

EMAIL ETIQUETTE

25 QUICK RULES

By Lynn Gaertner-Johnston

Email speeds from screen to screen. Nevertheless, it is communication between human beings. To be successful, it must be both efficient and considerate. To meet the needs of your email readers, follow these rules of email etiquette. Then hope your readers follow your example!

- 1 Begin with a precise subject.** For example, write “Two Changes in Your Maui Itinerary”—not “Travel Update.” Never leave the subject blank. If you are not sure what the subject is, you are not ready to send a message.
- 2 Think before you type.** Decide why you are writing and what you want your readers to do. Then organize your thoughts. Don’t expect your readers to do the thinking for you.
- 3 Get to the point** in the first two or three sentences. Be clear about your purpose. Don’t keep your reader guessing.
- 4 Insert essential information at or near the beginning.** Otherwise, your reader may press **Reply** (or worse, **Delete**) before even seeing it.
- 5 Include your name and contact information** at the end of your message and on attachments. Without it, readers may not recognize you as the writer, and they may be unable to reach you by phone or fax.

6 Keep your promises. Attach documents when you say you will, and be sure to attach the correct versions. Test hyperlinks to be sure they are correct and active.

7 Use standard punctuation, spelling, and capitalization to help readers understand your message quickly.

8 Change paragraphs when you change ideas. One-sentence paragraphs are acceptable.

9 Always insert a blank line between paragraphs. Big blocks of text intimidate readers. Intimidation = unread message.

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10 Press Reply to say thanks *only* when the message merits a thank you or the sender needs acknowledgment that you received the message.

11 Don’t send “You’re welcome” messages. Although “You’re welcome” is expected in conversations, it is excessive in email.

12 Never criticize or blame in email. After you press **Send**, you have no control over how the message is received or understood.



13 Review messages before forwarding them. Be sure nothing in them will embarrass the writer or readers.

14 Don't hide behind email. To build customer, client, and employee relationships, don't just type—pick up the phone and talk. To convey a sensitive message, use the telephone or meet in person for two-way communication.

15 Never include confidential or embarrassing information in email. It is too easy to forward it.

16 Use standard font sizes and colors for easy reading. Don't use “wallpaper” backgrounds or interesting graphics to dress up your messages.

17 Avoid smiley faces and clever emoticons like this one: {:-). Your reader (the CEO? your new client?) may think such symbols are unprofessional.

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18 Tell readers if you expect action from them. People read email too fast to guess at requests implied between the lines. If possible, include your request in the first lines of text so they can't miss it.

19 Everyone has enough to read. Avoid copying people on messages they don't want or need.

20 Do not send a blank message with a file attached unless your subject explains the attachment. Readers often delete such messages, especially from outside the firm.

21 Learn the preferences of people you write to often. For example, does your manager want background or just the facts?

22 Reply promptly, considering the urgency and importance of the message.

23 When using email as a formal communication, treat it like a letter. Begin with a greeting (“Dear Ms. Chiu:”) and end with “Best wishes” or a similar close. These customs convey respect.

For formal communication, begin with a greeting and end with “Best wishes” or a similar close.

24 For messages within your company and informal messages to external readers, address the reader politely in the first sentence, like this: Liz, here are the reports. Or use one of these ways, with the message following beneath: Liz, Liz: Hi, Liz, Hi Liz, Dear Liz: Dear Liz,

25 After using your grammar and spelling checker, proofread. Then forgive your errors and those of others. Despite our electronic communications, we are all human.

110 110 Tips for Sending Email That Gets Read—and Gets Results are available as a printed 30-page booklet and a searchable PDF for the desktop. For information, visit http://syntaxtraining.com/our_products.html.



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