

Tips for Professional Writing and Email Etiquette

Writing tips

1. Be as clear as possible.

- Use shorter sentences and break up blocks of text
- Focus on just the info the receiver needs
- Avoid sarcasm and humor that might not come across in text
- Read your email out loud before you send it, and listen for parts that are confusing

2. Be direct when you need something from the other person

- Put the main question or task in the subject line of the email
- Bold or highlight tasks or action items in the email
- If your message is time-sensitive, say so
 - “Please let me know by...”

3. Be sure to check details

- Use spell check to catch spelling and grammar mistakes
- If you’re attaching a file, make sure it’s the correct file and version
 - Mention the attachment in the email, so the person knows what you sent
- Check that you’re spelling people’s names correctly.
 - Don’t assume nicknames (Robert may not go by Bob.)

Grammar tips

There, they’re, their

- There: Refers to a location. Has “here” in it.
- They’re: Means “they are.”
- Their: Shows possession/ownership.

It’s and Its

- It’s: Means “it is” or “it has”
- Its: Shows possession/ownership (like hers, his, theirs)

You’re and Your

- You’re: Means “you are.”
- Your: Shows possession/ownership.

To, two, too

- To: Shows a relation between words. Usually comes before a noun or verb.
- Two: The number 2.
- Too: Means the same as “also” or used to describe something that is excessive (“too much”).

Email formatting

The subject line

- Briefly describe what your email is about
- Small adjustments can go a long way
 - Instead of “Quote question,” try: “Question about [Customer] quote”
- If you have a main question you’re asking in the email, consider putting the question directly in the subject line.

The greeting

Formal or casual? Depends on how well you know the person.

- Co-workers can be more casual
 - Hi,
 - Hey,
- Someone you don’t know well should be more formal
 - Hello,
 - Good morning,
- When emailing a group of people:
 - Hi team,
 - Hi everyone,

The closing

- Formal or casual depends on your relationship to the person
- Examples:
 - Best regards,
 - Thank you,
 - Thanks,
 - I’m looking forward to hearing from you.
 - Thank you for your time.
 - Have a great day!
 - Have a great weekend!

Timely responses

When to respond depends on the people you work with and the email topics.

General guidelines:

- Immediately – The email is about an urgent issue
- Within a day – Not urgent but the person needs something from you (answer a question, complete a task)
- Within a week – Email has a specific task or question for you but no specific deadline

Note: If an email asks you to do something that will take some time, it’s common courtesy to respond to the person within a day to let them know you’re working on their request.

If you aren’t responding to an email right after you read it, mark it so you remember to come back to it. In Outlook, you can flag or color code emails. You could also organize folders for follow-ups or add reminders to your calendar.