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E-Mail Etiquette Tips

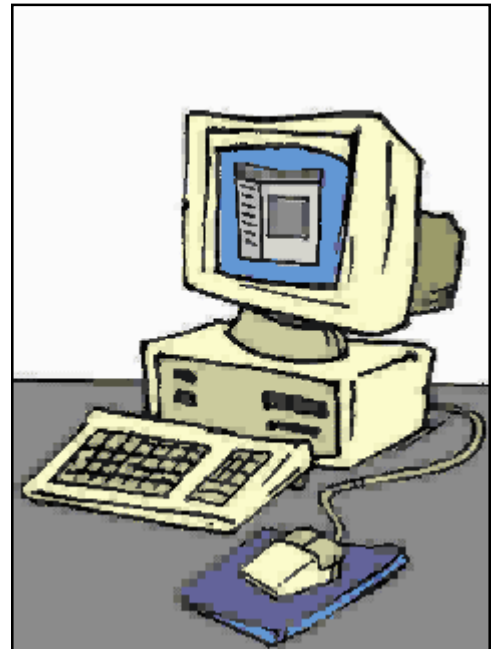
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Electronic mail (e-mail) is rapidly becoming accepted for communicating inside and outside a business or organization. For some applications it has replaced the telephone, business letter and memo. E-mail can cut communication costs dramatically. It provides an easy-to-use, efficient way to correspond with clients, colleagues, family and friends across the street and the world.

However, e-mail also has its pit falls. Because e-mail is so easy to use, many people believe there are no rules to follow when using it. To get the most out of e-mail and electronic mailing lists, you should realize that the system has guidelines like any other communication method.

E-mail has unwritten rules of etiquette. Most are based on good common sense. Here are some basic tips for handling your e-mail.

- ☛ Check e-mail at least once a day. Messages can be received any-time of the day or night.
- ☛ Respond to messages as soon as you can, particularly the messages that are directed to you personally. Treat it as you would voice mail. This lets the sender know that his or her message was received. Read the message entirely before responding. Never “handle” a message more than once to one specific person. Often, an e-mail message requires only a short response that can be dealt with quickly. If you receive general information through a mailing list, this does not necessarily mean that you have to respond. However, if you know the answer to specific questions addressed in a mailing list, especially in topical discussion groups, a general rule of courtesy would be to respond.
- ☛ Never send anything through e-mail that is private information. E-mail messages can be downloaded, printed and distributed. They can be attached to other e-mail messages and sent to others.



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☛ Delete the message. After reading a message and deciding no copy is needed, delete it. Many e-mail providers limit the number of messages saved on line. When that number is exceeded, messages are automatically deleted. Important messages may be lost by letting them pile up.

☛ Deleting a message does not necessarily remove it from the e-mail system. Some businesses and organizations save all e-mail messages sent from their computers. E-mail saved on business and organization systems is considered their property. Employers have the right to search an employee's e-mail box.

☛ Download the message. Save messages by downloading them onto your hard disk, floppy disk, or printing hard copies. Delete them from the system if there is no future use for the information.

Although there is no official style or format for e-mail, the way people write can affect the outcome of their communications. The format used will determine the effectiveness of the message. For a message to be effective, it must be read, understood and acted on. Following are some helpful style and formatting tips:

☛ Write to express ideas, not to impress people. Use simple, clear communications that convey ideas in the least amount of space.

☛ Get to the point. Be specific. If some action is expected, clearly state who should do it, what should be done, when it needs to be done and why it should be done.

☛ Limit messages to one topic. Trying to cover more than one topic in an e-mail may confuse the reader and cause him or her to overlook important information.



☛ Be polite. Avoid sarcasm and humor that may be misunderstood.

☛ Use words in all upper case letters sparingly. Upper case letters indicate shouting. Using all lower case letters makes the message hard to read. Use upper and lower case letters the same as they are used in writing letters and memos.

☛ Use short, common words. These are words people know and use regularly, so they are the best words for communicating.

☛ Use sentences that average 17 to 21 words long, but vary the sentence lengths. Long sentences tend to lose reader's interest before they reach the end of the sentence.

☛ Use paragraphs that average four to six lines. People tend to skim over long paragraphs and may miss important information.

☛ Double space between paragraphs. A double space helps readers identify when a new thought begins.

☛ Reread the e-mail message before sending it. Check for clarity, spelling, accuracy, and correct facts and figures.

Some considerations when using attachments with e-mail:

☛ When receiving attachments with e-mail, make sure you remember the directory the program has specified to receive attachments. If you plan to use the attachments for future use, download them onto your hard disk, floppy disk, or print a hard copy.

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☛ When sending attachments try to avoid, if at all possible, sending documents larger than 1.4 MB in size. Depending on your business or organization's equipment, large files can slow down the entire system operation and may even cause it to stop. You may want to consider other means of data transferring if



you have large files. Contact your Network Administrator or Internet Service Provider if you have questions.

☛ Before sending attachments, you will need to consider a file format that a majority of users will be able to interpret. These file formats include basic text files (*.txt) and rich text format (*.rtf) as examples. Sending documents as a Microsoft Word or Word Perfect document will be hard to interpret for those that do not have the necessary software. You should check with the users first and understand their abilities before sending attachments.

☛ Be cautious when receiving certain attachments, particularly from those that you do not know. They may contain viruses. Any files that are executable (i.e., files with EXE extension) are known to carry viruses. Make sure you have a good virus protection software package. Remember, taking the time to

scan for viruses can save you hundreds of dollars.

☛ Take careful consideration when sending attachments through a large mailing list. Most people do not like to receive lots of attachments, especially from those they do not know. If you know all the members of the mailing list and they understand and accept attachments from everyone you should have no problem. When you are in a large mailing list and you do not know how many people have subscribed, you may want to mention in a brief message to have subscribers respond to you for the information. Then you can send the attachment only to those who are most interested, rather than the entire mailing list. Your message could look something like this; "I have this document that is available via e-mail. If you are interested in receiving this document I can send it to you directly, please give me your e-mail address."

The more effective and efficient you become when using e-mail, the easier your job will be. With e-mail, a little common sense goes a long way.

This publication is part of the "Farming the Net" Series. This publication along with others are available at <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~farmnet>. For more information about this publication and others please contact Nathan Watermeier, Watermeier.2@osu.edu.

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