

Email Best Practices



Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- Explain what you should not do in email.
- Write emails that are clear and short.
- Properly construct an email.

“Email is liking kissing -
you think you are good at it, but
it might be a good idea to ask around.”

- Merlin Mann



No one remembers a great email.

Everyone remembers a bad email.

Never send anything electronically you don't want read by the world

- Your CEO
- The Tech News
- A Judge



Elon Musk

@elonmusk

[Follow](#)



Am considering taking Tesla private at \$420. Funding secured.

12:48 PM - 7 Aug 2018

15,897 Retweets **87,589** Likes

fiT



6.3K



16K



88K



What are the **worst** practices for email?

Reply All



"Do it. Reply all."

Email Worst Practices

NEVER EVER send email:

1. Intoxicated (Whatever your drug of choice is)
2. Emotion (rage 🤬, anger 😡, sad 😭, manic 😈, ...)

What are the best practices for email?

Email Best Practices

1. Keep it short
2. Round-up in Formality
3. Add Structure
4. Order of operations

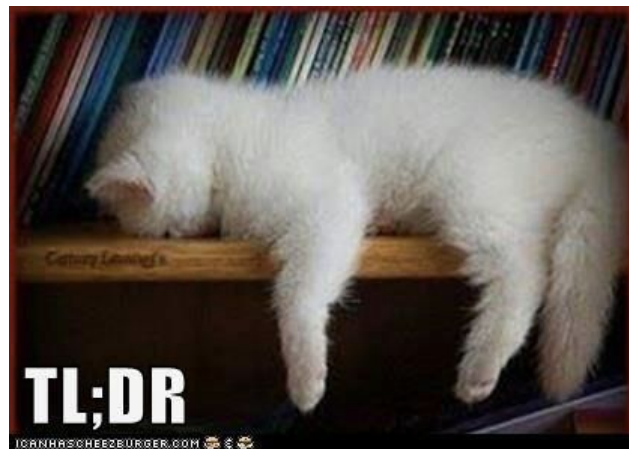
Everyone Short Emails

All pertinent information should be on 1 screen.

Many people check email on mobile, thus ideally should be on 1 mobile screen.

Length

- 1 word is fine.
- 1 sentence makes for a great email.
- 3-5 sentences could be useful.
- > 2 paragraphs = tl;dr



Student Activity:

Revise This Sentence

"At this point in time, I think it would make a lot of sense for us all to regroup on the issue and come up with a few key points for discussion at our meeting in two weeks that will help us get closer to finding a solution that works for all parties."

Who has what by when?

What would a successful outcome look like?

Be as specific and concrete as possible.

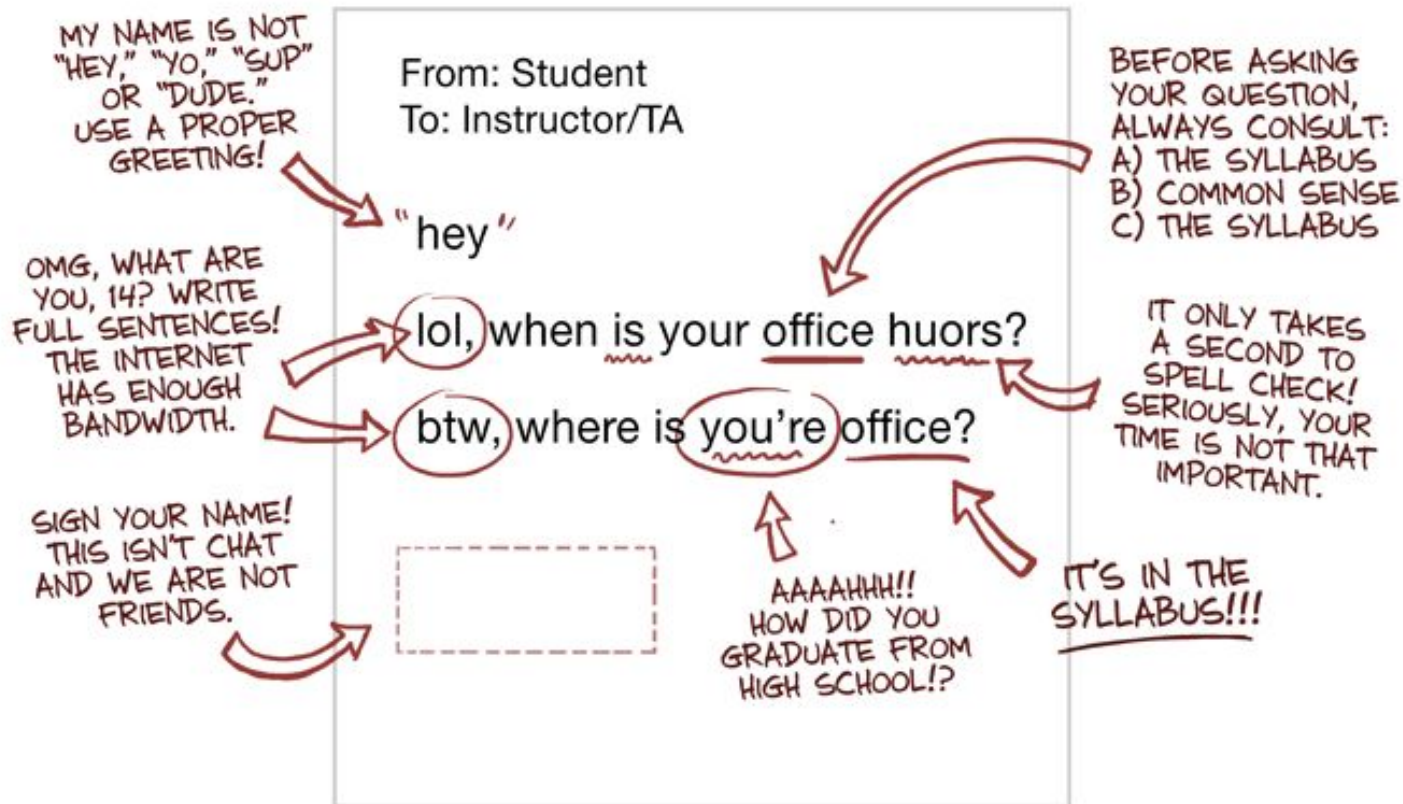
Revised:

"Let's each come up with 2-3 discussion points on the issue before our next meeting in two weeks (Tuesday, December 1st)."

Formality

- Always start by erring on the side of formality.
- Later, you can be less formal.

HOW TO WRITE AN E-MAIL TO YOUR INSTRUCTOR OR T.A.



How to Structure Long Messages

- Bullet Points
- Sections
- Clear Call To Action (CTA) at end

Bullet Points

- Bullet points make it easier for the reader to find and follow the flow of information.
- Bullet points are great!
- In fact, here is another bullet point.
- See bullet points are so easy to read, I'll add another one.

Lack of Sections

Dear team,

Last week we had a problem with the logs in the production environment. I am talking about the Redmine issue #453. We noticed a huge increase in the log messages leading to delayed responses because blah blah blah. At some point the server run out of disk and everything fell apart blah blah blah. Administrators backed up the logs and removed them from the server to blah blah blah. We started investigating what is going on immediately and after two days we managed to reproduce the error in the staging environment as well. The problem was the usage of an external library that had a bug which blah blah blah. We removed the library and the bug was no longer reproducible in the staging environment. The buggy library was blah blah blah. We released the fix yesterday and everything seems to be back to normal. We also added some scripts that will notify us immediately if such conditions start to emerge.

Thank you for your time,

With Sections

Dear team,

Background

Last week we had a problem with the logs in the production environment. We noticed a huge increase in the log messages blabla.

Consequences

The increase led to delayed responses because blah blah blah. At some point the server run out of disk and everything fell apart blah blah blah.

Cause of the problem

We started investigating what is going on immediately and after two days we managed to reproduce the error in the staging environment as well.

The problem was the usage of an external library that had a bug which blah blah blah. The buggy library was blah blah blah.

Actions taken

1. Administrators backed up the logs and removed them from the server to blah blah blah.
2. We removed the library and the bug was no longer reproducible in the staging environment.
3. We released the fix yesterday, June 26th, 2019.
4. We also added some scripts that will notify us on time if such conditions start to emerge.

Current status

The server is up and running, everything seems to be back to normal

Thank you for your time,

CTA (Call To Action)

- Last item in email.
- Try to make it a simple choice:
 - Yes or no
 - Option #1 or #2
- Not open ended - "How does this sound to you?" should be "Is now a good time to move forward?"

Use specific, absolute dates instead of relative (yesterday, tomorrow, ...)

“Yesterday we released a fix for the bug 455 on staging and we plan to release it next Monday if you give us the green light by tomorrow end of day.”

“Yesterday (June 25th, 2020) we released a fix for the bug #455 on staging and we plan to release it on production next Monday (July 1st, 2020) if you give us the green light by tomorrow (June 27th, 2020) end of day.”

Order of Operations

1. Construct message **outside** of email editor or Slack.
2. Write the subject line
3. Write body
 1. Quick rough draft
 2. Revise - Clarify. Is there a clear, easy-to-understand point to this email?
 3. Revise - Shorten. Is there anything I can take out that doesn't add to the main point?
 4. Revise - Check spelling & grammar!
4. Add the recipients' email addresses **last**.
5. Double check attachments.

Breakout Room Activity

re: introducing the new Experimentation Team interns

Hi All,

We are excited to be joining MeowMeet and introducing yourselves.

We are a new group of interns working on the Experimentation Team. We are from the University of San Francisco's Master of Science in Data Science (MSDS) program. We'll be running and analyzing A/B tests to better match cat lovers.

A fun fact about each of us:

1. Ariana had a cat that lived for 21 years! Picture is below.
2. Mikio has broken the same bone 4 times.
3. Xuxu has visited 68 countries.

We are looking forward to meeting more of you over the next couple of months.

Best,
Ariana, Mikio, Xuxu

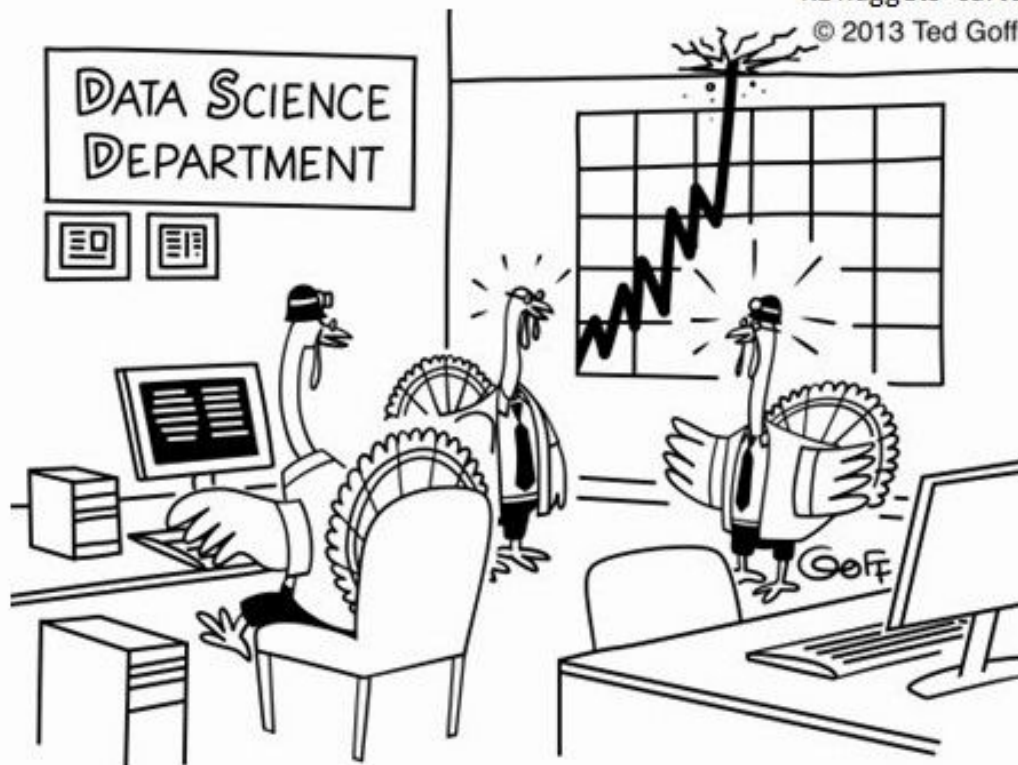


How to leave a job (or other awkward topics)

1. Send a message - “When you get a chance, I would like to chat. Does 4pm work for you?”
2. Then the topic discuss privately and synchronously.
3. Then send follow-up email that summarizes the conversation.

Takeaways

- Emails are the most common type of writing in business.
- People get too much email so you do your best to lighten their load.
- Always be clear. Then be brief as possible.



“I don’t like the look of this.
Searches for gravy and turkey stuffing
are going through the roof !”

Bonus Material



UBER

#SelfDrivingUber

Improving gmail workflow

Clarification

Ask for clarification when in any doubt since there are no non-verbal signals in email.

“I’m interpreting this as XXX. If this isn’t correct, let me know.”

Salutations

Generally, address an email by just first name(s).

It makes it clear that is specific message to people and who is addressed to.

Salutations are often not needed (e.g., Dear, Hi, Hello)

Should I sent a Thank You email?

It depends - If it is purely transactional, then no. If you relationship building, then yes.

It also helps to state that their email has been received, read, and you have all the information.

Examples: “Got it!” “Thanks. I appreciate it.” “Thank you”

Kicking Start a Stale Thread

If you've been following up with someone for a while, start off an email with "I wanted to follow up with you on this one last time". This reminds the person that you've emailed several times before (and perhaps makes them feel guilty for not replying sooner) and lets them know the ball is completely in their court. I have found this to be very useful in kick-starting leads that went stale.

DEAR KEVIN,

I'M SORRY IT'S TAKEN ME TWO YEARS TO REPLY TO YOUR EMAIL. I'VE BUILT UP SO MUCH STRESS AND ANXIETY AROUND MY EMAIL INBOX; IT'S AN UNHEALTHY DYNAMIC WHICH IS MORE PSYCHOLOGICAL THAN TECHNICAL. I'VE TRIED ONE MAGICAL SOLUTION AFTER ANOTHER, AND AS EACH ONE HAS FAILED, DEEP DOWN I'VE GROWN MORE CERTAIN THAT THE PROBLEM ISN'T EMAIL — IT'S ME.

REGARDLESS, THESE ARE MY ISSUES, NOT YOURS; YOU'RE MY FRIEND, AND I OWE YOU THE BASIC COURTESY OF A RESPONSE. I APOLOGIZE FOR MY NEGLECT, AND I HOPE YOU HAVEN'T BEEN TOO HURT BY MY FAILURE TO REPLY.

ANYWAY, I APPRECIATE YOUR INVITATION TO JOIN YOUR PROFESSIONAL NETWORK ON LINKEDIN, BUT I'M AFRAID I MUST DECLINE...



NICE TO MEET YOU!

THAT SOUNDS WEIRD;
WE'RE NOT ACTUALLY
MEETING IN PERSON.

TYPE TYPE
DELETE
DELETE



NICE TO E-MEET YOU!

WHAT IS
THIS, A 1995
CYBERPUNK
NOVEL?


TYPE TYPE
DELETE



OK.

CHILL.

JUST BE
NORMAL.



**IT'S WEIRD TO THINK THAT
THE WORDS I'M TYPING WILL
BE PROJECTED ONTO YOUR
RETINAS. IT'S LIKE MY HANDS
ARE TOUCHING YOUR EYES.**

ANYWAY, HI.

TYPE
TYPE



NAILED IT.