

11 Emails and Faxes

This chapter covers the transmission of formal, professional material by email and fax.

Formal Emails to Communicate Work Matters

A formal email should be written as though it is a business letter. Moreover, because of the immediate nature of both receiving and sending emails, some organisations have developed policies of etiquette for them. When using emails to communicate work matters, you need to take the following into account:

Style of writing	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Take as much care writing a formal email as you would in writing a letter. Be careful what you say and how you say it.2. Don't use the pop conventions of the email culture. Lowercase letters at the start of sentences, <i>i</i> instead of <i>I</i> and <i>u</i> instead of <i>you</i> will make a poor impression.3. For people you know, it may be appropriate to start the message with the person's name followed by a colon.4. For someone you don't know or are on formal terms with, start with the conventional Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs/Dr/Prof [see Chapter 10: <i>A Formal Letter (Hardcopy or Online)</i>]. Close with the corresponding closing.5. Structure the content of your message in the same way as you would a letter. Don't do a brain dump.
Confidentiality	Don't assume that an email is confidential. Never put in a mail message something that you wouldn't want other people to read. Some people call an email a 'postcard to the world'.
Permanence	Don't regard your files – sent or received – as in safe keeping. Networks are not fail-safe. Make sure that you store hard or digital copies of anything important.
Commercial sensitivity	No commercially sensitive material should be sent by email.
Contractual material	Avoid using email for contractual material unless it is followed by hard copies.

Attachments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When sending or receiving attachments, make sure they are free of viruses. 2. Check the size of file attachments before you send them. If they are large, zip the file first; this avoids transmission-decoding problems. 3. Any files sent via email must have the permission of the author.
Forwarding unnecessary messages	Don't send unnecessary messages, particularly when forwarding material to large groups. The minor effort involved is far outweighed by the irritation it can cause.
Content of auto-signature	Make sure your auto-signature contains your name, address of your institution and telephone and fax numbers. You may also want to include such things as a website URL. If your system doesn't carry an auto-signature function, then make up a template, and use that for each message.
Angry or inflammatory remarks	Don't write a formal email as a fast reaction when you are feeling irritated with the recipient. You'll probably regret it.

Formal Faxes

As with emails, take as much care as you would when writing a letter.

1. If possible, use a fax template for the cover document. This will lay out all of the necessary material such as the recipient's name, institution, fax number and so on.
2. **If you are faxing to someone you don't know or are on formal terms with:**
 - Use the conventions for starting and finishing letters [see Chapter 10: *A Formal Letter (Hardcopy and Online)*, page 125].
 - Structure the content of the fax as you would a letter. Don't do a brain dump.

Checklist for formal emails

- ☐ Have you used the conventions for the salutation and the closing of a letter?
- ☐ Is the content of the email structured as you would a letter?
- ☐ Have you avoided sending commercially sensitive or contractual material by email?
- ☐ Have you made hard copies of important emails, both sent and received?
- ☐ Have you scanned attachments for viruses?
- ☐ Have you zipped large files if they are to be sent as attachments?
- ☐ Do you avoid forwarding unnecessary messages?
- ☐ Does the auto-signature contain your name, address, telephone number and fax number?
- ☐ Have you written it when you are feeling irritated with the recipient?

Checklist for formal faxes

- ☐ Have you, if possible, used a fax template for the cover document?
- ☐ Does the fax use the conventions for starting and finishing letters?
- ☐ Is it structured like a letter?