Read and apply these tips to improve your email instantly.

Search by pressing CTRL+F.

Why Use These Tips?

About the Author

Buy This Booklet

Follow the Basic Rules

When email ignores basic rules, it gets ignored as unprofessional. Be sure to apply these tips.

Help Your Readers Focus

Focused readers can follow your message and respond. These tips improve readers’ focus.

Inspire Action

Readers need help to take action. Apply these tips to make things happen.

Write Quick-Read Messages

Email that takes too long to read will not be read. These tips lead to fast, efficient messages.

Use the Human Touch

Readers are human beings. They respond best to courteous, thoughtful actions.

Know When to Phone

A phone call outranks email in these situations.

Avoid Embarrassment

Readers and suffers! Thank you for sending only essential messages. These tips shrink excess email.

Use Your Time Well

Manage email efficiently and have more time to write well.

Try this 16-Tip Sampler!

Then get the full 110 Tips—available for immediate downloading as a PDF (like this file) and by mail as a printed booklet.

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110 TIPS FOR SENDING EMAIL THAT GETS READ— AND GETS RESULTS

SECOND EDITION

Tip Contents

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Use Your Time Well

Try this 16-Tip Sampler!
1. Think before you type. Decide why you are writing and what you want your readers to do. Then organize your thoughts. Don’t expect readers to think for you.

Help Your Readers Focus

15. State your conclusion at the beginning, not the end, unless you must lead up to it persuasively. Example: I recommend we enter into a one-year contract. My reasons are explained below.

19. When you forward email, briefly state why you have forwarded it. It is not enough to write “See below” or “FYI.” In one sentence, tell why. Example: FYI: See Chae’s new information about the release date.

Inspire Action

28. When you want readers to take several actions or answer several questions, list the items like this:
By Feb. 1, please submit these items:
1. Completed application form
2. Resume or curriculum vitae
3. One-paragraph bio
4. Digital photograph
Do not convey such items in a paragraph, or your readers may miss some of them.

35. Make it clear who is responsible for taking action. Avoid “We will look into other options.” Who is we? When you have multiple readers, list a name with each action item.
Use short sentences. They are faster and easier to read than long ones.

Use descriptive headings. For example, rather than the heading "Recommendation," use "Recommendation: Hire a Summer Intern."

Address a group of readers as "friends," "folks," "Finance team," or another group title. When writing to everyone, consider "Greetings" or "Greetings, everyone."

Be sure you are not being so concise that you seem abrupt. Even a word like "Fine" can seem abrupt when it stands alone. Instead state a complete thought such as "That sounds fine to me."

When your goal is to build relationships with clients, customers, and coworkers, don't type to them—pick up the phone and talk to them. And use the phone to reconnect after an absence.

If you are unsure how your reader will interpret your message, pick up the phone or talk in person to help the other person understand. Do not email.
Avoid Embarrassment

80. Review email before you forward it to others. Be sure nothing in it will embarrass the writer or readers. Delete personal information and private conversations before forwarding a message.

88. To prevent accidentally sending a reply in Outlook, type gibberish on the Copy to line (like lkdkla). The gibberish prevents the email from going out. When you are ready to send the email, delete the gibberish.

Send Only Necessary Email

93. Take time to find out who needs your message. Do not send an email to a team of 20 people when only 2 actually need it. Otherwise, you waste the time of 18 others.

96. Pay attention to what your reader wants when you reply to a request. Read or skim the entire message before writing your reply. Then skim again before pressing Send. If you follow this tip, you will not have to respond to repeat requests.

Use Your Time Well

102. Use email to ask for action, ask a question, and convey information. Do not use email to discuss, problem solve, or coach unless you can use it efficiently and diplomatically in those situations.
People get too much email. Because of the volume of email and the time it takes to read and act on it, much of what is written never gets read. Announcements, requests, and other important messages linger in email inboxes—or are deleted—simply because readers cannot handle them quickly and easily. Even more email does not get a response—or not the response the sender wanted.

These tips will help you send efficient, effective email that gets read and gets results. The ideas come from hundreds of employees and managers who told me why they do not read and cannot take action on much of the email they receive. They shared their hopes, strategies, and suggestions for more effective email. I have shaped their ideas into this second edition of 110 Tips.

I know these tips will help your email get read—and get results. Just choose a few and start using them!

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Since 1990, Lynn Gaertner-Johnston has helped thousands of employees and managers write better at REI, MasterCard, PACCAR, Ledcor, Dorsey, Puget Sound Energy, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, and many other organizations. Through her company, Syntax Training, Lynn delivers in-house and public business writing courses, with tools, tips, strategies, and job aids that help people write better, guaranteed. She has also taught in the MBA programs at the University of Washington and UW Bothell.

Lynn writes a monthly e-newsletter, Better Writing at Work, for more than 15,000 subscribers, and her blog, Business Writing, gets thousands of daily visitors from around the globe.

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For the latest tips and strategies to improve your business writing, visit Lynn’s blog at Business Writing Blog.
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