



WRITING EFFECTIVE EMAILS

Writing effective emails is a vital business communication skill. Here are some important dos and don'ts for composing and responding to messages.

Your email message should be structured as follows:

1. an action-oriented subject line
2. greeting
3. body of the email:
 - **introduction:** briefly explain the reason for the message.
 - **main point:** explain what main action is required by the recipient.
 - **supporting information:** necessary details about the main point.
 - **next steps:** explain what, if anything, happens next.
 - **conclusion:** one closing sentence.
4. farewell (e.g. 'Regards', 'Warm regards', 'Sincere regards')
5. signature, including the following information:
 - full name and title
 - department and division/faculty name
 - university name and address
 - your phone number and relevant contact information
 - website and social media links

EMAIL STRUCTURE

Be concise

A generally accepted length is 3 short paragraphs per email message. Anything longer risks losing the reader's attention.

Use headings

If you must exceed 3 paragraphs, use meaningful headings to break the content into sections and use them to reinforce your message.

Communicate action steps first, not last

This helps to ensure that your request is seen and actioned. People rarely read the whole message, often stopping after the first paragraph. Make sure that your main point is not buried in the last paragraph.

Number your points/questions

This makes it easier for the reader to see all your points and facilitates their response.

EMAIL CONTENT



DOs

Respond promptly

If you don't have time to offer a full response, indicate this immediately and tell the person when they could expect a reply.

Activate an out-of-office reply

If you are not able to access your mailbox for more than a day, activate your out-of-office reply and offer an alternate contact in the message.

Use "Reply" instead of "Reply All"

It is considered bad form to use **Reply All** in most cases. Instead use **Reply** to respond only to the sender of the email and then make judicious use of the Cc or Bcc fields to add certain individuals.

Delete unnecessary sections of the original message

This reduces the overall size of the message as it travels back and forth through the mail system.

Read the message carefully and stay calm

Remember that tone is not always correctly conveyed in a written email. Check that you haven't misunderstood the intent of the writer. When in doubt, pick up the phone and talk to each other instead.

Respond to all points/questions

Double-check that you have addressed all questions or issues raised by the sender. If you are unable to respond to some points, state this clearly. Do not simply ignore the point.

Be diplomatic and courteous

In writing, tone is hard to convey and easy to misunderstand. Re-read your email before sending it to make sure that your message is courteous, unambiguous and sincere.

Include deadlines where applicable

Most busy people appreciate knowing when their response is required so that they can schedule it into their workload.

If you include an attachment, mention it in the body of the email

This ensures that the recipient knows that there is an attachment and helps them to see it in context of your email. If you include several attachments, then mention them all.

Check your spelling and grammar before hitting "Send"

There is nothing you can do once it has gone. Use your Spellchecker and read the message twice before sending.

Check attachments before sending

Have you attached the files you mentioned in the message? This is a common oversight.



DON'Ts

Don't change the subject line when replying

This makes it difficult to use conversation threads. If you want to change the topic, create a new message.

Don't embellish your signature

Do not include any controversial, personal or religious messages in your signatures. This is seen as unprofessional and is strongly discouraged.

Don't alter what someone else wrote

When forwarding a message, by all means add your own comments above the forwarded message, but do not make any alterations to the original text.

Don't send an angry email

Sleep on it, and then the next day, re-read and rephrase if necessary.

Don't forward a message without first asking permission

The author may not want you to send their message to anyone else.

Don't reply to the whole mailing list

Mailing lists often contain hundreds of email addresses. Reply only to the sender or to the mailing list itself to prevent unnecessarily flooding people's mailboxes.

Don't pretend to be someone else

Don't forge someone's name or email address. It is illegal to impersonate someone else.

Don't forward chain letters, spam messages or virus threats

Delete these types of messages. When in doubt, check with the [IT Helpdesk](#).

Don't send unsolicited email messages

Don't contribute to people's already overloaded mailboxes by sending "junk" mail.

Don't type in uppercase

This is considered to be JUST AS RUDE AS SHOUTING at someone in person.

Don't use background images, colours or animations

They add to the overall size of the email and often "trail" into a reply.