



# Center for Writing and Speaking

**A NO. 12 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES**

## Style Guide for Emails

*Communication is about ninety percent body language, eight percent tone of voice, and two percent content. With email you can't rely on the first 98 percent—we can't depend on email readers to interpret our subtleties or tone either. It's best to spell it out, politely, especially if the readers are possible employers, professors or people you want to impress. Here are some tips.*

### **Write a clear subject line.**

It's the first thing people read. If you want to ask a question to a company about a job offer you saw in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, don't write "Question," or "Job Offer." Try to give as much information as you can, for example: "Inquiry about receptionist job ad in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution."

### **Use greetings and closings.**

"Dear," "Sincerely," etc. If you are writing to someone you are not familiar with, use a title — Mr. or Ms.—unless you know of another title such as Dr. or Professor. If you do not know the gender or title of the recipient you can use their first and last name. If the person identifies as gender non-binary Mx. can be used as a title.

### **Use formal writing as a default.**

With employers, teachers, or people in authority, you generally want to stick to a more formal writing style. To be safe, treat your emails like business letters you'd send through snail mail. Remember to use conventional English. Keep your message focused, but make sure to be polite. Say "Please" and "Thank you." Don't just ask for what you want and press "Send."

### **Make it easy to read.**

Reading from a computer screen is a lot more difficult than reading from a sheet of paper. Use a short paragraph per idea, and insert blank lines between each paragraph. When making points, consider using bullets to make them easier to follow. Don't WRITE IN ALL CAPS, or all lower case, or use strings of exclamation marks!!!!!! Also, since your email will be one of the heap of emails people receive daily, keep it short.

### **Proofread!**

Keep in mind that spell check doesn't catch everything. Be careful about your language —what may seem subtly humorous to you may seem insulting to others. Remember: tone is really difficult to convey through email. If you are trying to make a good first impression, read the message over several times to make sure the grammar and spelling are correct and that the message sounds appropriate. Once you hit the send button, you won't have another chance. Emails are often forwarded to many readers. You don't want to become infamous for your errors!

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