
BUILDING YOUR CAREER — EMAIL ETIQUETTE

Email as a form of communication is integral to most every industry and job. It is essential that you understand how to use email appropriately in the workplace. The following guidelines for email etiquette can not only help you land a job, but also keep one.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Possibly the most important thing to know is who your email is going to and to whom it could be forwarded. If you send a casual message to your friend about something in your company, and for some reason, it is forwarded again and eventually seen by someone in a senior position, you could be reprimanded and/or terminated. Companies can be liable for damaging statements you make if your email falls into the wrong hands. You never know the lifespan of an email or who may see a copy. A good rule of thumb to follow is to never put anything in an email that you wouldn't want to be printed on the front page of the newspaper.

STANDARD GRAMMAR RULES APPLY

Standard grammar rules including proper capitalization, punctuation, etc. always apply in a professional setting, including email.

USE PROFESSIONAL EMAIL NAME AND ADDRESS

Use a basic email address that is a version of your name. This will help identify your email in the recipient's inbox. Using loverboy@email.com or sweetbabe@email.com as your email address will likely cause a prospective employer to view you as immature and not as a mature professional.

SALUTATIONS

Use standard formalities, such as Dear Mr. Smith, as if you were writing a professional letter.

SIGNATURES

Use standard formalities and include your name, title, company name and email address in your signature line.

“SUBJECT” LINE

Always include a pertinent subject title for the message so the reader is able to quickly and easily locate the message as well as determine its importance.

LANGUAGE

All communication should be professional and concise. Never use profanity, off-color or sexually explicit jokes or stories, prejudicial references or slander. You should also limit the use of all uppercase words to only those times when you are trying to make a very important point. Use of all uppercase words is the equivalent of shouting in someone's ear.

FORMAT

Keep the format simple. Don't use fancy fonts, colors or backgrounds, as some servers cannot handle messages in these formats.

ABBREVIATIONS

Only use abbreviations that are common to the English language (e.g. FYI), otherwise, you may confuse your recipient.



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SMILIES

Since emails do not contain visual or auditory cues, users have come up with smilies and emoticons to convey the writer's emotions. These can be distracting and appear unprofessional so use sparingly.

PRIVACY

There is no such thing as a private email. With some systems, email administrators have the ability to read any and all email messages. Some companies monitor employee email. Somewhere in the world a person (usually a hacker) is able to read your email as well. Again, a good rule to follow is to never send anything by email that you wouldn't want to see printed on the front page of the newspaper or posted on the company bulletin board.

PROTECT INFORMATION AND PRIVACY

There will always be individuals (often hackers) who seek to retrieve information that does not belong to them using both legal and illegal techniques. If you are using a distribution list, protect the privacy of the recipients by entering their email address in the "BCC" or Blind Carbon Copy line. This will ensure the email addresses remain private even if the email is forwarded.

If you need to forward content of an email but want to ensure the privacy of a distribution list, create a new email and cut and paste the appropriate text to send the email without sharing someone's contact information and without risking exposure of any other confidential information.

FORWARDING

When forwarding an email, delete the list of previous email addresses as a courtesy to the reader and for the privacy of the previous recipients. Do not forward emails such as jokes, warnings, and other items unrelated to the job. In addition, such emails may often be hoaxes or contain unwanted tracking software or viruses dangerous to your computer.

DELIVERY CONFIRMATION

In some instances, it is important to know whether the intended recipient received your email or not. To confirm receipt you can use a delivery confirmation option that is common to most email operating systems. A phone call may also be appropriate if there is a need to converse with the recipient. You can also ask the recipient to reply to confirm receiving the email.

COMMUNICATE THE OLD FASHIONED WAY... BY PHONE

At some times and for some situations, communication should be over the phone. For example, if you are discussing confidential information with a client and they most likely would not want the discussion in print, simply give the client a call. If the issue is confrontational, it might be best to discuss the matter in person or over the phone. Always keep in mind email is meant to make things more convenient, not to completely replace person-to-person conversations.

FOLLOW COMPANY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Many companies have established policies regarding the use of electronic communications as well as procedures to prevent viruses and potential "hackers." Software such as VPN (Virtual Private Network) may be added to company networks to combat unauthorized access. Always make sure you are knowledgeable of and comply with company policies and procedures.

