



WRITING EMAILS

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Email. Brill, isn't it? And can you imagine how little we'd get done if, for every email we sent, we had to post a letter - and then wait for a reply? With literally billions of them being sent every single day, there's no doubt that email is the form of communication for the information age!

Thing is, with such convenience at our fingertips, bunging out an email without checking it through is all too easy. Well - rejoice! Help is at hand in these top email tips...

Write conversationally:

Many of us were taught at school never to abbreviate "I am" to "I'm", or "They would" to "They'd". But that's just not how we speak, is it? And because we speak more casually than we write, it stands to reason that when we *do* write that way, it'll be much more friendly and easy to read.

Watch that slang, though, innit!

You've got to keep a healthy balance! Being relaxed is good, being *insouciant* is bad! For that reason, 'text-speak' is a no-no. You might well see it creeping into emails - but alas; most people agree it crosses a line. Unlike the *contractions* mentioned earlier, text-like abbreviations give the impression of outright laziness & shd b avoided @ all costs. Lol.

Stick to the point:

Ever receive an email that looked like it would take an age to read, skimmed over it, and resolved to read it properly later? Chances are you have, and probably never got round to it! So keep emails concise and they're much more likely to get read. If you do have a lot to say, see what bullet points do for your brevity! At the very least, it'll make it *look* less intimidating.

Avoid repetition:

We've said it before and we'll say it again: avoid repeating yourself. Some people fall into the habit of giving one piece of information several times in the same email - or even the same sentence! For example, "I'm seeing Janet later today so I'll pass the message on when I see her" might be better phrased as: "I'll tell Janet when I see her later."

Check your spelling and punctuation:

As well as using your computer's spell check, carefully look over your grammar, etc. It may seem like a l-o-n-g time ago, but you'll recall learning how to write a basic sentence at school... A capital letter at the beginning and a full stop, exclamation or ellipses at the end! Amazingly, plenty of emailers forget the rules. This is just like poor spelling - it makes us look ill-informed, careless - or both!

Avoid repetition:

You didn't think we'd be able to resist putting this in twice, surely? Well, we said that we've said it before and we'll say it again: avoid repeating yourself. Some people fall into the habit of giving one piece of information several times in the same email - or even the same sentence! For example, "I'm seeing Janet later so I'll pass the message on when I see her" which might be better phrased as: "I'll tell Janet when I see her later."



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Focus on the recipient:

How often do you have to read emails that the writer has made 'I' focussed? "Hi Ken, **I'M** emailing you because when **I** spoke with you last week and mentioned **MY** blah blah blah..." Well, you might be surprised to find your email's more likely to get read if it's *reader* focused – in other words, it speaks in terms of 'you' and 'your'! For example: "Hi Ken, perhaps you'll recall our meeting last week? It was great to meet you and hear your thoughts..." etc. You probably get the idea.

Talk in positive terms:

It's always good to remember that, a great deal of the time, people are trying to get things done. That's why talking about what we *can* do, and *do* want is far more efficient than focussing on the negative form! Yet a great many emails – and phone calls, for that matter – present what we call 'impasse info'. In other words, they stop communication moving forward.

For example, someone emailing a question that could only be answered after speaking with an absent employee – let's call him Ken – *could* be worded: "I **don't** know, and Ken's **not** in the office today". You can probably see that this doesn't *progress* the communication. It leaves the recipient with an unanswered question and no indication of when it might be resolved. Perhaps you'll see how much more helpful it is to read: "I **can** get back to you tomorrow morning **once I've had an answer** from Ken" – now you've told them *more*, without knowing anything more yourself!

One thing at a time:

Some emails overload people with questions. Make sure you're keeping them to a minimum and, if you're *replying* to an email with a number of questions, or as part of a chain, make sure you address all the relevant points. It's easy to overlook stuff that's raised early on.

Declare your interests...

Then ask the question! If Stu emails Neil asking, "Are you going to be about at 3pm?" and Neil replies, "No", Stu might respond: "How about 4pm?" Again, Neil could say "No" with Stu asking "5?" and so on and so on... However, if Stu declares his interest as "I'd love to chat with you about the Gambrelli account before the end of the day – can you do 3pm?", then Neil is better informed and can comfortably say: "I'm out for most of the afternoon; but I can do 2pm today, or anytime tomorrow." Just volunteering the *interest* you have when asking the question speeds things up!



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Remember that emails can be re-read:

And not only by the recipient... For that reason, and the fact that most companies have quite strict email policies, you might want to save personal, private or sensitive information for phone calls and meetings. Hopefully, you've never experienced the sinking feeling that accompanies the realization that a hugely personal email to the boss has been accidentally forwarded to your entire database!

Check and check again:

Once you've finished your email masterpiece, make sure you read it back to check for mistakes and to ensure it reads how you *think* it reads! If it's even slightly important, take a break before reading it back and, once you've made any necessary tweaks, read it again. If it's a *really* important email, it might even be worth getting a colleague to have a shufti, too, since after reading something several times, we start seeing what we expect to see, and not *necessarily* what's actually there.

Make a check list:

Gosh. There's a lot to remember, isn't there? Fortunately, once you're in the habit, it's really easy to do. Until then, one quick way to get into it is to use our headers as a checklist and whiz down them whenever you send an email. OK, it takes a smidgen longer, yet before long you'll be consistently writing excellent, effective emails, spreading a little bit of happiness every time you hit send!