

EMAIL NETIQUETTE

Don't you wish that every person who received a new e-mail account had to agree to follow certain rules to use it? Here are some things to keep in mind regarding e-mail conduct:

1. **Be informal, not sloppy.** You may use commonly accepted abbreviations in e-mail, but when communicating with others, everyone should follow standard writing protocol as much as possible. Your e-mail message reflects on you, so traditional spelling, grammar, and punctuation rules apply.
2. **Keep messages brief and to the point.** Just because your writing is grammatically correct does not mean that it has to be long. Nothing is more frustrating than wading through an e-mail message that is twice as long as necessary. Concentrate on one subject per message whenever possible.
3. **Use sentence case.** USING ALL CAPITAL LETTERS LOOKS AS IF YOU'RE SHOUTING. Using all lowercase letters looks lazy. For emphasis, use asterisks or bold formatting to emphasize important words. Do not, however, use a lot of colors or graphics embedded in your message, because not everyone uses an e-mail program that can display them.
4. **Use the blind copy and courtesy copy appropriately.** Don't use BCC to keep others from seeing who you copied; it shows confidence when you directly CC anyone receiving a copy. Do use BCC, however, when sending to a large distribution list, so recipients won't have to see a ugly list of names. Be cautious with your use of CC; overuse simply clutters inboxes. Copy only people who are directly involved.
5. **Don't use e-mail as an excuse to avoid personal contact.** Don't forget the value of face-to-face or even voice-to-voice communication. E-mail communication isn't appropriate when sending confusing or emotional messages. Think of the times you've heard someone say, "Well, I *sent* you e-mail." If you have a problem with someone, speak with that person directly. Don't use e-mail to avoid an uncomfortable situation or to cover up a mistake.
6. **Remember that e-mail isn't private.** You should assume that e-mail over the Internet is not secure. Never put in an e-mail message anything that you wouldn't put on a postcard. Remember that e-mail can be forwarded, so unintended audiences may see what you've written. You might also inadvertently send something to the wrong party, so always keep the content appropriate to avoid embarrassment.
7. **Be sparing with group e-mail.** Send group e-mail only when it's useful to every recipient. Use the "reply all" button only when compiling results requiring collective input and only if you have something to add. Recipients get quite annoyed to open an e-mail that says only "Me too!"
8. **Use the subject field to indicate content and purpose.** You might be tempted to bypass this part of the e-mail, but just remember: everyone is in a hurry, including the recipient of your e-mail. That person will appreciate the clue the subject line provides as to the message content. Don't just say, "Hi!" or "From Laura."
9. **Don't send chain letters, virus warnings, or junk mail.** Always check a reputable antivirus Web site before sending out an alarm. If a constant stream of jokes from a friend annoys you, be honest and ask to be removed from the list.
10. **Remember that your tone can't be heard in e-mail.** Have you ever attempted sarcasm in an e-mail, and the recipient took it the wrong way? E-mail communication can't convey the

nuances of verbal communication. In an attempt to infer tone of voice, some people use emoticons, but use them sparingly. Also, don't assume that using a smiley will diffuse a difficult message.

11. **Use a signature that includes contact information.** To ensure that people know who you are, include a signature that has your contact information, including your mailing address, Web site, and phone numbers if necessary.
12. **Summarize long discussions.** Scrolling through pages of replies to understand a discussion is annoying. Instead of continuing to forward a message string, take a minute to summarize it for your reader. You could even highlight or quote the relevant passage, then include your response. Some words of caution:
 - If you are forwarding or reposting a message you've received, do not change the wording.
 - If you want to repost to a group a message that you received individually, ask the author for permission first.
 - Give proper attribution.

Bonus tips:

- a) **Read it, out loud, before you send it.** While you may think you're writing exactly what you mean, it pays to read some e-mails out loud to yourself, putting yourself in the recipient's shoes, before hitting that "send" button. Once it's in writing, it's hard to take back. Also, never forget that the recipient has both a printer and "forward" button. Never write something you wouldn't want to have circulated.
- b) **Don't write when you're angry.** Perhaps one of the most common etiquette rules to break is firing off an e-mail to someone when you're angry, either at them or a situation. See "Read it out loud" above. You can't take it back once you "flame" someone, and it can come back to haunt you.
- c) **Minimize abbreviated phrases.** Using abbreviations such as IMHO (in my humble opinion). FWIW (for what it's worth) and ROTFL (rolling on the floor laughing) can frustrate and confuse the recipient.
- d) If the email has high importance, make sure you "flag" it so that you draw attention to the message
- e) Don't send large or unnecessary attachments unless you have cleared it with the recipient first
- f) The content of your email should be, clear, concise and to the point
- g) Before sending the message review the content, grammar and spelling
- h) Let your personality shine through, use a friendly yet professional writing style
- i) Personalize your emails by making sure that you address the recipient by name
- j) Email is regarded as formal communication so ensure that you reply to emails sent to you in a timely manner
- k) Do not reply to spam as it will indicate to the sender that your account is active
- l) Be careful how you word the content of your email. Jokes or irony in a formal message don't always come through as well as they would during a normal conversation.

Use these suggestions as a starting point to create e-mail etiquette rules.