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Email Etiquette



- Don't write in capitals. IF YOU WRITE IN CAPITALS, IT SEEMS AS IF YOU ARE SHOUTING. This can be highly annoying and might trigger an unwanted response in the form of a flame email.
- Don't overuse the "HIGH PRIORITY" option. It will lose its function when you really need it.
- Don't overuse "REPLY TO ALL." Only use REPLY TO ALL if you really need your message to be seen by each person who received the original message.
- Be careful with abbreviations and emoticons. In business emails, try not to use abbreviations such as "BTW" (by the way) and "LOL" (laugh out loud). The recipient might not be aware of the meanings of the abbreviations, and in business emails these are generally not appropriate. The same goes for emoticons, such as the smiley :-).
- Don't leave out the message thread. When you reply to an email, you must include the original mail in your reply; in other words, click "REPLY" instead of "NEW MAIL."
- Use proper spelling and grammar.
- Use the active voice instead of the passive. For instance, "We will process your order today" sounds better than "Your order will be processed today." The first sounds more personal, whereas the latter, especially when used frequently, sounds unnecessarily formal.
- Avoid using "urgent" and "important" in an email or subject line. Only use these words if it is a really, really urgent or important message.
- Answer quickly. Customers send an email because they want to receive a quick response; therefore, each email should be replied to within 24 hours. If the email is complicated, just send an email back saying that you have received it and that you will get back to them.

Be concise and to the point.

- Wherever possible, try to compress attachments and only send attachments when they are productive.
- Have a good virus scanner in place for outgoing documents.
- Read the email before you send it in order to pick out any spelling and grammar mistakes.
- Send a more effective message by avoiding misunderstandings and inappropriate comments.

- Don't send emails that are too long.
- Try to keep your sentences to a maximum of 15 to 20 words.
- Avoid using sexist language such as: "The user should add a signature by configuring his email program." Apart from using he/she, you can also use the neutral gender: "The user should add a signature by configuring the email program."

Don't use email to discuss confidential information.

- If you receive an email message warning you of a new unstoppable virus that will immediately delete everything from your computer, this is most probably a hoax. Many virus hoaxes contain viruses themselves; the same goes for chain letters that promise incredible riches or ask your help for a charitable cause.
- Try not to use the "cc" field unless the recipient in the cc field knows why they are receiving a copy of the message.
- When responding to a cc message, do not include the person in the cc field unless you have a particular reason for wanting this person to see your response.
- Never make any libelous, sexist or racially discriminating comments in emails, even if they are meant to be a joke.
- Don't copy a message or attachment belonging to another user without permission of the originator. If you do not ask permission first, you might be infringing on copyright laws.
- Don't ask to recall a message.
- It is important to add disclaimers to your internal and external emails, since this can help protect your company from liability.
- Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph in an email.
- When making points, number them or mark each point as separate to keep the overview.
- Not only should the email be personally addressed, it should also include personalized content.
- An email reply must answer all questions, and pre-empt further questions.
- If your email address is a business address, be sure to include your title and company name in the signature.
- Ensure that you have a relevant subject line.
- Pay careful attention to where your reply is going to end up.

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- Don't overuse the exclamation point ("!"). This punctuation mark indicates emphasis and/or importance, and overuse of it reduces its effectiveness.
- Over-use of the full-stop (e.g. "...") can make a message difficult to read.
- Don't make personal remarks about third parties. Email messages can come back to haunt you.
- Make sure the content is relevant to the recipients.
- Use some kind of visual indication to distinguish between text quoted from the original message and your new text—this makes the reply much easier to follow.
- If you are sending in a question to which you expect a response, make sure you include enough information to make the response possible.
- Try to break your message into logical paragraphs.

Be polite. Terseness can be misinterpreted.

- Try to match your message length to the type of conversation taking place. For example, if you're only making a quick query, then keep it short and to the point.
- If your email program supports fancy formatting (bold, italic and so on) in the mail messages it generates, make sure that the recipient has an email program that can display such messages.
- Be very careful about including credit card numbers in email messages. Email can be intercepted in transit.
- Always use a signature if you can. Make sure it identifies who you are and includes alternative means of contacting you (phone and fax are usual).
- Keep your signature short—four to seven lines is a handy guideline for maximum signature length.
- If somebody sends you information or ideas by email, you should not assume that you have their permission to reproduce that information in a public forum (discussion group, USENET newsgroup, chat site, etc.).
- Don't pretend you are someone else when sending email, e.g. by using someone else's account to send it.

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- If you are sending an important message to somebody, don't use HTML code in your message unless you are sure that their email program can understand HTML correctly.
- Keep your email address simple.

Don't just rely on email; follow-ups can often be done via the telephone or regular mail.

- Avoid unprofessional sounding email names like "studmuffin" or "partygirl."
- Read your message carefully before you click the "SEND" button. The tone of an email can often be misinterpreted.
- Have someone else proofread your message before you send it.
- It may be easier to find errors if you print and review your email.
- Name your résumé document "YOUR NAME, RÉSUMÉ" so that, when you follow-up with employment recruiters by asking them if they received your email, they won't have to look through 300 attachments called "résumé."
- If you are attaching your résumé, ask the receiver if they would prefer that you send it in a different format, such as Word Perfect, Rich Text Format, or Portable Document Format (PDF).
- Be cautious when using sarcasm and humor. Because they lack the clues offered by facial expressions and tone of voice in "live" conversation, these do not translate easily through email.
- Your colleagues may use commonly accepted abbreviations in email, but when communicating with external customers, everyone should follow standard writing protocol.

- Concentrate on one subject per message whenever possible.
- Use asterisks or bold formatting to emphasize important words.
- Don't use "BCC" to keep others from seeing who you copied; it shows confidence when you directly cc anyone receiving a copy. Do use BCC, however, when sending to a large distribution list, so recipients won't have to see a huge list of names.
- Email communication isn't appropriate when sending confusing or emotional messages.
- Don't use email to avoid an uncomfortable situation or to cover up a mistake.
- Check your email regularly. Ignoring a mail message is discourteous and confusing to the sender.
- Reply promptly.
- Develop an orderly filing system for those email messages you wish to keep.
- Delete unwanted emails to conserve disk space.
- When you use the REPLY option, ensure that the subject field (automatically filled in for you) still accurately reflects the content of your message. Be sure to change or expand upon the subject if necessary.
- Try to restrict yourself to one subject per message; send multiple messages if you have multiple subjects.
- Don't reproduce an email message in full when responding to it, especially if you are posting to a bulletin board.
- Be tolerant of others' mistakes.
- Remember that people other than the person to whom it's addressed may see your message.
- Don't make changes to someone else's message and pass it on without making it clear where you have made the changes.

- Don't broadcast email messages unnecessarily.
- Don't send or forward chain email—it offends some people and is wasteful of network resources.
- Don't use vulgar language or graphics.
- Don't use acronyms or jargon unless easily understood by all recipients.
- Don't post a message that just says "Ditto," "Me Too," "I agree," etc. Don't waste everyone's time if you have so little to say.
- Don't send emails for these reasons: Disciplinary actions, conflicts, personal information, concerns about fellow students/workers and complaints.
- Check business emails twice before sending since they require substantial thought and attention to wording and content.

Always reply to emails, even if a brief acknowledgment is all you can manage.

- Don't send attachments which the recipient does not expect, especially large files that take a long time to download.
- Use separate accounts for personal and business email.
- Clean up the document when replying to or forwarding an email.
- Delete headers when appropriate for privacy.
- Learn your colleagues' email habits and preferences, such as how often they check mail and how long it takes them to reply.
- If you're asking for something, don't forget to say "please." Similarly, if someone does something for you, it never hurts to say "thank you."

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