

Writing Tip: Follow basic email etiquette for greater productivity

Adapted from *Writing to Get Things Done*® seminar

Productivity Tip

Poorly written emails today suffer the same consequences as poorly written memos and letters of earlier times. So, when writing emails to your colleagues and clients, remember to create a professional image by following these simple guidelines. As you do, you will help others meet important deadlines and keep projects on target.



Stan Berry

Keep It Short and Sweet

Avoid rambling as you type one idea after another. Instead, be clear in your thinking, use one of the three models of *Writing to Get Things Done*® (WGTD) and finesse with tone.

Make the Organization Visually Apparent

Avoid presenting one paragraph after another with no clear visual connection tying them together. Instead, make the organization of your emails apparent to your readers. Here are two simple, yet powerful, ways to do this:

- Organize a list of key points under a forecasting sentence in a bullet-point paragraph format. (Like we're doing here.)
- Use headings to forecast the content of your paragraphs. (Like we're doing with the paragraphs in this article.)

Write in the Style of Educated Professionals

Avoid thinking that good writing rules don't apply to emails. Instead, follow Standard American English rules for grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, word usage, spelling and capitalization. Remember:

- Few readers notice good grammar. When was the last time you thought, "Gosh, I like the way she used that semicolon! Super choice of punctuation!"
- All readers notice bad grammar. It knocks readers off message and makes the writer look uneducated and careless.

Must we also say?

- AVOID ALL CAPS. Readers will think you're yelling—which you are. Or is it just laziness?
- Avoid the use of smileys. ☺☹ Reserve these for fun between friends and family. In business, they can easily be interpreted the wrong way.

- Avoid text-messaging language: BTW, IMHO, J/K, LOL, BAK, MTFBWY, etc. These are great shortcuts in texting and should be reserved for texting. In business, they, as with smileys, can be misinterpreted and detrimental to your message.
- Avoid using colored type, freaky styles and sizes, colored backgrounds and unnecessary logos and graphics. These distract readers from your message.

Do a Final Revision

Avoid firing off your email as soon as you're finished typing. Take a minute to add some finishing touches:

- Engage your reader with a forecasting subject line that describes the topic of your email.
- Include a friendly salutation or greeting, such as "Good morning Brenda," if appropriate.
- Check that you have a professional, positive tone that encourages cooperation.
- Proofread each sentence carefully, even after doing spelling and grammar checks. As we all know from experience, a spelling check will miss the error of using *to* when we mean *too*.

Forward with Care

Avoid automatically relaying email from others. Respect the privacy of the messages you receive.

- Consider confidentiality before you forward, and use the "Reply to All" function with care.
- Ask permission before forwarding someone's private email on to others.
- Consider attaching only the last email in a chain of emails and deleting prior emails.

Make it Media-Ready

Avoid thinking that just because you respect the privacy of others, they will return the favor. Avoid putting things in your email that you wouldn't want anyone to see. Your email could end up on the desk of your boss, on the front page of the *New York Times* or in a court of law. And in such cases, you want to look your best.

Keep it Professional

Finally, avoid taking people to task via email. Conflict is often better addressed face-to-face or over the phone. Be aware that every email you send becomes a written record of your performance. It also reflects on those you represent—your work group, your department and your company.

By consistently following basic email etiquette, you demonstrate your professionalism and communication skills. Your readers will appreciate the effort. And your productivity soars.



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