

Communicate Virtually Anything

Communications solutions for virtually any organizational challenge

8 Tips on Writing Better Business Emails

With all of the email you've already read, written, deleted and forwarded you should already be an expert; here are 8 tips on writing better business emails that might actually get you there.

1. Know who you are writing to

You might not know everyone on the distribution list, but you should have a feel for how the people receiving your mail will react to what you are writing. Is the mail going out of the country? If so, don't use slang or contractions and keep the form most structured and formal. Is the mail heading both up and down the organization chart? Cut out the extra chatter and the make sure you are sending out a mail that you are proud to carry your name.

2. Give your mail a great subject line

You get a ton of mail during the day. Some from people you work with that you might not know. Some that you know all too well. How do you choose what mail you are going to read first, or not read at all, or file away. You take a look at the subject line. So when you write your mail, think about that and take the time to write a great subject line. If you have a question about the weight of a freight car, don't make the subject "A Question." Make the subject line what the mail is really about, sort of like "A Question About the Weight of a Freight Car." To make sure you handle the line correctly, you might want to write the subject line last.

3. Keep the mail on the message

Don't write a mail that meanders. Point it directly at what you are hoping to cover. Now, one of the ways to do that is to look at your subject line and make sure you have covered what you titled the message (OK, this is another way to make sure you stay on point, point 2 notwithstanding). Remember how easy it is to forward a mail so you want to make sure that what you are writing is not something that can come back and bite you later.

4. Re-read it before you hit send

OK. You've finished up the mail and your finger is on the mouse and poised over the Send button. Don't click it just yet. Do everyone a favor (especially yourself) and read your mail now that you've finished it. I know you've spell checked it, but spell check does not solve everything. There are context issues that spell check cannot fix. For those important mails (you know the ones), see if you can set aside the mail for just a bit. Go ahead and get that next cup of coffee. Or take that bio break. Remember that forwarding bit again. Now, don't you want to read it again before you send it?

5. When you have the chance, write a great reply

Just receive a reply to your last email with a few more questions? Your email reply should answer all questions, and pre-empt further questions (the ones especially you didn't think to answer the first time). Miss them again and you start a mail conversation with another mail you'll have to answer. That not only wastes time, it ratchets up the frustration levels on both ends. Even better, keep a step ahead and see if you can answer those questions that weren't asked that you would expect next time.

6. Be respectful of your reader's time

Before you write your mail make sure it makes sense to even do that. What are you trying to do? What are you expecting your readers to do? Now here's a bit of electronic heresy; will a phone call (remember the phone?) handle the situation better and faster? Do you need the audit trail mails provide? Or the ability to cover a detailed issue? I'm not saying, I'm just saying.

7. Remember you are writing a business mail

AWTTW (a word to the wise) the mail you are sending is not the place for texting slang, smilies or emoticons. There is a time and place – and your business mail is neither the time nor the place. You don't want to be the mail that everyone forwards and adds, "Can you believe this?"

8. Make the mail accessible

You don't need giant blocks of text to make your point. When writing mails, short sentences are your friend. They help you more easily deliver your message. The shorter sentences also make it easier for the people reading your mail on their mobile devices.