

Reports

Tips

A report should be well organised, with information in a logical order. There is no set layout for a report. It will depend on a) the type of report, and b) the company style. The format used here is suitable for most formal reports:

- title
- executive summary
- introduction
- findings
- conclusion
- recommendation(s)

The **executive summary** is a summary of the main points and conclusion of the report. It gives the reader an overview of the situation.

The **introduction** shows the points that will be looked at.

Lists and bullet points make a longer report easier to read.

The **findings** are the facts discovered.

Headings and sub-headings help to make layout and organisation clear.

Formal language such as the passive form is generally used in reports.

Use short paragraphs in reports, ideally with one idea per paragraph.

E-MAIL POLICY REPORT

Executive summary

E-mail is essential to our business. It is a highly cost- and time-effective method of communicating with clients, customers and colleagues. However, incorrect use of e-mail can reduce staff productivity and cause problems for our e-mail and other office systems.

Currently, the company has no written rules governing e-mail usage. I have been asked by the Human Resources Manager to investigate the need for a company e-mail policy. My research shows that there is a need for a formal policy, which I have outlined in this report.

Introduction

This report will look at:

- the issues associated with current usage of the e-mail system;
- the reasons why an e-mail policy is needed;
- the recommended content of our e-mail policy.

Findings

1 Incorrect e-mail usage

In interviews and meetings with managers and staff throughout the company, a number of issues have been raised:

- a) Firstly, staff in many departments complain about the amount of time they spend reading unnecessary e-mails that have been copied to everyone.
- b) Several people mentioned that chain messages are regularly circulated around the company.
- c) Some employees spend time on personal e-mails, non-work-related websites and social networking sites during working hours. Managers find it difficult to tackle this issue with their staff, as there is no e-mail policy to refer to at present.

2 Security issues

- a) Access to the e-mail system is password protected. However, some staff have their passwords written on yellow Post-it Notes which are left on the computer screen, which defeats the purpose of having a password.
- b) The IT team would like to make it a requirement for everyone to have a password change every 30 to 60 days.
- c) Furthermore, the IT team believes that staff need to be shown how to create secure passwords for themselves.
- d) In some cases, unauthorised software has been downloaded onto our computer system.
- e) The IT staff expressed concern about the risk of software viruses from unauthorised software and e-mail attachments that could corrupt our e-mail system and, indeed, other office systems.
- f) The computer system is often slowed down by the circulation of large attachments.
- g) Staff do not clear out their in-boxes regularly.

3 Legal considerations

- a) Most employees who are using the company's e-mail system inappropriately are not doing it intentionally. They generally do not understand that e-mails are not private documents, and that inappropriate use of the system can open both the company and the individual to embarrassment and loss of reputation.
- b) Moreover, e-mail has the same standing in law as any other document. Therefore sending discriminatory, harassing, offensive or other illegal or improper e-mails can potentially leave the company and/or the individual employee open to legal action.

The **conclusion** is what you think about the facts and how you interpret them.

Recommendations are practical suggestions to deal with the situation and ideas for making sure future activities are carried out more successfully.

Modal auxiliaries are used for emphasis in the recommendations of a report, e.g. *should/must*, etc.

Conclusion

It was generally felt that staff productivity is being reduced as a result of bad usage or misuse of the e-mail system. Furthermore, there are some important security and legal issues to be resolved.

These findings would indicate that an e-mail policy is a vital legal document that this company needs. It would set out our company's definition of acceptable use of the e-mail system for our employees, and help to solve many of the issues highlighted in the findings.

Recommendations

Therefore, I would like to make the following recommendations:

- 1 Employees should be made aware that while the company accepts their right to privacy, the company does have the legal right to open and read their e-mails if an employee is thought to be misusing the system.
- 2 The e-mail policy should be short, clear, concise and easy to understand. It is best to keep it to one side of A4, otherwise it will probably not be read.
- 3 The company should distribute this e-mail policy to all employees, and ask them to confirm that they have received, read, understood and agree to abide by the rules.
- 4 The policy should include these points:
 - a) **Personal e-mails**
It should be clear that the company e-mail is primarily for business purposes. While some personal e-mail may be acceptable, overuse or misuse is not. For instance, sending offensive jokes or chain letters must be prohibited.
 - b) **Sending e-mails**
We should restrict the general distribution of circulated material when only certain groups of people need to receive it.
 - c) **Passwords**
All employees should receive information on how to choose a secure password and should renew their passwords every 60 days. The IT team can set this up automatically.
 - d) **Attachments**
Large files should be transferred, wherever possible, at times of minimum usage out of office hours. Alternatively, the company should provide facilities for sharing data in larger files via an intranet, shared folders or file-compression programs.
 - e) **Housekeeping**
Staff should regularly delete unwanted messages and archive those that need to be kept. The IT department will automatically advise staff members when their account is getting too full.
- 5 Since the e-mail policy is a legally binding document, it is important that it is drafted or checked by a lawyer.
- 6 Employees should also receive guidelines outlining the preferred format and style for writing e-mails. For instance, how to write in a clear, concise, professional tone. For a suggested list of 'dos and don'ts' of e-mail etiquette, see Appendix A.
- 7 The e-mail policy should be closely monitored and reviewed at regular intervals. This should be done by the Human Resources Department in collaboration with the IT team.

Additional information not essential to the main report can be included at the end in the **appendices**.

Longer and more technical reports may include some of the following sections, although no report would probably use all of these:

Beginning	Middle	End
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Title page Foreword Preface Acknowledgements Contents page Summary or Abstract Introduction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main body including methods/procedures and detailed findings, organised into sub-sections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conclusions Recommendations Appendices References Bibliography Glossary