



**Title:** Writing Emails That Matter

**Grade:** 10

**Career Development Model:**

Self-Awareness • Career Planning & Management

**Nebraska Career Readiness Standards:**

- Communicates effectively & appropriately
- Contributes to employer & community success
- Manages personal career development

**Objective:**

- Students will write and send a professional email.
- Students will demonstrate writing conventions related to writing professional emails.

**Materials and Supplies Needed:**

- "Email Graphic Organizer" handout (copies needed)
- "Email Situation Cards" handout (cut into strips for groups)
- "Writing Effective Emails: Top 10 Email Tips" by Dennis G. Jerz and Jessica Bauer, [http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/e-text/ email/#attachments](http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/e-text/email/#attachments)

**Class Instructions:**

Part 1

1. This lesson can be done without computers if students do not have access. Have students write an email on paper to the following prompt. "You have noticed that a teacher has given you a score of zero for homework that you turned in. Draft an email, on notebook paper, that addresses the situation." Alternatively, a teacher may generate his or her own scenarios for students to use as a prompt.
2. Discuss with students how they handled the situation in their emails. What did they say to the teacher? Consider asking the following questions to students.
  - a. What types of things should they avoid saying in the email?
  - b. What can go wrong in this type of email?
  - c. What types of things did they say in the email?
  - d. What can make your message confusing to the person you're sending it to?

Part 2

1. List some do's and don'ts when it comes to writing emails that matter. Have student

volunteers write out the do's and don'ts on the board while the teacher leads the discussion with the class.

2. Review the article, "Writing Effective Emails: Top 10 Email Tips," with students. Teacher should point out additional pointers that are left off of the dos and don'ts list.
3. Instruct students that they will write their own emails in groups. Put students into groups or pairs, depending on the classroom. Students will receive a situation card and need to write emails using the "Email Graphic Organizer" handout. The teacher may lead the class through one example to explain the organizer. Groups need to choose recorder to fill out the handout. Emphasize that students need to consider their audience and purpose when writing emails.
4. When students finish, have them pass their emails to the next group. The group will discuss what they think of the email from the perspective of the "recipient." Students will write feedback on the email.
  - a. What is the tone that is used?
  - b. Are you missing information that makes it hard to reply?
  - c. What is your impression of the person based on the email?
5. The teacher will discuss with the class what went well and what didn't go as well together. What are some of the challenges in writing emails to people you don't know? Ask students if they feel confident in writing emails in the future.

**Credits/Sources:**



"Making my Future Work: A College and Career Readiness Program", U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

<https://www.csuohio.edu/cehs/mmfw/making-my-future-work-0>

## Email Tips: Top 10 Strategies for Writing Effective Email

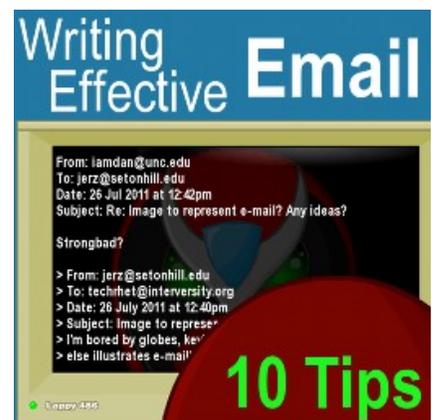
Follow these email etiquette tips in order to write more effective email.

While Millennials typically prefer texting, the improvised, back-and-forth pattern we expect of texting conversations differs greatly from the pre-planned, more self-contained messages most professionals expect in the workplace.

If you are planning an outing with friends, you expect multiple rapid exchanges asking for clarification and providing corrections on the fly. Since you are usually texting somebody you already know well, about a shared interest, you don't need to provide much context.

But most professionals do not want to engage in a leisurely back-and-forth in order to get their work done. They want to clear this item from their inbox, perhaps by passing it to an assistant or kicking it upstream, without having to ask the sender "I dunno, what do you think?" or "What did you mean by that emoji?" *Originally written by Jessica Bauer in 2000; expanded and maintained by Dennis G. Jerz*

1. [Write a meaningful subject line.](#)
2. [Keep the message focused.](#)
3. [Avoid attachments.](#)
4. [Identify yourself clearly.](#)
5. [Be kind — don't flame.](#)
6. [Proofread.](#)
7. [Don't assume privacy.](#)
8. [Distinguish between formal and informal situations.](#)
9. [Respond Promptly.](#)
10. [Show Respect and Restraint.](#)



### 1. Write a meaningful subject line.

Before you hit "send," take a moment to write a subject line that accurately describes the content, giving your reader a concrete reason to open your message. A vague or blank subject line is a missed opportunity to inform or persuade your reader.

Remember — your message is not the only one in your recipient's mailbox. A clear subject line will help a busy professional to decide that your email is worthwhile.



Subject: [Blank]

A blank subject line suggests that your name in the "From" line is all your recipient should need in order to make you message a top priority. That could come across as arrogant, or at the very least, thoughtless. A well-chosen subject line is an important opportunity to inform and persuade your reader.



Subject: "Important! Read Immediately!!"

Rather than brashly announcing that the secret contents of your mystery message are inexplicably important...



“All Cars in the Lower Lot Will Be Towed in 1 Hour.”

...write a functional subject line that actually conveys the important idea.



Subject: “Quick question.”

If the question is quick, why not just ask it in the subject line? This subject line is hardly useful.



Subject: “Follow-up about Friday“

Fractionally better — provided that the recipient remembers why a follow-up was necessary.



Subject: “That file you requested.“

Many email users get scads of virus-laden spam with vague titles like this. The more specific you are, the more likely your recipient’s spam-blocker will let your message through.



Subject: “10 confirmed for Friday... will we need a larger room?“

Upon reading this revised, informative subject line, the recipient immediately starts thinking about the size of the room, not about whether it will be worth it to open the email.

## 2. Keep the message focused.

Why are you writing? Are you responding to a request? Apologizing for an error on your part? Asking for the recipient to take some action for you?

- **Purpose:** Any textbook on business and professional writing will include examples of [complaint and adjustment letters](#), [proposal letters](#), [progress reports](#), [application letters](#), and so forth.
- **Directness:** You probably don’t need to open with “Dear Ms. Jones,” engage in personal chit-chat, and close with “Yours Truly.” (If you really want to be that formal, send a letter on paper instead.)
- **Organization:** Readers will often get partway through a complex message, hit “reply” as soon as they have something to contribute, and forget to read the rest. That’s human nature.
  - **Number your points** in more complex message. (Start with a clear statement of how many parts there are to your message.)
  - Split unrelated points into **separate, purposeful emails**.
    - If you send all your employees a message that only relates to some of them, a lot of people will waste time reading the whole thing, in order to determine whether any part of it applies to them.
    - Other people will give up as soon as they find any detail that does not apply to them. (Again, this is human nature.)
- **Politeness:** Please and thank-you are still important, but wordiness wastes your reader’s time (which is rude).



**Indirect and wasteful:** “Dearest Arnold: I would be very much obliged if, at your earliest convenience, you could send me the current password for the website. I look forward to your response. Have a nice day! Yours Truly, Philomena.”



**Blunt to the point of rudeness:** “Need the password for the website.”

If you **get** a message like this, you might assume the sender trusts you and really needs your help; however, if you **send** a message like this, you might appear needy and panicky. Is that how you want to come across? Think about it.



**Urgent, yet polite:** “Site is down, but I can’t troubleshoot without the new password. Do you know it?”

To help your reader focus on your message: **keep your text readable.**

- Proofread, *especially* when your message asks your recipient to do work for you. All-caps comes across as shouting, and no-caps makes you look like a lazy teenager. Regardless of your intention, people will respond accordingly.
  - If you are in middle school, a gushing statement “thx 4 ur help 2day ur gr8!” may make a busy professional smile — or shudder.
  - Often, the sweetness of the gesture won’t be enough. u want ur prof r ur boss 2 think u cant spl? LOL ;-)
- Write **short paragraphs**, separated by blank lines. Most people find unbroken blocks of text boring, or even intimidating. Take the time to format your message for the ease of your reader.
- **Avoid fancy typefaces.** Don’t depend upon bold font or large size to add nuances. Your recipient’s email reader may not have all the features that yours does. In a pinch, use asterisks to show *\*emphasis\**.

### 3. Avoid attachments.

Rather than forcing you reader to download an attachment and open it in a separate program, you will probably get faster results if you just copy-paste the most important part of the document into the body of your message.

To: All 1000 Employees  
From: Eager Edgar  
Subject: A helpful book everyone should read

Hello, everyone. I’ve attached a PDF that I think you’ll all find very useful. This is the third time I sent it the file — the version I sent yesterday had a typo on page 207, so I’ve sent the whole thing again. Since some of you noted that the large file size makes it a bit awkward, I’ve also attached each chapter as a separate document. Let me know what you think!Attachments:

- Big Honking File.pdf (356MB)
- BHF Cover.pdf (25MB)
- BHF Chapter 1.pdf (35MB)
- [... ]



Okay, raise your hands... how many of us would delete the above message immediately, without looking at *\*any\** of those attachments?

To: Bessie Professional  
From: Morris Ponsybil  
Subject: Email tips — a subject for an office workshop?



Bessie, I came across some tips on streamlining professional communications. Has anyone

volunteered to present at the office workshop next month? Let me know if you'd like me to run a little seminar (20 minutes?) on using email effectively. Below, I'll paste the table of contents. I'll send you the whole thing as a PDF if you want it. Table of Contents

1. Write a meaningful subject line.
2. Keep the message focused and readable.
3. Avoid attachments.
4. [...]

#### Recognize that attachments:

- consume bandwidth (do you want your recipient to ignore your request so as to avoid paying for a mobile download?)
- can carry viruses
- don't always translate correctly for people who read their email on portable devices.
- may require your recipient to have certain software installed (such as Microsoft Publisher or Apple's Pages)

#### 4. Identify yourself clearly.

If you telephoned someone outside your closest circle, someone who probably wouldn't recognize your voice, you would probably say something like "Hello, Ms. Wordsworth, this is Sally Griffin." A formal "Dear Ms. Wordsworth" salutation is not necessary for routine workplace communication.

When we send text messages to our friends, we expect a lot of back-and-forth. But professionals who use email don't enjoy getting a cryptic message from an email address they don't recognize.

While a routine email does not require a formal salutation such as "Dear Ms. Wordsworth," ask yourself whether the person you are writing knows you well enough to recognize your email address.



To: Professor Blinderson  
From: FuZzYkItTy2000@hotmail.com  
Subject: [Blank]Yo goin 2 miss class whats the homework

*Professor Blinderson will probably reply, "Please let me know your name and which class you're in, so that I can respond meaningfully. I don't recognize the address FuZzYkItTy2000@hotmail.com."*



To: Professor Blinderson  
From: m.ponsybil@gmail.com  
Subject: EL227 Absence, Oct 10Hello, Prof. Blinderson. This is Morris Ponsybil, from EL227 section 2. This morning, I just found out that the curling team has advanced to the playoffs, so I'm going to be out of town on the 10th. According to the syllabus, it looks like I will miss a paper workshop and the discussion of Chapter 10. May I email you my Chapter 10 discussion questions before I leave town? And could I come to your office hour at 2pm on the 12th, in order to discuss the paper? I've asked Cheryl Jones to take notes for me. Thank you very much. I'll see you in class tomorrow.

*If you are asking the other person to do you a favor, providing the right information will give him or her a good reason to decide in your favor. In this case, Morris Ponsybil shows his professor he cares enough about the class to propose a solution to the problem his absence will cause.*

When contacting someone cold, be polite and brief. If you are asking for a stranger to do something for you for free, be prepared to hear nothing in response.

Even if you already have a connection with the person you are contacting, a little context is helpful. Every fall, I get emails from “bad\_boy2315@yahoo.com” or “FuZzYkItTy2000@hotmail.com” who ask a question about “class” and don’t sign their real names.

If you are following up on a face-to-face contact, you might appear too timid if you assume your recipient doesn’t remember you; but you can drop casual hints to jog their memory: “I enjoyed talking with you about usability testing in the elevator the other day.”

While formal phrases such as “Dear Professor Sneedlewood” and “Sincerely Yours,” are unnecessary in email, when contacting someone outside your own organization, you should write a signature line that includes your full name and at least a link to a blog or online profile page (something that does not require your recipient to log in first).

## 5. Be kind. Don’t flame.

Think before you click “Send.”

If you find yourself writing in anger, save a draft, go get a cup of coffee, and imagine that tomorrow morning someone has taped your email outside your door. Would your associates and friends be shocked by your language or attitude?

Or would they be impressed by how you kept your cool, how you ignored the bait when your correspondent stooped to personal attacks, and how you carefully explained your position (or admitted your error, or asked for a reconsideration, etc.)>

Will you have to work with this person for several months? Do you want a copy of your bitter screed to surface years from now, when you want a letter of recommendation?



@!\$% &\*@!! &(\*!

Go ahead... write it, revise it, liven it up with traditional Lebanese curses, print it out, throw darts on it, and scribble on it with crayon. Do whatever you need in order to get it out of your system. Just **don’t hit “Send” while you’re still angry.**

From: Clair Haddad

To: Ann O. Ying

Subject: Re: Ongoing Problems with ProjectI’m not sure how to respond, since last week you told Sue that you didn’t need any extra training, so I cancelled Wednesday’s workshop. I can CC Sue in on this thread if you like, since she’s the one who will have to approve the budget if we reschedule it. Meanwhile, I can loan you my copies of the manual, or we can look into shifting the work to someone else. Let me know what you’d like me to do next.—Original Message –

From: Ann O. Ying

I tried all morning to get in touch with you. Couldn’t you find a few minutes in between meetings to check your messages? I’m having a rough time on this project, and I’m sorry if this is last-minute, but I’ve never done this before and I think the least you could do is take some time to explain it again.



If your recipient has just lambasted you with an angry message, rather than reply with a point-by-point rebuttal, you can always respond with a brief note like this, which

1. casually invokes the name of someone the angry correspondent is likely to respect (in order to diffuse any personal antagonism that may otherwise have developed) and

2. refocuses the conversation on solutions (in this conversation, Ann has already dug herself into a hole, and Clair has nothing to gain by joining her there)
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## **6. Proofread.**

If you are asking someone else to do work for you, take the time to **make your message look professional**.

While your spell checker won't catch every mistake, at the very least it will catch a few typos. If you are sending a message that will be read by someone higher up on the chain of command (a superior or professor, for instance), or if you're about to mass-mail dozens or thousands of people, take an extra minute or two before you hit "send". Show a draft to a close associate, in order to see whether it actually makes sense.

## **7. Don't assume privacy.**

A good motto: **praise in public, and criticize in private**. Don't send anything over email that you wouldn't want posted — with your name attached — in the break room.

**Email is not secure.** Just as random pedestrians could reach into a physical mailbox and intercept envelopes, a curious hacker, a malicious criminal, and your IT department can probably read any and all email messages in your work account.

If you stretch the truth in an email (downplaying a problem, leaving out an important detail, etc.), you're creating a written record that your recipient can (and will) use to determine whether

- you are uninformed about the truth
- you are informed but deliberately misrepresenting the truth
- your confused and conflicting emails mean you aren't a reliable source for determining the truth

## **8. Distinguish between formal and informal situations.**

When you are writing to a friend or a close colleague, it is OK to use "smilies" :-), abbreviations (IIRC for "if I recall correctly", LOL for "laughing out loud," etc.) and nonstandard punctuation and spelling (like that found in instant messaging or chat rooms).

These linguistic shortcuts are generally signs of friendly intimacy, like sharing cold pizza with a family friend. If you tried to share that same cold pizza with a first date, or a visiting dignitary, you would give off the impression that you did not really care about the meeting. By the same token, don't use informal language when your reader expects a more formal approach.

Always know the situation, and write accordingly.

## **9. Respond Promptly.**

If you want to appear professional and courteous, make yourself available to your online correspondents. Even if your reply is, "Sorry, I'm too busy to help you now," at least your correspondent won't be waiting in vain for your reply.

## **10. Show Respect and Restraint**

Many a flame war has been started by someone who hit "reply all" instead of "reply."

While most people know that email is not private, it is good form to ask the sender before forwarding a personal message. If someone emails you a request, it is perfectly acceptable to forward the request to a person who can help — but forwarding a message in order to ridicule the sender is tacky.

Use BCC instead of CC when sending sensitive information to large groups. (For example, a professor sending a bulk message to students who are in danger of failing, or an employer telling unsuccessful applicants that a position is no longer open.) The name of everyone in the CC list goes out with the message, but the names of people on the BCC list (“blind carbon copy”) are hidden. Put your own name in the “To” box if your mail editor doesn’t like the blank space.

Be tolerant of other people’s etiquette blunders. If you think you’ve been insulted, quote the line back to your sender and add a neutral comment such as, “I’m not sure how to interpret this... could you elaborate?”

### **Sometimes Email is Too Fast!**

A colleague once asked me for help, and then almost immediately sent a follow-up informing me she had solved the problem on her own.

But before reading her second message, I replied at length to the first. Once I learned that there was no need for any reply, I worried that my response would seem pompous, so I followed up with a quick apology:

“Should have paid closer attention to my email.”

What I meant to say was “[I] should have looked more carefully at my[list of incoming] email [before replying],” but I could tell from my colleague’s terse reply that she had interpreted it as if I was criticizing *her*.

If I hadn’t responded so quickly to the first message, I would have saved myself the time I spent writing a long answer to an obsolete question. If I hadn’t responded so quickly to the second message, I might not have alienated the person I had been so eager to help. –DGJ

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## **References & Further Reading**

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Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

## EMAIL GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

### SUBJECT:

Example: Missing Grade on Persuasive Essay

*This subject should be short and descriptive like a title. It should alert your reader to what to expect. A subject can get your email answered sooner.*

### SALUTATION:

Opening Greeting:

Ms. Johnson:

*If you call the person by their first name, you may use this in the salutation followed by a comma. For more formal letters, use their title (Ms., Mr., and Mrs.) followed by their last name and a colon. If you don't have the person's name, address the email to, To Whom It May Concern:*

### BODY OF EMAIL:

#### Main Point or Reason for Email:

Example: I noticed that I didn't get a score on my essay.

#### Supporting Details:

Example: I think I put the homework in your drop box. Is it possible that you haven't graded it yet?

#### Restate Main Point and Request for Action:

Example: I would like to get a grade for this soon. Let me know if you would like to meet about it.

#### Friendly Closing Statement:

Example: Thank you in advance, for looking into this.

### CLOSING:

Example:  
Sincerely,  
J. Smith

*Use a closing followed by a comma. For example: Kind regards, Many thanks, Sincerely, With consideration.*

# EMAIL SITUATION CARDS

*Instructions: Cut these statements into strips and hand out to groups to discuss.*

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You have heard from a friend of a friend that they are hiring for a job for theater intern at the Great Lakes Theater Company this summer. You cannot find this information online though you have an email address and a person's name and title. You are excited about this position. Write an email to this person to find out more.

.....

You need to set up an appointment to see an apartment to rent. Write an email to the landlord to set up an appointment.

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You are enrolled at Rivers Community College and you have noticed that they have mistakenly charged you for a parking pass on your student account even though you do not drive. Write an email to attempt to remedy the situation.

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You want to ask for a weekend off from work. Write your supervisor an email asking for the days you need off.

.....

You applied for a job at Dave's Supermarket using the web form on their website. You want to make sure that they received your message but the person you need to talk to is not there. They give you their name and email address and encourage you to write an email. Write an email that expresses your interest in the job and ask if they received your information.

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You want to apply into a program for Digital Media Design at a university in New York but you are unsure if you are doing everything you need to do, to get into their program. Do you need to have a portfolio with samples of work? What if you don't have the minimum GPA that they list on the website? How many graduates go on to find work that uses their degree? Write an email to the contact for the Digital Media Design program.

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You are struggling in your mathematics class in college and you're worried that you may fail. Sometimes you feel like you can't understand what he's saying in class. Write an email to your professor asking her for help or feedback.