

E-MAIL-ING GUIDELINES

“Don’t hit send if it may offend”

E-mail is a quick, accessible memo system, but it has its own etiquette and pitfalls
by Carole Kanchier (San Francisco career consultant at “Questers@daretochange.com)

Do you represent yourself or your company to others appropriately via e-mail? Are you courteous? Respectful? Do you present a professional image?

E-mail has made major changes in job-search and business-related communication.

Messages are sent instantly, easily and cheaply. Many powerful people can be contacted directly because they read their own e-mail.

Most company systems enable employees to e-mail everyone. Some have e-mail overload, receiving dozens of messages per day. Others feel hurt, anger, and mistrust after receiving inflammatory mail.

E-mails are essentially notes used for messages of 25 words or less. Since your e-mail represents you or your company to others as well as provides information to other companies and the public, it’s crucial that you portray a professional image.

Do you present a favorable impression?

When you send e-mails, do you:

1. Address the person to whom you’re sending the message by name?
2. Wrote your name at the end?
3. Say thank you?
4. Avoid writing anything that could eventually haunt you?
5. Avoid criticizing anyone?
6. Show the same attention to e-mail communication as other forms such as telephone, letters?
7. Respond quickly and courteously?
8. Send e-mails only to people who need the message?
9. Avoid spreading damaging information?
10. Check e-mail often?
11. Avoid sending complaints?
12. Proofread your message?

Give yourself one point for each “yes”. The higher your score, the more e-mail skills you possess. A score of six or less suggests you could enhance your skills.

Start by reviewing e-mail etiquette basics.

- ☞ Know elements of electronic style. Use only the 26 letters of the alphabet, the numerals 0 to 9, and commonly used punctuation. Don’t use boldface, italics, tabs, underlining or bullets. Your recipient’s system may not understand them. Never type all caps. It’s considered rude, offensive. Caps have the same effect as screaming in regular

conversation. Use caps for emphasis.

👉 Present a professional image. Think before posting. Realize you're making a first impression and leaving a written record. Write simply, clearly, logically. Avoid offensive or confrontational language. Spelling and grammar count. Review and proofread messages before sending. Be precise, brief, focused. E-mail longer than 25 words rarely gets read. Specify your content so that recipients can determine message relevancy. Send an attachment, which represents formal communication, if your message is more than 25 words. Address the person to whom you're sending the message. Also thank her and type your name to communication respect.

👉 Use respectful tone. Lack of interactivity causes misinterpretation of messages. Because there is no body language, voice tone, volume or eye contact, messages may be interpreted differently from writers' intentions. Recipients may feel angry, powerless. Feelings may fester. Although you can't control how another communicates with you, you can control your responses and messages. To minimize misunderstandings, practice reading messages silently, then aloud, emphasizing different words and syllabi. Ask for feedback. Note ways in which messages can be interpreted differently from your intentions. Rewrite to minimize misunderstandings.

👉 Know when not to e-mail. Never criticize or send inflammatory or rude remarks. Avoid sending complaints even though they contain valid points that need to be addressed. Don't respond negatively to inflammatory mail. If you're angry, calm down before posting. Question your assumptions for validity. Contact senders by phone or e-mail to schedule one-on-one meetings in person or over the phone to discuss concerns. Talk to people privately if you want to discuss delicate issues such as advising people of mistakes and when tone is important. Never use e-mail to advise others of sensitive matters such as poor performance, layoffs or firings. Communicate by traditional methods if you're conversing with people who don't use e-mail.

👉 Send e-mail judiciously. Value others' time. Send only relevant messages to key people. Protect yourself. Save important messages. Respect others' privacy.

👉 Check e-mail often. Act on requests. If you'll be out of the office for more than a day, arrange to access your mail. If your e-mail isn't read within a few days, follow up with a phone call. If you get no answer, send another e-mail. Manners matter. E-mail etiquette can have a major impact on your work relationships and career advancement.

Eliot Guidelines for E-mail (material gathered from article in *Vancouver Sun* "Don't hit send if it may offend" E-mail is a quick, accessible memo system, but it has its own etiquette and pitfalls" -by Carole Kanchier (San Francisco career consultant at "Questers@daretochange.com)

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