

Email Etiquette

In an effort to promote efficient and effective communication, the following guidelines are suggested for using email in the Department of Psychology at Harvard University (these guidelines are adapted from those offered on <http://www.emailreplies.com/>; <http://www.iwillfollow.com/email.htm>; and http://www.cit.gu.edu.au/~davidt/email_etiquette.htm). For how to handle email, see Roediger, H. L. (2006). E-mail onslaught: What can we do? Observer, Vol 19, 1. <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/getArticle.cfm?id=1921>.

1. Get to the point

Be concise.

2. Be polite

"Hey Jack" is inappropriate when addressing someone you've never met (or a member of the faculty or staff, unless you have such a relationship).

3. Do not ask people to do your work for you

Ask for help only if you've tried to find the information (e.g., via Google) and failed to do so, and your request is not a great imposition. Even then, don't expect that your crisis is somebody else's problem.

4. Attach only large files that are expected

If the recipient isn't expecting a large attachment, ask first. Also consider posting your attachment on one of the web services (e.g., <http://www.yousendit.com>; <http://www.megaupload.com>; <http://www.savefile.com>) and simply telling the recipient how to download it.

5. Need-to-know: Avoid "Reply All"

Use "cc" or "Reply to All" only if the addressed people need to know. Don't spam.

6. Use Bcc (blind copy) when sending large broadcasts

This is less cluttering than using the open-copy feature, discourages "Reply to All," and even makes it more difficult for spammers who steal addresses.

7. Reserve "high priority" for very high priority items

Emergencies are rare.

8. AVOID ALL UPPER CASE

Not only is this harder to read, but who wants to be shouted at?

9. Include context

Don't assume perfect (or even very good) memory; include enough of previous emails to provide the context for your message. But only quote back what is relevant; use "----Snip----Snip----" to indicate where you've edited.

10. Answer previous queries

When you are responding to an earlier email, include the questions and respond to each one; any question you overlook will just require another email cycle.

11. Make the subject line informative

Indicate the specific content in the subject line.

12. Read your message before you send it

Sometimes what you think you are typing is not what actually appears on the screen.