

Write Emails That Get Noticed

We all want people to read and act on the email messages we send them. But the fact is we don't always send messages that support effective responses.

Two important aspects of email messages that are often overlooked are how they read and how they look. Composition and formatting can make all the difference to how recipients respond to email message.

Easy-to-read, well-written messages help the reader stay focused on the content of the email instead of being distracted by poor structure, grammar, or spelling.

Appropriate formatting draws attention to who needs to do what, highlights critical information, and reduces eyestrain that can result from reading tightly condensed text.

You can make your email messages more useful and easier to read by keeping the following key points in mind.

Keep paragraphs short – Paragraphs should be no more than five or six lines long. If you get right to the point, you're more likely to keep the reader's attention and get the results you want.

Watch font size – Avoid fonts that are smaller than 10 points or larger than 12 points (except in headlines or for embedded details.) For many readers, small type makes reading difficult. On the other hand, over-sized type increases the reader's need to scroll in order to read long email messages and can make your message look less professional.

Use "white space" – Asking a reader to wade through line after line of text is a quick way to get your message closed back into the inbox – or worse, deleted. Use white space (empty space on the screen) to separate paragraphs and areas of detail.

Use boldface type or underlining for emphasis – Using differentiated type face will draw the reader's eye to the most important aspects of the email.

Use bullets and tables – Another way to get the appropriate attention from your readers is to use bullets and tables to call attention to particular elements of the email message, such as key points and action items. This will increase the likelihood of your reader understanding the content and knowing what action to take.

Be concise – No doubt you've received email messages that drag on and on, leaving you wondering what the point is. When writing your messages, make your point in as few words as possible, and pay attention to sentence structure to avoid run-on sentences.

Avoid jargon – We are often not aware of how frequently we use jargon and acronyms that are familiar to us but foreign to others. Unless you know that your audience fully understands the verbiage, avoid jargon and acronyms.

Use the spelling checker – While using the spelling checker tool is not a substitute for careful editing, running a spelling checker on all of your correspondence is useful. Correct spelling and grammar help the reader focus on the content rather than on your mistakes. In addition to using the spelling checker, be sure to proofread your correspondence before sending it.

Include a signature line – When a recipient needs to contact you after receiving your email message, the first place they look for your contact information is in the signature line at the end of your message. Email message signatures should display complete contact data, including name, title, phone numbers, organization, and website address.

Read one last time – Before sending your message, read it one last time. Take a moment to verify that your message is easy to read and understand. Make sure that your goal has been conveyed concisely and effectively and is likely to prompt the appropriate actions. We've all sent email messages that we regretted sending and wished, "Why didn't I read it one more time?" Make that "one more time" part of your email discipline.

Email will continue to be a primary form of communication in our lives. The more attention we give to the simple details of writing email messages, the better our communication with others will be.