



How to Get Better at Email

There are no universal rules- and rarely organizational ones- to guide our use of email. Yet we all approach emails with our own, often unexpressed expectations about how email *should* be done. It is important to understand that other people feel equally strongly about how they think email should be done. Below are some tips to help make email communication easier and more effective.

- ❖ **Be focused-** Many open emails as they come in either on our phones or on our computers. These constant interruptions prevent us from focusing on our work, disrupting that ever elusive flow that gives us space to do our best thinking and ultimately our best work. Instead, make time in your schedule to go through emails all at once, so you can focus and make sure you are responding effectively.
- ❖ **Be clear-** Very often, we create more emails for ourselves by not being clear particularly about our expectations to response times or even whether a response is needed. It is helpful to be clear about the expectation around responding to an email. Articulate it and remind people of it as you do with any other policy or expectation.
- ❖ **Be organized-** One strategy that has helped me a lot is to go through my emails each day, marking which should be spam, unsubscribing from those I am able to and only keeping those that need some action. Otherwise, they are deleted or moved into an appropriate folder. I also do my best to make emails as short and clear as possible, often using bulleted lists, highlights and underlines when helpful.
- ❖ **Be intentional-** It has become a running joke that most meetings can be emails. It is also true that many emails can be phone calls. Or a drop by someone's desk. Before sending an email, think about if it is necessary. This includes scheduling. Consider getting a scheduling tool like Doodle, Calendly or Acuity, or internally, a way to view other people's availability instead of the inbox-clogging method of, "How about Tuesday?" "Nope, Tuesday's no good for me. How about Thursday?" Ad infinitum.
- ❖ **Be flexible-** Like with all communication, different people have different preferences. Some people include a greeting and a goodbye in every email. Other people get right to the point. Although it may seem that there is a right or wrong way to go about this, it really comes down to preference. As a leader, you want to accommodate the needs of those you lead, so pay attention to how they communicate and adjust accordingly to improve your communication.

Email may one day go by the wayside. We can all do a better job of making it a little less cumbersome and a little more efficient each and every time we open that inbox. Hopefully over time that task will feel a little less daunting and a little more purposeful as a means to the end you are trying to reach.