

## **Effective Email**

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### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this presentation is to teach you how to use email effectively in your professional and personal life. Email is a powerful and efficient tool for communicating with people around the world, very quickly. Email can send text, pictures, video, and can include attachments that include any type of file. It is therefore a powerful tool for both students and researchers.

You probably already know a lot about email. This presentation will help you use it more effectively. All members of the Interactive Measurement Group are expected to use these techniques in their interactions with other lab members.

### **Reading Your Email**

1. Read your email daily. You check your phone for messages every day when you get home, and so you should check for emails at least once a day as well. Many people check their email several times throughout the day. It is relatively common to receive urgent emails that require a timely response.
2. Use the Subject Lines to categorize your emails. Deal with all emails on one topic before moving to the next topic. For example, you might deal with all the emails related to your Research Poster, then all the emails related to your English Composition class, then all the emails related to your upcoming family reunion. Unless you are expecting a very important personal email, avoid doing personal emails first. Personal emails tend to be fun and can take up a lot of time. First get your work done, and then reward yourself by doing your personal emails.
3. Avoid letting emails interrupt your work. Some people keep their email program open all the time they are at the computer, and then reply to emails as they come in. This is okay if you have a lot of spare time. However, if you are busy, this is a bad way to use your time. You will deal with your emails more effectively and more quickly if you handle several related emails all at the same time, and you will do your other work more effectively if you do not allow yourself to be interrupted by emails. Therefore, minimize your email program when you are working on something else. When you have finished what you are working on, open your email, reply to all the emails that are on one topic (your term poster for 498), reply to all the emails that are on another topic (your developmental term paper), etc. When you are finished with your email, minimize or close your email program again so you can work on something else.

### **Avoiding Looking Like Spam**

Many email recipients receive a lot of spam. These messages waste your time, take up valuable space on your account, and can carry viruses. Many people therefore have automatic spam filters that re-route possible spam to another folder, or they simply delete emails that look like spam, from the address and subject line. To avoid creating emails that look like spam

1. Use a sensible email address, rather than an email address that looks like a random collection of letters and numbers. [Barchard@unlv.nevada.edu](mailto:Barchard@unlv.nevada.edu) is a good email address. [K3j5l2d@yahoo.com](mailto:K3j5l2d@yahoo.com) is likely to be interpreted as spam.

2. Use a professional email address for work and school; if you have a fun email address ([jumpingpancakes@yahoo.com](mailto:jumpingpancakes@yahoo.com)), you should reserve this for friends.
3. Use a meaningful subject line. Emails with no subject line are likely to be interpreted as spam by both humans and automatic spam filters, and emails that do not have meaningful subject lines are also likely to be interpreted as spam. Included below is a section discussing effective subject lines in more detail.
4. Personalize your email. Address the recipient by name. Add content in the email that is specific to you and the recipient.

Bad email: Hi there, I got that file you sent me. Thanks!

Good email: Hi dad, I got the pictures of Whonnock Lake. Thanks!

5. If you suspect that someone might not have gotten your email, contact them using another method. If people are using an automatic spam filter, they may not check their spam folder to see if there are any not-spam emails in there. For most students and faculty, you can expect them to read your email within 24 hours and to reply to important or time-limited emails within 3 days. So if you send a time-limited email (about an assignment or appointment, for example) or an important email (about a conference presentation, for example) and you have not heard back within that time, you should resend the email, and if you receive no response contact them using another method. If it is important to know whether or not someone has read your email, you should ask them to send you a confirmation stating they have received your email. This idea is discussed in further detail later on. For emails that are less important or not time-limited, you will need to judge how long it might take the person to respond.

### **Avoiding Missing Important Emails Because of Your Spam Filter**

1. If you use an automatic spam filter, you should check your spam folder occasionally to ensure that all those messages are spam. If you are expecting an email and do not receive it, it is especially important to check your spam folder.
2. Some spam filters allow you to provide a list of approved email addresses. If you use this type of list, make sure that you keep it up to date.

### **Useful Subject Lines**

The subject line is an important part of your email. Think carefully about what your subject line should say. Here are some suggestions

- a. Use the subject line to indicate who you are. If you are emailing someone who may not recognize your email address, you can use the subject line to place your email in context.

Examples

Subject: Psy 210 student (from 210 student to professor)

Subject: Psy 210 quiz 3 question (from 210 student to professor)

WPA conference presentation (from WPA attendee to a presenter)

MSCEIT (from one MSCEIT researcher to another MSCEIT researcher)

- b. Use the subject line to help the reader categorize the content. If you contact the same person about topics that differ in content and importance, it is helpful to provide content information in the title. Imagine that all of the following emails were sent from the same student to the same professor.

Subject: Psy 210 question

Subject: Question about 496 assignment 3

Subject: Problem with data entry file! Help!

Subject: WPA conference registration “procedures”

Subject: Suggestion for lab orientation procedures

- c. Use the subject line to indicate that this email belongs as part of an ongoing conversation. If you have been exchanging a series of emails with someone about a topic, then if your new email is still on that same topic, it should use the same subject line.
- d. Often, the easiest way to find someone’s email address is to reply to an email that they sent. However, if your email is not on the same topic as the email you are replying to, give your email a new subject line that more accurately indicates the topic of your email

### **Who to Send Your Email to and Who to CC**

1. Often we send emails to multiple people. It is important to be clear in your own mind and in your email about who the email is being addressed to. Put the person who you are sending the email to in the TO address line. If you are copying the email to other people so that they know what was said, put their email address in the CC address line. Double check that you have included all of the email addresses you need. It is relatively common to address an email to several people, but to fail to send it to all of them.
3. At the top of your email, greet the recipients of the email by name. This is critical for a reader to know if they are the person the email is addressed to (and so they should respond and act based upon it) or if they are just getting a copy of the email so that they know what is going on.
4. Do not send people emails (or copies of emails) that they do not need.
5. Do send the email (or a copy of the email) to everyone who should know about its contents. For example, when co-authoring a poster, paper, or class assignment, all emails to any group member should be sent to all group members. The only exception would be if you are deliberately trying to have a private conversation, such as when you want to discuss a problem team member, or when you want to discuss personal topics that are unrelated to the group project. When we have in-person conversations, it is often impossible to keep everyone involved in every conversation that occurs between any two team members; but with email it is trivially easy to keep everyone informed. This prevents miscommunications and misunderstandings, and makes the work more efficient.
6. Sometimes we send an email to a group of several people, and we want them all to read and respond to it. In that case, greet each of them by name (Dear John, Steve, and Mary,) or use a greeting that clearly includes them all (Dear Psy 210 students, Dear lab members,). If you are using a group-greeting, use a greeting that includes everyone you are sending the email to, and no one else. For example, do not address the email to “lab members” if it is only going to some lab members.
7. Sometimes we send an email to a random assortment of people we know (friends, family, teachers, etc). This type of email is often sent to tell everyone that your email address (or physical address) has changed, or to tell everyone about a major life event (e.g., marriage, children being born). This is the only time when it is appropriate to use a general greeting (Hi everyone,). Even in such a case, you should never send an email to everyone in your address book – you should individually select the particular people you are sending your email to, to avoid sending inappropriate emails to people you are no longer in contact with.
8. Sometimes we want to send an identical email to several people, but we want each person to take the email seriously. Sometimes these are requests for help, which might take the person a few hours. In Kim's experience, if you send ONE general email to several people, even if

you address each person by name, between 1 and 5% of people will respond and be helpful. Instead, take the time to copy the email as many times as necessary, to send an individually addressed request. In addition, take the time to add one or two sentences that are specific to THAT person, so that they know why you are asking THEM for help. In Kim's experience, 100% of people who know you will respond to requests that come in this form.

### **Protecting Yourself Against Viruses**

1. Do not click on a link in an email unless you are really sure it's safe. The address that is shown on the screen in your email does not have to be the address that you will be taken to, if you click on the link. It is safer to copy the http address by right-clicking the link and selecting "Copy Link Location" and pasting it into the address bar of your browser.
2. Do not open attachments unless you were expecting them. Even if you know the sender, unless you have good reason to believe it's a valid attachment, do not open it.
3. Some email providers allow you to scan an attachment before you open it. For example, Yahoo! Mail does this. When you are expecting an attachment from someone you know, and you believe it is a valid attachment, you should scan it before opening it, if you can. Never open unexpected attachments, even if you scan them. Scanners are always necessarily one step behind the viruses, and so scanning for viruses does not guarantee that an attachment is virus free.
4. Even if the return address says it is from someone you know, it may not be. Many viruses pick email addresses from someone's mailbox, and then send emails that look like they are from those addresses. You are probably more likely to get a virus in an email that claims to be from someone you know than from someone you do not know.
5. If you are not sure if an email, a link, or an attachment is legitimate, email the sender and ask them. Because the attachment might include a virus, it is safer if you do NOT include the suspicious email in your inquiry. Instead, phrase your question carefully so that they know why you are emailing them (to check if an email is legitimate), and can identify the email you are talking about if they really did send it.

### **Judicious Use of Attachments**

1. Do not use an attachment if you do not need to. Attachments take a lot of memory, and so they slow down email programs, hog storage space, and fill up others' email accounts. Some email programs will reject emails that have attachments. Some people will refuse to open attachments and some will even refuse to open emails that have attachments, because of the danger of viruses. Therefore, don't use attachments unless you have to.
2. In your email, specifically state that there is an attachment, and say what is in the attachment. Address the recipient by name. This will help assure the recipient that you really did send the attachment, and it is not a virus.
3. It is relatively common to forget to send an attachment. The email says there is an attachment, but you forget to attach it. To avoid this, always upload an attachment as soon as you have mentioned an attachment is included in the email.
4. It's not a big deal if you forgot to attach the attachment. Just send a second email. Use the same subject in the subject line, but add the word "attachment". Then say something like "Here is the current version of the poster. I forgot to attach it to my email. Let me know if you have any difficulty in downloading or reading the file."

5. If you have a lot of storage space on your email server, you can use email attachments as a way of saving important files. Your email can be accessed from anywhere, which makes it convenient. For example, just before I leave for a conference, I sometimes email myself the PowerPoint slides for the posters I am presenting. If the poster gets lost (or the person who was supposed to bring the poster does not show up), I can get the poster from my email and then re-print it.
6. If you or your recipient do not have a lot of storage space on your email program, do not save emails that have attachments. Instead, put the content of your email in one email, and put the attachment in the NEXT email. In the first email, say “I wanted to talk to you about our poster. In the first paragraph... In the second paragraph... etc. In the next email, I will send you the current version of the poster. Let me know if you have any difficulty in receiving or reading the file.” In the second email say “Here is the current version of the poster. Let me know if you have any difficulty in downloading or reading the file.”

## **Useful Content**

### **History**

1. If your email is a part of an on-going conversation, include the history. Some email programs (e.g., gmail) make it easy for the user to trace the history of a series of email, just from looking at the current email. However, most email programs do not have this function, and so you should not assume that your recipient has (or knows how to use) this function. Always include the history yourself.
2. If your email program does not allow you to include the history of your email conversation, be sure to include enough information in your current email so that the reader knows what you are replying to.  
Bad email: Hi Kim, That time works great for me. See you then.  
Good email: Hi Kim, Yes, I can meet you at 4:30 on Thursday Oct 21 to talk about our class project. See you then.

### **Salutations**

1. Email is a cross between formal written letters and informal spoken conversation. In formal written letters, we use salutations such as “Dear Dr. Smith” at the top of EVERY letter. In informal spoken conversation, we do not repeat the person’s name every time we speak. Therefore, some emails have formal salutations (Dear Dr. Smith), some have informal salutations (Hi there!) and some have no salutation. In every email you send, be aware if you are sending a formal letter or having an informal conversation.
2. If you are initiating a new email (rather than replying to something that the other person sent you), you should ALWAYS include that person’s name in your salutation. This avoids confusion because the recipient might not be sure that you are intending to direct this email to them: if you omit the salutation, you are implying that you are continuing an ongoing conversation.
3. When you are emailing people that you do not know (such as professors whose class you want to take, or who you want to go to graduate school with), use a formal salutation until you are invited to use an informal salutation. For example, use “Dr. Smith” until that person replies and signs their email “Jane”.

## **Clarity**

1. Email is an impoverished communication system: we cannot hear the other person's tone of voice or see their non-verbal gestures and facial expressions. Therefore, word-choice and sentence structure are much more important than in spoken communication. As well, miscommunications are easy and frequent, and if your reader is in a bad mood because they are stressed out, tired, or overworked (which describes a lot of us a lot of the time), they are likely to misinterpret your words in a pessimistic way rather than an optimistic way. Therefore, make sure that your emails are clear.
2. Spell-check your emails before you send them. This improves clarity, and is a part of common courtesy. It shows the reader that you are thinking about them and their experience while they are reading your email.
3. Re-read your emails before you send them. You will catch a lot of your own mistakes, and you will think of ways that you can phrase things more clearly.
4. If there is someone else around who can proof-read your email before you send it, ask them to. For example, all students who have watched Kim send an email will recall that she reads the email out loud while she wrote it, and then asked the other people in the room if they had any suggestions for improvement.

## **Making up for the Loss of Non-verbal Communication**

1. Email communication consists almost entirely of written words. Non-verbal gestures, tone of voice, and facial expressions are all missing. Researchers have estimated that 60% of spoken communication is non-verbal, and when we send emails, we are missing all of that. This creates challenges for being clear and for being friendly. Clarity is important for obvious reasons. Friendliness is important because it helps prevent our recipients from feeling attacked and getting defensive, and is critical to building and maintaining trust. In the absence of friendly non-verbal communication, the statement "I read your paper" is ambiguous. The recipient does not know if we liked the paper or not – which they would know if they were talking to us in person, based upon our tone of voice, posture, facial expression, etc. So, we need to create substitutes for non-verbal communication, when we use email.
2. In face-to-face communication, people often know we are friendly based upon non-verbal communication. In email, we need to add friendliness words to substitute.
3. Begin your email with a friendliness gesture. Before starting the main email discussion, include introductory phrases that either compliment or thank the recipient or wish the recipient well. For example, if you have not communicated with the person for a while, you might start with "I hope you had a good weekend." or "I hope your semester is going well." If you are sending a response email, you might start with something such as, "Thank you for your feedback" or "I enjoyed reading the paper you sent me" or "I enjoyed the class discussion yesterday about ferret social structure". These friendliness gestures add a lot to the positive tone of the email. They are the equivalent of saying "How are you?" at the beginning of a conversation. Even the phrase "How are you?" can be used in an email.
4. You can also end your email with well-wishes. These include phrases such as "Have a great weekend!" and "Good luck with the paper." In general, though, it is more important to include friendliness gestures at the beginning of the email than the end, because they influence how the recipient will interpret the main body of the email.

5. Avoid over-saturating your emails with friendliness gestures. Usually, one sentence at the beginning and one at the end is the most that is needed or desired.
6. Regardless of whether or not you are writing a formal or informal letter, always end your email with a valediction. A valediction is an expression used to say “goodbye” at the end of a letter. Some good valedictions include: Best regards, Sincerely, Have a nice day, etc. Sometimes a friendliness gesture “I hope you have a good weekend” can serve as a valediction as well.
7. Emails also require extra effort to be clear. Because emails consist almost entirely of written words, and because you are not talking to the recipient in real-time, it is more common for there to be misunderstandings. Therefore, it is important that you encourage your recipients to ask you questions. One of the best ways to do this is to indicate you want to help or that you want feedback. Two useful phrases are “Let me know if there is anything else I can do to help” and “Let me know if you have any questions or concerns”. These phrases also make your email seem friendlier, even when the email itself is entirely clear.
8. Finally, it is sometimes useful to add explicit substitutions for non-verbal communication. These come in two forms. The first is an explicit statement of a non-verbal communication signal. Here are some examples. “Your story made me laugh” “<smile>” “I am at a loss for words”. People sometimes use emoticons (such as a smiley face) to indicate emotions. Be careful of these, because these faces do not have universal interpretations. Never use emoticons in professional emails, both because they are informal and because they may be misinterpreted.
9. The second type of substitute for non-verbal communication is an explicit statement of an emotion. People use non-verbal communication to infer emotions, and when non-verbal communication is missing, it is much harder for someone to know what you feel. To avoid ambiguity and confusion, you can explicitly state how you feel. Here are some examples. “I enjoyed reading your paper” “I am sad to hear that the download didn’t work” “I am stressed out because of the deadline” “I am disappointed that you weren’t able to do the work”. If you chose to do this, be careful. In face-to-face communication, people rarely state their emotions explicitly. Therefore, when you state them in an email, the recipient will interpret your emotions as being very strong. When expressing negative emotions, be particularly careful: perhaps chose a milder word than you would when talking face to face.

### **Dates and times**

1. If you are discussing dates, it is useful to give the actual date (March 3) or day (Wednesday), rather than saying yesterday, today, or tomorrow. Your recipient might not read your email on the day that you send it, and words like yesterday, today, tomorrow, and next weekend can become ambiguous.
2. If you are discussing times, it is similarly useful to give precise times. Do not say “right now” or “an hour from now” or “an hour ago”. Instead say “now, at 2pm” or “at 3pm”.

### **Ask for reply**

1. Emails sometimes disappear. Sometimes they start at your computer and your server and they simply never arrive at their intended destination. If the email you are sending is important, ask for a reply. You can say “please email me back to let me know that you got this email” or “let me know what you think of these ideas”. If you do not receive a reply within the expected time-frame, forward your previous email to the person and at the top say

“I’m not sure if you got this email, since I didn’t hear back from you. So I thought I’d send you my email again just to be sure.” For some recipients and some topics, you might be expecting an email back the same day, but for others, you shouldn’t expect to hear back for a couple of weeks. For example, I personally expect emails back the next day from my professional associates and the students I work with regularly, but if the email topic isn’t urgent, I realize it may take them two or three days. But when I am emailing professional who do not know me, I don’t expect a reply for a couple of weeks.

### **How to Set a Meeting**

1. When you are setting meetings by email, every email you send should contain useful scheduling information.
  - Bad email: Hi Jane, I would like to meet to talk about our project. When are you available?
  - Good email: Hi Jane, I would like to meet to talk about our project. The best days for me next week are Tuesday (anytime), Wednesday (anytime), and Thursday (before 2:30). If it fits in your schedule, I’d prefer noon on Thursday, but if that doesn’t work, any of the other times would be fine. What time works best for you?
2. You should be able to schedule a meeting in three emails.
  1. Jane’s first email: available times.
  2. John’s reply email: suggest specific time.
  3. Jane’s reply email: confirm time.
3. To make this work, the first email should include a lot of available times. It can optionally suggest a specific time if you have a time preference. The second email should give one specific time.
4. Finally, do not give approximate times. Do not say "around 10" or "10ish". Give a specific time, so that everyone knows when your meeting is. If everyone concerned is flexible about the time, be very specific about that. Say something like "I will expect you to arrive sometime between 10:00 and 10:30."

## **How to Ask for Help**

1. If you are asking someone to do something, address them by name. Personalize the email to them, so that they know why you are asking them instead of someone else. If you ask for help from several people, send each person a separate, personalized email. Each person should feel like they have been carefully selected based upon their qualifications, and that they are your first choice for someone to help them.

## **Asking Questions**

1. To ensure that the recipient notices your question, you may want to highlight it somehow. You can put it in bold, or a different color, or just put it on a new line.
2. If you ask multiple questions spread throughout your email, the person may reply by only answering the question that comes at the end of your email. Therefore, you need to organize your email in a way that encourages the reader to answer all of your questions. You have two options. You can leave space after each question for the person to insert their answer (i.e., put your questions as the last sentences of each paragraph), or you can summarize your questions again at the end of your email. I often do both.

## **Answering Questions**

1. In your answer, always include the question or use full sentences so that the reader is reminded about what the question was. If you are replying to an email with a series of questions, there are three ways to do organize your reply.
2. First, you can write complete answers to each question in your own email. A complete answer is one that can be read on its own, without the need to re-read the question. Example:  
Question: Can you meet me at 5:00 on Thursday?  
Incomplete answer: Yes (you need to see the question in order to make sense of the answer)  
Complete answer: Yes, I can meet you at 5:00 on Thursday.  
As long as you provide complete answers to each question, this method works well.
3. Second, you can provide incomplete answers. This method does not work well, even if you try to make up for it by numbering your answers to match the numbers of the original questions. When I have received emails like this, I had to re-organize the emails so that the answers came right after the questions. This is a very bad method of answering multiple questions.
4. Third, you can start your email by saying “My replies are giving in CAPS below.” Then scroll through their email and insert your answers after each of their questions. This method works well, because the incomplete answers come after each of the questions. However, if your reply includes more questions, their reply can become cumbersome and difficult to read.

## **Formatting**

1. The recipient of your email usually will not be using the same email program as you do, and the same recipient might access their email through several different programs. Therefore, you need to use formatting that will work in all email programs. The general rule is to keep it simple.
2. Indenting may not work properly. Separate paragraphs with an extra line.
3. Tables may not work properly. I use tabs instead, but I’m not sure if they always look right on the recipients’ computers.

4. It is now possible to make your email look really pretty. You can use pictures or wallpaper as background, fancy scrolling fonts, pictures, and animations. These are not considered professional at this time, and should be avoided in your school and work emails. Judicious use of color is acceptable.

### **Finding a Previous Email**

1. Most email servers will allow you to save old emails. This can be incredibly useful, because it's another way of organizing and saving conversations about work, school, and your personal life.
2. Organize your previous emails in a way that makes sense to you. Usually, this involves creating folders that group your emails by topic. Some recent email programs, however, instead encourage users to organize emails be "threads". A thread is a series of emails where one email is a reply to the previous email, back through time.
3. Many email programs allow you to "flag" a selected email. You can use these flags in any way you want: these might be important emails, or emails that you have not replied to completely, for example.
4. If you cannot find an email by using the previous methods, most email programs have a method of searching your previous emails. The search functions can be very powerful, allowing you to search by recipient, topic, date, or content.

### **Forwarding**

It is often useful to forward an email to another person. This can prevent confusion and ambiguity. Here are some guidelines regarding forwarding.

1. Assume that any email you write will be forwarded to your supervisor, your subordinates, your co-workers, and all your friends. Because it is so easy for someone to forward your email, sometime someone will forward an email that you were not expecting to be forwarded. Therefore, be careful what you say in your emails. Always try to be professional, and do not say unforgivable or embarrassing things, especially regarding people you work with. If some content should be kept confidential, state this explicitly in your email.
2. When you are forwarding someone else's email, consider whether the information (or the specific way they phrased the information) should be considered confidential or private (even if they did not say so). If it is helpful or important to forward someone else's email so that the recipient can see exactly how something was phrased, consider if there is any content in the email that should be deleted. Do not rephrase what someone else wrote (that would be mis-quoting them), but do feel free to delete private information that they would not want shared with others. In some cases, it may be best to rephrase the other person's email, rather than forwarding the email they sent.
3. When you are forwarding someone else's email, be sure that your own email is coherent and understandable without reading the forwarded email, and that your email specifically refers to the forwarded email so that the reader knows they should keep reading after your email ends.

### **Suggestions**

If you have other suggestions about the effective use of email or if you can improve upon any of the suggestions given here, email your suggestions to Kim Barchard at [barchard@unlv.nevada.edu](mailto:barchard@unlv.nevada.edu)