

Women's Professional Network of Rowan University: Email Tips

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In general

1. Even if it's just to say "OK" or "Got it," acknowledge your emails quickly. And try to send an official reply within 24 hours.
2. Always use a subject line.
3. Email may serve as documentation. That can be good . . . or not so good.
4. Know the protocol of your organization. Are personal emails allowed? Are emails routinely read or screened?
5. If you don't want your name and address associated with a particular subject, don't send or receive an email related to that subject.
6. Don't sign up for or send spam.
7. Always address an individual with his or her correct position/title. And if you have a doubt about the spelling of his or her name, look it up. Just because you are emailing, don't assume you are on a first name basis if you don't know the person.
8. Keep your emails short (no longer than two screens).
9. Use Mixed Letter Cases. Don't use all caps, as they are perceived as "shouting."
10. Spell check — electronically and with your own eyes!
11. Open any attachments prior to sending. This ensures that you've attached something and it's the right attachment.

Did I really do that?

12. Don't be stupid. Don't blast the boss, a colleague or your organization. And don't write anything you wouldn't want your parent or kid to see.
13. Write as though you expect the email to be circulated beyond the person to whom you sent it.
14. Don't CC the world, which can be annoying and/or perceived as going over someone's head.
15. Be judicious in your use of the BCC. Make sure you are not replying to or forwarding an email with a BCC and inadvertently copying someone you really don't want to include on the address list.
16. Many people are very informal in their electronic communiqués. But you're a professional and want to be perceived as such. If you are writing a business email, it should reflect that. Use proper grammar, punctuation and sentence structure. Write in complete sentences. (Adjust accordingly, depending on the comfort level you have with the person to whom you are addressing the email.) With the penchant for forwarding emails, you never know where that "Can you believe what he did?" is going to end up.
17. Avoid marks such as :), :P and :o. Emoticons can be an issue; be cautious with their use. Some people find them juvenile or too informal. Others feel they are necessary to help clarify an email, which doesn't allow recipients to pick up on body language or other cues beyond the written word. In business, use them with caution and only with people you know won't perceive them as unprofessional.
18. Related to that: Make sure you reread your email before you send it, as the tone is very important. Sometimes the words that you choose can make you come across as angry or critical. You may want to first read your email out loud if it is an important one.
19. Slang is not professional.
20. Cursing is never appropriate.

21. Make sure that you don't "over" email a contact. Give the person sufficient time to respond (usually at least 48 hours) before you start sending multiple emails. Otherwise, you could come off as unprofessional.
22. After hitting "Reply," take out the name of the person to whom you are replying. That forces you to re-read and edit without accidentally hitting "Send" and then regretting it. When you're all set, put the person's name back in the "To" field, and hit "Reply" with no regrets.
23. Never send an email in a moment of passion — whatever that passion may be and no matter how justified you feel in your sentiments. Write the email to vent your concerns/frustrations/convictions, but then save it as a draft and come back to it later when your emotions have cooled off. Then you can make a calmer judgment about sending it, revising it or hitting "Delete."
24. Don't write email after 9 p.m. (or whenever your mental energy is low) — except for very routine responses.
25. When hitting "Reply All" always make sure you actually read and know exactly who is going to receive the email. Don't assume it's the same old recipients. You might have to tailor your language or content.
26. If you're unsure about an important email and have a trusted colleague who could read it and provide feedback, ask him or her to do so.
27. Be extremely careful when forwarding e-mails to not include everyone under the "To" list. Not everyone wants his or her e-mail addresses shared. It's always safest to blind carbon people. Also, regarding forwarding e-mails — be very careful that the person who sent you the original e-mail is OK with you forwarding his or her exactly worded e-mail to others. Another forwarding tip — if you're passing along a joke or a recipe or anything like that, delete all the prior forwards, so the recipient doesn't have to open the e-mail so many times.

Take a minute

28. If you are using the email to praise someone, copy his or her boss. It's an easy way to pat someone on the back.

Remember your housekeeping

29. E-mail is designed to keep you up to date on current events. It is not a storage tool. Once you get to 100 e-mails in your "In Box," you need to start cleaning. When you get to 200, you really need to make time for some housekeeping. If you reach 300, shut your door until you get it done!
30. Sort e-mail by subject when you need to clean up. This way you get the whole picture before you start responding.

Did we say this enough?

31. When in doubt, reread, reread, reread.

Contributions to this list of email tips also came from Rohrer College of Business professors and instructors Lori Block, Sandy Gubbine, Jen Gushue, Dan McFarland, Bob Scarpa, Stephanie Weidman and others and from Cicely Enright of ASTM International, West Conshohocken, Pa.; Jackie Pantaliano, of ImPRessions, Voorhees; and Tobi Schwartz Cassell of The Word Source, LLC, and Girlfriendz Magazine, Cherry Hill.