

9 Tips for Professional Email Communication

Communicating via email in the professional world can be tricky. Unlike in-person communication, email leaves much open for misinterpretation. Here are few tips to help you better navigate professional emails:

1. Limit recipients to need-to-know only.

Only send emails to people who need to be in the loop. Double-check the recipients to make sure that only people who need to be included are listed and remove all others. Also, hit "Reply To All" only if everyone on the list needs to receive your reply; otherwise, simply "Reply" to the original sender.

2. Subject line: Use It!

Include a brief, key word/phrase subject in the subject line of the email. When possible, limit each email to one main issue/topic; if you have multiple things to discuss, consider sending multiple emails.

3. Be concise.

Avoid excessive wordiness in emails. Be concise and to the point...but still be polite (see below). Use paragraphs to separate thoughts. Use numbering or bullets/etc. to help highlight key points or when listing things. It is perfectly fine to use CAPS or **bolding** to help highlight important key terms/phrases; however, avoid using all caps so that people do not feel as though you are shouting at them. Finally, use punctuation.

4. Include a formal salutation and use Mr/Ms/Mrs/Dr, unless you are on a first name basis with the recipient: "Hello, Mr. Smith"

5. Begin with a pleasantry (when appropriate), and then **clearly state the purpose** of your email: "It was a pleasure to speak with you today. I am writing to follow up on your request for information on our new product line."

6. Be polite.

This can be the most challenging part of communicating via email. We want to be concise and to the point, but we don't want to come off as harsh, either. So, how do we do that? Here are some tips for politeness in professional email:

- Soften tone:
 - Harsh: "I need the details by Friday or we'll lose the deal."
 - Softer & politer: "Thanks for all the effort your team put into this project. Could you please get me the final details by Friday so that we have adequate time to close the deal?"
- Use the "sandwich method" when giving negative criticism/information:
 - Start with something good
 - "Your team did an excellent job preparing the presentation for today's meeting."
 - Then give negative criticism/information
 - "For the next meeting, could you please include the spreadsheets in the packet so our Board members can easily flip through them?"
 - End with something good
 - "Thanks again to you and your team for your hard work."
- Read your email out loud before you send it. This can help you gauge the overall tone.

7. Make requests clear and explicit—Explicitly tell the recipients what you need from them.

8. Proofread—Before you send, proofread! Typos often come across as unprofessional and may send unwanted messages about you and your organization.

9. When angry, click "SAVE" (not "send")!

Or better yet, type and save your message in a Word document. Then come back after you've had a chance to calm down, read and edit your message, and then copy/paste into an email to send. If you choose to type a message directly into email while your emotions are running high, do yourself a favor and click "SAVE" rather than send. Once it's out there, you can't take it back.