

E-mail Etiquette Quick Reference Sheet

Crash Course: E-mail Etiquette

No longer the domain of just the technically savvy, e-mail is used by just about everyone. Microsoft Outlook alone is used by an estimated 120-million-plus people worldwide. Follow these guidelines to protect you and your organization when using e-mail.

Preventing Virus Outbreaks

- Viruses are often spread through e-mail. Follow these precautions to greatly reduce the spread of e-mail viruses:
 - Use antivirus software.
 - Use only e-mail services – such as those from AOL, Google, Hotmail, and Yahoo – that offer automatic antivirus protection. If your e-mail host doesn't offer automatic antivirus protection, switch to a provider that does.
 - Open e-mail only from trusted sources.
 - Open only attachments you are expecting and need.
 - Always use an antivirus program to scan attached files before opening them.

Preventing Spam

- Spam is loosely defined as unsolicited bulk e-mail and loosely correlates to the junk mail that turns up in your home mailbox.
- Spam messages clog e-mail accounts – and networks and servers – while trying to sell products, spread jokes, or propagate Internet hoaxes.
- Reduce the amount of spam you receive by being cautious where you post your e-mail address; indiscriminately posting your e-mail address is a sure way to get spammed.
- Avoid publishing your e-mail address on Web sites.
- Avoid submitting your e-mail address to every site or organization that requests it.
- Don't forward chain messages, which often reveal coworkers' and colleagues' e-mail addresses to other parties.
- Use caution when accepting e-mail offers or agreeing to accept mailings from vendors; subscribe to only those Web sites and newsletters you really require and consider creating a generic Hotmail or Yahoo e-mail account for these subscriptions.
- Don't open unsolicited e-mail.
- If you accidentally open spam, don't click links offering to unsubscribe or remove you from the mailing list unless the sender is a trusted vendor.

Avoiding Phishing Scams

- Phishing scams are designed to steal consumers' personal information.
- These scams often use doctored and fraudulent e-mail messages to trick recipients into divulging private information – such as credit card numbers, account usernames, passwords, and even social security numbers.
- The number and sophistication of phishing scams is dramatically increasing.
- While online banking and e-commerce is generally safe, you should always be careful about divulging personal and corporate information over the Internet.

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- Some phishing scams are so well designed that it's sometimes difficult to discern a genuine e-mail from a scam. Phishing messages often boast real logos and appear to have come from the actual organization, but those messages are frequently nothing more than copyright infringements and faked addresses.
- Avoiding scams is easy:
 - Don't divulge personal or sensitive information in response to an e-mail message.
 - Should you suspect a message possesses any credibility, you are much safer calling the company directly – preferably at a telephone number printed on a paper statement or invoice – and talking to an authorized representative.
- One particular trick to watch for is phishing scams that send a partially completed form in an e-mail and ask you to just complete the remainder. Don't respond to such inquiries; delete them instead.

✚ Managing the Inbox

- Sort messages by priority, subject, date, sender, and other options to help find important e-mail that requires your attention.
- Proper e-mail etiquette dictates that you respond to all e-mail in a timely fashion; generally speaking, you should respond to all professional e-mail within a business day, even if it's just to say you've received the message and will look into the matter.
- Occasionally you may receive an e-mail thread that contains responses from several people; always read the entire thread before responding.

✚ E-mail Composition Basics

- Follow proper grammar and sentence structure when composing and responding to e-mail messages.
- Don't type in all capital letters.
- Don't write using large and unbroken paragraphs.
- Use a spell checker.
- Before clicking the Send button, carefully re-read the entire e-mail, checking it for grammatical errors, punctuation mistakes, and spelling gaffes and to ensure that the tone matches the message.

✚ Effective Writing Tips

- Use the inverted pyramid writing style, which presents the most important information first, followed by other details in order of importance.
- Follow the ABCs of good writing for help writing accurate, brief statements:
 - A stands for Accuracy. Before sending an e-mail, ensure that all of the statements in the text are true, or accurate. Not only should the statements be accurate, but you should also provide evidence to back up your claims. In addition, verify spelling and ensure that dates and times are correct.
 - B stands for Brevity. Avoid wordy explanations that contain flowery language. Long, wordy e-mails lose the reader's attention. Short, concise, well-crafted sentences hold the reader's attention and give your writing a professional edge.

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- C stands for clarity. Ensure that the meaning of your sentence is clear to everyone who will read the e-mail. For example, don't include technical jargon when sending an e-mail to a senior executive who won't understand the terminology.

✚ Writing Effective Subject Lines

- Always include a subject.
- Writing effective subject lines can be tricky. The goal is to summarize the entire message without being overly wordy or vague.
- Remember, long subjects tend to be ignored, and often they don't fully display in e-mail viewers.
- Always use sentence case for subject lines; avoid typing subject lines in all capital letters.
- Avoid words like important, urgent, and critical.

✚ Using CC and BCC

- The carbon copy (CC) and blind carbon copy (BCC) features found in most e-mail clients allow you to send copies of an e-mail to others you need to keep informed but who aren't necessarily the intended recipients.
- The blind carbon copy feature is the same as carbon copy, with one important difference: recipients can't see which individuals or groups were blind carbon copied (nor are blind carbon copied recipients' e-mail addresses visible to others).
- Use the BCC feature sparingly; if sensitive topics require BCCing others, it may be best to take the matter offline and discuss it in person.
- When copying others, be certain the e-mail message pertains to them.
- If you use e-mail address lists, verify that all of the members of the list should receive the e-mail, too, and remove those who don't need to be included.

✚ E-mail Forwarding Etiquette

- When forwarding e-mail, ensure that all recipients need to receive the message.
- Be extremely careful when forwarding sensitive or confidential information. Don't forward proprietary information to external audiences or to unauthorized recipients.
- Before clicking the Send button, always review whether a message's contents are appropriate for each listed recipient.
- Always think before responding to emotionally charged e-mails (if you respond at all). Calm behavior can diffuse the situation and avoid an ugly scene.

✚ Extinguishing a Flame War

- Flame wars – heated e-mail exchanges that are more emotional than reasoned – have no place in professional communications.
- If you receive a flame or suddenly find yourself in a flame war:
 - Take time before responding, if you respond at all. Think about the situation and reply with your head.

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- You may also decide not to reply and defer to managing the issue in person. Often, flame wars are started because of a simple misunderstanding. An ill-phrased comment, misinterpretation, or misplaced word can easily be construed improperly by a recipient, who fires off a salvo in response. Instead of replying, go and talk to the person and discuss the message.
- If talking with the person doesn't end the problem, involve a manager for assistance resolving the issue offline.

+ Keep Addresses Private

- Protect e-mail addresses by:
 - Not divulging coworkers' e-mail addresses to vendors, friends, and others outside the organization.
 - Being sure recipients listed in the To and CC fields should actually be receiving messages and that, by doing so, you're not revealing others e-mail addresses inadvertently.
 - Not posting your or coworkers' e-mail addresses on Internet forums or bulletin boards, on Usenet groups, in chat rooms, or in other public areas.
- Use the BCC feature when it's necessary to keep coworkers' e-mail addresses hidden from external audiences.
- If you are forwarding an e-mail, one of the easiest things you can do to keep others' e-mail addresses private is to delete them from the message. This takes just a few moments and helps reduce the chances of coworkers' e-mail addresses proliferating in the wild.

+ Important/Urgent Messages

- Mark messages urgent only when they're truly important and require immediate response.
- Overusing the high priority flag makes those messages that are important lose their importance.
- Overusing the high priority flag may make others view your behavior as overly aggressive.

+ Working with Attachments

- E-mail attachments consume inordinate amounts of e-mail server space and network bandwidth and are often the culprits behind virus outbreaks.
- E-mail attachments are often the easiest way to transfer files, though, so follow these guidelines when e-mailing files:
 - Don't attach large files to an e-mail: anything over one or two megabytes shouldn't be sent via e-mail.
 - Limit the number of files you attach to a message to five or fewer.
 - Save attachments to your hard drive and then delete the e-mail message containing the attachment.
 - Don't open unexpected attachments.

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- Don't open attachments sent by unknown parties.
- Always scan files with an antivirus program before opening an attachment. Never click an attachment without first confirming it's virus-free.
- Avoid annoying recipients by forwarding attachments they can't access. If an attachment requires a new or less-common application, say so in your message.

✚ Items to Avoid in E-mail

- Don't include any information in an e-mail that you wouldn't want published on the front page of your local newspaper.
- Leave water cooler chat and gossip at the water cooler; keep jokes and gossip out of e-mail.
- Never send confidential, proprietary, sensitive, personal, or classified information through e-mail.
- Refrain from making inflammatory, emotionally charged comments in e-mail.

✚ When Not to Use E-mail

- Businesses provide e-mail for professional, business-related use, not for jokes or chain e-mails.
- Complicated subjects are often difficult to explain in conversation, much less in an e-mail. Instead of sending a complicated explanation in e-mail, set up a short meeting to address the issue in person.
- Don't use e-mail as a substitute for interpersonal communication.
- Don't rely upon e-mail when conducting critical, difficult, and/or unpleasant conversations – such as those that often arise related to human resources matters – that are best handled in person.