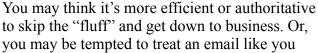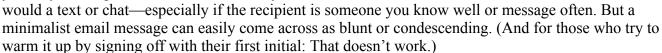# 9 ways your emails might be disrespectful—and how to fix them

For better or worse, email is still one of the primary ways people communicate at work. It can be efficient, but it's also impersonal—readers can't see your face, hear your voice, or respond in real time. Here are nine common email habits that could cause you to unintentionally come across as dismissive, impolite, or pushy—plus tactics to try instead.

1. Cutting out the niceties.

You may think it's more efficient or authoritative to skip the "fluff" and get down to business. Or, you may be tempted to treat an email like you would a text or chat—especially if the recipient is someone you know well or message often. But a minimalist email message can easily come across as blunt or condescending. (And for those who try to warm it up by signing off with their first initial: That doesn't work.)

It won't take you any more time to use the person's name, but it will get their attention and make them feel respected. Likewise, saying "please" and "thank you" when making requests shows your appreciation and may raise your chances of getting a prompt response.

Poor:

"Send me the file you mentioned in our team meeting so I can pass it to the finance team.

—G"

Better:

"Hi Lucy,

Please send me the file you mentioned in our team meeting so I can pass it to the finance team.

Thank you,
Gameli"

2. Writing uninformative or no subject lines.

A complete (yet brief) subject line is the ultimate sign of respect for your recipient's time. It lets them know why you're writing and what they should do by when—even before they open the message. That way, they don't have to sift through their torrent of emails to figure out what's significant and how to reply.

Many people write vague, useless subject lines (e.g., "Doc scanned" or "I thought you'd be interested"), but even seemingly good subject lines often leave out some important information.

Poor:

- Could you please approve this slide deck? *(Approve it by when?)*
- Slide deck for Allied Sales Conference *(What do I do with it?)*
- Need this back ASAP *(What is it?)*

Instead, try starting your subject line with an indication of the type of message you're writing:

- Announcement of …
- Request for …
- FYI …
- Please review …
- Urgent …
- Not urgent …

Then fill in everything the recipient needs to know to take action.

Better:

- Urgent: Please approve sales conference slides by Tuesday

3. Including too much information or requiring too much back-and-forth.

You've barely hit send on a reply to an email to Phyllis before she fires one back with yet another question. And then you see an email from Harpreet—a wall of text. Sigh. You'll either spend precious time responding to or wading through these messages or, if you're in a hurry, put them off.

Don't be like Phyllis or Harpreet.

If your question or issue is so complex that it requires more than a couple of paragraphs or exchanges to reach an agreement or solve a problem, consider whether a phone or in-person conversation might be a more efficient way to address it. This also applies when you have a number of questions or a significant amount of information to convey.

Also, you don't need to include everything you know about a subject in your email. If you find yourself writing an essay, ask yourself: What's relevant for my audience? What do they need to know to take action? Then stick only to that information. One way to make your email easier to scan and understand is by organizing your message into a bulleted or numbered list and using bold text for key dates or questions that need answers.

For more, see [How to write emails that pass the 10-second test](#).

4. Adding too many or the wrong recipients.

There's no harm in adding a few more people to your recipients list—transparency, right? Maybe. But also consider when you might be wasting the additional recipients' time or causing harmful misunderstandings.

For example, say you email a colleague on another team, Misha, to ask for the status of a report you're waiting for. If you include Misha's manager or teammates, it could send the signal that you don't trust Misha to do the work without others holding her accountable.

Before hitting send, read over your recipients list and ask yourself:

- Are there others who need to see this message?
- Are there people I've included who *don't* need to see this message? If so, what's a better way to convey any information they need (e.g. a phone call, meeting, or separate email)?

5. Routinely emailing during off-hours.

What's the problem with sending a message at 11 p.m.? The person will just read it in the morning.

Not so fast. Many people set their phones to receive alerts when email rolls in. Off-hour work emails may interrupt their personal time and even make them feel obligated to reply—especially if you're in a position of power relative to them.

Sometimes, emergencies happen and you really do need to communicate outside of work hours. The rest of the time, once you leave work, step away from your email! You might suggest that your team establish formal email off-hours, with a different mode of contact for emergencies. And if you have an idea that just can't wait, write it as a draft email and hit send the next day.

6. Writing unhelpful out-of-office messages.

In those frenzied last few minutes before you go on vacation, you may be tempted to simply flip your status to "away" and list when you'll return. But consider the person who gets your auto-reply: What if they have an urgent ask or need information before you get back? Instead of leaving them in limbo, include whom to contact for different needs in your absence.

Poor: "I will be away from my desk from July 10 to July 22. I will respond to your message when I return."

Better: *"I will be away from my desk from July 10 to July 22. I will respond to your message when I return. In the meantime, if you have a sales question, contact Kristen Chapman at XX. If you need information about the Allied Sales Conference, contact Ari Green at XX."*

Note: It's equally inconsiderate to direct inquiries to a colleague who doesn't know they're coming or how to respond. So, before you add someone's contact information to your out-of-office message, ask them if they can cover the requests that might come in, prep them with what they'll need, and let them know what can wait until you're back.

7. Circulating gossip.

"Did you see how Karl looked yesterday? Do you think he's sick? He was out for three days last month, and I heard him say something about 'medication'…"

Stop. Hit delete. Email isn't a place for gossip at work. You could easily come across as untrustworthy if your recipient thinks, *Wow, what's being sent about me?*

Besides, once you send an email, it can be forwarded with the press of a button and read by people you didn't intend. And your company ultimately oversees your work email, so don't write anything that would damage your standing if read by IT or HR.

8. Using an unprofessional tone.

These days, even in business writing, plenty of people express enthusiasm using [exclamation points](#), emojis, words in all caps, or a "hey" greeting. In some situations, flourishes and informalities like these are welcome signs of friendliness and familiarity. But in others, recipients may find them irritating and unprofessional.

When writing an email, ask yourself: What's the appropriate tone for this audience? Consider the recipient's role (e.g., peer, client, executive) and how well you know them as you determine your answer. When in doubt, err on the side of formality.

Also, use humor with caution. Jokes typically need context from facial expressions, voice cues, or body language, which can't be easily conveyed in writing. So, what you might think is a hilarious aside could easily be interpreted as a slight by your reader. And consider language barriers. While you don't want to dumb down messages sent to those who may not be perfectly fluent in your language, try to steer clear of slang or idioms (e.g., it's raining cats and dogs), which may confuse or feel exclusionary.

9. Sending emails without proofreading them.

The occasional typo is unavoidable, but "sneding emails that looks like thias" makes you seem unprofessional and implies that you dashed off your message without thought or consideration.

If your email program has a spelling and grammar check function, turn it on—but don't let it lull you into a false sense of safety. Checkers won't catch incorrect uses of words (e.g., "you're" instead of "your") or typos that spell real words (e.g., "thongs" when you mean "things"). And software certainly won't save you from the ultimate email insult: Misspelling someone's name (e.g., using Josh instead of Jash or Audrey instead of Audra).

So, take an extra minute to check for mistakes before you click send. As you're reading through, also take the opportunity to check for unfinished thoughts and proper tone (see No. 8). For more, see [After writing an email, read it back as if you're the recipient](#).

Was this article helpful?