



# UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

Newark, New Jersey

**What exactly is e-mail etiquette?**  
 Using technology to communicate with

- knowledge
- understanding
- and courtesy.

## Before You Hit “SEND”...

### Your E-Mail is You!

E-mail is so common today that few of us really give much thought to how we present ourselves when we send cyber messages. That represents a major change from the approach to business communication just a few short years ago.



In the past, business people took pains to make sure every document produced was letter perfect, with flawless spelling and punctuation. To do less was to invite the recipient to think poorly of the writer. We have gone away from being thoughtful in the way we compose our communications. E-mail is seen as a form of informal communication that doesn't worry about style, nouns, verbs, and objects. We need to get back to thinking “This is business,” and that everything we put in e-mail is a reflection of us as professionals in the workplace and a reflection on our organization.

When it comes to e-mails, you don't have the tone of your voice to assist you – so those who receive your written message will read tone into your words and the formatting (caps, bold, underline) you use.

If you are ever unsure of your tone, or if you are emotional or simply frustrated as you type an e-mail, step away from the computer and take a deep breath. Then go back, reread your e-mail out loud and see if you would like someone to speak to you in that manner.

### QUOTE:

*“There are four ways, and only four ways, in which we have contact with the world. We are evaluated and classified by these four contacts: what we do, how we look, what we say, and how we say it.”*

- Dale Carnegie (1888 -1955) American Educator

TOOK KIT

E-MAIL ETIQUETTE

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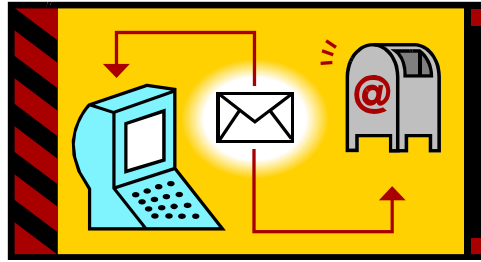
## The Basics: Creating E-Mails

With every e-mail you have the opportunity to communicate with clarity. The onus is on you as the author to ensure that the intent and tone you wish to relay is what comes across to those you e-mail. And, with every e-mail you also run the risk of being misunderstood or giving a less than positive impression by not paying attention to detail.

Follow these four Essential Elements to ensure you minimize possible negative perceptions and misunderstandings:

1. **The Subject Line** – Most people are inundated with e-mail. Treat them with courtesy by crafting a subject line for your e-mail that briefly describes the message. A short, well thought out subject is helpful to the recipient and may ensure your e-mail gets opened. A line like “Good News on Assignment’s Progress” or “Action Needed by 3 p.m.” is more likely to result in an e-mail being opened than a line like “Status Report” or “Update.” Keeping your subject to five to seven words that accurately identify the topic and context of your e-mail is important. You will also want to modify the subject field in on-going conversations to reflect when the direction or topic of the conversation has changed.

2. **The Greeting** - Without a greeting at the beginning of your e-mail, you risk being viewed as bossy or terse. While acceptable in a correspondence with a friend or close relative you e-mail regularly, the no-greeting approach makes you look



much too informal in the business setting and may even give your recipient the sense you’re really too busy to show some respect. Take the time to include a “Hello,” or “Hi” and the recipient’s name. How you type your contact’s name (John, Mr. Doe) indicates the level of formality your e-mail will portray. Let the other side dictate the level of formality and follow their lead. After all, formality is just another form of courtesy. You can usually get an indication of how those you communicate with prefer to be addressed by how they sign off their e-mails.

3. **The Body** – Taking the time to communicate with clarity is time well spent. Complete, correctly structured and capitalized sentences that reflect proper grammar and punctuation are crucial to your message. Be concise with your words; be as detailed as you can in as few words as possible. If possible, try to keep your message all on one screen, which is about 25 lines or less – that forces you to be concise. Get to the point in the first sentence: readers will absorb your message more readily if you avoid dragging your feet in your opening lines.

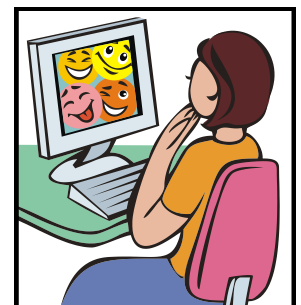
Inject some air into your message by providing some white space – this is known as “chunking.” The addition of a clean line between paragraph breaks provides needed white space

and prevents readers from being repelled by a gigantic block of characters. How often do you receive e-mails that serve up a single, monolithic block of copy? Not a line of white space. Not a bullet. Not even a paragraph break from one thought to the next. How tempted are you to wade into that jungle?

Also, keep in mind that typing in all small case or all caps may lead to misperceptions and/or misinterpretations. (With all lower case letters, you give your recipients the impression you think you’re poet e.e. cummings, or that they just aren’t important enough for you to tap the shift key a few times. Remain in upper case, and it appears you’re constantly SHOUTING, AND QUITE POSSIBLY ANGRY!)

Review and spell-check every message before clicking Send – the extra time it takes is well worth it.

4. **The Closing** – Whether it is “Thank you for your time,” “Sincerely,” “Look forward to hearing from you,” or “Warm Regards,” use what is consistent with the tone and objective of your message. By not including a proper closing, you increase the possibility that your e-mail will be perceived as demanding or curt. Without exception, close by including your name at the end to put that final considerate touch to your e-mails.



**Email Example Version 1**

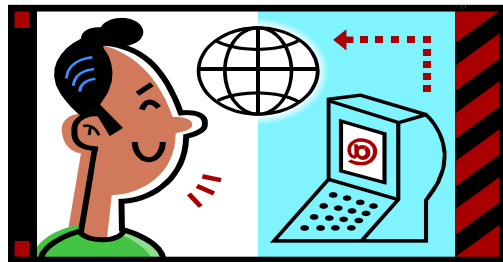
From: Ed Smith

To: Tom Jones

Subject: Internship

Hi Doc! Your class has been a blast – especially the easy tests! Can you find me an internship at the hospital this summer? I'd love to hang there with you! Ed

*Hmmm, will Ed get this internship?*

**Email Example Version 2**

From: Ed Smith

To: Tom Jones

Subject: Internship at hospital this summer

Dear Professor Jones,

I've enjoyed your class this semester. I especially appreciated your fair tests.

Can you help me find an internship at the hospital this summer? I would truly enjoy the opportunity to work beside you there.

Sincerely,

Ed Smith

*Okay, this is more like it!*

Make the effort to integrate the Essential Elements in every e-mail you send and you will contribute to the perception that you are tech savvy, courteous, and a pleasure to communicate with.

**Handling Rude E-Mails**

Rude e-mailers are people who do not take the time to communicate carefully with the written word by integrating courtesy and clarity. People who compose rude e-mails simply do not realize the power of their words and the tone they are setting.

What do you do when you are the recipient of an e-mail with an accusatory or rude tone?

Here are some thoughts:

- When you receive an e-mail that is blatantly rude or obnoxious and is not based in fact, decide whether there is any constructive reason to respond. If the tone is so bad that you feel your blood pressure rise, wait until the next morning at the very least to even think about if you need to respond. Don't allow yourself to respond in kind to this type of e-mail. Hold yourself to a higher level. There are times when choosing not to respond is the best tactic.
- If someone is rude because they are misinformed or made a mistake in interpretation or just have a wrong assumption, "kill" them with kindness by giving them the benefit of the doubt. They probably do not realize how they are being perceived regarding their lack of e-mail skills nor do they expect you to take them at their word. Here's a tip: *know what you mean when you type it.*
- Refuse to engage in a "flame war." What is a "flame" or specifically, what does it mean to be flamed? To be flamed means that you've sent an e-mail to a person that has caused that person to respond in a rude manner. It's basically a verbal attack in electronic form. How do you respond to a flame? See the two suggestions above. There are times when picking up the phone or having a face-to-face conversation to clarify the intent of the e-mail and resolve any misunderstandings is best.



**Remember:** On-line, ignorance is not bliss and perception is the only reality!



## **E-Mail Etiquette Resolutions**

1. I will refrain from using bold, all caps, or red text to reflect emphasis in my e-mail's tone. Instead, I will choose my words carefully to reflect my intent and meaning.
2. I will start every e-mail with a nice greeting and sign off with a closing and my name. One sentence e-mails without these efforts are perceived as demanding, terse, and/or rude.
3. I will continually work on my writing and communication skills so that my e-mails are not misunderstood or disregarded. Lack of spell checking, grammar, and proper sentence structure reflects a lack of education or concern about being taken seriously.

**Take the quiz: “Test Your E-Mail Etiquette Knowledge!” on this website at:**

[www.netmanners.com/email-etiquette-quiz.html](http://www.netmanners.com/email-etiquette-quiz.html)

### **Websites to Visit**

[www.iwillfollow.com/emailetiquette.html](http://www.iwillfollow.com/emailetiquette.html)

<http://emailreplies.com>

[www.netmanners.com](http://www.netmanners.com)



### **References**

[E-Mail Etiquette Made Easy!](#) By Judith Kallos

[Email, The Manual,](#) by Jeffrey Steele

**Contact Us at:  
Human Resources,  
Training &  
Organizational  
Development**