sentences, and the order of the information you present. Because e-mail lacks the formality of other

forms of printed communications and the body language of face-to-face communication, the words themselves carry more meaning. Your tone in an e-mail or how you say what you say, is so important because an inappropriate tone can cause a reader to ignore, delete, or overreact to your message. All business e-mail writers must be able to control the tone of their writing so their e-mail messages will have the results they intend. Don't rely on emoticons - such as this smiley : -) - or abbreviations, BTW for by the way - to set the tone in your e-mail.

Remember that well-chosen words create a personal, professional tone in e-mail. Think and choose the right words to convey your message. Write in a tone that is closest to the way you would speak to your reader in person. A flippant tone that the reader doesn't find funny can damage a relationship as well as progress on a company project. Your tone can help you maintain or lose customers.

We all know that the volume of e-mail we answer each day makes it difficult to write each message thoughtfully and attend to the tone of the language we choose. But if we want our messages to achieve our goals, we must set the appropriate tone in email just as we do when we speak.

Use proper spelling, grammar & punctuation

What kind of impression does a misspelled email give to the recipient? This is not only important because improper spelling, grammar, and punctuation give a bad impression of your organization, it is also important for conveying the message properly. E-mails with no full stops or commas are difficult to read and can sometimes even change the meaning of the text.

Whenever you send an email communication, especially if it is business related, it is a direct reflection on you. That is why it is important to remember to do a spell check on your email before you hit the send button.

Most email programs have a spell check button or feature available. In some email programs such as Outlook you have the option of spell checking your email before it is actually sent automatically. Use these tools. If your program doesn't offer spell check you can always write the text in Word, which will alert you to any misspellings and then you can easily cut and paste into the email.

Use the active voice and be clear and specific. For instance, *We need you to work overtime on Saturday* communicates more clearly than *It has been determined that you will work overtime on Saturday*. Active voice makes your e-mail tone clearer and more direct. Active voice makes the "doer" in the sentence clear. When you write in the active voice your e-mail tone won't sound bureaucratic the way passive voice does.

Proofread your work

Proofreading consists of reviewing any text, either hard copy on paper or electronic copy on a computer and checking for typos and formatting errors. Unfortunately, there's not a spell check program out there that will catch all the potential mistakes you can make while writing. That's why it's so imperative to proofread.

What's wrong with these sentences?

- "This contract shall be effective as of the singing of this agreement."
- "He used his wench to pull his truck out of the ditch."
- "I know judo, karate, jujitsu and other forms of marital arts."
- "Sign up now for our Beauty and Fitness Curse."
- "To Whom I May Concern:"
- "We proudly feature some-day shipping."
- "Our massage treatments help relive your pain."

Now you see why you should proofread everything you send....just in case!

When NOT to email

There are times when email is not the appropriate form of communications. Most of us probably know when this is but just to be clear here are some guidelines:

- 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. If you are really angry, give it a day or two. Reread it carefully.
- Don't use e-mail for reprimands or criticism. Have a face-to-face conversation to handle sensitive or delicate matters.
- Don't use e-mail to discuss confidential information. Never send classified or sensitive information electronically. Email is NOT private!
- Don't forward chain letters. These messages waste time and clog up the servers with unnecessary volume. In addition, chain letters often violate company e-mail policies and make you look unprofessional.

Signatures and stationary

A signature block, often abbreviated as signature, sig block, or sig file is a block of text automatically appended at the bottom of an email message. This has the effect of "signing off" the message. It is common practice for a signature block to consist of one or more lines containing some brief information on the email sender.

Information usually contained in a signature block includes the your name, your title, company name, phone number and email address, along with other contact details if required, such as URLs for the business. A witty or profound quotation is often included Consider a signature of your company's marketing tag line or a special sales offer or a direct link to the company Web site or to a registration page so customers can sign up to get news or offers. These are all extremely cost-effective ways to build business.

Even sending signatures of quotations or sayings in business e-mail is a way to make you stand out amid the clutter. It can also drive business to your website.

Note that a signature block is *not* the same as a digital signature. A signature block is easily copied and pasted, whereas a digital signature uses cryptographic techniques to provide verifiable proof of authorship.

Stationary

How do you feel when you get an email from a colleague and it has a cutesy flower pattern, a dancing cartoon, or some other silly background? Usually the reaction is to cringe or think something unflattering. The best guideline for the use of stationary patterns is to forgo the use of them. Some email programs don't recognize the stationary anyway and produce a jumble of attachments on the email message including the pictures used in the stationary. Many can't see them at all so why even bother unless your line of business IS stationary.

Top E-mail Blunders that Cost \$\$\$

Most complaints voiced time and time again point to distinct blunders that make email communication counterproductive and costly. These blunders impact both internal and external communication and may produce a single crisis or result in compounded losses. They usually result in lower productivity and higher stress levels for all involved.

- **No clear purpose**

Most e-mails fail to communicate on the first try because the sender did not have a clear purpose for writing. As a result, the reader is reluctant to keep reading and avoids the message. Additional contact is necessary to re-communicate

Cost: Inaction; rework

Remedy: Be crystal clear and specific

- **No specific action step**

Many readers complain that after reading an e-mail, they're not sure what to do with the information or how and when to respond.

Cost: Inaction, rework

Remedy: What exactly do you want done? When?

- **Incomplete information**

Messages that lack important details result in unnecessary follow-up communication.

Cost: Inaction, rework

Remedy: Check for vital information

- **Too much information**

E-mails that contain too much extraneous information and detail confuse readers, waste time, and hinder productivity.

Cost: Excessive reading time (equates to lost hours)

Remedy: Keep it short and simple

- **Harsh or demanding tone**

Negative messages offend readers and can trigger nasty, counterproductive e-mail exchanges. In addition, abrasive e-mails discourage readers from responding.

Cost: Strained relationships, missed opportunities, lost customers

Remedy: Check your tone

- **Sending sensitive or confidential information**

E-mail should not be used for private matters and subjects that require tactful face-to-face communication. E-mail lacks the personal touch and discretion needed to address these kinds of issues.

Cost: Damaged relationships, disgruntled employees

Remedy: Is what you are sending appropriate?

- **Overly complex writing**

An impersonal writing style, such as writing in the passive voice, makes the reader's job more difficult and time consuming, as does an overly formal or academic writing style.

Cost: Excessive reading time

Remedy: K.I.S.S.

- **Spelling & Grammar Errors**

Spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors distract readers and give the message an unprofessional, sloppy look.

Cost: Tarnished image, loss of status or job, loss of customers

Remedy: Take a moment to proof

- **Unnecessary and Excessive emails**

Spam, junk, unnecessary FYI's and CC's, mishandled distribution lists—all of these add to the increasing number of e-mails people must organize and attend to every day.

Cost: Hundreds of thousands of dollars

Remedy: Do you really need to send this?

What other email “blunders” can you think of? Are they happening at your place of work? How many emails do you receive that are unnecessary or unclear?

Legal Issues

Breaking privacy guidelines and crossing ethical boundaries

Companies have paid out millions of dollars in settlements in recent years because of e-mail litigation. In attorney Helen Conroy's article, "Electronic Mail: What You Don't Know Can Hurt You," in *Enterprising Women*, she states that all business litigation arises from communication failure. Because people tend to speak freely and without

reflection in email, jurors consider email highly credible evidence. The cost to your organization can be staggering.

People typically use email as a quick and convenient way to engage in a wide variety of business activities, including discussion and revision of policies and procedures, circulation of draft documents and meeting minutes, distribution of work assignments and schedules, and actual business transactions. While many organizations have enthusiastically embraced the opportunities provided by email, the vast majority overlook the fact that when email messages contain evidence of business decisions, actions, and transactions, they become documents which are subject to the same legal requirements, restrictions, and standards as any record produced in any form or media.

Don't use emails to communicate sensitive or confidential information. It doesn't matter if you delete the emails, they can be retrieved with the right technical skills and software. Emails can be used as evidence in court. Remember the Enron debacle? Don't use emails to fire staff. Termination is a touchy enough subject without alienating the staff further by being so impersonal or cold.

Never forget that your organization or business owns your emails and they are **NOT** private communications. Don't write in a tone you would be uncomfortable sharing with your boss or staff. Don't write when you are angry. Flaming, as angry emails are called, can escalate into lost respect and lost clients. They may also turn into messy legal issues.

Add disclaimers to your emails

It is important to add disclaimers to your internal and external mails, since this may help protect your organization from liability. Consider the following scenario: an employee accidentally forwards a virus to a customer by email. The customer decides to sue your organization for damages.

If you add a disclaimer at the bottom of every external mail, saying that the recipient must check each email for viruses and that it cannot be held liable for any transmitted viruses, this may be of help to you in court. For instance, if your company has an email policy in place and adds an email disclaimer to every mail that states that employees are expressly required not to make defamatory statements, you have a good case of proving that the company did everything it could to prevent offensive emails.

Many organizations also use a confidentiality disclaimer on every email so that if an email unintentionally reaches a recipient outside of a specified group, the organization is released from liability. Often wording such as "This message and any attachment are confidential and may be privileged or otherwise protected from disclosure and solely for the use of the person(s) or entity to whom it is intended..." is used.

Do you know what the email policy is at your workplace?

Choosing your subject line for effectiveness

How many times have you received an email with a subject line that said something like Question, FYI or some other meaningless subject line? Or, worse yet, had no subject at all? Good emailers know that a meaningful subject line helps everyone understand, prioritize, and deal with an email more quickly and accurately. The subject line can be used for searching and prioritizing emails too.

Subject lines are headlines

The headline in a newspaper does two things: It grabs your attention and informs you what the article is about so you can decide whether you want to read further. Email subject lines need to do the same thing. Use the subject line to inform the receiver of EXACTLY what the email is about in a few well-chosen words. You might include a call to action such as "Please respond by 7 November", and if your message is one of a regular series of mails, such as a weekly project report, include the date in the subject line too.

Because everyone gets emails they do not want, also known as spam, appropriate use of the subject line increases the chances your email will be read and not deleted. Use this to your advantage whenever possible.

Read the newspaper

If you want to write a better subject line, pick up your local paper. The headline usually highlights a story's most important fact in a limited space. A subject line, in turn, should clearly state what your reader can expect from your email, what's in it for them or what you want them to do as a result of the email. However, there isn't enough space to do all of them all the time. Look at the newspaper headline to see how it interplays with the story.

Avoid using URGENT and IMPORTANT

Even more so than the high-priority option, you must at all times try to avoid these types of words in an email or subject line. Only use this if it is a really, really urgent or important message.

List key info first

Some email clients allow more characters in a subject line than others, but most give you at least 50, including spaces. Make sure your key information in that first 50 characters. Also, make sure the cut-off doesn't occur in a crucial word, such as a price or date. Send yourself a test email to see how it looks if you are not sure.

Don't leave the subject line blank

Most email applications such as Outlook and Outlook Express have search capabilities and use the subject as one of the criteria. If you need to find an email later, it will simplify the search if it has a subject line.

Of course, just as it would be silly to publish a newspaper without headlines, don't leave the subject line blank. Your email recipients will thank you.

The Real Costs of Email

Email, how did we ever live without it? Yes, email is very convenient and very fast but as more and more tasks are shifted to using email rather than good old face-to-face communications, the costs of using, or should we say overusing, email is growing exponentially.

What does email costs businesses?

The IDC, a provider of market intelligence, advisory services, and events for the information technology, telecommunications, and consumer technology markets estimates mail volume has doubled over the past 5 years to over 40 billion person-to-person emails daily with volume expected to continue to grow over 18 percent in each of the next five years..

A monetary estimate puts where reply to alls are the norm, some **\$1,800.00** per employee in wasted time goes down the drain, while emails that lack clarity cause miscommunications wasting between **\$2,100.00 to \$4,100.00** per employee in lost productivity. If these numbers are any indication of trends, email use needs to be looked at more closely.

Companies such as Intel, and US Cellular are trying out "no email" Fridays or weekends. While contact via email with clients and customers or responding to urgent situations is allowed, the usual stack of emails is stopped. The main reason, to encourage face to face discussions and to reconnect teams and staff.

Another common email problem is receiving non-information messages such as thank you, I understand, or I agree. Repetitive messages—such as recaps of one-on-one discussions or summaries of phone conversations—ranked high on the list of annoying e-mails that pointlessly add to the volume of e-mails people receive every day.

Does this seem familiar to you? How much is email costing your organization? Estimate amount of time spent dealing with unnecessary or unclear email and multiply it by your hourly rate? How does it add up? What are some ways you can cut down the amount of email?

The High Cost of E-mail Blunders

Workforce Size	Hours Lost	Cost
100	15,000	\$420,000
250	37,500	\$1,050,000
500	75,000	\$2,100,000
1,000	150,000	\$4,200,000
5,000	750,000	\$21,000,000

The calculations are based on an average compensation cost per employee per year of US \$50,000, 225 workdays in a year, and 8 work hours in a day. Source: Rogen International.

Where's the Next Great Idea??

Yes, you can train employees to be more creative and innovative at work.

Growing Great Ideas: Unleashing Creativity at Work Training Program

In today's rush for success, we tend to forget the vast wealth within the human mind, especially the untapped potential we have in our employees.

So how do we tap into the other 95% of potential? Many employees want to develop and use all their skills, but they aren't sure how to get there. It's up to you to show your employees the way, bring enthusiasm and fun, and most importantly, **IDEAS** back to work.

Learn:

- ✓ **Where's the next great idea?**
- ✓ **How your employees are a potential goldmine**
- ✓ **Ideas=\$\$\$**
- ✓ **How to tap the creative flow**
- ✓ **Mistakes are part of the creative process**
- ✓ **If we don't ask, they won't tell!**
- ✓ **How to build an idea library**
- ✓ **And much, much more...**

Growing Great Ideas: Unleashing Creativity at Work Training Program is a customizable training addressing your organization's challenges, projects, and opportunities by combining interchangeable creative exercises with business-related problem solving skills. Teach employees how to be more creative at work to unleash ideas and innovation.

For more information, email Karen S. Sieczka at founder@growinggreatideas.com or visit <http://www.growinggreatideas.com/creativity.html>

Karen is also available for presentations on the value of creativity at work.

Buy the Book! *Growing Great Ideas: Unleashing Creativity at Work.*

This book explores creativity and lays the foundation to unleash problem-solving skills and creative potential, build teamwork, and turn business challenges into business opportunities.

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