

Exercise 1: Build Your First Custom Mode

Create a local email mode that transforms dictation into professional messages

15–20 minutes

Beginner

LOCAL • PHI-Safe

What You'll Build

A custom SuperWhisper mode that turns your rambling dictation into polished, professional emails—all processed locally on your device. By the end of this exercise, you'll understand how modes work and have a practical tool you can use every day.

Why Start With Email?

Email is the perfect first custom mode because you write emails constantly, the transformation is visible (raw speech → formatted email), and you can immediately tell if it's working. Plus, email content is often sensitive, so using local processing matters here. This exercise teaches patterns you'll reuse for every custom mode you create. Master this one, and the rest come easy.

What You'll Need

- SuperWhisper installed with a local model downloaded (Fast recommended)
- An email application (Outlook, Mail app, or Gmail in browser)
- About 15-20 minutes of focused time

Step-by-Step: Build the Mode

1

Open SuperWhisper Settings

Click the SuperWhisper icon in your menu bar (top-right of your screen), then click the gear icon to open Settings. If you've never been here before, take 30 seconds to look around—this is where all the configuration happens.

2

Navigate to Modes

In the Settings panel, click **Modes** in the left sidebar. You'll see the built-in modes listed (Voice, Super, Note). We're about to add a new one to this list.

3

Create a New Custom Mode

Click the **+ Add Mode** button (usually at the bottom of the modes list). A new mode configuration panel will appear.

Name your mode: "APH Email" or "Work Email"

Keep it short—you'll see this name in menus and notifications.

4

Select Local Models (Critical for Privacy)

This is the important part for government work. You need to ensure your audio stays on your device.

Voice Model: Select **Fast** or **Standard** — both are LOCAL

Language Model: Select a model labeled LOCAL (not Cloud)

Look for the LOCAL badge next to model names. If it says CLOUD, don't use it for work email.

Check the Labels

Every model has a LOCAL or CLOUD label. For this exercise, we're building a PHI-safe mode—that means LOCAL models only. Cloud models are fine for personal use, but not for work content that might contain sensitive information.

5

Enable Context Settings

Context gives the AI information about what you're doing. For email, we want two types enabled:

- Application Context** — AI knows you're in an email app
- Selected Text Context** — AI can see text you highlight (essential for replies)

Leave Clipboard Context off for now—we'll use that in later exercises.

6

Set Up Auto-Activation

This is what makes modes feel magical. Instead of manually switching modes, SuperWhisper can detect when you're in your email app and activate this mode automatically.

Click **Add Rule** in the Auto-Activation section.

Select **Microsoft Outlook** from the application list.

If you use webmail, add another rule for Chrome/Safari with URL containing "mail.google.com" or "outlook.office.com".

7

Enter the AI Instructions (The Core of Your Mode)

This is where you tell the AI how to behave. Find the **AI Instructions** text area and paste the following prompt. We'll explain what each section does after.

```
# Email Mode - Professional Email Writer

<role>
You are a professional email editor for Austin Public Health.
Your job is to transform dictated speech into polished, professional emails.
</role>

<instructions>
The User Message is dictated speech—it may contain filler words,
corrections, and stream-of-consciousness phrasing. Transform it into
a professional email:
```

```
1. Add an appropriate greeting based on context
2. Organize content into clear paragraphs
3. Remove filler words and hesitations
4. Add a professional closing with my name
5. If Selected Text exists, treat it as the email being replied to
</instructions>

<style>
- Professional but warm tone
- Clear, direct language (no jargon unless topic requires it)
- Appropriate for government workplace communications
- Concise—respect the reader's time
</style>

<output>
Return ONLY the formatted email. No explanations or commentary.
</output>
```

Understanding the Prompt Structure

The XML-style tags (<role>, <instructions>, etc.) help organize instructions clearly for the AI. The **role** sets context, **instructions** explains the task, **style** defines tone, and **output** specifies what format you want back. You can modify any of these sections—we'll experiment with that shortly.

8

Save Your Mode

Click **Save** or **Done** to save your new custom mode. It should now appear in your modes list alongside the built-in options.

Test Your New Mode

Time for the fun part. Let's see if it actually works.

Test 1: New Email

1. Open Outlook (or your email app)—your mode should auto-activate
2. Start composing a new email
3. Hold your recording hotkey (Option+Space on Mac by default)
4. Dictate something like this (ramble a bit—that's the point):

"Hey so um I wanted to follow up on that meeting we had last week you know the one about the budget proposal and uh I was wondering if you had a chance to look at the numbers I sent over let me know if you have questions or need anything else from me thanks"

5. Release the hotkey and wait a moment
6. The AI should transform your rambling into a clean, professional email

Test 2: Reply to an Email

1. Open an email someone sent you
2. Highlight the text of their email (Cmd+A or select with mouse)
3. Hold your recording hotkey
4. Say something like: "Tell them yes I can meet Thursday at 2pm and ask them to send over the agenda beforehand"
5. Release the hotkey

Because you enabled Selected Text Context, the AI should recognize you're replying and format an appropriate response that references their original email.

✓ Did It Work?

If your dictation was transformed into a formatted email with greeting, paragraphs, and signature—congratulations! You've built your first custom mode. If something went wrong, check the troubleshooting section below.

Try Something Weird

Dictate something intentionally messy—lots of "ums," changing your mind mid-sentence, repeating yourself. See how well the AI cleans it up. The worse your input, the more impressive the transformation. This is a feature, not a bug: you're supposed to talk naturally.

Then try dictating the same content with the built-in Voice Mode (pure transcription). Compare the outputs. That difference is what your custom mode is doing for you.

Completion Checklist

- Created new custom mode with a name like "APH Email"
- Selected LOCAL models only (both Voice and Language models)
- Enabled Application Context and Selected Text Context
- Added auto-activation rule for Outlook (and Gmail if used)
- Pasted and understood the AI instructions prompt
- Saved the mode
- Successfully tested with new email dictation
- Successfully tested with email reply (using selected text)

Troubleshooting

Mode doesn't auto-activate when I open Outlook

Check Settings → Modes → [Your Mode] → Auto-Activation. Make sure the rule is enabled (checkbox checked) and the app name matches exactly. Try closing and reopening Outlook.

Output looks like raw transcription, not formatted email

You probably only selected a Voice Model but not a Language Model. The Voice Model transcribes; the Language Model transforms. Make sure both are set, and

the Language Model is a LOCAL AI model.

Processing takes a really long time

Local models need to load into memory the first time you use them. This can take 10-30 seconds on first use. After that, it should be faster. If still slow, try the "Fast" model instead of "Standard".

Selected text context isn't working for replies

Make sure you actually highlight the text before recording. The AI only sees what's selected at the moment you start recording. Try selecting, then immediately starting dictation.

The tone doesn't match what I want

Edit the AI Instructions! The <style> section controls tone. Change "Professional but warm" to whatever you prefer: "Friendly and casual" or "Formal and precise." Your mode, your rules.

□ MAKE IT YOURS

The prompt we provided is a starting point. After using your email mode for a day, you'll probably want to tweak things. Maybe you want emails shorter. Maybe you want a specific sign-off. Edit the AI Instructions anytime—the mode is yours to customize. The best modes are ones you've refined through actual use.

What's Next?

You've just built a foundation skill: creating custom modes with local processing. In **Exercise 2**, we'll create a similar email mode using cloud processing—which offers higher accuracy but different privacy considerations. Comparing the two will help you understand when to use each approach.