WRITING FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES: ELEMENTS OF EMAIL ETIQUETTE

GABRIELA DUMBRAVĂ, ADRIANA KORONKA *

ABSTRACT: Starting from the premise that electronic mail has experienced an explosive development throughout the world over the past few years, gaining substantial territory in the field of business communication, the paper focuses on the basic elements of email etiquette and on their importance in writing an effective and competitive electronic message: adapted to the context and purpose of professional writing.

KEY WORDS: email, etiquette, message, business writing, sender, recipient

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

The electronic mail is a relatively new medium of communication that is experiencing exploding growth around the world. E-mail messages can be sent across different kinds of networks, both locally and globally as, aside from the Internet, there are thousands of local area networks and wide area networks that send messages daily various kinds of transmission cable.

Due to its broadcasting speed, electronic communication is fundamentally different from paper-based communication. The first characteristic that differentiates it from traditional paper-based media is the almost instantaneous response, which brings it closer to oral communication. Therefore, if in a paper document it is absolutely essential to make everything completely clear and unambiguous because your audience may not have a chance to ask for clarification, with email documents, your recipient can ask questions immediately. However, when we write an email message, we should always keep in mind our correspondent and, according to the specific relationship with him/her, adjust our language and tone.

On the other hand, email cannot convey emotions as well as face-to-face or even telephone conversations, because it lacks vocal inflection, gestures, and a shared environment.

* Lecturer, Ph.D. at the University of Petroşani, Romania
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Another difference between email and traditional media is that what the sender sees when composing a message might not look like what the reader sees, as the differences in the software and hardware used for composing, sending, storing, downloading, and reading may determine distortions in the visual qualities of the message.

Because e-mail has become a mainstream form of communication, it is not easy to switch from casual and conversational e-mail to professional e-mail, which is very different from casual electronic messages. Consequently, specialists in the field of business writing unanimously agree upon the following basic rules to be observed when writing or responding to potential employers, co-workers, colleagues, business members, and college staff or personnel:

1. In order to be taken seriously and given more credibility, the email sender should avoid such **common mistakes** as:
   - using emoticons:
   - being too informal:
   - misspellings and poor grammar:
   - no capitalization:
   - spelling words the way they sound.

2. In terms of **content**, the following guidelines are indispensable:
   - always introduce yourself the same way you would in a cover letter;
   - make the reason of your writing obvious in the subject line: *Application for X position*;
   - make sure you change the contact name and content according to the person/company to whom you are sending the message;
   - when responding to an e-mail, include the original message in the reply, so the receiver can put your e-mail into the correct context. Also, respond within two business days;
   - never use all capital letters. Apart from being difficult to read, receivers may think that you are screaming;
   - keep your address simple, and avoid unprofessional sounding names;
   - read your message carefully before you click the send button in order to eliminate any possibility of misinterpretation;
   - have someone else proofread your message before you send it. The printed form also makes it easier to find errors upon review;
   - do not assume that if an employer is informal you should also be;
   - don't just rely on e-mail, which can be lost. Follow-ups can often be done via the telephone or regular mail.

3. Setting the **tone** in email relies on the awareness that how you say something is as important as what you say.

   Therefore, we should keep in mind that tone in e-mail is so important that an inappropriate tone can cause a reader to ignore, delete, or overreact to your message. A versatile writer can write the same thing using a variety of tones, but all business
e-mail writers must be able to control the tone of their writing, so their e-mail messages will have the results they intend.

The simplest definition of tone is “the quality in your writing that reveals your attitude toward your topic and reader”. Tone comes from your choice of words, the structure of your sentences, and the order of the information you present. As electronic communication is indirect, the temptation to express thoughts we would never say to an interlocutor in face-to-face conversation is sometimes dangerous. Equally dangerous is the tendency of most e-mail writers to review only the content of their messages overlooking the tone, and ignoring the obvious fact that the wrong tone can damage a business partnership, as well as the progress of a company project.

Consequently, reference books on business communication basically focus on five ways of setting the right tone in email writing. The best advice in setting the tone for your business e-mail is to write in a tone that is closest to the way you would speak to your reader in person. These following steps will support the writing of e-mail in a courteous and professional tone:

a. **Keep cool and use words carefully.** For many reasons, it's never appropriate to lose control in e-mail:
- email is easily forwarded so the recipient can share it with lots of readers;
- if you use an angry tone in e-mail your reader will probably answer in anger. While the tone escalates, the work is delayed and you make an enemy of a colleague or client;
- remember that your employer owns your e-mail. Therefore, keep in mind that what you are writing is not private and avoid using a tone you'd be uncomfortable sharing with your boss.

It is very important to remember that well-chosen words create a personal, professional tone in e-mail. You can't rely on emoticons. Rely on words to set the tone in your e-mail because they carry meaning to all readers, some of whom may not understand emoticons or abbreviations.

b. **Choose an appropriate greeting and closing.** The greeting in your e-mail establishes your relationship to your reader. Most writers of business e-mail begin their messages with *Hi* or *Hello* followed by the recipient's first name: *Hello, Fred*. Some writers begin the message with the first name only. *Dear* is still an acceptable greeting in e-mail, not merely a vestige of old fashioned print culture.

If writing an e-mail message to a group, use the group name in the greeting. Don't begin your message with *Hi, guys* or *Everybody*. Though these extremely casual greetings may sound friendly, it is actually just vague. Try *Dear Leadership Team* or *Hello, Interns*, as a more specific greeting sets a focused tone to the message.

Always write a closing for your message. Beside making it easier for your reader to find the end of the message, the closing reinforces the tone and serves as a final reminder of the main point or requested outcome. Try an action-oriented closing such as *I'll call you on Tuesday to schedule the meeting*, or choose a gracious closing such as *Thanks for your help*, or *I look forward to meeting you*. 
c. **Use Personal Pronouns.** In order to make your e-mail writing personal, address your reader directly, by using the pronoun you. Write: *You may use the Executive Health Club on weekends,* rather than: *Employees may use the Executive Health Club on weekends.*

Use the pronouns *I* and *we* when referring to yourself or your organization. Write: *I discovered that our mailroom clerks were throwing away most of the promotional fliers,* rather than: *It was discovered that most of the promotional fliers were being thrown away.* Choose: *Because you used the product incorrectly we will not refund your money,* instead of: *Mannheim Manufacturing cannot refund your money because the product was used incorrectly.*

d. **Write in the active voice.** Active voice makes your e-mail tone clearer and more direct. When you write in the active voice your e-mail tone won't sound bureaucratic the way passive voice does. Write in the active voice: *We will gladly provide funding and materials just as soon as the foundation accepts your proposal,* rather than: *Funding and materials will be provided promptly when the proposal has been accepted.*

e. **Order information to maintain a professional tone.** The beginning of an e-mail message sets the tone and emphasizes the content of the message. Set a direct tone by communicating the most important information first. Even when the main point of the message is bad news, you must begin with it. Burying the bad news in the middle or end of the message is harmful, as readers may miss it or misinterpret its importance.

We all know that the volume of e-mail we answer each day makes it difficult to write each message thoughtfully with the correct tone but, if we want our messages to achieve our goals, we must set the tone in e-mail just as we do when we speak.

Writing competitive email is essential for the development of any business but, at the same time, it is also quite difficult, having in view that what you say and how you say it matters even more than in print communication. Therefore, your misspellings and unorganized messages will call your competence into question, being very easily interpreted as disregard for customer service or business partnership.

Thus, in order to be able to observe the basic rules of business email writing and to follow the five steps that ensure an efficient business, you first need to plan your writing carefully, and then, after the message is drafted, to give it an appropriate layout.

**REFERENCES:**

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