

## A Guide to Writing Effective Email Messages

Most of us haven't been trained to write email messages, but our jobs now rely on our email communication skills more than ever before.

Emailing in English is probably a little different from the language you studied in school and read in the press. An email written in English is closer to the way we speak than it is to newspapers or textbooks.

Use your time effectively: a poorly written email usually requires additional correspondence to clarify and correct what should have been clearly communicated the first time around.

Here are some features to keep in mind:

- Arrange your paragraphs from most important to least important.
- Keep paragraphs short.
- Keep sentences short.
- Make sure your intent is clear; begin with the conclusion, and then explain.
  - o For replies, give your answer in the first sentence and then explain your reasoning.
  - o For requests, tell the reader straight out what you want; this saves everyone time.
  - o If you have a question, ask it right away.

The goal is to be friendly, professional and straightforward.

### **Plan Your Message**

Organize your ideas and structure your text logically and clearly. This will help you stay focused and relevant, and ultimately save you time when writing.

## Email Structure

When you don't know the first name of every email recipient, or there are too many to list, use a collective name, such as "Dear Team Members," or "Dear Colleagues,"  
Another option is to use "Dear All,"

1. **Subject** – The email subject line should clearly and briefly indicate the subject matter.
2. **Greeting** – Start the message with a greeting to help create a friendly but businesslike tone. Use the person's first name ("Dear John,") or their title along with their last name ("Dear Ms. Smith,").
3. **Purpose** – The first paragraph should include a more detailed, even clearer indication of the subject than the short subject line. Give the full details in the following paragraph(s). Make sure the final paragraph indicates what should happen next.

### **Announcements, such as:**

I am writing with regard to...

This is just to tell you...

Thank you for your e-mail...

I am writing to confirm...

4. **Action** – Any action that you want the reader to take should be clearly described, using polite phrases such as "Could you please..." or "I'd be grateful if..."

### **Use Positive, Diplomatic Words**

Use words with a positive rather than a negative focus:

"issue" or "matter" (instead of "problem")

"inconvenience" / "challenging" (rather than "difficulty" or "difficult")

"misunderstanding" (rather than "argument")

"sensitive" (to describe an issue you'd rather not discuss)

"unfortunate" or "disappointing" (rather than "bad")

**Goodwill Closings:**

I will keep you informed.  
If I can assist you further, please let me know.  
I look forward to hearing from you soon.  
Please let me know if there's anything else I can help you with.  
If you'd like to discuss the project in detail, please phone me at...  
If you need more information, feel free to contact me at...  
I am always available to provide additional information.  
Please get back to me with any questions or comments you may have.  
I look forward to seeing you.

5. **Endings** – End the message politely. Common endings are:  
“Yours sincerely,”; “ Best regards,”; “Best wishes,”; “Regards,”

**How to Write Those in More Senior Positions**

You need to be careful to sound polite and diplomatic when writing to people in a “higher” position than you, such as your boss or a client. Make sure you use correct verb forms to avoid sounding too direct.

**Some Tips for Writing Politely:**

1. Make a suggestion rather than a statement. “We should commission a report” becomes “Perhaps we could commission a report.”
2. Make a request rather than a demand. “We need to discuss my salary” becomes “Would it be possible to discuss my salary?” “I would like you to sign this letter” becomes “Could you sign this letter?”
3. Involve the other person, rather than focusing on your own needs. “We need to meet the suppliers” becomes “Do you think we should/could meet the suppliers?” Or “It might be useful to meet the suppliers.”

**Thank You Emails:**

The difference between a spoken and a written thank-you is that the words that come out of your mouth usually don’t leave a trace, whereas printed words hang around for as long as the data remains.

## Model Letters:

### Summary of a Conference Call

Dear Zara, Norm and Carla,  
The April 18, 2018 conference call on... (subject) included (participants).  
We agreed to the following:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Let me know if I can supply additional information.  
Best regards,

### Notice of a Meeting

Dear Derek and Margie,  
I'm setting up a meeting at 10:00 a.m. on Feb. 3, 2018, at (location) to discuss our new product...  
We will be reviewing and evaluating the performance of...  
Please confirm, and be in touch with your questions and concerns.

YES: February 3, 2018      NO: February 3, 2018
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### Confirmation of an Oral Agreement

Dear Don,  
This is to confirm my understanding of our conversation on Sept. 8, 2017...  
Details...

<p>In busy offices, important information is as likely to be exchanged in an elevator as in a conference room. Don't make the mistake of thinking your interlocutors will remember your conversation. You may forget the details too.</p> <p>In informal business jargon, this strategy is called "Cover Your Ass" or "CYA."</p>
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### Away from My Desk

Hello,  
I will be out of the office on Tuesday, March 27<sup>th</sup>. [No need to write the year]  
I will respond to your email upon my return. If you have any questions or concerns that require immediate attention, please contact (name) at (email address).

A common mistake that people make is pressing the send button without first doing a quick edit and spell-check.

**When to Call Instead of Write:**

- When you need to communicate how you feel.
- When you need to break bad news before sending the email.
- When you've been emailing back and forth with someone without coming to an understanding.

**Examples of Holiday, Congratulatory or Sympathetic Greetings:**

Dear John,

I hope you and your family are enjoying the holiday season...or: I hope you and your family are enjoying the holidays...

Dear John,

Congratulations on your recent promotion. I'm sure it was well-deserved.

Dear John,

I was sorry to hear the sad news of your grandmother's passing, and wanted you to know that I'm thinking of you and your family...

**Identify the Best:**

Save copies of some of the best-written and most effective emails you receive in a separate file to consult for future use.

(Holiday greetings, condolences, personal congratulations, etc)