

How to Write An Email

Hao Zhang

haomoodzhang@gmail.com

October 14, 2016

Contents

1	To and CC	2
2	Use a Neutral Email Address	2
3	Use a Short and Accurate Subject Header	2
4	Use a Proper Salutation	2
5	Introduce Yourself in the First Paragraph (If Necessary)	3
6	Thank the Recipient	3
7	Write the Actual Message	3
7.1	Use Appropriate Punctuation	3
7.1.1	Comma (,)	3
7.1.2	Semicolon (;)	3
7.1.3	Colon (:)	4
7.1.4	Hyphen (-)	4
7.1.5	Other Punctuations	4
7.2	Ask For Information	4
7.3	Avoid Informal Writing	4
7.3.1	Formal and Informal Words	4
7.3.2	Avoid I and you	5
7.3.3	Do Not Start a Sentence with and, but, so, or	5
7.3.4	Avoid Cliches to be Formal	5
7.3.5	Avoid Vagues Words	5
7.3.6	Always Include whom or which	5
7.3.7	Other Notices	5
7.4	Mention of the Attachment	6

8 Add Your Closing Remarks	6
9 Use the Correct Form of Leave-Taking	6
10 Sign With Your Full Name	6
11 Proofread Your Message for Content, Spelling, and Grammar	6
12 References	7

1 To and CC

Does everyone on the To line have an action to take?
Split unrelated points into separate, purposeful emails.

2 Use a Neutral Email Address

Should not use

- Username or nickname.

Should use

- A variation of your real name.

3 Use a Short and Accurate Subject Header

Should not

- Saying too much.

Should

- Reflects the content of your email.
- Include a keyword for the ease of searching.
- E.g., Meeting regarding the damaged escalator on March 12th.

4 Use a Proper Salutation

Three ways

- (Mr. Mrs. Ms. or Dr.) + last name + (comma or colon).
- Dear + last name + (comma or colon).
- Hello + last name + (comma or colon).

Using a last name is more formal and should be used unless you are on first-name terms with the recipient.

American english employs a colon, but british english employs a comma.

If you do not know the name, use

- (Dear Sir/Madam or Dear Sir or Madam) + colon.

5 Introduce Yourself in the First Paragraph (If Necessary)

If you are starting the email, include

- Your name.
- How you found that person's email address : I obtained your email address from
- Why you're writing : I am writing to enquire about ..., or I am writing in reference to

6 Thank the Recipient

If you are replying to a clients inquiry, you should begin with a line of thanks: Thank you for contacting ABC Company.

If someone has replied to one of your emails, be sure to say, Thank you for your prompt reply, or Thanks for getting back to me.

7 Write the Actual Message

Should

- Break up the message into paragraphs by topic.
- The email should be no more than 5 paragraphs long and each paragraph should be no more than 5 sentences long.
- Insert a line break between each paragraph, indenting is not necessary.

7.1 Use Appropriate Punctuation

7.1.1 Comma (,)

Separate any of the following

- Two or more adjectives.
- Items in a list.
- The name of a city from the name of a state.
- Two independent clauses.
- Direct quotations.
- Direct address of a person or group, e.g., Mary, listen to me.

7.1.2 Semicolon (;)

To separate

- Two related but independent clauses.
- A series of items that already contain commas.

7.1.3 Colon (:

- Introduce a list.
- Introduce a statement that expands upon the clause before the colon.

7.1.4 Hyphen (-)

- Prefix.
- Create compound words.
- Write numbers as words.

7.1.5 Other Punctuations

Limit use these punctuations in formal writing

- Parentheses.
- Exclamation points (!).
- dashes (—), prefer colons.
- Ampersand (&), prefer **and**.

Use asterisks to show *emphasis*.

7.2 Ask For Information

I would be grateful if you could ...

7.3 Avoid Informal Writing

Informal writing

- Sound more like conversation.
- Make listeners feel more comfortable when you are speaking.

Formal writing

- More polished.
- Make a good impression.

7.3.1 Formal and Informal Words

See Tab. 1.

Table 1: Formal and informal English.

Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal
device	contraption	dismiss	fire	child	kid
why	how come	quotation	quote	adorable	cute
yes	yeah	film	movie	present	introduce
type of	kind of/sort of	allow/permit	let	madam	ma'am

Do not use contractions. Note that the full form of **can't** is **cannot**.

7.3.2 Avoid I and you

Phrases such as **I think that** can be deleted from a sentence when it is obvious that this is the author's opinion.

Replace **I** with **we**, replace **you** with **one**.

Exceptions

- **I** is acceptable in personal writing.
- **you** is acceptable in letters and how-to's.

7.3.3 Do Not Start a Sentence with and, but, so, or

Coordinating conjunctions are meant to join words, phrases, and clauses, but not to start a sentence.

Attaching the sentence that starts with a coordinating conjunction to the previous sentence to be a compound sentence.

Some transitional adverbs

- **additionally, moreover.**
- **nevertheless, however.**
- **therefor, thus.**
- **alternatively, instead, otherwise.**

though can be used at the end of a sentence.

7.3.4 Avoid Cliches to be Formal

Here are some cliches to avoid in formal writing:

- Hercules was *as strong as an ox*.
- I have to give *an arm and a leg* to find a parking spot during the holiday season.
- It was *as pretty as a picture*.

7.3.5 Avoid Vagues Words

Avoid **a few, enough, a little**. Replace with more specific descriptions.

7.3.6 Always Include whom or which

Even when they are not essential to your meaning.

7.3.7 Other Notices

No online IM abbreviations or smiley faces, e.g., lol, :).

Do not use capitals unless really needed.

7.4 Mention of the Attachment

Please refer to the attached document.

8 Add Your Closing Remarks

Examples

- Thank you for your patience and cooperation.
- Thank you for your consideration.

The follow up with

- If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to let me know.
- I look forward to hearing from you.

9 Use the Correct Form of Leave-Taking

Examples

- Yours sincerely,
- Yours cordially,
- Best regards,
- Respectfully,
- Your student,

Add a blank line or not between leave-taking and your name, either is fine.

10 Sign With Your Full Name

- Name.
- Job title.
- Company name.
- Business phone number.
- Website.

11 Proofread Your Message for Content, Spelling, and Grammar

PASS principle

- What is the *purpose* of this communication?
- What *action* is involved and does it have a due date?
- What *supporting* information does the recipient need?
- Has the communication been effectively summarized in the *subject* line?

12 References

- [1]. <http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Formal-Email>.
- [2]. [http://www.wikihow.com/Avoid-Colloquial-\(Informal\)-Writing](http://www.wikihow.com/Avoid-Colloquial-(Informal)-Writing)
- [3]. <http://englishlive.ef.com/blog/write-perfect-professional-email-english-5-steps>
- [4]. <http://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/skills/writing-skills-practice/more-formal-email>.
- [5]. <http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/e-text/email/>.