Professional Email

Etiquette for Today and Tomorrow

Nothing personal, but ...

- Email belongs to the organization – just like the computers, phones, and copy machines.
- Nothing you send to, from, or at work using the workplace email program belongs to you.

Professional Etiquette

Professional email, unlike the casual message you might send a friend, should look professional:
- polite
- considerate
- responsible
- forward-looking

WARNING!

- The ease of the technology itself means that we often treat email as something temporary and unimportant.
- But workplace email is not a casual tool:
  - When sent outside the workplace, email functions much like the business letter.
  - When sent inside the workplace, it functions like a memo.

WARNING!

- Email, like the letter or memo, will be:
  - filed (intentionally or unintentionally)
  - referred to by the recipient, sender, or a third party sometime in the future

WARNING!

- Most important, in legal proceedings email is discoverable.
  - The most seemingly innocuous message can make you and the organization liable for damages.
Email Liability

- One law firm settled for a six-figure payout when a disgruntled client sued for malpractice and through routine discovery read the email correspondence from one attorney to another.

When are those scumbags going to pay us?

Email Liability

- Many a working relationship has soured when an employee was forwarded a derogatory email he or she was never meant to see.

Two Email Fundamentals

- Email etiquette requires users to never forward personal messages.
- Email reality dictates that any message you send will be forwarded.

Like that FBI agent said, Trust No One.

Spamming

spam v: 1. to inundate with superfluous garbage; 2. to serve tasteless, bland pink blobs and call it meat; 3. to foist your views on those who have absolutely no interest.

- Define your to and cc groups carefully.
- Don’t routinely send an email to everyone in the company, department, team, or organization.

The Reply

- Were you directly addressed or just cc’d?
  - A reply may not be required from you.
- Is a reply requested?
- Or is the message simply informational?
  - A reply may not be required from you.

Otherwise, recipients tired of your wasting their time will develop their own routine: deleting your messages without reading them.
The Reply

- **Reply** only to those who need a reply from you.
  - Usually, **reply** only to the individual who sent you the message.

The Reply

- Use **Reply to All** sparingly.
  - When appropriate, **Reply to All** ensures that other team members or departmental coworkers stay in the loop.
  - But be sure you’re not replying to the 712 people the sender emailed!

The Reply

- If you receive **misdirected** mail, let the sender know what happened.
- Do **not** forward email without permission from the sender.
  - But of course, **assume that others do**!

The Message

- Email has two purposes:
  - to **document**
  - to **communicate**

The Message

- If your purpose is **documentation**, be as clear as possible.
- Consider your readers:
  - your intended recipient(s)
  - the file
  - users months or years from now
  - the unintentional recipient (due to forwarding or discovery)

The Message

- If your purpose is **communication**, craft a message that will get the readers’ attention within the few lines of text that appear in **Auto-preview** or on the small preview screen.
The Subject Line

- This may be the only part of your email the recipient sees!
  - Be descriptive.
  - Do not type on the subject line beyond the visible screen.

Avoid “important” or “urgent.”
- Readers usually ignore such overused signals.
- Instead, provide enough description that the reader understands the urgency of your message.

The Message

- Readers will not work to understand an unclear meaning. **Cut to the chase!**

Cut to the chase!
- The recipient fell asleep while trying to find the point in this unproofed, rambling message.

Cut to the chase!
- Here, the recipient knows exactly what the sender wants!

Use short sentences and short paragraphs.
- Bullet items to break up long passages.
- Avoid long passages.
- Be professional!
  - Use standard grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.
Netiquette Rule No. 28

- Professional correspondence lags behind acceptable-use trends.
- So be conservative when it comes to netspeak abbreviations and emoticons.

Let's do the 1st b/c I've got plans on 2d, lol. :-)!

Netiquette Rule No. 28

- Managers and supervisors have compared an excess use of emoticons and netspeak to the tendency of teens to dot their “i’s” with circles and daisy petals.
  - And pointed out that they tend not to take such messages – or their senders – seriously.

Let's meet on the 1st b/c I have plans on 2d, I hope! LOL. :-)

Netiquette Rule No. 1

- Avoid writing in all capital letters.
  - It reads as ANGRY SHOUTING!
  - And it’s hard to read.

Netiquette Rule No. 78

- Avoid writing in all lowercase letters.
  - It is unprofessional and suggests that you can’t be bothered to capitalize.
  - Never use “i” for the personal pronoun “I.” It shows disrespect for your reader.

The Message

- Beware of the tone of your message.
  - Short, curt responses may unintentionally communicate anger.
  - Sarcasm is an expression of anger – and often comes across hotter than it would in person, where the face and voice assist understanding.

Beware the emotional reply!

- The marvel and the danger of email is its ease of use.
  - Too often we type our reply in anger (or when we're having a really bad day), then hit send before we take time to think.
**Beware the emotional reply!**

- First, type your response. But don’t hit *send*!
- Second, walk away. Take a moment before you return to your desk, and then proof the reply before sending it.

Positive Karma!

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**Netiquette Rule No. 47**

- Sometimes email gets in the way of good communication.
- *Know when to go low-tech!*

[Handshake illustration]