



Netiquette: Email Basics

An overview of online communication manners and protocol for job seekers.

Plume, pen, or pixel, universal truths apply

We may have exchanged the clay tablet for a laptop or smart phone, but the purpose of communication has remained unchanged through the millenia: To convey information appropriately and effectively to generate a desired response. Electronic communication has become as fast as clicking the Send key. And with that, so are the chances of making a faux pas you can't erase.

As a job seeker, consider the employers, advisors, and professionals with whom you'll be interacting online. What kind of impression do you intend to create? What sort of outcome do you want to generate? Believe it or not, old fashioned manners, timeliness, and consideration of others still apply when it comes to Internet etiquette.

Don't be a Generation Idiot emailer.

With email, you have to rely on words, spelling, and grammar, instead of voice and visual body language, to convey a professional attitude, tone, and message. What you send WILL create an impression and perception of who you are, right or wrong, in the recipient's mind, factors that could determine your potential candidacy or termination. And while email etiquette may vary depending on company and industry, it's always best to be safe.

Mind your manners. Above all, always be polite and respectful. Formality is the flavor unless otherwise indicated, so use titles and last names. Personalize the email to address the contact. Avoid slang and NEVER use offensive language. Reply to emails promptly and close with a thank you.

Put your college education to work. Use complete sentences, correct punctuation, and proper grammar. Choose words wisely to convey your intended tone and message. Make sure all names are spelled correctly and that you have the proper company information. As with any correspondence, use spellcheck and PROOF, PROOF, PROOF! Typos make you appear sloppy and less than serious to a prospective employer. Hey, if you're not willing or able to pay attention to details now, chances are you're not going to be any better as an employee.

Be concise. People are busy, and long emails may go unread. For ease of reading, keep sentences short, and paragraphs brief with spaces in between. Use bullet points, if necessary. Don't ramble. Include only relevant information.

Looks matter. Avoid multiple colors and fonts, and background patterns. Stick to standard fonts such as Arial, Helvetica, or Times; no Comic Sans or script. Use plain text, not HTML that may become garbled on the recipient's side. DON'T USE ALL CAPS; it's considered SHOUTING and rude. Likewise, avoid all lower case; you'll come across as lazy, careless, or mumbling. Avoid emoticons and acronyms; they're too casual. Plus, the reader may not know their meaning; you're emailing, not texting. With critical emails, send a test version to yourself to make sure everything displays properly before emailing the final.

Email for hire.

When sending a job related email, have a clear Subject heading. Make sure your name displays properly in the "From" field; no nicknames. Use an appropriate email address, not "partyanimal@..." or "qtpie@..." Like your cover letter, your email should have an intro, body, and conclusion. Clearly state who you are and why you're applying for the position. You may cut and paste your résumé into the body of the email for easy review. If attaching your résumé or other relevant files, use Word docs or PDF formats. Avoid large attachments that increase download time and may fill the recipient's inbox; resample graphics. Include your contact info. Finally, bcc: yourself for a record of your job applications and correspondence.

Use email effectively to represent yourself as a qualified and serious job candidate. And once you enter the workforce, you'll be ready to brush up on proper business email etiquette.



i n a nutshell:

You will be judged by how well you communicate, even in an email, so:

- **Think before you write**
- **Keep it simple, keep it polite**
- **Proof for spelling, grammar, punctuation, tone, and content**
- **Be prompt in replying**
- **Stick with standard fonts and formatting; less is more**
- **Nix emoticons and acronyms**
- **Respect privacy; don't forward personal emails without the author's permission**
- **Consider using a separate job search email address**

For paper or pixel correspondence, choose your words wisely and PROOF your text carefully. There's no Undo button once you hit Send.