

How to Use E-Mail Best

by Carol Dunitz, Ph.D.

Use Your Web Site to Build Credibility. Make sure your online presence is inviting. Potential customers, clients, and business associates often visit web sites to determine whether or not they want to approach someone. If you communicate well on your web site, you will be perceived as able to do other things well.

Follow Previously Established Conventions. Make communication attractive to look at and easy-to-understand. Include headlines, sub-headline and bullets to organize and clarify what you have to share.

- Use proper sentence structure and a new paragraphs for each new idea.
- Avoid all caps or all lower case -- they are hard to read.
- Don't leave out apostrophes in contractions, periods at the end of sentences, etc.
- Proofread what you write for good grammar and correct spelling.

Personalizing Your Message. Generic messages lack the power of messages that are directed to a specific person. Let your recipient know that you are thinking of them. If you are writing someone you have never met, err on the side of formality. If you know someone, by all means, use their first name.

Write Simply and Succinctly. Use a conversational style with strong subjects and active verbs. Avoid excessive qualifiers and intensifiers that weaken instead of strengthen your message. Try to construct your message in 24 lines or less so its entire contents can be viewed at the same time.

Be Brief but Not Brusque. E-mail is very cold. There is no nonverbal to temper what is being written. Sometimes it helps to cushion your comments so they are not misunderstood. Don't use e-mail to express angry or upset feelings, or to deliver bad news.

Follow E-Mail Etiquette. Use a subject line in the header. It acts as your headline and entices the recipient to open your e-mail. At the same time it is a courteous way to let the recipient know whether what you have is of interest. Refrain from sending sensitive or confidential information over the Internet; there is no promise of privacy in cyberspace.

Copy with Care. Ask permission to forward messages that are confidential. And sparingly mark messages 'urgent.' Give serious thought to using the return request function as it may alienate receivers.

Be Considerate. Don't turn off your readers by forwarding SPAM in the form of jokes, recipes and ads. Your e-mail will start to land in the trash before it is ever opened.

Return to Sender. If you receive e-mail that was intended for another, return it to the sender. Your thoughtfulness will be appreciated.

Create and Use A Signature. Your signature marks the end of the e-mail and documents your role in it should it be forwarded. It also provides other ways to contact you such as telephone number and fax.

Don't Assume Something is Junk. It's easy to assume e-mail from an unknown entity is spam. Deleting at high speed can cause costly mistakes. Give serious consideration to all e-mail before striking the delete key to ensure you answer bona fide questions and requests.

Don't Let E-Mail Become A Distraction. Few e-mails need an immediate response. Checking your e-mail a few times a day is often enough. If someone really needs to reach you they'll probably phone.

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