



EMAIL GUIDELINES

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General

Email is but one of a number of forms of communication and is not always the preferred mode of conveying a message or information. Face-to-face and telephone communications often are much more appropriate and effective means of communication. They can convey inflection, emotion, timing, facial expression, and body language, which are lacking in e-mails.

Some suggest that only 10 per cent of the meaning of verbal communication is conveyed by words. Only another 30% is conveyed by voice inflection. Most of the meaning is conveyed by body language. For example, would you believe someone who said, "I'll never lie to you" while looking at their feet? Or the person who says "I'll love you forever," while rolling their eyes? But what about the person that says "I will deliver the chairs Friday morning," looking you straight in the eye? Thus, as handy a communications tool as e-mail may be, it often can be quite inadequate in conveying the full meaning of a message.

Composing and Sending Email

- Long, wordy emails are rarely appropriate. They demonstrate a lack of consideration for the recipient's time. The recipient usually is opening a number of emails in one sitting and often will not have time to fully consider and respond to a multi-paragraph email. And lengthy emails are easy to put aside for another time. But another time never comes.
- Your email address rarely will fully identify you as the sender, so adding a short signature including your name and other relevant contact information (including your preferred email address) will eliminate misidentification of the sender.
- Subject lines are important. They should convey the specific subject of the email in as few words as possible.
- Using a salutation ("Dear John," "Hi, Friends") is courteous and shows respect for the recipient(s). Starting an email cold (*e.g.*, "I have attached a notice...") may seem abrupt and even unfriendly.

- Even if the substance of an email is in an attachment, the body of the email should say enough to encourage the recipient to take the trouble to open the attachment.
- When attaching documents to an email, converting the document to the .pdf format will reduce the possibility of anyone's tampering with the document and forwarding it to others in altered form. The .pdf format also enjoys near universal accessibility.
- Use of "smiley faces :) and other "emoticons" is inappropriate in the context of church-related communications. Many people are not familiar with many acronyms and Internet abbreviations. Avoid unnecessary confusion by using acronyms and abbreviations only when you are certain that the reader will know what they mean.
- Similarly, use normal capitalization and punctuation. Using all lowercase can be confusing. And using ALL CAPITALS LOOKS LIKE YOU ARE SHOUTING. Again, if you need to convey emotion, an email may be the wrong mode of communications.
- When sending an email to more than one person, place the addresses in the "BCC" field to avoid unauthorized disclosure of others' email addresses.
- Otherwise, the "BCC" field should be used only to copy yourself or someone else as proof that an email was sent.
- Do not use "BCC" as a way of obscuring whom you have copied.
- Use "CC" only as a means of providing information to those who really need it.

Confidentiality

- Sending sensitive personal information such as medical condition, credit card or bank account information, PINs, passwords, addresses and phone numbers in an email is very risky and should be avoided.
- Disclaimers like "This email is confidential and intended for the recipient only" should create no illusion that any email is truly confidential or secure. All too often emails are misdirected, wrongly forwarded, or inappropriately copied. Complete privacy or confidentiality of an email *never* can be assured.

- If confidential or sensitive personal information must be sent by email, put the information in a password protected document and attach it to an email. Then put the password in a separate email or simply call the recipient and tell them the password.
- Once an email is sent, it is sent. The recipient is going to receive it whether it's the message you intended or not. If you do send an email in error, call the recipient to suggest they ignore and delete it. An email asking that a previous email be deleted unread likely will arrive too late. If telephone contact fails, then send an email advising the recipient(s) that you made a mistake and apologizing.

Replying

- Change the subject line when your reply covers a new subject area.
- Always check carefully where your reply to an email is going to go. For example, in replying to emails on a list-serve or mailing list, your reply will go to the entire group. This can be embarrassing to a sender and annoying to others in the group for whom the message was not intended. This can be avoided by sending a new email to the sender of the message you wish to reply to.
- Use "reply all" only when everyone who received the email to which you are replying (the "TO" and "CC" fields) need to know your response.
- Do not use "reply all" when only the original sender needs to know your response. Note that you always can add a few additional recipients to your reply if other recipients of the original email also truly need to know your response.
- Do not use "reply all" when you have been a "BCC" recipient of an email. You have no way of knowing to whom your response may be sent.
- Answering a spam email only confirms the validity of your email address to the spammer. Better not to reply, but to delete.

Forwarding

- Forwarding personal email without the original writer's permission is at best inconsiderate and at worst illegal.
- Clutter on forwarded emails can be reduced by removing all the "virus protection" messages and advertising that have been tacked on when the email was forwarded to you and prior recipients.

- When forwarding an email, delete all the other addresses that appear at the top of the message to avoid unauthorized disclosure of others' email addresses.
- Forwarding jokes is inappropriate in the context of church-related communications.
- Some chain letter emails promise good luck if you forward them and bad luck if you do not. To be kind to the 10 people you might have sent them to, just delete them.
- You can easily check out "virus alerts" and similar possibly questionable emails before you forward them at www.snopes.com.
- Beware of email petitions. They become a treasure trove of valid names and email addresses. Chances are someone out there would be willing to pay for such a list. So putting your name and email address on a petition likely will be furnishing your name and email address to a spammer.