



How to Structure Your E-mail

E-mail is the preferred mode of communication in the business world because it is convenient and inexpensive. Of the three routes of communication—letters, memos, and e-mails—emails are the least formal; however, when you send an e-mail, you should maintain a professional decorum and follow the rules for workplace writing.

1. Overview:

- A. E-mail functions as a means to communicate both inside and outside of your company. E-mails serve as a medium to share files, to exchange information, to facilitate discussions, to collect and disseminate information, and to work on collaborative projects. In addition, e-mails serve as a means to send business letters, contracts, memos, proposals, reports, and a multitude of types of business documents. E-mails should be brief, to the point, and clear.
- B. Creating an e-mail follows the same writing process as writing a letter. Plan what you are going to write, research any information that you may need, organize the content, write your first draft, revise, redraft, edit, and then complete the final draft. Before sending, proofread one more time.

2. Components:

- A. Heading—The heading contains the recipient’s e-mail address, your e-mail address, any other recipients to whom you are sending a courtesy copy, and the subject line.
 - I. To: Address your recipient (double check to make sure you have the correct e-mail addresses)
 - II. CC: People you are courtesy copying
 - III. Subject: Always include the subject on the subject line (use the subject line so your recipient will immediately know the topic)
 - IV. Attach any and all documents before you begin your e-mail to avoid sending an email without the attachment
- B. Salutation—You should always use a salutation that is appropriate for your audience. If you are sending the e-mail as part of your business practice, do not start with an informal salutation.
 - I. When your e-mail functions as a traditional letter, use the standard business letter salutation—“Dear Mr. Jones:” or “Dear Dr. Smith:”—and follow with a colon
 - II. When you are sending the e-mail to individuals inside your company and with whom you are in daily contact and consider to be friendly co-workers, you may write “Dear Sam:” or “Dear Colleagues:”—but make sure you follow the salutation with a colon
 - III. When you are writing to a co-worker to whom you send many messages, you can begin with “John Smith,” and follow with a comma. But, again, you must be careful to foster the professional relationship
- C. Content—E-mails are favored as a means for communication because they are brief—usually one to two small paragraphs. The first paragraph is similar to an introductory paragraph of a letter and is where you put your purpose of the e-mail.
 - I. The introduction paragraph has only one purpose—to give the reason for the e-mail



- II. The body paragraphs contain the support information
- III. In each of the body paragraphs, be brief and specific
- IV. For longer e-mails, you can break the information into blocks that can be divided under headings and subheadings
- V. Alert your audience to any attachments
- VI. Double space between each paragraph
- D. Closing—In the closing, you should practice good etiquette by thanking your recipient and signing your full name.
 - I. End with a note of gratitude
 - II. Provide follow-up information such as a phone number
 - III. Sign with your full name
- E. Signatures—signatures are created to provide your name, title, company name, address, e-mail, and phone number.
 - I. Keep line length to 60 or fewer characters
 - II. Test your signature block before using it in a real e-mail
 - III. Use white space between the text and your signature block
 - IV. Avoid using quotations, aphorisms, pop culture quotes, religious quotes, political quotes, or poetic quotes, and avoid supporting racism or sexism by having a questionable quote connected to your name

Why Protect Your Signature: In business practice, you are going to be sending and receiving e-mails from a multitude of people from a variety of religions, political affiliations, and cultures that are different from what you may be professing. If you offend someone, you run the risk of losing him or her as a client. Likewise, if the person you offend is in your office, you run the risk of facing legal ramifications that could cost your company thousands, even millions, of dollars. Keep your business persona free from any quote or symbol that might offend someone.