



Better Email

Posted on [October 24, 2011](#) by [Robert Grede](#)

To: Reader

cc: Mom

Subject: Email Communication Made Simple (and Professional)

Reader –

In the era of the telephone, the glib talker reigned supreme.

That was then. Today, clear, succinct, readable email is the preferred way to correspond with clients too distant for face-to-face meetings, or too busy to take your telephone call. Email can request information, make a recommendation, or serve as an inexpensive marketing tool. Written well, it can set you apart from your colleagues. And your competition.

Here are a few simple guidelines for communicating effectively via email.

1. Use the “Subject” like a headline

The “Subject” of your email should serve as a headline. Draw in your reader. Identify the benefit of reading your communiqué.

Research shows that five times as many people read the Subject line as read the entire email. Sixty percent delete the message without ever reading it! And those figures don't include spam.

2. Get to the point

At Leo Burnett, we began all our memos with “This” as in “This recommends ...” or “This requests information regarding...” or “This responds to your request...”. “This” has always been appropriate for more formal correspondence. The same principle applies to email. Tell your recipient the purpose of your email up front. Don't put your examples first. Don't digress.

The best advice I ever received: when finished writing a memo or email: try putting the last sentence first and see if that doesn't vastly improve the flow.

It often does.

3. Make it interesting

Convey your message in such a way as to make the reader want to read it. Your opening statement should compel the reader to read line two; line two should compel the reader to read line three, and so on.

Sometimes, when you need to have a long sentence to explain some complicated thing or another, follow it with a short sentence. Like this.

Write as if you are talking to the person next to you. And forget about complete sentences. Remember the way your high school English teacher taught you? With a subject and a predicate? People don't talk that way. You don't need to write that way either.

4. No more than one page

John Smale, former president of Procter & Gamble, once dictated: "Keep all memos to one page. If you can't say it in one page, you haven't clearly thought out your message."

We live in a world of sound bites. We have become so busy (or perhaps so lazy), we prefer not to engage the down arrow on our keyboards. So get to the point quickly. State your issue. Close. If you need more than one page to state your case, make it an attachment.

5. It's not who you send it to, it's who you copy

Imagine your colleague just sent you an email complimenting you upon your creativity and hard work on a particular project. And he copied your boss and your boss's boss.

Or you just outlined a new service training program designed to streamline your shipping and save two days on delivery. And you copied your key customers.

Use the cc: judiciously. No one wants to receive uninteresting or irrelevant email. But copying others can be an effective marketing tool. As your email opinions and recommendations are circulated throughout your company and your industry, with your name attached to them, your visibility grows.

6. Use a standard format

Email need not follow formal letter writing format. The date and return address are automatic anyway. You can even skip the salutation, though opening with the recipient's name is always a good idea.

Then, state your case, the reason for the correspondence and close. Most email software includes an option for a signature. This may be anything from a simple name to a complete corporate address, phone, fax, and Website address, even disclosures and confidentiality assurances.

Even so, it's not a bad idea to personalize the closing with your name. I just use my initials.

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