Writing Effective, Professional Emails

Within the last few decades, email has become a popular mode of communication in schools, workplaces, and for personal use. During your lifetime, you'll likely write thousands of emails. Depending on your audience and purpose, you'll want your emails to be professional. Below are tips for you to use when writing emails to your instructors, bosses, and for other professional settings.

1. **Use an informative subject line.** This helps the recipient know what to expect to find in the email's content. For example, I could use the subject line: Helpful Tips for Writing an Email for the content of this handout. Also, if you don't include a subject line, the recipient may accidentally delete your email out of fear of a virus or other malicious content.

2. **Make sure the recipient knows who you are.** If you are emailing someone for the first time, especially someone you've never met, it's a good idea to introduce yourself in the first line of your email: "I am enrolled in your English Composition course this upcoming semester." This provides the recipient with enough context to know how to respond to your email.

3. **Keep messages short and focused.** Think about the tl;dr comment you see online sometimes. When reading online or email messages, readers like short messages with short paragraphs. Get to the point quickly and conclude quickly.

4. **Try to include only one major topic per email.** This builds off of the third tip: If you stick to only one topic, then your emails are less likely to be overly long. Short emails with only one topic are more likely to be read and responded to.

5. **Put requests near the beginning of the email.** This goes along with the third tip: If the main point of your email is a request, then get to the point quickly. For example, "I hope your day is going well so far. Please send last week's report. Thanks!

6. **Keep attachments to a minimum**. Now that Google Drive, Dropbox, and other cloud services exist, there's really no reason to clog up someone's inbox with attachments. Use your best judgement when considering sending attachments.

7. **Avoid abbreviations and emojis in formal emails**. When emailing an instructor or your boss, it's unprofessional to use abbreviations (e.g. BTW) or emojis (e.g.☺), especially when you're first getting acquainted with the recipient. However, if the recipient is informal in his/her emails to you, then it is probably fine to be equally informal.

8. **Above all, always be respectful and courteous.** Remember: You want the recipient to respond favorably to you and your message, especially if you are asking for a favor or making a request. Being respectful and courteous goes a long way in getting on the recipient's good side. There's no guarantee you'll get exactly the results you're hoping for, but being disrespectful and discourteous guarantees you won't get what you want.

9. **Don't write anything in an email that you would regret seeing on the front page of the newspaper.** Be careful of the message you write and what it conveys about you.

10. **Be careful with your tone.** An email should read as though the writer is calm and professional. Be sure the tone you convey is the one you want your recipient to read.

11. **Never write anything in an email you wouldn't say in person.** If you can't say it to the person's face, don't email it.

12. **Don't use all caps.** It looks like shouting.

13. **Never send an email when you are angry.** If you're angry, it'll be hard for you to control your tone. Give yourself time to cool off, collect your thoughts, and then respond calmly and professionally.[i]

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[i] Adapted from Feldman, Robert S. "Writing Effective E-Mail Messages." "Chapter Seven: Technology and Information Competency." *POWER: Learning and Your Life: Essentials of Student Success.* McGraw Hill, 2011. pp. 165-166.