



WRITING CENTRE

Communication via email is a valuable tool when used effectively and with the right etiquette. The use of formal or informal writing can be imperative to how your email is received hence keeping your audience in mind is an important step to always consider. The purpose of the email will therefore shape the formality, intended audience and outcome it creates.

When to Use an Email

Sending an email is better in the case of:

- Needing to reach someone not typically available via telephone or in person.
- Information which is not time sensitive. Consider that people usually check their emails during business hours only as a part of their work therefore, unless stated otherwise, a response may take a few days.
- Sending someone an electronic file such as images, a paper, or materials for a course.
- Needing to send information to a large number of people, such as a group a project.
- Keeping a record of written communication that is easier to refer back to.

Avoid emails when:

- It contains lengthy information that requires a discussion and is better face to face. Schedule a meeting in this case.
- Seeking information that you have direct access to like a syllabus or outline. These are deemed unnecessary.

Email Etiquette

Note: prior to writing your email, consider the email address you are using to send it – especially formal ones. An informal and inappropriate email address can ensure that your email is quickly disregarded.

Subject Lines

This is perhaps the most over looked concept when writing an email but it is important. It should state the point of your email or the message your email conveys. If it is time sensitive add a date to the subject line such as, "Meeting Friday, July 12". Do not skip this step as an email could end up in the "Junk" or "Spam" folder.

Greetings and Sign-offs

Always include a greeting as an opening and a sign off to close. If it is someone you are unfamiliar with or do not know very well, it is better to keep a formal tone to avoid offending the person, especially if you are unsure. Common ways of addressing someone are:

*Dear professor,
Hello Ms Crawley,
Hi Harold,*

If you're referring to a larger group of people something more generic is acceptable:

*To whom it may concern,
Or Hello everyone,*

For your closing, something brief and friendly will usually do, such as:

*Thank-you,
Best Wishes,
See you tomorrow,
Regards,*

Follow any one of the above with your name, letting the receiver know who is emailing them, especially if it is an introductory email or you are unfamiliar with the person. Adding your title and the organisation or affiliation you belong to can help in clarifying this. For example:

*Jessie Banuelos
Research Assistant
Ollivand's Learning Institute
Hogwarts University, Class of 2012*

When writing a formal message like a job application, consider ending with a closing similar to a business letter:

*Sincerely,
Or Respectfully yours,*

Formating & Structure

Plan your email prior to writing and sending it. This will ensure that it is organized and structurally sound, delivering a clear and cohesive message or conveying a concern you may have. This will better ascertain a response in alignment with your intention.

Consider the tone of your writing and presentation. As with anything that is written, so much of what is delivered in person is lost – like voice inflection, gestures or other cues. Therefore, it is best to keep it simple and avoid sarcasm and jokes or anything which may come across as rude or presumptuous.

Aim for concise, clear language and paragraphs. An email that is unclear will require a follow up email to explain it; this miscommunication is not what you are aiming for. The following is a guideline to avoid this:

1. State the purpose of your email at the beginning, after your greeting.
2. Provide context for your receiver. If there is a question or evidence you need to include regarding a problem, add it. For example, errors codes which come up for a webpage or computer program help who you're writing to, to understand the problem. When responding to an email, restate the relevant information from the sender
3. Use paragraphs to clearly separate thoughts and points. Write a new email if there are too many occurring in one email
4. Conclude your email with your desired outcome, especially if it has a due date on it. For example, "I need the recommendation letter by end of day, Friday." Give the person enough time to ensure that this is done and highlight necessary information

Format your message accordingly. Editing tools, such as color and italicising, can work to your advantage. Also the use of white space (paragraphs) and bullet points can bring attention to particular areas of your message. **Make sure to not overdo it.**

Proofread. This can save you from a slight word error that could make your message disconcerting. Check for grammar, punctuation, spelling errors and awkward phrasing.

Things to Consider Before Sending an Email

Is this suitable for an email or is it better delivered face-to-face or with a phone call?

What is the purpose of this email and will the receiver consider it important? Or will it be seen as an annoyance or waste of time?

Does the formality and style of my writing suit its audience?

Have I included all attachments and relevant information? Will it be understood?

Have I identified myself properly so that the person can respond accordingly?

