1. **Keep email communications** [**concise and focused**](http://www.emailreplies.com/#1concise) **on the topic**

Email is meant to be a quick medium and often requires a different kind of writing than letters. Wherever possible avoid sending lengthy emails. If a person receives an email that looks like a dissertation, chances are that they will not even attempt to read it. Keep messages brief and to the point. Make your most important point first, then provide detail if necessary. Make it clear at the beginning of the message why you are writing. There is nothing worse for the recipient than having to wade through a long message to get to the point. If a lengthy email is sent, it is much less likely that the person will act on what is sent or respond to it. It’s just too much work and the email often gets set aside. There is a Five (5) Sentence rule that is sometimes used. The suggestion simply states that all email responses should be 5 sentences or less.

1. [**Use a meaningful subject**](http://www.emailreplies.com/#22subject) **that will let the recipient(s) know what the email is about.**

Use a descriptive subject line that's no more than four to five words. Avoid important and urgent. These can be overused and people become desensitized over time. Try to use a subject that is meaningful to the recipient as well as yourself. For instance, when you send an email requesting information about a project, it is better to mention the actual name of the project, e.g. 'Project AXZ Status Request' than to just say 'project information' in the subject.

1. **Avoid attaching large or unnecessary files to your email.**

Think about it before attaching that large presentation or graphic loaded document to your email. This is particularly important when sending to a broad audience. How many copies of that 4MB presentation did you just send to all of IT? For attachments greater than 2 MB, look for alternative methods to make the information available. Secure mail, SharePoint or “Shared file servers” are all good alternatives for making large files available within the organization. Making content available online comes with the added advantage of allowing people ongoing access the latest version of the document as opposed to emailing the 7th version. ZIP large files when it is necessary to attach to an email.

1. **Use optimized signatures and avoid wallpaper or unnecessary graphics.**

Our FA signatures already include company appropriate Logos and “Best places to work” graphics. It is fun to add that Halloween picture of Freddy or Jason chasing an IT person but these images are often large. Multiply that by the number of recipients and we are adding significant overhead to our combined email traffic. Give this some thought before enhancing our emails with large images or elaborate wallpaper backgrounds.

1. **Avoid requesting multiple items from different recipients in the same email.**

Avoid discussing multiple subjects in a single message. If you need to discuss more than one subject, send multiple e-mails. This makes it easy to scan subject lines later to find the message you need. This practice also contributes to briefer e-mail messages and a greater likelihood of a response. As a rule of thumb, the more people you send an email to, the less likely any single person will respond to it or perform any action that you requested. Understand the difference between “To” and “CC.” The people you include in the “To” field should be the people you expect to read and respond to the message. The “CC” field should be used sparingly. You should only CC people who have a need to stay in the know.

1. [**Do not overuse Reply All**](http://www.emailreplies.com/#12replytoall)**.**

Think twice before hitting “Reply all”. Ask yourself, "Do all these other people really need to hear my response?" If not, reply only to the original writer. How many times have hundreds of us been copied on a response to “What is your shirt size?” Not only can this be annoying but, add the graphic loaded signatures and … well you get the picture. Your default response should be to reply only to the sender. Before you reply to everyone, make sure that everyone needs to know. Similarly, we can all be proactive and pay attention to the scope of your audience when starting an email thread.

1. **Always use** [**proper spelling, grammar & punctuation**](http://www.emailreplies.com/#3grammar)**.**

We should take our correspondence seriously. It reflects on us. If we misspell words, use bad grammar or punctuation, then it reflects negatively on us and the company. Lapses in grammar or punctuation can be forgiven but misspelled words are just too easy to correct. Use your spell-checker. Make sure yours is turned on. Be very careful when using un-common names as spell checker has been known to suggest inappropriate alternatives. Look at the suggestion before accepting.

1. **Proof read e-mails before sending.**

This practice of rereading an email prior to sending will avoid a number of potential issues related to poor grammar and miscommunication. Our fingers have difficulty keeping up with our thought process. It is not unusual to omit a word or two as we hurry to transcribe a thought. [Read and re-read sensitive or difficult emails before sending.](http://www.emailreplies.com/#11read) Matter of fact, email should not be the only medium used to communicate these difficult messages.

1. **Be careful** [**with the use of abbreviations and emoticons**](http://www.emailreplies.com/#13abbreviations) **in emails.**

Emoticons are not always appropriate for formal communications. That smiley face at the end of a sensitive statement does not always diffuse the situation and can sometimes be misconstrued. When using abbreviations ensure that your audience speaks the language of your acronyms. A good practice is to use the fully qualified name with a reference to the acronym in brackets for the first reference. The acronym by itself would be appropriate for subsequent references within the same email communication.

1. **Beware of the tone of an email**

Unlike face-to-face meetings or phone calls, those who read your e-mail messages don’t have the benefit of our pitch, tone, inflection, or other non-verbal cues. As a result, we need to be careful about our tone. Sarcasm is especially dangerous. If something gets “lost in translation,” you risk offending the other party. Stick to the facts. If we have a concern about how an email will be interpreted, it is probably a good idea to proactively use a more tactile from of supplemental communication. Avoid writing emails in all CAPITALS or all lowercase.

1. **Beware of the appropriateness of your email.**

[Emails should never contain libelous, defamatory, offensive, racist or obscene remarks](http://www.emailreplies.com/#offensive).

1. **Respond within a reasonable timeframe.**

It is good practice to respond within 1 business day. Apart from informational communications, our customers and colleagues send us e-mails because they wish to receive a timely response. If the email is complicated, or you require more time, let the sender know you're reviewing the email and when you'll get back to that person. This will put the senders mind at rest and most customers will then be very patient once their expectations are set. When responding, a[nswer all questions wherever possible to pre-empt further questions](http://www.emailreplies.com/#2answer).

1. [**Do not copy a message or attachment without permission**](http://www.emailreplies.com/#20copy)

Do not copy a message or attachment belonging to another user without permission of the originator. If you do not ask permission first, you might be infringing on copyright laws or sharing confidential information.

1. [**Do not use email to discuss confidential information**](http://www.emailreplies.com/#21confidential)

Sending an email is like sending a postcard. If you don't want your email to be displayed on a bulletin board, don't send it. Never make any libelous, sexist or racially discriminating comments in emails. Remember, email is not private. Don't put anything in email that you wouldn't "want the whole world to know about."

1. [**Don't forward virus hoaxes and chain letters**](http://www.emailreplies.com/#hoax)

If you receive an email message warning you of a new unstoppable virus that will immediately delete everything from your computer, this is most probably a hoax. By forwarding hoaxes you use valuable bandwidth and sometimes hoaxes contain viruses themselves. The same goes for chain letters that promise incredible riches or ask your help for a charitable cause. Even if the content seems to be bona fide, the senders are usually not. Since it is impossible to find out whether a chain letter is real or not, the best place for it is the recycle bin. [Don't reply to spam](http://www.emailreplies.com/#spam).

1. **Don’t use email as an excuse to avoid personal contact.**

Don't forget the value of face-to-face or voice-to-voice communication. E-mail communication isn't appropriate when sending potentially confusing or emotional messages. Think of the times you've heard someone in the office indignantly say, "Well, I sent you an e-mail." If you have a sensitive issue that warrants healthy interactive communication, speak with that person directly. Don't use e-mail to avoid an uncomfortable situation or to cover up a mistake.

1. **Don’t reply in anger or when emotions are high.**

You should never ever fire off an e-mail in anger. These reactive communications almost never serve their purpose or your long-term interests. They burn up relationships faster than just about anything you can do. Sometimes it is good to write the message and sit on it for at least a day. Usually a day or two after you didn’t send an angry e-mail, you’ll be happy that you exercised restraint.

1. **Email is not the best medium for criticism.**

Don’t use e-mail to criticize others. E-mail is a terrific way to commend someone or praise them. It is not an appropriate medium for criticism. Chances are, you will simply offend the other person, and they will miss your point. These kinds of conversations are usually better handled face-to-face or, if necessary, over the phone. Avoid using email to criticize a third party. E-mail messages live forever and are usually shared. Performance Management issues will require formal communication and documentation. Email will be an appropriate way to accomplish that but should always be a complement to a direct conversation and not on an email with a broad audience.

1. **Avoid sending** [**request delivery and read receipts**](http://www.emailreplies.com/#18receipts)**.**

This can be annoying to the recipient and most people ignore or block this feature. If you need confirmation that your email has been received, request that in the email.

1. **Avoid asking to** [**recall a message.**](http://www.emailreplies.com/#19recall)

Once an email is sent it is probably already reviewed by the recipients. Sending a recall request more often may prompt recipients to ensure they read the email before allowing the recall. Better practice is to send a correction or retraction email and the recall can still be sent if deemed necessary. Suggestion number 8 will go a long way to avoiding having to recall or correct an email.