

e-Mail Etiquette

WHO IS INCLUDED

Think about your audience. What type of involvement would you like them to have? The **TO** field in your e-mail is for direct conversation. The **CC** (Carbon Copy) group gets to hear/see what is going on but isn't necessarily part of the conversation. If you want someone to know what is going on, without the other groups knowing, put them in the **BCC** (Blind Carbon Copy) group.

Picture this:

Joan is having a one-on-one conversation with Peter (TO). Jesse and Pat are standing in the same circle listening, but not participating (CC). Joan is wearing a wiretap device to allow Susan to hear what is being discussed (BCC).



If you want to have your say - Again, remember your audience. Do they all need to hear your reply (**Reply All**) or do you want to keep it private (**Reply**).

MASS MESSAGING

When sending to large groups, that are not members of a listserv, you should always put the e-mail addresses in the BCC field. This prevents unauthorized replying to the group.

THE SUBJECT LINE

The **Subject** field in your message should always pertain to the contents of your message Body. If you want to change the topic start a new conversation. In other words, send a new e-mail with a proper Subject.

PREFIX

Note the prefixes that are attached to some Subject lines. They explain where the message has been. **RE:** means that someone is replying to your previous message or adding you into a conversation they are replying to. **FWD:** means someone has forwarded you an e-mail that was sent to them.

Remember to stick to the subject when replying to or forwarding any message.

THE SPEED OF COMMUNICATION

Typically, your paper mail service delivers once a day, but not on Sundays. E-mail is always moving. You should check it as often as possible. Checking e-mail once a day is not enough. The electronic messaging culture brings with it a need for instant results.

BE SENSATIVE TO THE CASE

We cannot see facial expressions nor can we hear someone's tone of voice in a written document. The reliance on linguistic skills governs our perception of the written message.

Capital letters usually signify a raised tone or anger. Always leaving the **Caps Lock** on is very inappropriate.

Emoticons are acceptable in unofficial documents and in small amounts. Here are some examples:

- :) or :-) is a smiley face
- :(or :-(is a frown
- :o or :-o means surprised
- ;) or ;-) is a wink
- There are many more.

SYNTAX AND COMPOSITION

When speaking of a Web site or page make sure you use a proper Uniform Resource Locator (URL).

Check to make sure it works

before sending it to someone. A proper URL looks something like this: <http://faa.appstate.edu/>.

A wise man once spoke about the dangers of sending a poorly thought out message:

"Don't write anything in an e-mail you wouldn't want to see posted on a billboard."

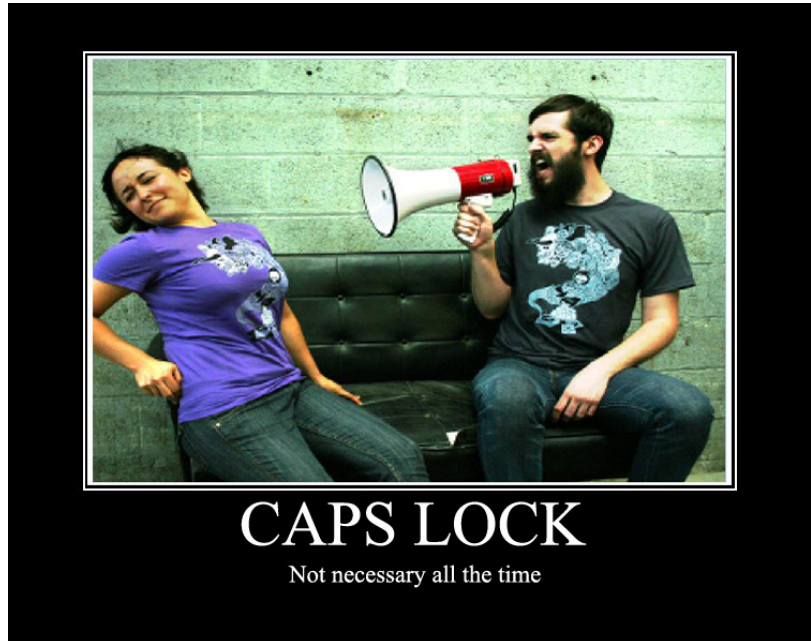
–Max Kanagy

Do not let your emotions get the best of you. Once you hit **Send** there is no going back. Check and recheck your message. Are you getting your message across in your desired tone? Do not assume your audience knows what you are thinking – tell them.

Are you attaching a file to your message – tell them you meant to do this. Otherwise they might think it is a virus.

INFORMATION IS KEY

It can be difficult to recall a verbal conversation. Just as it can be difficult to recall a written one. When replying to an e-mail conversation you should always reference the original text. The **Reply-To** function does this by default. You should not turn off this feature.



People like to know with whom they are dealing. More than just their first name. Every e-mail application has the option to add an automatic **signature** to each message. Once you setup this option you only need to change it if your contact information changes.

Some e-mail programs give you the ability to attach a **Vcard** to every message. A vcard is a virtual business card. It contains the information normally put on a paper business card. Think of it as the next generation of e-mail signatures. Vcards make it easy for someone to add all your information to their address book with minimal clicking.

If you have the option for both a signature and a Vcard you should use both.

SIZE MATTERS

E-mail messages take up very little storage space, unless they have an attached file. Most e-mail service providers allot a maximum storage capacity measured in either megabytes (MB) or gigabytes (GB). Basic e-mail messages, without an **attachment**, take up around 10 kilobytes (KB). Get ready for some math.

The typical storage capacity of today's e-mail account averages at around 3.0 GB. That means you can have 3221225472 bytes of data or over 320000 e-mail messages without attachments. On the other hand, once you put some photo attachments in there things change drastically. A 5.0 megapixel digital camera, at a maximum quality setting, will yield a photo file around 4 MB in size. That means that you can have about 800 photos in your e-mail before you stop receiving messages.

Yes, that is what happens when you reach your quote – you stop getting messages until you clean some out. Just deleting messages isn't enough. You should be aware that all your e-mail folders count towards your quota, including your trash/recycle/deleted folder. You need to empty your discard folder(s) periodically.

SPEAKING OF ORGANIZATION

There are several things wrong with having 14,000 messages in your inbox. First of all it will dramatically slow down your e-mail software. Secondly, it makes it hard to give attention to the messages that really matter.

Separate your e-mails by category. Create yourself a **folder** structure.

Create some **filters** to help automatically sort your messages. These can be set to run automatically or at will.

Use color **tags** to sort by importance, work-related, personal, and so on.

THE GOLDEN RULE

Do to others what you would like to be done to you. This applies even to e-mail. Learn from others' mistakes. If you see something you like in an e-mail you get incorporate it into your style. Find something you dislike – do not repeat the mistake.