

Email Etiquette Handout

Emails are great form of communication, until they aren't. These guidelines can be helpful in ensuring emails are powerful, to the point, and hitting the right target every time.

Key Guiding Principles of Email Etiquette

- One email per subject / topic
- Make subject lines meaningful and searchable
- Lead with the intent or the question
- Clear call to action
- Every electronic message leaves a trail

One email per subject / topic

The most important of all email rules: One email per subject. Don't send one email with more than 1 unrelated topics of discussion or with multiple, unrelated questions or calls to action.

Email threads become confusing when there are multiple topics being discussed, or worse when the topic changes mid thread and the subject line isn't adjusted appropriately. Stick to one topic per email as much as possible.

This is particularly important if the email is going to multiple recipients so tangent conversations don't generate a multitude of reply email chains. It also assists with filing emails without having to duplicate and means emails can be moved or deleted when completed rather than having to revisit to check items.

Make subject lines meaningful and searchable

The recipient should know what to expect before they open it. Keep subject lines clear and concise and relevant to the topic being discussed. Where practical use words and phrases in the subject line that will assist with searching in the future.

Don't Send:	Do Send:
Hi there!	Follow up from JobAssist Webinar – contact details for Tim Brown from AltTime
Meeting	This afternoon's Board Meeting will now be in the Lotus Room
Rebranding	Jenny will look after rebranding the cars
Question	Quick question about your time management presentation

* See Subject Line Codes below for more ideas

Lead with the intent or the question

Put the main thing up front – BLUF (bottom Line Up Front). Whether that is a question; a request; a statement; an argument; or an intent to act, ***put the intent of your message first***. That way the reader can understand the context of the email from the beginning. This also helps with long-form emails allowing the reader to stop reading when they have the information they need to respond.

Clear call to action

Include an easy to find, clear call to action. The reader needs to have no doubt what you are asking them to do. If you can't work out what your call to action is, question if the email is necessary. The only exception here is an FYI (*For your information only*) email. * See Subject Line Codes below for detail

Every electronic message leaves a trail

Always remember what former CIA chief General David Petraeus apparently forgot: Every electronic message leaves a trail.

Assume that others will see what you write, so don't write anything you wouldn't want everyone to see. A more liberal interpretation: Don't write anything that would be ruinous to you or hurtful to others. After all, email is dangerously easy to forward, and every email leaves a permanent trail.

The other way to think of it is 'The Courier Mail Test' ... Emails are not private. Consider whether you would be okay with seeing your email on the front page of the paper or pinned up in the tearoom before you send it.

If you might benefit from some cool-down time or reduced emotional response, consider leaving the email in draft or delay delivery to give yourself time.

Subject Line Codes

Codes can be used at the start of the subject line to identify level of importance and/or category. The rest of the subject line then has the relevant information as per above.

! HIGH IMPORTANCE

Only use if it is really highly important for the recipient.

WYR (WHEN YOU RETURN)

Acknowledges that the person is away from work and shouldn't have to check in or respond to emails.

Subject WYR: Please upload Melbourne Cup Luncheon photos to the SharePoint folder.

ACTION

If all recipients are required to take action put it at the start of the subject line, if the action has a time or date for completion include that too.

Subject Action by COB: Availability for workshop Wednesday 6 March.

AGENDA

Letting someone know that it is an agenda item for your next scheduled catch up or to add to the team meeting agenda.

FYI

Letting someone know it is information only.

MSG

Precursor to a message to contact someone.

CLIENT

Letting someone know that it is client related.

HIPPO / EMERGENCY HIPPO

Use a team-agreed phrase or word for truly urgent items that need attention first thing on someone's return or if they check their email outside of work hours.

Subject Emergency hippo: Louise needs password to restore access to server backup.

There may be a combination e.g. ! HIGH IMPORTANCE CLIENT

Subject Closing

EOM

If your message fits in a subject line, finish it with ...EOM (end of message) to let the recipient know they don't have to open the email.

Who?

To, CC, BCC

To – intended recipient, action taker

CC – needs to know information in the email, or that the email was sent

BCC – only use when absolutely necessary

CC

Use with caution – does the person really need to know or do you just want to tell them?

CCing in Managers or others to make a point is considered poor form.

Rule for CC

Some people set a rule for all CC emails to go directly to a folder, be aware that recipients in CC might not see the email as a priority. If recipients have an action to complete or need the information to do their job, use To.

Move to BCC

Can be used to take someone out of an email chain who no longer needs to be involved, but you want to let them know the email chain will continue without them i.e. 'I'm moving Pete to BCC to spare his inbox'.

Reply all

Only use when absolutely necessary.

Other

Phone messages

Where practical use Name, Company, Contact Number and instructions in subject line.

Subject Please call Margaret Richards (Silverstone) 4678 1234 after 2pm.

Read receipts

Only use if proof of reading will be required.

Font, colour, backgrounds

Emails are not the place for creative expression – keep to standard fonts, automatic colour, white backgrounds – for ease of reading, professional image and branding consistency.

Signature

Use the signature block your company gave you unadulterated, this is important for branding and consistency.

Now that signature blocks can be huge you might want to consider whether it is appropriate to use it on forwards, particularly for internal emails.

Bolding

If you must use bolding, try to keep it to one word or phrase. It can seem patronising to receive an email pointing out all the important bits, and if you need to highlight the important bits it might be worth checking whether you are communicating effectively.

Respond by

Other people have different priorities. If you need a response by a set time, make sure that is clear in the email.

Delay delivery

If working while you are on leave, the recipient is on leave, or it's the evening or weekend etc consider delaying delivery.

Voting buttons

If your email requires a simple response (i.e. yes or no answer, or a choice of options) consider using voting buttons.

One-word responses

It can be helpful to have agreement in a workplace about whether short responses like 'Done', 'Okay', 'On it' or 'Thank you' are polite or unnecessary clutter.

"Frozen Blue Chickens"

If there is someone you suspect is not reading your emails correctly or fully, try adding a test in the body of the email. If you use some obscure phrase, line or instruction and they don't comment on it, it's likely that they haven't read the whole thing.

Don't over-use this and understand that it can be insulting to the wrong person.

A less direct approach is to include a specific request to the call to action. E.g. When we are recruiting, add a question like: "*please tell us how tall you are?*" as part of the application steps. Be careful not to use anything discriminatory.