

# E-mail Guidelines

Adapted from "12 Tips for Better E-Mail Etiquette" by Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, The Productivity Pro®

- 1. Keep messages brief and to the point.** Concentrate on one subject per message whenever possible.
- 2. Use sentence case.** USING ALL CAPITAL LETTERS LOOKS AS IF YOU'RE SHOUTING. Using all lowercase letters looks lazy. For emphasis, use asterisks or bold formatting to emphasize important words. Do not, however, use a lot of colors or graphics embedded in your message, because not everyone uses an e-mail program that can display them.
- 3. Use the blind copy and courtesy copy appropriately.** Don't use BCC to keep others from seeing who you copied; it shows confidence when you directly CC anyone receiving a copy. Do use BCC, however, when sending to a large distribution list, so recipients won't have to see a huge list of names. Be cautious with your use of CC; overuse simply clutters inboxes. Copy only people who are directly involved.
- 4. Don't use e-mail as an excuse to avoid personal contact.** Don't forget the value of face-to-face or even voice-to-voice communication. E-mail communication isn't appropriate when sending confusing or emotional messages. If you have a problem with someone, speak with that person directly. Don't use e-mail to avoid an uncomfortable situation or to cover up a mistake.
- 5. Remember that e-mail isn't private.** Never put in an e-mail message anything that you wouldn't put on a postcard. Remember that e-mail can be forwarded, so unintended audiences may see what you've written. You might also inadvertently send something to the wrong party.

6. **Be sparing with group e-mail.** Send group e-mail only when it's useful to every recipient. Use the "reply all" button only when compiling results requiring collective input and only if you have something to add. Recipients get quite annoyed to open an e-mail that says only "Me too!"

7. **Use the subject field to indicate content and purpose.** Don't just say, "Hi!" or "From Laura." Agree on acronyms to use that quickly identify actions.

8. **Don't send chain letters, virus warnings, or junk mail.**

9. **Remember that your tone can't be heard in e-mail.** Have you ever attempted sarcasm in an e-mail, and the recipient took it the wrong way? E-mail communication can't convey the nuances of verbal communication.

10. **Summarize long discussions.** Scrolling through pages of replies to understand a discussion is annoying. Instead of continuing to forward a message string, take a minute to summarize it for your reader. You could even highlight or quote the relevant passage, then include your response. Some words of caution:

- a. If you are forwarding or reposting a message you've received, do not change the wording.
- b. If you want to repost to a group a message that you received individually, ask the author for permission first.
- c. Give proper attribution.

**About the author** [Laura Stack](#) is the president of The Productivity Pro®, Inc., an international consulting firm in Denver, Colorado, that specializes in productivity improvement in high-stress organizations. Laura holds an MBA in Organizational Management (University of Colorado, 1991) and is an expert on integrating advances in business productivity with the retention of key employees. Laura is the author of the best-selling book *Leave the Office Earlier* (Broadway Books, 2004).