

BEST PRACTICES FOR EMAIL ETIQUETTE



WikiJob

Best Practices for Email Etiquette

What Is Email Etiquette?

Email is a simple, fast way to communicate. As a result, email management is an important part of many job roles.

Over **300 billion emails** were exchanged in 2020, with the average office worker receiving 121 emails per day.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more businesses are now relying on email to keep in touch with colleagues and clients.

The main difference between sending a personal email and a business email is the level of formality. That said, it is important to tailor every email you send to make sure its tone suits the intended recipient and the message content. Some emails require a more formal approach than others.

Acceptable email etiquette varies between businesses. However, some common themes can be applied across the board, for example, using an appropriate subject line and easy-to-read text formatting. Some employers have formal written guidelines for email best practices and email etiquette at work.

With so many emails sent and received each day, it can be easy to forget the correct email etiquette. But doing so can leave a poor impression on the recipient.

Why Does Email Etiquette Matter?

Your email communication style affects how people view your professionalism. It also reveals your general work ethic and ability to pay attention to detail.

A well-written email will give a positive, professional impression of you and your employer. It will deliver your message clearly and efficiently.

Some Consequences of Poor Email Etiquette

Not using proper email etiquette, especially at work, can result in numerous negative consequences, including:

- Spelling and grammatical errors suggest that you do not pay much attention to detail.
- Sending a long-winded email could mean the recipient does not read it all. As a result, they could miss out on important information.
- Addressing the recipient inappropriately could make them question your level of respect for them.
- If you receive an email not intended for you, and fail to send a quick reply to let the sender know what has happened, they might not realize, and the correct recipient will miss the message. Once you have informed the sender, it is good practice to delete the email immediately.

10 Best Practices for Email Etiquette

What does good email etiquette look like? Read on to discover 10 best practices for email.

Use a Professional Email Address

You should always use your company email address to send business emails. Keep your personal email address for online shopping, social media and keeping in touch with friends and family.

Outside of work, for example, when applying for jobs, it is vital to use a professional-sounding personal email address. The best option is something like **firstname.surname@email.com**. Never use nicknames or other 'fun' addresses, as they are often seen as unprofessional or childish.

Use a Clear Subject Line

When writing the subject line, your goal is for the recipient to understand what the email is about before they open it. This will help them to quickly assess the contents of the email and prioritize accordingly.

The email subject line should be a simple description of the subject matter.

Here are some examples of appropriate email subject lines:

Scenario: You are sending an email to cancel next week's meeting.

Email subject: Meeting cancelled – DATE

Scenario: You are sharing the latest financial report for information purposes.

Email subject: Quarter 1 - Financial Report – YEAR – for your records

Scenario: You are writing to confirm your attendance at a meeting.

Email subject: I will be attending the meeting on DATE – No reply necessary

Scenario: You are applying for a job role.

Email subject: Application for the role of JOB ROLE

To prevent your email from being filtered as 'junk', avoid using all upper or lowercase letters in the subject line. Do not include any exclamation marks. Hyperlinks should be included in the body of the email message, not the subject line.

If you are replying to an email but the content is different from the original subject, remember to update the subject. This will ensure it reflects what your message is about.

For example:

Original email subject: Meeting postponed – DATE – please confirm availability for w/c March 14

Scenario: You are now emailing the recipient list to confirm the rescheduled meeting date

New email subject: Meeting originally scheduled for DATE rearranged for DATE at TIME in VENUE – no reply necessary

Use the Appropriate Form of Address

While it is standard to use 'Dear Sir/Madam' or 'To whom it may concern' for a letter, these salutations are usually too formal for email correspondence.

If you do not have a name for the person you need to email, it is usually easy to find this out. You can either browse the company website or contact the main switchboard number to ask for the correct name and email address. Taking the time to find out this information will give a better impression than sending a blanket email.

Avoid using 'Good morning' or 'Good afternoon'. The recipient is unlikely to open the message immediately. They might even be in a different time zone to you.

Unless you know the recipient(s) well, it's best to avoid informal salutations like 'Hey guys'. If your message is informal, you should use 'Dear', 'Hi' or 'Hello'.

Use the recipient's full first name unless you are certain they prefer a shortening. For example, 'Dear Stephen' rather than 'Dear Steve'.

If you do not know the recipient well, use their title and surname, for example, 'Dear Mr Brown'.

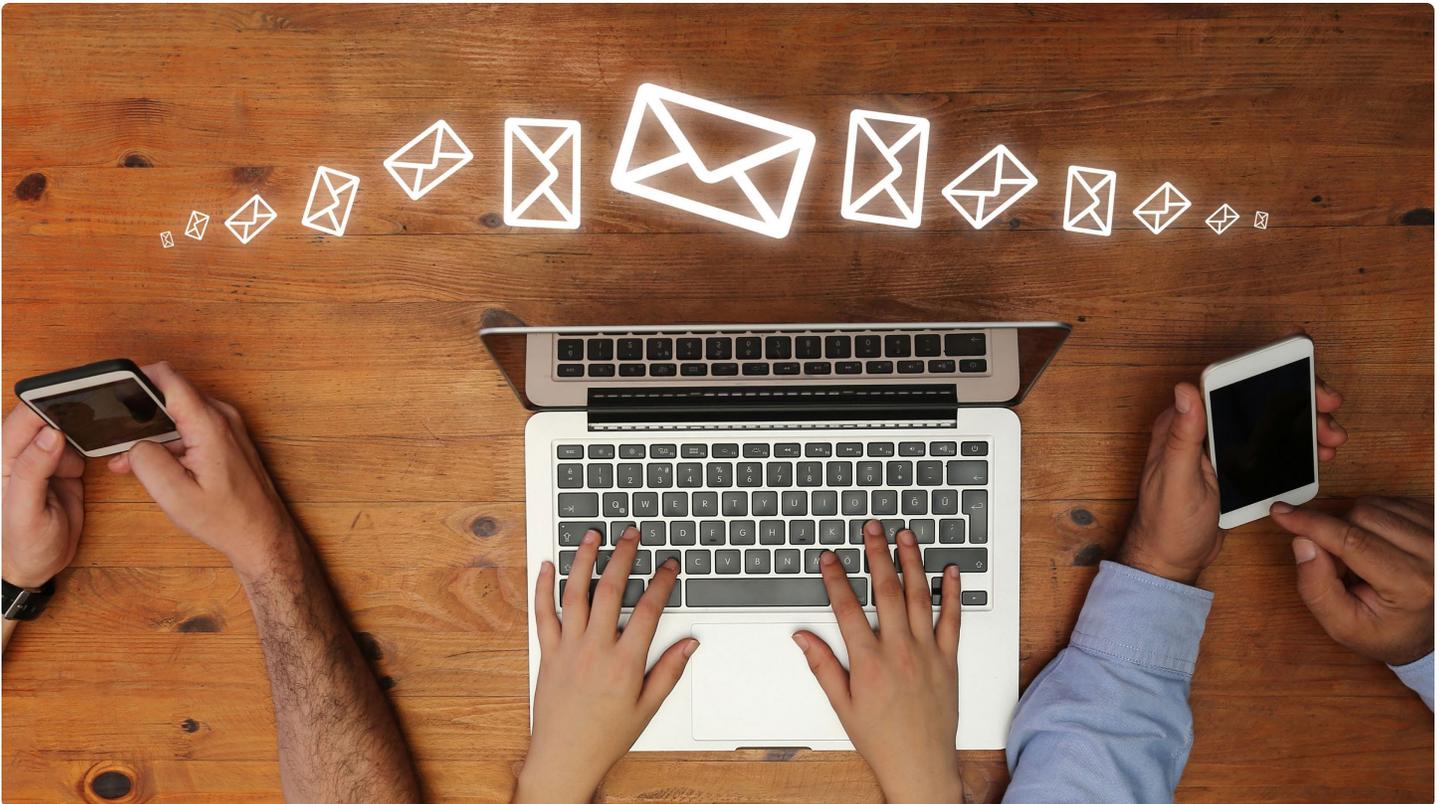
In summary:

Scenario: You are emailing a colleague, Sally, with whom you work closely.

Email starts with: 'Hi Sally' or 'Hello Sally'.

Scenario: You are emailing a customer, Mr Allen, whom you have not met before.
Email starts with: 'Dear Mr Allen'.

Scenario: You are emailing your client, Robert, who you are aware prefers being called Rob.
Email starts with: 'Dear Rob'.



10 Best Practices for Proper Email Etiquette at Work

Scenario: You are sending a job application to the HR manager of a company. You have found out from the company website that his name is David Wright.
Email starts with: 'Dear Mr Wright'.

Reply Promptly

Consider whether a reply is necessary. For example, if you have received an email that is marked 'for information', you may not need to reply unless the sender has specifically asked you to.

If you have decided that a reply is necessary, review the To, Cc and Bcc fields to make sure you only send a response to people who need it. To avoid inundating people with unnecessary emails, 'Reply' is often a better option than 'Reply all'.

Aim to reply to emails within 24 to 48 hours. If you will need longer to compose a full reply, send a brief message to explain this, advising the sender when they can expect to hear from you again. This will help to avoid receiving a 'chasing' email from them.

Draft the Body of Your Email First

Get into the habit of adding the recipient's email address after writing the body of the message. This will:

- Help you to avoid accidentally sending an email before you have finished writing it
- Give you the opportunity to check you are happy with the contents before pressing send
- Allow you to check you have added any attachments

Double-check the recipient's email address is spelled correctly before sending the message. Doing so will help you to avoid data breaches.

Remember to Proofread

Carefully check the contents of the message before sending it. Read it, re-read it and use the spelling and grammar checker tool.

Be conscious of the tone of your email. When having a face-to-face discussion, facial expressions and body language are good ways to understand the meaning behind a person's words. Without these **nonverbal cues**, it can be easy to misinterpret the message.

Try reading your email out loud. If it comes across as abrupt, it could be perceived this way by the recipient.

Ensure Your Email Looks Professional

Use an easy-to-read typeface such as Arial, Verdana or Tahoma. It is best to keep the text black and use font size 10 or 12. Use bold or italic text sparingly; it is only needed if you want to emphasize a specific word or sentence.

Avoid using emojis or lots of exclamation marks as these can change the meaning of what you have written. They can also be perceived as being childish and unprofessional.

Try to keep your message short and to the point. Avoid including unnecessary information and aim to have plenty of white space on the screen. Use paragraphs and bullet points where appropriate, for example, if you are including a list of actions.

Sign off Appropriately

Your **email sign-off** should reflect your level of respect for the recipient and how well you know them. If you know them well, consider how formal their own interactions are and mirror this.

If you are not sure which sign-off to use, 'Kind regards' is a good option. You could also use 'Many thanks', 'Regards', 'Best wishes' or simply 'Best'.

'Yours sincerely' is usually too formal for email correspondence. Sometimes 'Sincerely' is appropriate, for example when submitting a formal job application by email.

Add a professional signature to the end of your email. This should include your name, job title, company and contact information (including a telephone number). Depending on your area of work, you may wish to include links to the company website and your professional social media profiles.

For example:

Amanda Robertson
Director of Finance
Robertson's UK
Email: amanda.robertson@robertsonsuk.com
Phone: 01234 567890

Keep the typeface, text color and font size of your signature consistent with the body of your email message.

Be Aware Your Message Can Be Forwarded With a Single Click

Do not forget every email you send leaves an electronic trail. If you would not be comfortable with the contents of your email being shared with others, it is best not to send the information electronically.

When forwarding a message, remember to include a summary of the email contents. Be careful when forwarding, as it is easy for email messages to end up in the wrong hands. **Data breaches** can have serious consequences including substantial fines.

If you need to share sensitive or confidential information, avoid potential data breaches by ensuring it is encrypted or password protected.

Never use an email to break bad news. In most cases, it is better to pick up the phone. Occasionally, an email may be appropriate if you need to share the same information with several different people.

Never use an email to comment on another person's character or abilities, or to convey private thoughts or information. You cannot be certain that your email will not end up in someone else's inbox. If it is not a topic you would feel happy writing about on company-headed paper, do not send it in an email from your company email address.

Be Considerate When Sending Large Files

It only takes one large file to clog up somebody's email inbox. If you need to send a file that's larger than 500MB, upload it to a cloud server and share the link. If you are unable to do this, email the recipients to let them know in advance what time you are planning to send the file. This will enable them to look out for it and move it out of their inbox if necessary.

If you do need to send attachments, try to limit them to a maximum of two per email – unless the recipient has specifically asked you to send more.

Be Careful About Using Humor

Everyone has a different sense of humor. Something that you find funny may not amuse somebody else in the same way, and could even offend or upset them. For this reason, it is best to avoid using humor in your email correspondence.

If you know the recipient well, it might be OK to use humor, but you will need to use your judgment to decide on a case-by-case basis.

Research and Respect International Customs

Email etiquette varies between cultures. In Scandinavia, Germany and the US, people tend to be succinct in their communication. But in China and Japan, you may find people want to know a bit about you before they will engage. The best thing to do is carry out some research on the preferences of your recipient's culture, then tailor your email accordingly.

Final Thoughts

Email messages should be written and sent with the same level of care and attention as **business letters**. Emails leave a permanent electronic trail which could affect your professional image indefinitely.

Although emails are fast and convenient, that does not mean they should be informal. Always remember to tailor the tone of your email to the recipient and subject matter. Consider your tone and remember to check every detail carefully before hitting Send.