

Ten tips for writing excellent emails

1. At work, only send an email to someone if it is going to help them. It should either contain useful information or actions they need to perform.
2. Stop and think what you want to make happen as a result of sending this email. Is it for action or information? What do you want the recipient to do? It may have been obvious to you, but was it to them?
3. Would the other person know what your email was about – just from reading the subject line? Summarise what you want in the subject line e.g. “Please return this survey by 10 May [action]” or “Sales figures for 2nd quarter [info]”
4. With your goal up front, the reader will see it in their preview window (if they have it turned on). In any case you avoid the possibility of “Oh, I didn’t read to the bottom of the email” syndrome.
5. People like “please” and “thank you.” Even if it’s not important to you, remember a lot of people like emails to start with a salutation. Start with a greeting and match the style and tone of their reply.
6. Some people have to download over a modem: sending big attachments will take them a long time.

Perhaps they have a hand-held computer – and cannot access the attachment.

7. Nobody reacts badly to correct spelling, but some people do react very negatively to mistakes. This interferes with them taking in your message. Use your spell-check and read the message again before you send.
8. Choose a legible font and colour: black Arial 10 point (11 is better) is recommended. Keep sentences short and paragraphs to about four lines maximum. Leave a blank line between paragraphs.
9. Was the whole message relevant to them? If it was a reply, did it have a lengthy history, most of which they didn’t need?
10. Have you made any assumptions about the information the recipient has? Double-check they have all the information they need to understand your message.

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