

The Do's and Don'ts of E-mail Etiquette



If you're like most people, email plays a major role in your life. Maybe it's the first thing you look at when you wake up in the morning and the last thing you check before you go to bed. While personal emails between you and your buddies might not require much decorum, such is not the case when communicating electronically with colleagues, clients or anyone work-related. Even though you may not like it, how and when you communicate via email for professional purposes can have a tremendous and lasting effect on your reputation. To ensure you send emails that are not only professional, but set you apart from your colleagues, we've compiled our best list of Do's and Don'ts below.

Introduction

If you're emailing someone for the first time, it's imperative to get your introduction right as it can make or break the entire conversation. Using a proper salutation such as "Good Morning" or even "Hello" is better than "Hey" or "Hi". From here, get right to the point of who you are and why you're reaching out. The tone of introductory emails should always be upbeat and courteous while remaining highly professional.

Subject Line

You probably receive dozens of emails every day. Chances are you probably skip over the ones that aren't flagged as important or whose subject lines don't catch your eye. The same goes for emails you send as well. Using subject lines like

“FYI,” “Circling Back,” and “Hi” ensures that your emails won’t be read either. Your subject line should be concise and effectively communicate what your email is about. Subject lines like “Board Meeting Minutes” and “Time Off Request” directly communicate to the recipient what your message is about and are more likely to be read.

Speaking of Concise

Professional emails aren’t for sharing your thoughts and feelings in most cases. Instead, they are intended to communicate necessary information in an orderly, easy-to-read fashion. If you have several items to discuss in your note, use headings, short sentences and bullet points. Avoid using too many adjectives and excessive flowery language. Remember, your message is one of many that is going to be read so get to the point.

Don’t Hit Reply-All

Sometimes you’ll get emails from C-Suite Executives or Administrative Assistants addressed to 10 or people asking for your availability to volunteer for a community event or something similar. When responding, make sure you reply ONLY to the original sender. The entire thread doesn’t need to know that you’re committed to your kids’ soccer game and can’t make it.

Why Are You Forwarding This to Me?

The forward option in email is a great way to share ideas and gather input quickly. Whether it’s something you’re passing along to another department, HR or a colleague, take the time to write a sentence or two explaining the reason you’re forwarding the message. Failing to take this simple step will leave your recipient either clueless or guessing at the intent of your forward.

The Power of One

As we’ve discussed, email is a form of communication that is meant to exchange information quickly and efficiently. While being concise is paramount, limiting the subjects you cover to one per message avoids confusion and makes organization

easier for everyone involved. If you find yourself sending a message with multiple topics, make them brief and list them out in bullet point fashion.

Emojis

When you're sending a professional e-mail, you're not telling your boo how much you miss them. At all costs, avoid using emojis. Though you might think you're being funny or playful, all you're really doing is causing people to question your competency.

Why are You Sending Me This?

Make sure that the intended recipients are in the right fields before you hit send. There are plenty of stories of people that sent an email to the wrong person and the consequences can be devastating. Even if you're sure your message is bullet-proof, take the necessary time to give it a second look.

Grammar Police

While you might not care if someone uses "u" instead "you," others might. And even if they don't, you're always better off being safe than sorry on this one. Taking the time to use the right "there" or "their," commas and semicolons goes a long way in avoiding confusion and conveys intelligence to your reader. Though the occasional grammar mistake is forgivable, repeated or blatant offenses can damage your credibility.

All Caps

Writing in ALL CAPS is something you should never do in an email. To your reader, it seems like you're shouting. Can you imagine reading a line in an email that says "NEVER BE LATE AGAIN"? Using all caps communicates unrest and is seen as confrontational. If you need to make a point, do it professionally and avoid language that incites anger or fear.

Read Receipts

When you send important emails, you want to make sure they are read. Utilizing the read receipt option lets you know that your message has not only been seen, but read as well. This eliminates any potential breakdown in communication.

Before You Hit Send...

Once you hit send whatever you've typed is gone forever. There are no do-overs. Before you hit send, take the time to thoroughly read what you've written to make sure that you are communicating the right message. Did you answer all the questions the original sender asked you? Were your directions clear?

Whether you hate e-mail or love it, it's not going away anytime soon. Being unprofessional or lazy in your electronic communication can prove costly. On the other hand, taking time to make sure your messages are professionally written, intended for the right recipient and communicate necessary information in a concise manner will set you apart from those that fail to make the effort.