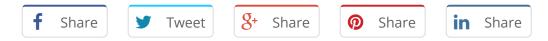ABOUT   CONTACT

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Email Etiquette: The Ultimate Guide

August 8, 2016 by Mendo — Leave a Comment

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Email etiquette is defined as the approach you should take to writing and structuring an email in a professional or personal environment. It is important to practice proper email etiquette because it is a quick form of communication that does not easily convey feelings or emotions.

It can be very easy to misunderstand an email whether it's the wording used, the way you were addressed, or the speed in which you do or don't receive a response. Email is used heavily in business and professional

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Overview

Email is still a widely used form of communication. While text messages have replaced email and other web based forms of communication as the main form of text based communication in personal and social settings, Email is used heavily in business. Usually, you'll have an email account associated with your company's web domain. But there are still personal situations where you may use email through one of the many free providers.

Imagine a situation where you may be coordinating a party for your child's baseball team with the other parents. Proper email etiquette is key in situations like this. Due to it being extremely difficult to convey emotions through text, there is great amount of room for misinterpretation to lead to unnecessary drama and conflict.

In business situations, an email that is too forward or too casual could lead to

seeking. Even worse, you could cost your company hundreds, thousands, or even millions of dollars if a recipient misinterprets your email.

When is it appropriate to communicate via email

There are certain situations where email is a great tool to utilize. Knowing these situations will save time and help boost productivity. This is true for both business and personal scenarios

Appropriate business use of email

- **Providing directional orders** – If you are outlining a detailed course of action for a project that your team is undertaking, it is wise to communicate this via email. Having a list of tasks in a written format allows your peers to refer back to it as needed. This will help avoid misinterpretation or forgotten tasks.

- **Providing detailed information** – If you are sharing a piece of detailed information such as a website URL, sending an email is appropriate. A website address can be long and confusing. They are often made up of what seem like random numbers and letters. Just one misheard or forgotten character

- **Maintaining a record of communication** – We've all been in a situation where wrongdoing occurs or a task is overlooked. Maybe the co-worker you delegated the task to forgot about it. Or maybe you received incorrect directions. A written record can save you some grief.
- **Quick status updates** – If you are just seeking a quick update about the status of a project, sending an email is a good choice.

Appropriate personal use of email

- **Communicating with colleagues within a group or organization** – It will probably be easier and more convenient to use email as opposed to text messages. This is definitely true if a large amount of information is going to be distributed.
- **Reaching out to an old friend/colleague** – Maybe you are reaching out to an old friend and you don't have their phone number? Most people keep the same email address for a long time, so chances are good that you'll get a hold of them. It may just take them a few days or weeks until they see it. This is a situation where time isn't really of the essence, so email is a good non-offensive way to attempting to get in touch.

When is it not appropriate to communicate via email

There are some times where sending an email is not appropriate at all. It could cause a deadline or plans to be missed. It can also kill productivity if used incorrectly. Someone may get offended if you choose to email them in a situation that warrants a phone call or face to face talk.

Inappropriate business use of email

to relay some bad news. If you decide to send the customer an email, they may not see the message until it is too late. Perhaps a delivery that they are counting on is not going to arrive until tomorrow. A prompt phone call to the customer may allow them to send their workers home instead of paying them to wait around to unload a truck that isn't going to arrive.

- **If you require a quick reply** – If you need a quick response to a question, don't send an email. The recipient may not see it until it's too late. You can't really hold them accountable. Email is known not to be a very speedy form of communication.
- **If you are giving complex or detailed instructions** – If you are giving complex or detailed instructions, while delegating project tasks for instance, don't use email. A good rule of thumb is to not use email if you think there will be any questions directed back towards you, or if any of the instructions may be open to interpretation.

Inappropriate personal use of email

- **If you are angry or upset** – It can be easy to say something that you'd regret when you are behind the safety of your keyboard. Furthermore, it may be more sensible to settle a personal dispute through a more direct method of communication. Getting an angry email when the person is expecting a phone call could make matters worse; they may feel that you aren't putting enough effort in to resolve the issue.
- **If you aren't sure that they'll see it** – While most people have an email address, many younger folks don't actively check it. They might only use their email for verifying online accounts or making purchases. If the other person isn't used to getting emails from you and you suddenly begin to email them, don't expect an email reply.

phone or changed their number without telling you, it means that they don't want to talk to you. You might resort to emailing them because they probably didn't think to block you on there, or you can just easily make a new email account. We've all been in a situation like this, and it's painful. But don't do it. It will make things worse for you. (And that being said I promise to not give any more relationship advice in this guide).

How to choose an email address

Choosing the right email address is important, because once you start handing it out to other people, it will be difficult to later change it without any hiccups. A business email address will most likely be chosen by your employer, so there isn't much you can do there. They will choose something simple and professional though. It will probably be some form of your first and last name or an initial and your last name.

Choosing a personal email address can be fun, but you shouldn't go too outlandish with it. It should be a professional email address. You don't want to be sending a formal email, or a resume to potential employers with an email like "sweetgirl42@……..com". Take some advice from the corporate world. Make your personal email address your full name, or some form of your name and initials.

Advantages of email

There are many advantages to using email in business and personal settings. The advantages are mostly the same for both, so we'll just combine them here.

- **It's basically free** – Unless your paying a few dollars for more storage space or additional features, email is basically free. How much do postage stamps even costs nowadays?
- **Saves time** – Calling someone up on the phone just to relay a small piece of information that isn't very important can be time consuming. You're not even sure if they'll answer. You probably won't leave a

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they will see it relatively soon.

- **Maintaining communication records** – As stated earlier in this guide, a huge advantage of email is that there is no denying if and when something was or wasn't said.
- **Quickly share documents** – Email allows you to quickly share documents or other files such as images. You can easily send a contract to someone thousands of miles away and get a signed copy in return within minutes.
- **24/7 Access** – Most everyone has 24/7 access to their email account whether personal or business. This is convenient for night-owls or overachievers mainly. Calling someone at midnight to leave a voicemail may be frowned upon. But sending an email won't disturb them. Just be careful if you suddenly start doing this, we'll talk more about it later.
- **Easily reach out to many people** – Email allows you to send the same message to a large group of people with a the click of a mouse.

Disadvantages of email

There are some disadvantages of communicating through email that you should be aware of. Just like the advantages, we'll combine them here.

- **Spam folders don't always work properly** – Certain email inboxes don't like getting emails from certain email providers for whatever reason. You'll find that there are many instances where valid emails get directed to your spam folder where you won't see them. There are usually settings that allow you to save a sender as "safe" so they don't get marked as spam, but it's important to keep this in mind.
- **Doesn't convey thoughts or emotion very well** – This is huge. Email (or any form of text based communication) doesn't allow you to convey or express feelings very well. This can make the recipient

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- **It's easy to over do it** – Many people find it extremely easy to go nuts at emailing. If it takes you more than a few minutes to decide what to say, or if it's a huge wall of text, you probably shouldn't use email.
- **Hackers** – Hackers are known to target email accounts. It's an easy way for them to find a way into your network. This is more of an issue for large corporations, but they generally have much better security and training to prevent things like this. Nonetheless, it is an ever increasing problem.

Email terms and definitions

There are some terms and acronyms related to email that you may have heard before, but you have no idea what they mean. That's what this section is for.

Attachment – A file that is included as part of an email message by the sender. The recepient will be able to view and download the attachment to their own hard drive. It can be a something like an excel spreadsheet, a word document, an image, or even an audio file.

Bounce – An email that is not delivered to the recipient's inbox. An email can bounce for many reasons. The most common reasons are an incorrect email address or the recipient's inbox is full.

Forward – To forward an email means to send an email that you have received in your inbox to another recipient without having to re-create the email yourself.

From – This is who an email came from. It can be a person's name, a company name, or just the email address may be displayed.

line will be able to see who else has been included.

BCC – Stands for "Blind Carbon Copy". This is the same as CC except for the fact that the recipients listed on the BCC line will not see who else has been included. This is useful if you are sending the same email to a wide range of customers for example, and you don't want them to know.

These are just a few definitions, but they will suffice for 99% of people reading this. CC and BCC most notably.

How to start an email

Starting an email might be the most important part of creating and sending an email. It is the first thing someone will see in their inbox. Email marketers have done extensive testing, and have determined that the subject line plays a large role in the open rate of their emails. Now that is a bit different than sending an email to your boss, but it does show that people pay attention to what is in the subject line.

Once the recipient opens the email, they will be greeted by you (hopefully!). The way you should greet or address the recipient varies depending on the circumstances, but it isn't hard to figure out. We'll go into more detail about that too.

Writing an email subject

Like we mentioned, this is the first thing your recipient will see. Writing a short and descriptive subject line is good business email etiquette. It should convey exactly what the email is about, and that should be easy to determine. Otherwise the email is probably too long.

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Good email subject lines

1. Signature needed – Purchase order
2. Meeting reminder – Monday sales meeting
3. Tuesday baseball practice cancelled

Bad email subject lines

1. I need you to sign this
2. Meeting
3. Baseball practice

Let's evaluate. The first example is about a signature that is needed. By specifying that it is a purchase order that needs a signature, the recipient can immediately see that they can skip over it for now as they know that more purchase orders will be coming in later, and they'll complete them all at once.

The second example is a simple meeting reminder. The good subject line doesn't even require the recipient to open the message. But the bad example isn't clear, and would require them to open it. There's no way to tell what it is about. It could be thoughts about a past meeting, or a new meeting that is being scheduled, or it could be a cancellation. The good subject line saves valuable time. This is a great example of proper email etiquette.

The third example is a personal scenario. The good subject line is useful because the recipient can quickly glance at it and make a note that practice is cancelled Thursday. They may not know if it rescheduled or not, but they know for sure that they have some freed up time on Thursday. The bad example doesn't offer this luxury.

unless you know the recipient or have been in contact before. Consequently, you should avoid being to formal in personal emails as it may convey an unfriendly tone.

Greetings for business emails

- Dear,
- Good morning,
- Good afternoon,

You should try to avoid "To whom it may concern" if at all possible. It may convey that you did not do your research prior to sending the email. This is especially true for employment applications.

Greetings for personal emails

- Hi,
- Hello!,
- Dear,

There is more room to put your own spin on things in a personal email. It all depends on your relationship with the recipient and how you are used to communicating with them.

How to introduce yourself in an email

Introducing yourself in an email is important if you have not met the recipient before. Knowing exactly who you are, what your role is, and how you found out about them will better help the recipient serve your needs.

An introduction with good email etiquette should consists of three parts:

3. Tell them how you got their email address or where you met.

Examples:

- Dear Jim, My name is Catherine Martinez and I am the director of marketing. We worked together on the black Friday promotion last year……
- Dear Jennifer, I'm Mark Hughes. I received your contact information from a family member that purchased a car from you……

What to write in the body of an email

The body of an email is where all of the important will be located. It's important to make it short, descriptive, and to the point.

Business email format

You should be sure you are using proper and spelling in business emails. This is especially true if you are contacting someone for the first time. Additionally, the email should be formatted in short 1-2 sentence paragraphs with a line break in between. This makes it easier for the recipient to read the email, and it is good business email etiquette

If some background information is required in order for the recipient to understand the circumstances of the email, it should come first. But avoid rambling on. If it requires more than a few sentences to provide relevant background information, you should speak on the phone or in person.

Personal email format

email. Just try to break it up into small paragraphs so it is easier to read.

Email attachments

You'll definitely be attaching files if you use email in a business environment. Anything from word documents to spreadsheets. In personal emails, you could be sharing pictures, audio files, or other documents.

When should you attach a file to an email

You should attach a file to an email if the recipient doesn't need it immediately, or if they know to expect it. Some thing to keep in mind when attaching files to an email

What to keep in mind when sending an attachment

Be sure you attach the proper file – If you have a rough draft and a final copy of the same document, double check to make sure you attached the right one. It could be an embarrassing mistake if the recipient receives a copy with spelling and grammar errors.

- **Take note of the file size** – Most email providers have a cap of 25-50mb per attachment. You may have to split it up into multiple emails. If this is the case, check with the recipient and find out if there might be a better way to send them the file.
- **Mention that you've attached a file** – In the body of the email, mention that you have attached a file for the recipient's viewing. Some email clients don't make it extremely noticeable that there is an attachment, or the recipient could simply overlook it. Another benefit to mentioning it is that many email clients have a feature that if the word "attached" is detected in the email body, an error message will appear if you hit send without attaching any files to the message.

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mistake.

Email length

It is important to manage the length of an email that you are sending. They should generally be very quick and easy to read, but there are exceptions.

Business email length

A business email should not be longer than a few paragraphs unless specific tasks or directions are being relayed and detailed information is necessary. While you should be polite and courteous in your email messages, going overboard will add unnecessary "fluff" that just makes the message harder to read. It's business, and the goal is to be as efficient as possible.

Personal email length

Personal emails are a bit more flexible. If you are trying to relay important information in a timely fashion, then avoid including un-necessary information. If you are communicating with an old friend or colleague, it may be appropriate to include more information. Maybe they want to hear all about what you've been up to in the last few years. Just be sure that they are actually interested in reading a long email before you send a wall of text their way.

How to end an email

You should be sure to end an email in the correct way. As the last thing that your recipient will read, it could leave a lasting image of you in their mind.

- Regards
- Sincerely
- Thanks
- Your name

I'm a fan of the last option personally, but it is more suitable for short internal emails between co-workers. Sincerely is a bit old fashioned, but still appropriate. Regards is very popular, and a good choice.

How to end a personal email

As is usually the case, there is more freedom in the proper way to end a personal email.

- Thanks!
- With love
- Best wishes
- Take care

There are many more you can use. There is nothing wrong with being creative in these casual situations. Just be sure to at least give it some thought. Don't profess your love to someone for the first time be ending an email with "Love, my name here".

Email signature

An email signature is a bit of information that you can set to automatically be included in all of your messages. It can be text, an image, or a graphic (not recommended).

and email address. It may include a corporate logo as well. You can format your name in bold text to make it more apparent, but don't over do it.

Try to not make your email signature too tall. Rather, make it spread out in a horizontal manner. This avoids pointless scrolling on the recipient's end. Avoid including inspirational or witty quotes.

How to write a personal email signature

Email signatures aren't as common in personal emails, but they are used. You'd commonly include your name and email address. You might also include your phone number. This is a situation where it may be appropriate to include a fun or witty quote, or even a small image. Just try not to make it too controversial to avoid offending a friend or colleague.

How to reply to an email

The way in which you reply to an email is just as important as the way you would send an email. A poor reply could come off as rude or condescending. This can be detrimental in business and personal situations alike.

You'd like your reply to be well though out, short, and to the point. Include the most important information first. If you need more information or have any questions, send a prompt follow up.
You should leave the subject line alone in most cases, and you should greet your recipient in the same manner that you would if you were sending the first email.

How often should you check your email

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How often should you check your business email

This depends on your specific workplace and role. But I recommend to check your email no more than three times daily. This may sound crazy, but it will greatly help boost productivity. In order to be successful at this, you should turn off email notifications from showing on your desktop. Too many workers fall into the trap of immediately checking an email and acting on it as soon as it comes in. This is distracting and inefficient. It also leads to forgot

I recommend checking your email first thing in the morning and after lunch. This allows a small block of time for actions to be taken on a task that you may have relayed in your message. If you have a few moments before you head home for the day, you can check your email a third time and complete any small tasks that may have piled up in order to lighten your work load in the morning.

It is very important to stick to this schedule once you start. Your peers will quickly be accustomed to it and you'll find that it works well.

How often should you check your personal email

Most people don't check their personal email very often nowadays, though it varies. It really depends on what you use your personal email for. If you only use it for making online purchases than you probably won't be checking it often. But if you communicate with your peers in a group or organization, you should be sure the check it often.

How soon should you reply to an email

Response time is more important in business settings, but what really matters is consistency.

email at 8am Monday, don't reply any later than Noon the next day.

If you need more information, you should try to follow up sooner. And if you won't be able to act on an email within 24 hours, you should send a quick follow up stating that you are working on it, and provide and estimated time and date.

How soon should you reply to a personal email

You should try your best to follow up to a personal email in a similar matter that you would for business. A deadline related to an organization or group you are involved in can still be important if you have a responsible role within the organization.

When should you send a follow up

We've all sent emails and never heard back, and it can be annoying. You never know for sure what happened so it's best not to over react. If you are sending an unsolicited email, you should give it some time. It would be best to give it a week. After a week, send a quick follow up response.
If you haven't heard back from an internal business email, you should follow up after 48 hours.
It is important to not sound as if you are upset for not receiving a response, and you should avoid rushing the recipient. It could have just been a minor oversight on their part. It happens.

Summary

- In this section I'll summarize the most important tips for sending effective emails.
- Write a descriptive subject line
- Use an appropriate greeting

- Reply within 24 hours
- Send a follow up if needed
- Use a proper ending salutation
- Keep your signature short, informative, and format it in a horizontal style.
- Make sure you don't forget to include attachments
- Make sure you attach the correct file
- Don't use email if you expect immediate collaboration from the recipient
- Don't use email for urgent matters
- Stick a schedule when checking your email

Tips and tricks

Below are some tips and tricks that will help you utilize email more effectively. I like to refer to them as email hacks.

Don't check your work email after hours

This depends on your role and importance in the organization, but if you are not required to send and reply to emails after hours or on weekends, don't get into the habit of doing it. Your peers and/or boss will get used to it, and next thing you know you'll be expected to always be doing it.

Use a grammar tool

You should be sure that you use proper spelling and grammar when sending emails. A tool such as Grammarly is good way to be sure your grammar is spot on. It's a free app that can be used with your internet browser. It detects grammar mistakes and makes a suggestion to fix it. There's no reason not to use this free tool.

Does your email client allow a send delay?

If you read through this guide, you shouldn't need this. But things do happen. Some email clients have a feature where an email is delayed for a specific amount of time after you hit send. This allows you a few moments to cancel it if you have any regrets. It's a good idea to use this feature if it's available. Set it at a two minute delay.

Reply vs. reply all

If there are many people CC'ed in on an email, you should evaluate if everyone really needs to see your reply. If you hit "reply all", then everyone will get a reply. If you just hit "reply", only the sender will get the reply. Be careful in situations like this. A mistake could lead you to sharing something that you didn't want everyone to read.

Sending a short message?

If you are sending a short message that only contains a few words? If so, put your message in the subject line and end it with "EOM" (End of message). It allows the recipient to quickly see the message without wasting time opening it. This is very good email etiquette, and if your peers aren't doing this, it will surely catch on.

Conclusion

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proper email etiquette. Check back occasionally to refresh your memory, and look out for periodical additions and revisions.

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Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

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