Tips on Writing Effective Emails – Reading Material

**Overview:**

It has always been said that, "We only have one chance to make a first impression." In today's business world, that first impression is often in the form of an email.

This critical first impression is not just of the person hitting send, but potentially the entire organization.

**Objectives:**

This reading material is designed to help you:

* Understand the principles that make email work
* Organize your content and consider your audience
* Get the best results from the emails you send

**Introduction:**

With the ever-increasing speed of technological change, we all need to stay up to date with new equipment and new computer programs. As soon as a new version of a popular program becomes available, we must learn it. When some new technology comes out, we have to have it. In line with technological developments, the way business is conducted generally has changed immensely over the last couple of decades. Business is being conducted in a much more informal way a natural, informal, more relaxed language is being used in meetings and conferences rather than stilted, formal language.

It seems we are now writing more than ever. Most managers are creating their own communications letters, memos, faxes, reports, articles, marketing materials, and especially emails. Especially in this global age, speed is often the key to successful negotiations, so writing effectively under these circumstances is often very demanding.

### Learn to write right

Effective communication gives a professional impression of you and of your organization. Effective communication helps to get things done. Writing effectively is perhaps the most demanding work we do. Writing requires imagination, creativity, organization, careful planning and many other skills if a message is to be effective and get results. In today's fast-paced business world, there should be no room for yesterday's old-fashioned, long-winded jargon. Today's business language should be proactive, stimulating, interesting, and most of all, it should reflect your own personality. Instead of using boring clichés that have been around for decades, the key is to write in a natural style, as if you are having a conversation. So, when you are composing any business document in future, ask yourself: "If I was speaking to the recipient, would I say this?" and remember: if you wouldn't say it, don't write it!

A wise engineer must extract only the significant information and support it with only the minimum-necessary argument. The expertise is used to filter the information and so to remove inessential noise. The engineer as expert provides the answers to problems, not an exposition of past and present knowledge: we use our knowledge to focus upon the important points.

For the future when you approach any document, follow this simple procedure:

* Establish the AIM
* Consider the READER
* Devise the STRUCTURE
* DRAFT the text
* EDIT and REVISE

Writing is an essential skill upon which all engineers and managers rely.

### PANIC Model to Write effectively:

Use the PANIC model to make your writings effective:

**Purpose**: Understand why you're writing. Before you type anything into a new message, have explicit answers for two questions:

* Why am I writing this?   
  What exactly do I want the result of this message to be?

For example: If you can't succinctly state these answers, you might want to hold off on sending your message until you can. People get dozens, hundreds, even thousands of emails each day, so it's only natural for them to gravitate toward the messages that are well thought-out and that clearly respect their time and attention. Careless emails do not invite careful responses. Think through your email from the recipient's point of view, and make sure you've done everything you can to try and help yourself before contacting someone else. If it's a valuable message, treat it that way, and put in the time to making your words count.

**Audience**: Identify, to/for whom you are you writing to and what is your relationship with the person? If the person you are writing to is in a higher position than you, your email should use more formal language than if the person is someone in the same level position than you. If you have never met the person receiving your email before, you should use formal language in the first email to him or her. Once you have sent the first email and received a reply, you can choose to continue using formal language or choose to use less formal language in future emails.

**Need**: You must identify the need for writing. This can be addressed by asking the following questions:

* What does the reader want from this write up?
* What an impact your writing should made on the audience?
* What is the action plan?

If you want the receiver to do something for you, make it clear. Tell the receiver exactly what action you want done. Tell the receiver if no action needs to be taken. If you want the receiver to respond by a certain date, write the response date. If you are negotiating or rearranging a meeting, write your demands or available times clearly. It is important to address the audience’s need.

**Information**: The more information you stick into one email, the more likely your recipient is going to lose focus on what's important. Here are a few ways to keep your email relevant to the task at hand:

* Use Descriptive Subject Lines: Use a subject that clearly defines what the email is going to be about. You can use certain descriptors as tags (i.e. "Important!: HR needs your new contact information"), but you should make it easier for your recipient to differentiate between it and other "important" emails.
* Start a new thread when Changing the Subject: If you're having a conversation with someone over email, it can be easy to go on tangents. When you do, you want to start a new thread rather than continue the old one. If your reply is not relevant at all to the subject line, start a new thread with a fresh subject line which more accurately reflects the email's actual contents. It's annoying to open an email thinking that it's about "Re: Deadline reminder" when it's actually really about "By the way, how do I log into our servers?“ Not only does it help the person you're communicating with organize their thoughts, but if you ever have to find that conversation later on, it'll be easier to find if the subject line is always relevant to the message's content. Just like you want to separate actionable items, you want to keep your conversations separate as well.
* Keep It Concise: We've already talked about the importance of concision, but the easiest way to keep your messages relevant is to keep them brief. The shorter your message, the fewer "hey, how are you doing" and other off-topic rants you're likely to throw in unnecessarily. Summarize the important points, give them something to act on, and be done with it. You'll be a lot more likely to get the desired response if you don't stray from your message's purpose.

**Communication**: when you are writing, it is worth taking a few extra minutes to think about how best to do this and to consider what language and style you should use to get the best results. Decide if formal or informal language is better. Think about the reason you are sending the email. If you are requesting a service or asking a favor, you should use formal language. If you are making a complaint, you should use strong words to express your dissatisfaction or problem, but you must be polite. If you are introducing yourself, you should use formal language, but you can use words or phrases that let your personality show through as well. If you are writing a customer relation letter, you should use formal language.

In the **PANIC** model, **PANI** falls under Higher Order Concerns and **C** falls under Later Order Concerns.

When you are drafting or editing a document, like an email, not every element of your work should have equal priority. The most important parts of your write-up, often called "Higher Order Concerns (HOCs),".

HOCs deal with macro-level or "big picture" issues. Revising and editing for higher-order concerns involves identifying and correcting substantive problems such as poor format and design, unclear organization of information, and inadequate development of ideas.

The following are the key HOCs in almost every write ups including emails:

Focus and Purpose: Business writing is an action-oriented, rhetorical, and user-centered. It aims to effect positive change, through both persuasive and informative strategies. It is essential that you have a clear understanding of the purpose of your document. Focus can be identified by some questions, such as:

1. What is your purpose in writing the document?
2. Are you giving information
3. Asking for Information
4. Conveying Good or Bad news
5. Showing Appreciation
6. What purpose should the document serve for your reader?
7. Is your main point stated early in the document?
8. What do you want your reader to do when s/he finishes reading the document?

Audience: You must know who the audience for your email. If the person you are writing to is in a higher position than you, your email should use more formal language than if the person is someone in the same level position than you. If you have never met the person receiving your email before, you should use formal language in the first email to him or her. Once you have sent the first email and received a reply, you can choose to continue using formal language or choose to use less formal language in future emails.

**Organization:**

Effective organization is crucial to the success of a business message. User-centered, logical presentation of your ideas makes the document professional. In addition, you need to organize your document so that your arguments are clear to the reader. Finally, your document's design (visual appearance) impacts the persuasiveness of the communication.

Does your document begin by explaining your point and forecasting the communication's main ideas?

Your introduction should answer these three questions from the perspective of the reader:

1. What is this?
2. Why am I getting it?
3. What do you want me to do?
4. Does your communication proceed in a logical and organized way, moving from general to specific information?
5. Is the information arranged in order of importance to your audience?
6. Is similar information kept together?
7. Is each section organized around only one main idea?
8. Do key sentences begin each paragraph?

Ask others to read your document and explain your most important ideas.

**Document Design:**

A clean, correct, and professional-looking document portrays you as professional.

Effective document design increases the usability and persuasiveness of your communication and highlights important information, which helps busy readers.

Check for the following points in the Document Design

1. Does your document conform to the genre expectations of the document you are composing
2. Can your readers find information where s/he expects to see it?
3. Key points are emphasized by using boldface, underlining, or italics?
4. Do you have clear and specific headings?
5. Is there any place where you can improve the readability of the document by using indentation or bullets?

**Development:**

Anticipate that your audience will read your document carefully, questioning its validity and claims.

Your document should be informative and persuasive, and yet concise enough not to waste your readers' time.

1. Do you provide enough background information for the message?
2. Have you included specific examples, numbers, dates, names and percentages to support your claims?
3. Do you have graphics (charts, graphs, diagrams, and tables) where appropriate?
4. Have you eliminated unnecessary and/or obvious information to your audience?

Ask someone to read the document and comment if something is unclear and needs more description, explanation, or support.

Anticipate, also, that your audience may consist of many different readers. Each of these readers will have different needs. Your communication should be designed in a modular fashion, so that different readers can find information they need quickly and easily.

**Later Order Concerns**

Sentence structure, punctuation, word choice, and spelling

Are there a few problems that frequently occur? Keep a list of problems that recur and check for those.

Read the email aloud watching and listening for anything that sounds incorrect.

Ask yourself why you put punctuation marks in certain places. Do you need to check any punctuation rules?

For possible spelling errors, proofread backwards, from the end of a line to the beginning.

**Four Point Action Plan for Structuring the Content**

Mostly communications are short and routine. You can write or dictate them without any special thinking or preparation. However, documents that are not so routine need more thought and careful planning. The Four-Point Action Plan provides a useful but simple framework for structuring all written communications:

The following is the Four-Point Action Plan for structuring the content to be written in your documents:

Introduction: This can be derived from:

Why are you writing?

Set the scene.

Maybe refer to a previous letter, contact or document.

Details:

Give information/instructions.

Ask for information.

Provide all relevant details.

Separate into paragraphs.

Ensure logical flow.

Responses or Actions: Specify the:

Action the reader should take.

Action you will take.

Deadline if necessary

Close: Sometimes all that is needed is a simple one-line closing sentence.

Email Structure - Internal Emails

When sending internal emails, keep the following in mind:

* Be Obvious: Ensure the subject line clearly defines the task and is closely related to the content – this will make finding subject specific emails easier in the future.
* Be Succinct: Keep emails short, sharp and to the point.
* Be Correct: Always be polite and use proper spelling and grammar.
* Be Professional: Emails can be friendly, but keep them professional and on topic.
* Be Realistic: Sparingly use the high-priority option.

Email Structure - External Emails

When sending external emails, keep the following in mind:

* **Subject Line:** Always use an appropriate subject line, related to the content of the email.
* Attention to detail: Aim to use proper spelling and grammar, and avoid abbreviations.
* **Tone:** Keep a positive tone throughout the entire email and don’t make negative or accusatory statements.
* **Personalization:** Take note of key events in past dealings with clients, using these in future correspondence can create a strong bond for future communication.
* **Formatting:** Ensure you use the correct font (size and colour) throughout the entire email; this creates consistency and improves readability.
* **Ice breakers**: Address your contact directly and include an appropriate greeting. For example: ‘Hi Alex, hope you’re well.’ or ‘Hi Alex, thanks so much for your email.’
* **Purpose**: Clearly outline the purpose of the email in the opening sentence. For example - ‘Just touching base in regards to the SEO Team’s content recommendations.’
* **Provide a Solution**: This is hugely important over email and allows the conversation to have a purpose. Providing more complex solutions to problems may require a phone conversation or meeting, and this should be highlighted within the email.
* **Questions:** When asking a question or requesting information, provide all of the relevant information and then request or ask directly. For example: ‘Is this something you would be interested in?’ or ‘When convenient, can you please send this through?’
* **Addressing Questions:** Address and answer all questions directly. It’s also good to use this opportunity to try and pre-empt future questions. For example: ‘In regards to on-page SEO, the SEO Team has noted the following…’
* **Sign-Off:** Sign-off your emails by inviting open and further communication. For example: ‘If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me.’
* **Email chains:** When replying to an email, make sure you reply to the email chain. This allows the client to easily reference your reply. However, always create a new email chain for a new subject matter, to avoid confusion.
* **Carbon Copies:** If a client CCs someone into an email, CC them on your reply.
* **High Priority:** Sparingly use the high-priority option, and try to avoid using urgent and important in subject lines unless necessary. You cannot decide how urgent a task is for an external stakeholder!
* Proofreading: Always re-read your email prior to sending.

**HOT TIP:** Try and avoid placing the email address in the ‘To’ box until you have proofed your email. Sometimes it can be too easy to, accidently, press send!

Example:

**Task Requirement:** Read the given job advertisement .You are the right candidate for the job, you have all the required skills and traits. Write an email responding to this job advertisement. You will be given 15 minutes to write this email.

Talentech Corporation

Application for the position of Java Developer – Ref no : 12345

We are looking for BTech/ BCA graduates fresher candidates with the following skill set:

Must have basic knowledge of HTML, XHTML, CSS,

The Person should be technically sound (. Net \ Java and SQL Server) and

Should be able to be quickly productive and need minimum hand-holding.

Must be Proactive and  exhibit effective inter-personal and communication skills

Develop and deliver quality code adhering to the standards.

Interested candidates need to apply by sending their resume and other details to [XYZ@talentech.com](mailto:XYZ@talentech.com)

Sample Mail:

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| --- | --- |
| To | XYZ@talentech.com |
| Subject | Application for the position of Java Developer – Ref no : 12345 |
| Greeting | Dear Mr./Ms............... |
| Introduction | My name is ABC and I am writing in response to your advertisement, for the post of a Java Developer. |
| Details | I am a Btech graduate from the Electronics and Communication background. I have recently completed a three month intensive course in Java programming. I have basic knowledge of HTML, XHTML, CSS and SQL server.  During the course, we were given a real time project to work on and I was able to do the tasks assigned to me with minimal supervision. I have participated in debates and elocution competitions in my school and college and won many prizes, I believe I can work in a team as I have done my academic project by being a part of a team. I am confident of developing quality codes, adhering to the standards of the company. |
| Action Plan | I have attached my resume and I would be available to attend the Interview  if my profile matches your requirement. I would be happy to provide any additional details that you may need |
| Close | I can be contacted on 9240264617 and I look forward to hearing from you. |
| Signature | Thank you,    Warm Regards,    ABC |