

Email etiquette at work

While meetings and phone calls still hold an important place in the professional world, email has quickly taken over when it comes to work communication. It's a versatile and accessible way to communicate, whether you want to briefly check in with a colleague or send a formal proposal to a client.

However, this convenience comes with its own set of challenges and nuances, which is where email etiquette rules come into play. It's not just about what you say, but how you say it and when.

Good email etiquette enhances the clarity of your message and maintains a professional tone, while bad email etiquette can affect work relationships and productivity. In this article, we cover a range of topics to help you write your work emails with confidence.

What is email etiquette?

Email etiquette refers to the unwritten rules that dictate what is polite and appropriate when you're writing and sending emails. Etiquette, or social convention, applies to all types of communication, and should also guide your email messages. It includes things like the [tone](#), language, format, font, response time and more.

To a coworker

When emailing a coworker, it's best to lean towards a balance of professionalism and friendliness. It's important to maintain a respectful tone while also building a strong work relationship.

- Use a friendly yet professional tone.
- Be concise and to the point.
- Avoid overly casual language or slang.

To a boss

Emailing a superior, such as your boss, requires a more formal approach, especially if

you don't work closely with them. Regarding email etiquette rules in the workplace, it's important to show respect and professionalism when emailing anyone senior to you.

- Use [formal openings](#) and closings.
- Be clear and concise.
- Proofread for errors to ensure professionalism.

To a friend

Emailing a friend is when you can be conversational and casual. Of course, how casual exactly will depend on your relationship with this person and how well you know them. Take it on a case-by-case basis.

- A relaxed tone is the way to go.
- Be mindful of the email's content and context.
- Personalise the email to strengthen the connection.
- Don't say anything you want to keep private using your work email account.

To an unknown person

An 'unknown person' could be a recruiter, a potential client or even someone in your organisation that you haven't met yet. In these cases, be respectful, professional and courteous, make your message concise, and include a call to action so the person is clear on why you emailed them.

- Use a formal tone and structure.
- Introduce yourself and state the purpose of your email.
- Be concise and clear.
- Include a call to action (if you're emailing to request something).

In each of these scenarios, the core principles of email etiquette remain the same: clarity, respect and an appropriate level of professionalism. However, the way these principles are applied will change depending on your relationship with the recipient and the context of your email. By understanding these nuances, you can confidently adapt your emails to different situations.

Why is email etiquette important?

When words are put onto paper (or in this case, on the screen), your message can lose

its mood and tone. This can lead to misunderstandings when it comes to how your email is received. Here's why email courtesy is so important, especially in your professional life.

It maintains professionalism

Emails are often the first and most frequent point of contact in work settings. How you write your emails can either enhance or detract from your professional image. If you strike the right tone, your emails reflect a friendly and professional attitude. This helps build a positive reputation for you and strong, trusting relationships with your coworkers. It also ensures that your emails are taken seriously.

It highlights your attention to detail

Being careful about what you send to your colleagues shows that you are thorough and conscientious in your work interactions. It demonstrates that you're able to communicate effectively and shows that you take work seriously. Good email etiquette at work also tells people that you can be relied on to do things to a high standard.

It reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings

Clear and well-structured emails reduce the chances of misinterpretation and confusion. This is especially important in a professional context, where miscommunications can lead to [costly mistakes](#) or strained relationships with coworkers or clients.

Best practices for email etiquette

Mastering the art of email etiquette can significantly improve how clear, impactful and professional your emails are. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind for all your future email messages.

Email from a professional email address

Using a professional email address is the first step in making sure your emails are taken seriously. This means using an address that ideally includes your first name and is associated with your organisation or line of work.

- Avoid using personal email addresses for work emails.
- Ensure your email address is simple and not overly long.

Respond to email communication on time

Timely responses to emails not only show professionalism but also respect for the sender's time. Even if you can't fulfil a request straight away, it's polite to acknowledge receipt of the person's email and provide an estimated timeframe for when you can get back to them.

- [Aim to respond](#) within a reasonable timeframe, typically within 24 to 48 hours.
- If a detailed response is needed and you need more time, send a brief note acknowledging receipt and indicating when they can expect a full reply.

Keep your email short and to the point

Long emails can be confusing and time consuming to read. Keeping your emails concise and focused makes it easier for the recipient to understand and act on your message.

- Stick to the main points and avoid unnecessary details.
- Use bullet points or numbered lists if the email covers multiple topics.

Use language that's easy to understand

The language in your emails should be clear, avoiding jargon, acronyms or complex terminology that might confuse people.

- Avoid industry-specific jargon unless you are sure the recipient will understand.
- Take the time to explain any terms that the recipient might not understand.
- Don't use popular text shorthand or initialisms (like "TY" instead of "thank you").

Use a friendly and professional tone

The tone of your email should strike a balance between being approachable and maintaining professionalism.

- Be polite and respectful, regardless of the recipients.
- Adjust the formality of your tone according to how close you are with the recipient.

Don't use all capital letters

Using all caps in emails will either be interpreted as shouting or make you seem technologically unsavvy.

- Use standard sentence-case capitalisation rules for all your emails.
- Save capital letters for conventional uses, like acronyms or initialisms.

Don't use emojis

While emojis can be a fun way to express emotions in personal messages, they are generally not appropriate for professional emails to senior colleagues or people you don't know very well.

- Avoid using emojis to keep the tone professional.
- Reword your message if you think it doesn't sound friendly enough.

How to follow business email etiquette

Writing a professional email involves more than just writing a message. Every element of your email should follow proper business etiquette. Here are some essential email tips to help you out, so you can hit send with confidence.

Check who is included in the email

Before sending your email, it's crucially important to check who is included in the email. You want to be certain about who will be receiving your email to make sure it's going to the right people and to preserve confidentiality.

- Double-check the recipients in the To, CC, and BCC fields.

- Ensure that you are not oversharing information with anyone.
- Be mindful of replying to all, to avoid cluttering inboxes.

Use a professional greeting

The greeting sets the tone for your email. It's important to start with a professional and respectful opening. Address the main recipient(s) if you've CCed a group.

- Use a formal greeting like *Dear [name]* in more formal contexts.
- For less formal situations, *Hello [name]* or *Hi [name]* can be appropriate.
- Avoid overly casual greetings in a business context.

Use an appropriate sign-off

The way you close your email is as important as how you open it. The [email sign-off](#) should be professional and leave a good lasting impression.

- Use formal sign-offs such as *Best regards* or *Sincerely* in professional emails.
- In less formal emails you can use *Best wishes* or *Kind regards*.
- Ensure the sign-off matches the tone of your email.

Ensuring accuracy and professionalism

Proofreading is an essential final step when writing your email. It's a chance to pick up on spelling or grammatical errors to make sure your message is clear and free of mistakes.

- Read through your email carefully to catch any errors or typos.
- Check for clarity and tone to ensure you get your message across correctly.
- Consider how the email might be perceived from the recipient's perspective.
- Set a delay on your email of a few minutes as an extra safeguard.

Example of email with good etiquette

Below is an example of an email that shows good etiquette, followed by an explanation of why each element is so important.

Subject: Request for meeting: Q3 project review

To: [Recipient's name]

Cc: [Relevant team members]

Dear [Recipient's name],

I hope your week is going well. I am writing to request a meeting to discuss our upcoming Q3 project. Would you be available for a catch-up next week on Wednesday or Thursday? Please let me know what time works best for you and I will send an invite to the call.

I look forward to your response.

Best regards,

[Your name]

What makes this a good email?

- **Subject line:** the subject line clearly states the purpose of the email, making it easy for the recipient to understand the email's intent at a glance.
- **Recipient addressing:** the use of *Dear [recipient's name]* is formal and shows respect, setting a professional tone for the email.
- **Email body:** the email opens with a courteous greeting, setting a positive tone, followed by the point of the message. Following this is a question/request, giving options for the recipient to choose from, and a call to action. The email ends by reinforcing the need for a response.
- **Conciseness:** the email is brief and to the point, making it easy to understand.

If you work in an office environment, you probably send emails daily. Email etiquette is a key skill for **effective communication** that ensures your words are received exactly as intended. A well-crafted email can open doors, build bridges and get your message across in the right tone. On the other hand, a badly written email can lead to misunderstandings and can even damage professional relationships. By taking the time to send polite, well-worded emails, you can make sure that every email you send makes the right impression.

FAQs

Is it necessary to respond to every email?

No, it's not necessary to respond to every email, especially if the email is informational or does not require a response. However, for emails that do require a response, acknowledging you have received them and addressing their content is important.

What should I do before hitting send?

Before hitting send, you should proofread your email for errors, make sure your tone is right, double-check the recipient list, and confirm that all attachments are included. Doing a final review before sending your emails can save you from making embarrassing slip ups.

How can I manage email tone and avoid miscommunication?

To manage email tone and avoid miscommunication, use clear and straightforward language, be mindful of your word choice, and consider how your message might be taken by the recipient. Reading the email aloud to yourself and being empathetic of how your words might be interpreted is a great way to assess the tone.

What are the risks of misusing CC and BCC?

Misusing CC (Carbon Copy) and BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) can lead to breaches of privacy, unnecessary email clutter and potential confusion or misunderstandings about who is required to respond or take action. The CC and BCC functions should be used with careful consideration each time.