

Email Madness- Keeping it under control

Efficiency

Key points

Be Structured

Use the same approach for content in e-mails as you do in other forms of correspondence:

Have a meaningful subject

Concisely state the email's purpose

State what it is you expect of the recipient

Discuss issues where a decision is required

Include all necessary contact details

We need to consider how and why we are using e-mail. Whilst it can be an effective communication method if used well, used poorly, it wastes a lot of unnecessary time.

Think before you write, not when you write - Remember that a face-to-face conversation is the best form of communication. If that's not possible, use email to set up a telephone call and use email as a record of agreed outcomes. What can be discussed in minutes often takes hours in the creation and transmission of a series of emails between two parties.

Don't confuse Important and Urgent - When sending an email that requires action by a specific time, consider including this in the subject, for example "Response required by dd mmm".

Reply Vs. Reply ALL - Don't use Reply All unless there is a valid reason to do so. Only use Reply All where your response is to be directed to all recipients.

When Forwarding - Unless required, clean up unnecessary information such as previous addressee lists and mail system markers (ie <<) from the body of the email.

Subject Lines - A good subject line will assist recipients in deciding whether to read an e-mail or not. E.g. IT Requirements or Budget Implications for 2013

Summarise / Be Brief - Try to write self-contained emails. When using attachments for reference purposes, summarise them to avoid the need for the recipient to open them. People who read hundreds of emails per day, tend to skip over the very long ones.

Format - Avoid using fancy signature blocks or backgrounds - in most cases they simply make e-mails larger in size. Use line spacing between paragraphs to make reading easier and to separate topics. Use coloured and bold font sparingly as it can make text difficult to read. DON'T SHOUT IN YOUR EMAILS (all capitals is also more difficult to read).

Thank you - It is not necessary to respond with just "thank you". Consider thanking people in advance to avoid a second interruption.

No Personal Attacks - Avoid personality discussion. Speculation or accusation about another person's motives, thought processes or beliefs isn't helpful. You can explain why you did something, but proposing theories about others is off-limits.

Check Addresses - Before hitting send, check the addresses. In most cases, sent e-mails are unable to be recalled. Pause after you have finished writing and before you hit SEND, read your mail again to double check that you have explained your point clearly and that the message is free from errors. When in doubt, save the message and wait until the next day to read it in the "cool light of dawn".

Group Emails - For external group e-mails, use the BCC field to ensure the privacy of all e-mails addresses.

In conclusion, email is a very useful form of communication in an educational environment when used wisely. Please consider others carefully when using e-mail as it may be that you are sending messages unnecessarily. E-mail should not be used as a conversational tool, as this can overload staff with many meaningless emails

Life is short but there is always time for courtesy.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ken Gilbert

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Founder of the private consulting firm, the Growing Edge Consulting Service, Ken's experience and continued learning provides confidential and relevant services to individuals and organisations.

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