

Effective E-mail Communication...and Etiquette

In a relatively short time, e-mail has evolved into an indispensable tool that has enhanced productivity and results in the workplace and made it easier to stay in touch with family and friends. The following tips can help you increase the effectiveness of your e-mail communication, particularly in your professional life.

1. Keep it short.

As you've undoubtedly experienced, a long e-mail is hard to read. The shorter your e-mail message, the better your chances that your e-mail will be read carefully and thoroughly.

2. Limit your distribution list.

Consider your distribution list carefully to avoid including unnecessary recipients. Consider who should act on your e-mail, and who simply needs an "fyi." Send the e-mail "to" those who play an active role, and "cc" those who just need to be aware of the content or message.

3. Reread before you send.

Reread your e-mail message before sending it. In our fast-paced, results-oriented world, it's easy to rush through an e-mail. Shorten your sentences. Cut unnecessary words or information. Check your spelling and punctuation.

4. Think before you Reply All.

When you reply to an e-mail sent to a wide distribution list, for example, to an entire company or organization, think about who needs to see your reply. If only the sender needs the information, don't Reply All.

5. Reply with history.

Have you ever received an e-mail reply with no history and wished you had the prior e-mails to refresh your memory? When appropriate, include the history or "chain" of prior e-mails.

6. Vent, then revisit.

When you're angry or frustrated, it's easy to type a tirade. If you've got to vent, do it, but don't hit Send. Once you get your feelings out, you'll feel better having gotten them off your chest. Then go back and edit heavily, replacing feelings with facts.

7. Avoid embarrassment; avoid gossip.

To state the obvious, don't write something in an e-mail that would embarrass you if forwarded to someone else. It's not worth the risk. If it has to be said, say it in person or on the phone.



8. Subject line.

ALWAYS include a subject line. You know how frustrating it is when you try to search for a stored e-mail without a subject line. A subject line displays the importance of your topic. It's your opportunity to grab the recipient's attention. Don't waste it.

9. Keep to one topic.

Avoid combining topics in one e-mail, even if it means sending several e-mails. This will help ensure that each topic receives the attention it deserves. It will also help the busy recipient keep track if you've requested multiple actions.

10. Is it faster by phone?

Sometimes it's faster—and friendlier—to pick up the phone or walk down the hall. If you don't need to document the communication, and you think immediate feedback would be faster than several e-mail exchanges, consider talking!

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