

E-mail etiquette and tips



Use the “4 D’s for Decision Making”

- Dedicate time for e-mail every day.
- Do the action requested in the message,
- Delete it,
- Defer it until later, or
- Delegate it to someone else.

General tips

1. Be informal, not sloppy.
2. Keep messages brief and to the point.
3. Use sentence case.
4. Use a signature that includes contact information.
5. Use the subject field to indicate content and purpose.
6. Change the subject line, when the e-mail topic changes.
7. Use the blind copy and courtesy copy appropriately.
8. Be sparing with group e-mail.
9. Don’t use e-mail as an excuse to avoid personal contact.
10. Remember that e-mail isn’t private.
 - Do no harm.
 - No passwords, user names, credit card information.
11. Don’t send chain letters, virus warnings, or junk mail.
12. Remember that your tone can’t be heard in e-mail.
13. Summarize long discussions.
 - If you are forwarding or reposting a message you’ve received, do not change the wording.
 - If you want to repost to a group a message that you’ve received personally, ask the author for permission first.

How to compose an e-mail to someone you don’t know

- Be sure to include a meaningful subject line.
- Open your e-mail with a greeting like Dear Mr. Jones, or Ms. Smith.
- Use standard spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.
- Write clear, short paragraphs and be direct and to the point.
- Be friendly and cordial.

Suggestions for continuing e-mail conversations

- Once you have exchanged e-mails with a person on a given subject, it is probably OK to leave greetings off of your following e-mails, but it is better to use some kind of salutations.
- Try to respond within a reasonable time frame. (24 hours)

- Trim back the old messages. (Five or six e-mails, delete older ones. Also delete list of recipients in e-mails.)
- If someone asks a lot of questions, it may be OK to embed your answers into the sender's message copied at the bottom of your e-mail. Be sure to say so at the top, and leave generous space, for example:

How long are you staying?

Less than two weeks.

- Will you have time to visit with us?
 - I'm really hoping to, but my schedule will be pretty tight. Let me get back to you about that after the weekend.

What about sending attachments?

- Never send an attachment to someone you don't know the first time you contact them.
- Avoid unnecessarily large file sizes.
- Provide an advance notice of large file transmissions.
- Use anti-virus software.

E-mail list servers and discussion groups

- Double-check the "to" area.
- Do not air grievances or beefs.
- "Lurk" awhile if you are a newcomer.

Don't let e-mail damage important relationships

- Do not dash off a hasty reply that you will come to regret.
- Take time to cool off. Find a quiet place and pick up the phone. Note: Use your "drafts folder" to compose a reply. Reread it. Can you imagine saying those exact words in a face-to-face conversation?
- Separate the message from your emotional response.
- Diffuse the tension through personal contact.
- Use "I" phrases.
- Control how you react.

