



# tipsheet

September 2006

## Effective Emailing

Email is fast becoming the primary means of communicating with our friends, colleagues, and bosses. However, while traditional writing and grammar rules still apply, this new medium also requires some shifts in communication styles. Understanding composition, tone, and clarity are critical to writing effective email messages.

### Tips for writing efficient, effective emails:

**1. Be Concise.** The same rule applies to email as to all business communication: say exactly what you mean in as few words as possible. This guideline is especially important given the sheer volume of emails most people receive daily.

- Use brief but descriptive subject lines. Instead of "Spreadsheet," try "Dec. 2005 Sales Spreadsheet—Version 2."
- State your purpose and any critical details in the first paragraph. Any background information should follow.
- Keep paragraphs short with blank lines between them to aid in readability.
- Use bullet points and numbered lists to organize and emphasize information.
- Highlight specific questions you have by setting them apart from the rest of the paragraph or by bolding the font.

**2. Watch Your Tone.** The most difficult thing to convey in email is emotion. Without tone of voice, the writer's intent can often be misunderstood. You can, however, convey tone through the use of punctuation, formatting, and word choice.

- Use words such as "please" and "thank you" to avoid sounding rude or abrupt.
- Avoid overuse of punctuation and emoticons. Too many exclamation points are distracting and decrease their effectiveness.
- Consider using an "em" dash (achieved by typing two short dashes with no spaces before, after, or in between) to emphasize what comes next. Example: At today's meeting, please be prepared to present the sales data—including data from this month.
- Convey importance by using words such as *especially*, *particularly*, *most importantly*, and *above all*.
- Do not type in ALL CAPS – it can be seen as yelling.
- Read your message several times before sending to ensure you come across as friendly and approachable.

**3. Be professional.** The speed with which we can converse via email gives it an conversational feel, tempting some writers to do away with traditional rules and niceties of written communication. Some tips for remaining professional while emailing:

- Use appropriate salutations. Unless you are already on a first-name basis with your recipient, always address the person as Mr., Ms., Mrs. or Dr.
- Avoid abbreviations. They make you look lazy and unprofessional, and if the recipient doesn't know you, they have the potential to cause miscommunication.
- Use spell check! Always read through your message before you hit send to ensure you have not left out words or used incorrect grammar.

*The consultants at the Business Communication Center proudly bring you these Tipsheets.*

*From resumes and cover letters to presentations and PowerPoint slide design, the Business Communication Center can help you with all your communication needs. Stop by and visit us in McColl 3127, or visit our [Website](#) for more information.*