

E-Mail for Business Communication

The Basics:

Remember that **e-mail** is a written form of communication. Therefore, there is a **“permanent” record of what you say**. That can be an advantage. (For example, it may help clarify the history of a project.) But remember, an e-mail message may be around long after you hit “delete.” **So, do not say anything you would not be comfortable having recorded.** You really don’t know who is going to see it.

E-mail is not secure. It can be seen by others along the Internet highway. Especially avoid giving personal information – such as social security numbers, credit card numbers, etc. – in an e-mail message.

Another effect of e-mail’s written form is the lack of nonverbal cues. Statisticians tell us that people on receive 7% of a message from our actual words. We use facial expressions, body language, eye contact, and intonation to clarify the meaning of our words. Without that extra information, the message may be unclear or misunderstood. Be sure to be clear and detailed in your message. Avoid using sarcasm or jokes.

Basic Do’s and Don’ts

- **DO’s**
 - o Use e-mail when you’d like to have a record of communication
 - o Use e-mail to ask simple direct questions that are not extremely urgent
 - o Use e-mail to communicate information in a brief and organized manner
 - o Use e-mail to contact a large number of people with important information
- **Don’ts**
 - o Use e-mail to relay bad news or negative feedback to an individual
 - o Use e-mail to debate a topic or for ongoing discussions
 - o Use e-mail to chat with co-workers
 - o Reply to everyone if you only need to communicate with one person
 - o Forward a message without notifying the original sender

The Content of a Message

Since e-mail use is so quick and pervasive, we usually do not take the time to write clear and effective e-mail messages. Unfortunately, this ultimately wastes time and causes unnecessary confusion. Consider the following when writing a message:

1. Use the subject line to clearly state the topic. This saves everyone time!
2. Avoid excessive use of special fonts and colors. It can detract from your message and uses up more inbox space.
3. Clearly organize your message. Use numbers or bullet points to address several items in one message.
4. State explicitly any follow-up you expect from the recipient.
5. Only mark a message urgent if it truly is.
6. Avoid using capital letters and extra punctuation to add emphasis.
7. Delete long strings of forwarded messages. Only forward the part that is needed.
8. When sending attachments, include a brief summary of the information in the text of the e-mail.

9. Clearly identify any abbreviations or acronyms in your message.
10. Do not communicate strong emotions, sarcasm, or disagreement by e-mail.
11. Be careful with humor. Not everyone will understand and/or appreciate your humor.

Always keep a handy copy of your institution's e-mail policy. Do not clog everyone's inbox with silly, controversial, or irrelevant messages.

E-mail Formality

Due to the speed and ease of using e-mail, it is usually considered a less formal communication than a letter. This allows for more informality in the language and form of the writing in e-mails. People are usually more forgiving of mistakes in spelling and even grammar. However, you must be careful! Just as speaking, there are varying levels of formality in e-mails and you should choose an appropriate level depending on the context. Carefully consider the recipient and your relationships to them. A serious topic will also increase the formality of the writing. It is better to be safe than sorry. In other words, if in doubt, use the more formal language and/or format.

Look at the following text from two separate e-mails. Both are from the same individual and offer the same invitation. Note at least six differences between them that signal differences in formality.

To a friend:

Hey Sam,

I'm having some people over to my place this Sat. We're grilling burgers on the deck, we'll start around 5ish. Lemme know if you can make it. If you can, our house is on the corner of 63rd and Maple, the big blue one. If you need directions, gimme a call, 555-5678.

How to see you there!

Jackson

To supervisor:

Mr. Kline,

Thank you for last week's luncheon – I had a wonderful time. This Saturday, I'm having a small cook – out and was hoping you would join us. You and your family are welcome to come by at 5:00 and enjoy some hamburgers and bratwurst. Please let me know if you can make it. Below I've listed my home address and phone number. If you need directions, just let me know and I'll send them to you.

Hope to see you there!

Jackson

Factors Affecting Formality

Factor	Formal	Informal
Directness	Indirect	More direct
Use of Modals	More modals	Fewer modals
Reduced Forms	Minimal use	More common
Mistakes	Few to none	Allowed
Correct Capitalization	Always	Usually
Clarity	More clear	Less clear
Details	More details	Fewer details
Contact Information	Present, easily read	Absent, less clear

Grammar Notes

Modals: are auxiliary verbs such as should, could, would, can and will. They change the meaning of the main verb to show intention, possibility, or permission. For example, He can run. He may run. He might run. He should run. He will run.

Reduced Forms: are the shortened forms of words or phrases that we often use in informal speech (and sometimes in informal writing). For example, What are you going to do? -> Whatcha gonna do?

E-Mail Writing Prompts

Write a brief message appropriate for each prompt:

1. Inform a co-worker of a missing file.
2. Remind the entire department of a retirement party.
3. Request an extended deadline from a supervisor.
4. Invite a friend/co-worker to eat lunch out tomorrow.
5. Remind a subordinate that his/her report is overdue.
6. Request a catalog from a manufacturer.
7. Request a meeting with your supervisor to review the progress of a project.
8. Ask a co-worker to review a project report.
9. You are a chief engineer. There have been unclear entries in the boiler logs. Remind the three boiler technicians about the correct procedures for boiler log books.
10. Ten days ago you applied for a job as a building engineer. You found the job posting online, and you submitted your cover letter and resume by email (as directed in the job posting.) You have not had any response from the company. In fact, you don't even know the name of the company. You only have their email address. Ask the company about the status of your application.

Assignment: Each student should write short emails for all 10 of the above scenarios. Students should email the above scenarios to me in ONE email. To break apart the topics, number each scenario. This is due at the end of the hour.