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Do you ever get an email in your inbox and wonder what the sender was thinking when they hit send? (Or *if* they were thinking...) Email is an amazing tool when used correctly. However, it is also one of the biggest time wasters in most companies. Are you using email effectively or are you guilty of sending bad emails? Yet, when were you or anyone at your company *taught* how to write better emails? Chances are, there aren't any email standards or training at your company. Instead, everyone is left to work in a free-for-all of email chaos.

Don't Abuse the Email

There are many good uses for email. It allows near-instant communication across organizations and long distances. As well, it permits workers to time-shift their schedules and hours.

However, just as email can be used for productivity, email can also be abused. For example, the other day I received an urgent email. The message inside read, "We need an immediate solution to this problem." This was a time-sensitive matter and the author was expecting action within minutes, not hours or days. Yet, sending an email was probably not the most prudent communication method under those circumstances.

In this case, the author got lucky. Even though I check my email only a couple of times a day, I happened to catch this email a short time after it arrived. Otherwise, it would have sat unnoticed for quite some time. Why was this a bad email? If immediate action was required, this person should have picked up the phone and called.

Not all emails are bad, some are just written that way.

Here are 7 Bad Emails You Need to Avoid Sending:

1. **The Urgent Email** – Email is the new snail mail. People are not sitting at their desks awaiting your messages. If something is truly urgent, email is not the medium you should be using. Call, text, tweet, or anything more immediate.

2. **The Reply All** – Everyone does not need to see your “Thank You” to the original sender. When thanking someone, “Reply” directly to that individual. Otherwise, 57 people suddenly end up with 57 “Thank You” emails cluttering their inboxes. (True Story: I have seen a Fortune 20 company have to shut down their email due to a company-wide “Reply All” message run amok.)
3. **The Email to Too Many People** – Avoid sending emails to more than 2–3 people. Copying the whole gang only creates confusion and clutters inboxes. Only send emails to the individuals that directly need the information. Avoid using CC, and never use BCC (ever!).
4. **The Email to No One** – I recently received an email addressed to 8 people. The message said, “Can someone please make sure this gets done?” Yet, the email did not say which person should take the action. In essence, it was addressed to no one and everyone at the same time. As you can guess, everyone assumed that someone else was going to do the task, and it didn’t get done at all.
5. **The Spam Email** – People can find enough random stuff to surf on the Internet, they don’t need your topics, as well. Passing along random articles, gossip, and websites only clutters up others’ inboxes.
6. **The Conversation Email** – If your email message cannot be conveyed in less than half a page, then it probably shouldn’t be an email. It is probably better handled as a direct conversation. As well, if your email is going to require more than 2–3 back-and-forth responses, it is better to talk to the person than play email Ping-Pong.
7. **The Bad News Email** – Never deliver criticism via email. Never. Ever. Never. Bad news should always be delivered in person, not in a bad email. Even constructive criticism can easily be taken out of context or be misunderstood.
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Email Dos and Don’ts

Despite its reputation, email isn’t all bad. In fact, it can be a very productive tool when used correctly.

The following tips can help you write better emails, get better responses, and create less frustration with your co-workers.

21 Dos and Don’ts to Improve Your Email Communication:

1. **Do Keep Your Emails Short** – Effective emails shouldn't be more than a few lines long. Use 5 lines as a good guideline. If you find yourself writing an essay, it should probably be a separate document or report.
2. **Don't Reply-All to say Thanks to 1 Person** – If you want to thank 1 person, you don't need to copy 33 other people on the email.
3. **Don't Use BCC** – There is no *real* use for the BCC field. Really, there isn't. Either publicly copy someone on email or don't include them.
4. **Do Write your Emails Backwards** – To improve responses to your emails, lead with the question or call-to-action as the *first line* in your email.
5. **Don't Copy the Entire Universe** – Copying more people won't get your message read more. In fact, it actually becomes counter-productive because if you are always copying extra people, they will stop reading your emails in general.
6. **Don't Knock Twice** – Don't email someone and then walk down the hall and say, "I just sent you an email." Pick one channel of communication.
7. **Don't Play Email Ping-Pong** – Avoid the back-and-forth email conversation. If you have to reply more than twice, you should probably pick up the phone and call the individual. Email is not a good medium for conversations.
8. **Don't Use Silly Fonts or Colors** – Writing your message in fancy fonts just makes it unreadable. Colored fonts are just as bad. Keep it simple.
9. **DON'T USE ALL CAPS** – NO ONE WANTS TO BE YELLED AT IN ALL CAPS. DON'T WRITE YOUR EMAILS IN ALL CAPS.
10. **Do Lose the Signature** – You don't need a long and drawn out signature with images, social share icons, and your favorite quote. If you must have one, keep it simply your contact info and nothing more.
11. **Don't Send Criticism via Email** – Praising via email is good. (Although in person is better.) However, sending negative information can easily be mis-interpreted by the recipient. Even constructive comments can be misunderstood as flame mail.
12. **Don't Broadcast Your Location** – No one needs to know where you are writing your email *from*. You don't look cool by having "Sent from my Smartphone" or sent from my iPad. Remove these silly messages from your emails.

13. **Don't Send Time Sensitive Info** – Email is the new snail mail. It is not instantaneous. Don't expect immediate responses to your messages. In fact, you should give recipients at least a day to address your message. If you need a quicker answer, use a quicker communication method. (Text, phone, etc.)
14. **Don't Shuffle Your Work** – Email has become the modern version of “paper pushing.” Don't simply forward your work to others via email.
15. **Don't Copy Yourself on Messages** – You get enough email. Seriously. You don't need to copy yourself on messages. Ever.
16. **Do Archive Those Messages** – The average email user has thousands of emails rotting in their inbox. These only clutter your email and impede your productivity. Get older messages out of your inbox and into an archive.
17. **But, Don't File Them** – The average email user has 37 folders they try to sort their email into when filing. This is a waste of time and effort. Archive your email into a common folder and in the *off case* you need to find a message again, Google-search your email.
18. **Don't Send Large Attachments** – Blasting someone with an inbox (and mobile) crushing attachment isn't cool. If you are sending large documents or video, send a link for download instead of the actual file.
19. **Do Work Your Email from the Top** – Process your email inbox starting with the newest message. This may seem counter-intuitive, but you can save yourself much time and effort. Often, newer messages will have already addressed the inquiries of older messages.
20. **Do Use Other Communication Channels** – Don't get stuck in an email only communication world. Use other methods such as text messages, phone, and even in person. (Many newer technologies like Slack can replace your team email entirely.)
21. **Don't (Ever) Send Flame Mail** – Never ever send an email in anger. Hit “Delete” instead of “Send.” Before you send that Flame Mail, ask yourself, “Would I be embarrassed if this message was made public?” It just might... *you never know.*

Use Email for Good

Email can be an effective communication method and a huge timesaver in many situations. However, email can also be abused and end up creating communication confusion. Most problems are better solved by speaking to someone directly rather than blasting off an email volley. And if something is

truly urgent, reach out and touch someone instead of sending an email into their inbox. Use email for good, and resist sending those bad emails.

Email doesn't have to be bad. Use these 21 tips and guidelines to improve your emails. Not only will you write more effective emails, but your co-workers will thank you. (But, hopefully not with a "Reply-All.")