



Workplace Email Guidance

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Use of workplace emails - etiquette and guidance

Below is a list of hints/tips and good practice guidance about sending and receiving work related emails. The list is not exhaustive, but staff should refer to this for guidance in relation to email communication both internal and external. Staff are expected to ensure emails are professional and courteous at all times.

Always include a clear and concise subject line

A clear subject line means your recipient instantly knows what your email is about and allows them to prioritise it accordingly. Subject lines that are vague or very long can be confusing and could mean that the recipient misses important correspondence. Good examples of an email subject line are 'Rescheduling today's meeting' or 'Question about your presentation'.

Be clear about whether the email is for information only or if there are expected actions or an “ask”

Be clear about whether the email is for information purposes only. If there are expected actions/requests for follow-up, make sure this is clearly outlined and add any relevant timescales.

If you need to send longer emails where you are both passing on information and requesting action, make sure you separate these out and place in separate paragraphs. Make your expectations/questions clear. If there are multiple recipients, be specific about who is required to do what.

Use standard fonts, formatting and spacing

Use standard fonts, formats, and colours in every email. This means that it looks professional when the recipient opens it and is easy to read. As a general rule, black is the most appropriate colour to use for text unless there's a good reason for using another colour. Be aware that pasting text into your email can cause formatting issues. Make sure you clear formatting or only paste unformatted text to ensure your email formatting is consistent. Similarly, only use emojis if your recipient has done so in their emails to you and you're certain that it's acceptable. Ensure that your email reads easily- if there is a lot of information separate into paragraphs. Also, if there are large amounts of information that may require further discussion, consider whether a meeting or call would be a better forum to relay the information.

Use punctuation appropriately

Overusing punctuation like exclamation marks could indicate overexcitement, so use it in an appropriate way. One exclamation mark at the end of a sentence is sufficient, but in general, keep your emails somewhat formal. Similarly, only use sentence case when sending emails unless there's a good reason for doing otherwise. Typing in all caps can seem aggressive and imply that you're shouting.

Be cautious about tone and humour

Some recipients can misunderstand tone and humour when it's written in an email. It's essential to make sure your emails are always polite and professional in tone. Similarly, humour and jokes might be misunderstood in emails unless you know the recipient very well. For professional emails, maintain a serious tone unless you're certain the recipient can understand and appreciate the joke.

Include a signature

Adding an email signature is a great way of making an impression and looking professional. It also gives the recipient some information about you, including where you work and your contact information. Make sure that your email signature includes all the essential information and also fits into your professional image. Most companies have an email signature template to use. It's recommended to use standard fonts and colours if you're designing your own.

Think before using 'reply all' or forwarding

Make sure that using 'reply all' or forwarding an email is the right thing to do. It can be distracting to receive emails that are intended for someone else because other people are using the reply all button. If you're doing this regularly, it could affect your reputation as a professional, so always think about whether it's necessary.

If the reply is simply a thank you or acknowledgement of receipt you should only reply to the individual who set the email, not the email group.

This also applies to forwarding emails. Some emails are only intended for you, so think about whether forwarding them on is appropriate. If you're forwarding a lengthy chain of emails, provide a summary in the email you send so that your recipient can quickly understand what you need from them.

Proofread your emails

Always proofread your emails to make sure your spelling, grammar and formatting are correct before you send them. Small errors can have an impact on the impression you make, so getting this right is really important. When checking the content of your email, make sure you've selected the correct recipient and check any attachments too. If you're sending attachments, check that you've definitely attached them before you send the email and make sure that you've attached the correct files as well.

Reply to your emails

It shows good manners to always reply to your emails. Even if you receive an email sent to you in error, it's good etiquette to respond anyway and tell the sender that they've contacted you by mistake. This means they can quickly contact the correct person instead. Aim to respond within 24 hours of receiving an email. If sending a detailed reply requires more time, send a response within 24 hours to tell the sender that you've received their email and intend to send them a more detailed response later.

Remember that others may see your email

Emails always leave a trail. There's also always the possibility that your recipient forwards your email or shows it to other people. Keep this in mind when you're writing emails and stick to positive, polite and professional language and comments. A good tip is to assume that people other than the recipient can see your email, so write accordingly.

Use your 'out of office'

When you're away from work, even if only for one day make sure you use the 'out of office' function. Always set up an informative 'out of office' reply that explains when you're back in the office and able to respond to emails. Also, include information about who the sender can contact whilst you're gone if their query is urgent.

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