Title:
Email Grammar Guide

Word Count:
566

Summary:
Just because email messages are sent quickly doesn't mean they can be composed
in a hurry. Sorry! You were hoping I'd say little pesky things like grammar
aren't important. But, they are.

Keywords:
email, commmunication, business, marketing, customer service

Article Body:
Just because email messages are sent quickly doesn't mean they can be composed
in a hurry. Sorry! You were hoping I'd say little pesky things like grammar
aren't important. But, they are.

Here are a few grammar pointers to get you started on the right track for
sending proper email messages. This isn't an exhaustive list. Entire text
books are devoted to grammar. But, these few tips will be helpful.

Incorrect Modifiers
Put modifiers in their proper place. Sure – as soon as I tell you what a
modifier is, you can tell it where to go.

Modifiers are adjectives and adverbs. Adjectives are used to modify nouns and
pronouns. Adverbs are used to modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. One
way to help remember this is that most adverbs end in the letters "ly."

Example - Using Modifiers Correctly

The following example demonstrates how to use adjectives to modify a noun and
how to use adverbs to modify a verb.

When modifying a noun, use an adjective:

•   He did a poor job.
•   She is a frequent contributor.

When modifying a verb, use an adverb:

- He did the job poorly.
- She contributes frequently.

Noun/Pronoun Agreement

Another common grammar problem is when the pronoun doesn't agree in number with its antecedent. Or, in plain English, that means incorrectly using a plural pronoun to modify a singular noun, or vice versa. The most common offender is using the plural "they," when the sentence really calls for the singular "he" or "she."

Example

This will become clearer when you read the following example. The illustration also offers several options for rewording these statements in order to make them correct.

Sample of Single Versus Plural Pronouns

The following statement is incorrect. The noun and pronoun do not agree.

"When a customer is upset, they need to vent."

Here are several ways to reword the statement to make it correct:

- Rewrite it in the plural:

"When customers are upset, they need to vent."

- Use he/she:

"When a customer is upset, he/she needs to vent."

- Re-use the noun:

"When a customer is upset, a customer needs to vent."

- Re-word the statement:

"An upset customer needs to vent."

Recent Phenomenon

This specific problem is a recent phenomenon. Long ago, "he" was the standard pronoun used to refer to both sexes. In current times, we have tried to be more politically correct. This leads to the he/she issue. Errors on this issue not only lead to poor grammar, but they may offend someone.

Future Trend

Now that you've had a quick history lesson, let's look to the future. In a few years, it may be acceptable to use the plural pronoun "they" with a singular antecedent.

However, those times haven't arrived yet, despite what you may see to the contrary. So, don't use plural pronouns with singular nouns until you receive the official memo from the Proper English Grammar Gurus.

Grammar Surprises

Here's a final point about grammar. You may be surprised by who becomes upset if your messages aren't grammatically correct. Your customer, colleague, or boss may use incorrect grammar all the time. However, that doesn't mean they don't recognize improper usage when they hear it or see it from others. In other words, they may be holding you to a higher standard. Make sure you measure up.