

THE UBIQUITOUS EMAIL

- Email can serve many purposes, from friendly notes to job applications.
- Messages differ in formality according to the audience and desired outcome.
- Emails for advertising clog the channel, preventing some emails from reaching the audience.
- A challenge is to make emails stand apart from “spam,” and to grab and hold the attention of the reader.



WHEN TO USE EMAIL

- You need to contact someone hard to reach by phone.
- You need to contact someone located a great distance away — for example, in a different time zone.
- Your information is not time-sensitive. An email travels at the speed of light, but you can't count on an instant response.
- You need to send an electronic file, such as a document for a course.
- You need to send information to many people quickly, such as a memo to an entire office staff.
- You need a written record of the communication. This is a big advantage of email over the telephone.

WHEN EMAIL ISN'T APPROPRIATE

- Your message is long and complicated or would best be accomplished face-to-face.
- Your information is highly confidential.
 - Email is never private; your message could be forwarded to others.
 - A backup copy of your email is always stored on a server where it can be retrieved, even when you think it is gone forever.
- Your message is emotionally charged or the tone of the message could be easily misconstrued.
- If you would hesitate to say something to someone's face, do not write it in an email.

KNOW THE EXPECTATIONS OF YOUR AUDIENCE

- Some regard email as a rapid, informal form of communication — a way to say hello or to ask a quick question.
- Others view email as a more convenient way to send a formal letter. Such people may consider an informal email rude or unprofessional.
- A message like this one might be OK to send a friend, but not to your professor:

Hey Joan,

Do you know what the assignment is about?

Can U help me?

M

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE AUDIENCE

- In the email above, tone is casual; it assumes the reader knows the sender, and reader and sender have a personal relationship.
- It contains an ambiguous reference to “the assignment,” so it assumes the reader is familiar with the subject at hand.
- The writer also assumes the reader is familiar with slang used when sending an instant message or text message.



IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ABOUT AUDIENCE

- Who is your audience?
- How often does your audience use email to communicate? How comfortable is your audience with electronic communication. For example, when in their lifetime did they begin using email?
- What is your audience's relationship to you: teacher? boss? friend? stranger? How well do you know the reader?
- How would you talk to the reader in a social situation?
- What do you want your audience to think about you? What kind of impression do you want to make?

SUBJECT LINES

Subject lines are like newspaper headlines.

- Should convey the main point of your email or the idea you want the reader to take away.
- Be specific: One word subjects such as “Hi,” “Question,” or “FYI” don’t suggest how important your message is.
- If your message is time sensitive, include a date in your subject line: “Meeting on Thurs, Dec 2.”
- Think about the subject lines on the email messages you receive. Which ones do you think are most effective? Why?

GREETINGS AND CLOSINGS

- A greeting and a closing are required.
- If you don't know the person well, you might be confused about how to address him or her.
- When in doubt, address someone more formally. Some common ways to address your reader:

Dear Professor Smith,

Hello Ms. McMahon,

Hi Mary Jane,

- For an unknown person or for an email to a diverse group, try something generic yet polite:

To whom it may concern,

Dear members of the selection committee,

Hello everyone,

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE EMAILS

1. Think before you write. Don't rush.
 - Decide on a purpose and what outcome you expect.
 - Think about what information the reader might need to produce the intended result.
 - Organize your thoughts in a logical sequence.
2. Choose an appropriate tone. Remember, your words are not supported by gestures, voice inflections or other cues, so misreading your tone is a hazard.
 - Sarcasm and jokes are often misinterpreted.
 - Be careful about how you address your reader.
 - Try reading it out loud to a friend to test its tone.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE EMAILS

3. Strive for clarity and brevity.

- Miscommunication can occur if an email is unclear, disorganized or just too long and complex.
- Briefly state your purpose for writing the email in the beginning of your message.
- Provide context for your message. Cut and paste relevant text — computer error messages or assignments you don't understand, for example — so the reader has a frame of reference.
- Use paragraphs to separate thoughts.
- Consider writing separate emails if you have many unrelated points or questions.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE EMAILS

4. State your desired outcome at the end of your message.
 - For a response, let the reader know what kind of response you want: email reply, possible meeting times, a recommendation letter, phone call.
 - Highlight any due date in a prominent position in your email.
 - Ending your email with the next step can be extra useful in work settings. You might write, “I will follow up with a phone call tomorrow,” or “Let’s discuss this at the meeting on Wednesday.”

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE EMAILS

5. Format your message so it is easy to read.

- Use white space to separate paragraphs into separate blocks of text.
- Make your email “scannable” with bullet points for important details.
- Use bold face type or italics sparingly for emphasis of critical information, such as due dates.

6. Proofread. Re-read messages before you send them.

- Use proper grammar, spelling, capitalization and punctuation; use spelling and grammar checkers.
- Try reading your message out loud to help you catch awkward phrasing you might otherwise miss.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE SENDING AN EMAIL

- Is this message suitable for email? Would a letter, phone call or face-to-face meeting be better?
- What is my purpose? Will the message seem important to the receiver, or will it be seen as a waste of time?
- Is the reader busy? What will make him or her read this or delete it?
- Does my tone and style fit the audience?
- How will my message look received? Is it easy to navigate?

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE SENDING AN EMAIL

- Have I used correct grammar and punctuation?
- Have I divided my thoughts into discrete paragraphs?
- Are important items highlighted in the text?
- Have I provided enough context for a reader to follow the thread of the message?
- Did I identify myself and make it easy for the reader to respond in an appropriate manner?
- Will the receiver be able to open and read any attachments?

EMAIL FROM STUDENT 1:

SUBJECT: Help!

hey,

*i need help on my paper can i come by your
office tomorrow*

thx

EMAIL FROM STUDENT 2:

SUBJECT: Assignment for COJO 111

Hi Professor O'Donnell,

I am in COJO 111 Section 2. I have a question about the paper due next Tuesday. I'm not sure I understand what you mean by this sentence in the prompt:

"Comparing rhetorical agency in the U.S. and China, and provide adequate support for your conclusions."

I am not sure what you consider "adequate" support. Would using 3 sources be OK?

Can I come to office at 2 p.m. tomorrow to discuss sources? Please let me know. I also could come by on Friday after 1.

Thank you,

Louisa May Alcott

EMAIL FROM SUPERVISOR 1:

SUBJECT: tomorrow

As you know, tomorrow afternoon we'll be meeting to discuss the status of all of our current projects. Donuts will be provided. Be sure to arrive on time and bring along the materials you have been working on this week—bring enough copies for everyone. Some of these materials might include your calendars, reports, and any important emails you have sent. Also, I wanted to remind you that your parking permit requests are due later this week; you should turn those in to Ms. Jones, and if she is not at her desk when you stop by, you can email them to her.

EMAIL FROM SUPERVISOR 2:

Subject: Materials for Wed. staff meeting

Hi, everyone—

For the staff meeting at 3 p.m. tomorrow in the conference room, please bring 15 copies of the following:

- *Your project calendar*
- *A one-page report describing your progress so far*
- *A list of goals for the next month*
- *Copies of any progress report messages you have sent to clients this past month*

See you tomorrow—

Louisa