How to Write an Email

Everyone has TOO MUCH email! Do yourself -and the people receiving your emails- a BIG favor and write your emails with a little bit of care. The more effectively you can craft an email, the more likely you are to get a quick *and* complete response.

GUIDELINES

- **One topic/issue per email.** This makes it much easier for the recipient to process email! It also prevents bottlenecks; if you have two questions to ask of the same person, they often will have the answers at two different times. For example, they may be able to answer Question A right away, but Question B may require them to look something up or ask another person. If that's the case, people will rarely "split" the responses. Instead, they will wait until they can answer BOTH or ALL of your questions before they reply. Avoid this problem by splitting the questions/issues from the beginning.

- **Ask your question first. Then, elaborate on details**. If you start with details, the reader does not know WHY the details are important. When you start with your question, you give the reader the important context they need to understand additional details.

  Opening with your question also forces you to be clear on the point of your email! When following your natural, "auto-pilot" mode, the question usually emerges at the end. If that happens, cut and paste it to the beginning.

- **Bold the key sentence**; it will often be your primary question. However, it may also be a critical piece of information your reader should not miss, later in the email.

- **Format your email for FAST reading.** People will NOT read every word of a wordy email, so it your responsibility to write AND format your email so it can be read in LAYERS:

  Layer 1 = scan for the gist and main ideas of the email
  Layer 2 = read for details.

  How do you write in layers? By following these guidelines:

  - **Write in short paragraphs.** On a screen, our eyes cannot process much more than 3-4 lines at a time.

  - **Start each paragraph with the most important sentence**. Bold that first sentence, then add related details following that key sentence, exactly as I have done on this page.

  - **Use numerated lists (1, 2, 3) or bullet-points. I**f you want the reader to notice that you have three points, use the tools –numbers or bullets- to format a list. Once again, the first sentence should be the most important point, followed by additional details. Bold the first sentence.

- **Put keywords in the subject line.** If you are replying to an old message with a totally different topic, change the subject line. This makes your new topic more apparent. Also, it will pull the email from an old thread, where it is likely to get lost.

- **Remember:** all email is public. Emails can be forwarded to the wrong person far too easily or somehow made public. Never email anything you wouldn't want displayed on a billboard! Use code words to exchange passwords. If you must express something that is unflattering, it is best to share in person, where tone-of-voice communicates better than text, anyway.

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3Qs + 1 THANK YOU

The template below illustrates a model for writing most emails. As you might guess, "3Qs + 1 Thank You" stands for "three questions + a thank you."

Every email should answer three basic questions:
1. What is my REASON for writing this email?
2. What are additional details this person should know?
3. What do I need this person to do?

…and conclude with a note to thank the person for their time.

SENTENCE STARTERS

In the illustration below, there are four sentence starters; the first three starters answer the three questions. Obviously, the final starter thanks the person:

I am writing to _____

I have tried/included/etc _____

Please _____

Thank you for _____

SUBJECT LINE

For quick-but-clear subject-lines:

- **Compose your subject line AFTER you complete the full email.** Subject-lines are much easier to write after you've written your email.

- **Use keywords from your starter sentence**; select words that will be most important for the receiver to see in their inbox.

Email Template

Dear <Person's Name>,

<What is my reason for writing this email?>
I am writing to _____

<What are additional details this person should know?>
I _____

<What do I need this person to do?>
Please _____

<Thank the person for their time/effort. Wish them well.>
Thank you for _____.

Sincerely,
<Your Name>

TUTORIAL VIDEO & GOOGLE DOC TEMPLATE

Click the links below to access:

- Email Template: Copy/paste the text from above to create a "canned" response in your email.
- Video Tutorial: See this video for a quick explanation on how to compose an email.