

Email Etiquette

What is Email Etiquette?

Etiquette is defined as the rules governing socially acceptable behavior. Socially acceptable behavior varies greatly depending on who you are with, your relationship to that person, and the environment that you are in. If you are writing to coworkers that you communicate with frequently and have developed working relationships with them, you can be as flexible as the environment allows. However, if you are corresponding with an instructor, you will need to be more careful with your behavior. Despite the fact that this article is largely concerned with email, most of this advice will also apply to other forms of electronic communications such as chat, message boards, and web pages.

Why do I need to worry about email etiquette?

Most people in business and education are using email as a form of communication. Just as you follow certain normative expectations when communicating with different types of people in person, you should also do the same when writing. Not following these types of social standards can often lead to miscommunication, resulting in the recipient holding a negative opinion or simply ignoring your email altogether.

Generally speaking, well written messages will be more effective in conveying your ideas and building strong relationships with peers, teachers, and employers. In other words, how you act in a social environment plays an important role in how people form their opinions about you. In some cases, email may be the only form of communication that you have with an individual. Therefore, using good etiquette in your messages is paramount.

Format

Address the email recipient properly. For example, be sure to use the proper salutation, social title and greeting (i.e., Mr. Ms. Miss, Dr. Professor, etc.). Also, check to see if your recipient has a strong preference on how they should be addressed. Normally, they will let you know if they would like you to alter how you are addressing them.

Rules on Using First Names

- Only use a recipient's first name if you have a personal relationship with that person.
- If they have sent you a message signing it with only their first name.
- Don't shorten a name or assume a common nickname for someone. (i.e., not all people named Robert will want to be called Bob.).

Message Length

Make sure that your message length is appropriate for the subject.

- Don't ramble! If a message is too long and does not get to the point quickly, the recipient may quit reading and disregard the message.
- If a message is too short, you may be perceived as being snippy or uncommunicative.
- Use lists when possible. This will make the information easier for the recipient to read.

One subject per message

Keep to a single subject when composing a message. Also, be sure that your subject line accurately describes the nature of the email.

General

Tone

Pleasantries go a long way! Greetings and salutations such as, “Hello”, “Have a good weekend”, “Hope you are feeling better!” work very well in developing and maintaining a professional rapport. Also, don’t forget to write “Please” and “Thank You”.

ALL CAPITAL LETTERS

Writing in all capital letters is perceived as yelling in written communication. Capital letters are also much harder to read; we rely on ascenders and descenders in letters such as b, d, g, h, q, y to help us recognize characters by their shapes. In other words, avoid composing messages in all capital letters at all cost.

Over punctuating

Avoid overusing punctuation in messages. Depending on your audience, the following may be perceived as unprofessional:

- !!!!!!! ??????????
- Emoticons ☺ " :) ;) =)

Abbreviations

Don’t use abbreviations when communicating professionally. For example, don’t use the following:

- ❖ “U” instead of you; “2” instead of “too” or “to”; “thanx” instead of “Thanks”; etc.
- ❖ The above examples may be acceptable in messages addressed to close friends, but are normally considered too casual when communicating professionally.

Egregious

Proof Read!

Always proof read messages before clicking send. Also, be sure and double-check your spelling and grammar manually. Spell check will not catch the times when you incorrectly use “to” and should have used “too” or “there” when you should have used “their”. Lastly, check names for misspelling.

Sample Email

To: dominic.little@csun.edu
From: johndoe@johndoe.edu
Subject: Sociology 150, MWF 11:00am, Writing Assignment 1

Dear Professor Little,

Thank you for reviewing my latest rough draft. I will be sure to make the necessary changes before submitting my final draft. On a separate note, is it possible that I could come by your office and discuss a strategy on how to better prepare for the next exam? Thank you for your time and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

John Doe

**Proper
salutation
and title.**

**Complimentary Close
with full-name.**

**Body of the message after it has
been double-checked for spelling
and grammar mistakes.**