

TIPS FOR MASTERING EMAIL – ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT BUSINESS TOOLS

- Don't lose credibility from sloppy messages that contain errors.
- Watch out for offensive content and a tone that damages relationships.
- Consider that email can lead to a loss of confidentiality. Is email the appropriate place for communicating a particular message?
- Consider that misunderstandings may occur because the body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice that help people interpret communication are not there. Is email the appropriate place for communicating a particular message? Complex information or sensitive topics should be handled face to face and on the phone.
- Are you compulsively checking email? Think of the time wasted writing, reading, and responding to email that did not need to be sent.
- Write concise, clear emails that quickly convey the information people need and get the results you want.
- Use your email time more productively by improving your writing process. This also allows you to convey a professional image of yourself and your organization.
- Avoid trouble by recognizing that topics and information that are not appropriate for email. Pick up the phone if you have to. As a rule of thumb, if more than three emails are required to convey your point, pick up the phone or walk over to talk to the recipient in person.
- Think before you write - don't send stream of consciousness emails. Plan your writing.

- Think, “Why am I writing this email, who is my audience, and what is my reader's point of view? Is this being sent to multiple people? Does this email have the potential to be forwarded to others? Is my recipient likely to print this message? Do I want this message printable?”
- Ask yourself, “Do some people need more background information because they will be copied, but don't know the history. Do some people have less technical knowledge? Does this need to be simplified?” Provide that additional information, if appropriate.
- People usually read the first few lines because they are busy. Do the first few lines of your email summarize your point? Is your SUBJECT line meaningful?
- Make sure you attach appropriate documents before you send an email.
- To save time and help convey a more professional image, use Letter and Email templates, if you send similar documents again and again.
- Always include a salutation.
- Always use complete sentences.
- Use good grammar and punctuation.
- Proofread your email for “Sense,” and check for tone. Don't use all caps or all lowercase letters. Is it easy to read? Are the main points there?
- Use short sentences, short paragraphs, and lists to organize the look of the email. Introduce the list, if you are using one, and use short lists. Make sure all the items belong in the list.
- Use whitespace effectively, to increase readability.
- Use closings and signatures so that they always have your contact information.

- Make sure the recipient understands why they are receiving this and what they need to do with it.
- Distinguish between Reply and Reply All options, so that you don't reply to the wrong group of people, if your message is intended only for the sender.
- Edit distribution lists often, so that the appropriate people receive your messages.
- Be careful who you forward a message to.
- Use the BCC line with caution. It's like listening in to a conversation. Make sure they know they are supposed to receive the message and verify that it is appropriate for them to receive it.
- Managing email: Turn off "you've got mail" alarms, reduce email checking interruptions, do not check email when you are on the phone, and get away from your computer if you need to concentrate on something.
- Reduce the amount of email that you send and receive. Don't check your email simply because you are bored. Take yourself off distribution lists and use the phone for discussions.
- Set up separate email boxes for different types of mail, if you need to organize your email. Communicate expectations in your messages, so that people know you will be checking email once a day, etc.
- Ask yourself, do you need to respond? Has the message made you angry? If so, delay sending a response.
- Use out of office response messages to manage lots of email while you are away. Set reply time expectations in the office auto-response so that people know when to expect a response.
- Create an electronic filing system consisting of folders to organize your Inbox better.

- Decide whether or not to save sent messages automatically.
- Free up space by archiving and deleting messages periodically. Make sure you comply with information retention guidelines of your industry.
- Convey a professional image even in the format of your email message.
- Use active language.
- Use plain English rather than inflated language. Say, “As you asked,” instead of “Per your request...”
- Use jargon and tech language sparingly and appropriately.
- Curtail colloquialisms like “head honcho” and try not to use abbreviations.
- Use gender neutral language.
- Understand that your messages can sometimes end up in a court of law! Email is permanent.
- Understand that, legally, your organization owns your email.
- Controlling the message content: Ask, “What's the main point, what information should I include, and how should I organize the information?”

The Tips in this guide have been compiled from “E-Mail: A Write It Well Guide-- How to Write and Manage E-Mail in the Workplace (Paperback)”

by Janis Fisher Chan