



Email Best Practice Tips

Do you really need to send an email?

Don't send an email when you can pick up the phone or if someone is sitting close by go and speak to them.

Be concise and to the point.

Do not make an email longer than it needs to be. Most messages should be no more than 1-10 sentences. Communicate your main point in the first sentence or two. Remember that reading an email is harder than reading printed communications and a long email can be very discouraging to read.

Think about content

Avoid messages sent in anger. Messages sent in the heat of the moment are likely to exasperate the situation and are often regretted later. Where there is a difficulty, break the cycle of message and response. A telephone call or personal conversation can do wonders in resolving problems.

Read your email frequently

If you are away from the office for a period of time use the 'out of office' facility available within your email software. If necessary, specify a person to contact in your absence.

Use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation

The use of improper spelling, grammar and punctuation can cause confusion and frustration to the reader. Emails with no full stops or commas are difficult to read and can sometimes even change the meaning of the text. Use the spell checking option before sending an email.

Answer swiftly

Emails should be replied to within at least 24 hours, and preferably within the same working day. If the email is complicated, just send an email back saying that you have received it and that you will get back to the sender.

Use proper structure and layout

Since reading from a screen is more difficult than reading from paper, the structure and layout is very important for email messages. Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph. When making points, number them or mark each point as separate to keep the overview.

Manage your messages

Don't let your inbox get on top of you. Try not to use your inbox for storing messages, but just as the place where you receive new messages before they are stored appropriately or deleted. Delete messages as soon as you no longer need them and use folders to store messages you need to keep. Only save outgoing messages where appropriate.

Think about courtesy and privacy

Don't forget that email is about communicating with other people so don't forget common courtesy. Remember that the recipient could also be embarrassed if a delicate message is read by other people. When you compose an e-mail message, read it over before sending it and ask yourself what your reaction would be if you received it.

Do not 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.

Read the email before you send it

Remember to use the spell check facility and be aware that you can't rely on the spell checker to catch all errors. Reading your email through the eyes of the recipient will help you send a more effective message.

Take care with abbreviations and emoticons

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 :-). If you are not sure whether your recipient knows what it means, it is better not to use it.

Be careful with formatting

Remember that when you use formatting in your emails, the sender might not be able to view formatting, or might see different fonts than you had intended. When using colors, use a colour that is easy to read on the background.

Use a meaningful subject

Always include a subject line in your message. The subject helps the recipient to validate the message. In addition, the subject can be used to help file away and search for messages so make the subject line meaningful.

If you are replying to a message but are changing the subject of the conversation, change the subject too. The subject is usually the easiest way to follow the thread of a conversation, so changing the conversation without changing the subject can be confusing and can make filing difficult.

Use a signature

A 'signature' is a small block of text appended to the end of your messages, which usually contains your contact information. Signatures should identify who you are and include alternative means of contacting you (phone, fax). Keep your signature short.