

Email Etiquette

Adapted from "Save Yourself from E-Mail Faux Pas" by Bill Howard, (April 2003) *PC Magazine*

Swap your desktop for a notebook; move to broadband from dial-up; use wireless networks. Those are key productivity enhancers for both business and personal users. Now with all that bandwidth bringing many of us 100-plus e-mail messages a day, another productivity booster is the savvy use of e-mail.

- **Don't reply to an email if your message is not related to the sender's subject.** If you receive an email about a meeting agenda, don't reply with an email explaining that your computer is down. Take the extra two second and compose a new message with a subject related to your message.
- **Send one complete e-mail, not two partials.** If someone asks to meet next Tuesday, don't respond, "It's crazy busy right now, so I'll let you know this afternoon." Check your schedule, and then respond.
- **Use clear subject lines.** "A couple thoughts", "Help" or "About next week" is unnecessarily vague. The subject line of a message should help jog your memory a week later as to a message's contents.
- **Cover one topic per message.** If you append an unrelated thought at the bottom of your long message ("By the way I'm thinking of taking a computer workshop") it may never get noticed.
- **Make the subject line work for both sides.** Employees received lots of messages with the subject line "Proposed special ed meeting with parents:" How much better would it be if the subject read, "Proposed IEP Meeting 10/14 for JR." Outlook can be a performance hog when it's performing searches, so put the most obvious words in the subject line. Then recipients can find the e-mail using a subject search instead of a full-text search.
- **Append to the subject line when responding.** It's okay to change a subject line as the underlying discussion evolves. But keep the first several words, so messages sorted by subjects stay together.
- **No unnecessary attachments.** Attachments can carry viruses. Name your attachments with specific filenames. Never open any attachment ending in .bat, .exe, .vbs. If the name of the attachment is not something you're looking for, delete the message immediately.
- **Include previous message.** This will help the recipient track the topic history if the email is sitting in an inbox full of emails.
- **Check the cc: list.** When you spin off a discussion just to the people on your side of the deal, be sure to remove everyone else from the mailing list.
- **Use addressee auto-fill cautiously.** If you type C-l-a-u, *Claudia Andrews* appears in the addressee window before *Claudia Mezza*. Hit *Enter* too soon and you'll send the message to the wrong Claudia.
- **Angry? Save it to the drafts folder.** No matter how annoyed you are at some jerk's e-mail, save your "that'll put the jerk in his place" response and look at it again an hour later or first thing the next day. Chances are you'll want to tone it down.
- **Beware the tone.** Sarcasm can come across too heavily in e-mail, and irony is often too subtle. When in doubt, play it straight. You can use smiley faces, :) shorthand and hope that the recipient knows that your writing in jest.
- **DO NOT USE CAPITALS.** Use of capitals signifies "flaming," or that you are screaming at the recipient. If they were standing in front of you and you wouldn't be screaming at them, don't use Caps. If you would, well...