

# **DANGEROUS MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT E-MAIL**

## **E-MAIL IS PERSONAL**

There is a chummy, gossipy lure to e-mail, but it's not personal, secure, or private. Anyone can read your messages.

Electronic messages are just another means for conducting business. A personable tone may complement one's communications, but stick to business.

## **E-MAIL IS INFORMAL, SO I CAN RELAX**

Who says? A letter can be formal and informal; an interoffice memo, formal or informal. E-mail is the same. Your clarity, competence, tone and professionalism are still being judged by the printed word.

So eliminate spelling errors, incomplete sentences, ambiguous statements. Watch out for a glib or misconstrued tone.

## **I CAN BE FUNNY**

Being personable is an advantage in writing. But you don't have to be funny to achieve this. Not everyone is funny. And even the best sense of humor is hard to translate onto a page. Don't think a smiley face is going to help. ☺ ☹ Since anyone can read these messages, make sure everyone will get the joke—now and weeks later if they should read it again.

Much humor, too, relies on irony—meaning the opposite of what the words seem to say. Why take the chance that the reader won't get it?

## **E-MAIL HAS ITS OWN LANGUAGE**

Yes. No. But. You have smiley faces, slashes, abbreviations, hundreds of special symbols and characters. But the language is still English. This sounds a bit school-marmish; but cryptic language is still vague and ambiguous. We're trying to include everyone, not exclude, in business communications.

## E-MAIL TIPS

***Treat an e-mail message just like you would any written message—*** memo, letter, report, post-em note. Write clearly, concisely, completely, and courteously. E-mail is faster than other writing, but the reading experience is identical.

***Take your time,*** and respond to messages according to their importance. E-mail is faster than a speeding bullet, but don't shoot yourself in the foot by responding hastily.

***Use succinct, pithy subject lines.*** These can alert your reader to your message's importance. Don't rely on these solely, however, and forget that the context and significance of your message need to be clear in the first lines of your message.

***Write a self-contained message.*** Do not rely on attachments, previous messages, the subject line, or a reader's memory to get your point across. Provide enough information so readers understand immediately the context and purpose.

***Clarify the message's purpose.*** This is true for all business writing, e-mail especially. Your reader may not get to main points that are reached only by scrolling down the page. Some software programs allow readers to view the first lines of messages without opening them. When communicating time-sensitive news, requesting information or action, make sure the significance is clear up front.

***Watch your tone.*** *Flaming*—sending a hostile message—is in vogue; but it's nearly a 100-percent certainty that you'll burn yourself along with important bridges. Common sense and professionalism require a positive and professional approach in all writing. You're not protected by signaling your intentions by using a <flame on> or <flame off> notice.

***Stick to business.*** We can be personable in all our business dealings, but we are writing to complete a business task. Eliminate gossip, personal comments, and judgements that can be distracting, annoying, and impolite.

***Don't litter.*** Sending indiscriminate emails of irrelevant information is also called *spamming*. Spamming includes sending jokes (and jokes and jokes and jokes), holiday messages, best wishes, goodbye messages to one person or to everyone in a company.

***Don't put anything in writing that you wouldn't mind anyone reading.*** One click of a button and your message can be broadcast to thousands.

***Use upper and lower case.*** ALL CAPS IS IRRITATING AND DIFFICULT TO READ. AND HARD TO TELL WHEN ONE SENTENCE ENDS AND ANOTHER BEGINS. A GOOD WAY TO WRITE SENTENCE FRAGMENTS.

Writing in all caps saves time for yourself. But you are writing for another's convenience and ease, not your own.