

# E A M E S S E N G E R P

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## Supporting a Healthy Organization

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### Email Etiquette at Work



Most of us start our workday by checking email. We receive and send numerous email messages every day. It's a wonderful tool for conveying information and for gathering input from a team. And yet, as is true for any form of communicating, there are good and not so good ways to engage in email, especially at work.

#### Email as a communication skill

The way we communicate affects our image and chances for success at work. With email, how well we communicate in writing is especially important. Let's say we have a great idea, but can't clearly express what we know. In this case, our idea might not get the consideration it deserves. Or perhaps we can convey an idea but overlook details such as proper

punctuation or spelling. This distracts from our overall message and the impression we hope to make. There is added pressure knowing anything we write in an email could become a permanent record and come back to haunt us.

It's not just the how; it's also what we write and when. Even competent writers make errors. Examples are using email to express strong emotions or to make an inappropriate joke. Some of us are familiar with the temptation to send a well-crafted yet snarky email when we've been slighted. These types of messages, if viewed by the wrong set of eyes, could damage our reputation and even cost us a job.

This article provides some tips for

brushing up on email etiquette in the workplace. After all, when it comes to communication on the job, most of us aren't perfect!

#### Email Faux Pas

For work related email, here are some things to avoid:

- Misspelling, poor punctuation, and grammar
- Overuse of capital letters, exclamation points, question marks, underlining and bold letters
- Use of decorative images or exotic fonts
- Long winded messages of more than a few paragraphs
- Replying to all when you mean to reply to just the sender or when it is unnecessary for all recipients to be included
- Leaving a key player off a message to a team
- Unprofessional language
- Sharing a lot of personal information
- Use of abbreviations commonly used for texting
- Use of email to complain to or about a superior or a coworker

#### The Basics

To project a professional image, we need to put our best foot forward with communication. In general, thoughtfulness and consideration are good rules for email at work. This means taking care with spelling, punctuation and grammar, and

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editing for brevity and meaning before we click “send”. A well-crafted email is thoughtful, brief, and to the point. A good strategy is to let the draft of an important message “age”. Then we can review and edit with fresh eyes before sending it off.

It’s also good to attend to style. We need to consider our audience and adjust wording and tone accordingly. Our tone at work should be cordial and polite, although the degree of formality can differ depending on the person being addressed and the purpose of the message. A message with a request to one’s superior benefits from a formal tone, complete sentences and a polite greeting, whereas a message inviting a co-worker to lunch can be informal, using a few words.

When starting a new conversation in email, we begin with a friendly greeting such as “Good morning” or “Hi” and then end by signing our name with a closing remark. For an ongoing exchange, greetings and closures can be dropped. A thoughtful choice for the subject line helps readers organize and prioritize their messages. Also, as a conversation thread develops, we might want to delete some of the prior messages in order to clear space and make a message easier to read.

### **Considering privacy**

Even when a message is intended for one person, we cannot count on privacy in email. Whatever we write and send can either be intentionally or

thoughtlessly copied and sent to others. Think of the political careers that have been ruined by a message that was supposed to be private! We also want to be careful with personal sharing, sarcasm, jokes or language that might be offensive, and with making critical comments about others. Basically anything we don’t want a third party to



read should probably be left out of an email message at work.

Yet with messages received, good etiquette requires us to check with the sender before copying and forwarding content to others.

Another point is that regular email is not secure and should never be used to share confidential information. If such information needs to be sent by email, it should be encrypted. And, information such as account numbers or passwords should never be shared via email.

### **Timing and other courtesies**

For messages that require a reply, it’s courteous to respond within a reasonable timeframe. Of course what is considered to be reasonable depends on the topic and the culture

of the workplace. It helps to peruse and prioritize messages throughout our workday to identify those which require a quick response.

Attachments should be handled with care. It’s best to hold off sending or opening messages with attachments until we have established a trustworthy

connection. We also want to make sure that the attachments and files we send are a reasonable size and easy to open.

Another courtesy has to do with our behavior on list-serves and group emails. A thoughtful approach is to observe the culture and exchanges on a list serve or email group before we take an active role.

### **EAP CAN HELP WITH COMMUNICATION**

The above tips are offered to help improve communication skills at work. For further help and for specific situations, the EAP is a wonderful resource. A consultation with an EAP counselor can help employees at all levels examine and make improvements to their communication at work. We’re just a phone call away!

## **RESOURCES**

Email Etiquette. Retrieved February 2019 from Purdue Online Writing Lab, [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/academic\\_writing/email\\_etiquette.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/email_etiquette.html)

Whitmore, J. (2016). The do’s and don’ts of Email Etiquette. Retrieved February 2019 from Entrepreneur, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/272780>

## **EAP SERVICES**

EAP is here to help. For more information about articles in this newsletter, or any other EAP-related topic, please call one of our trained counselors at our toll-free number:

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