

Email Use

A Guide for Individuals and Organisations

Sadly, too many of us will have experienced situations where emails have been sent or circulated and suddenly things seem to get out of hand, with relationships being tested or damaged, emotions flying around and even in some serious cases, people losing their jobs as a result.

What was once heralded as a breakthrough in modern communication now has many people feeling stressed and hurt. Sometimes the most simple and well intentioned email can come back to haunt us in ways we could never have imagined.

This article will briefly look at some of the reasons behind this and suggest a guide for sensible email use.

The advantages

Emails, or electronic mail, is an amazing tool. Messages can be sent across the world in a matter of seconds. We can keep in touch with loved ones far away, we can work from home and send or receive updates of progress on reports and projects. Email has transformed the way many of us live and work.

The disadvantages

Sometimes the advantages and disadvantages of something are two sides of the same coin. People are finding it more and more difficult to “switch off” from work as it can now follow them home. Many of us are also finding that while we can keep in touch with people with a short email message, the quality of our interactions drops. Many people find their stress levels increasing as work demands rise with technology.

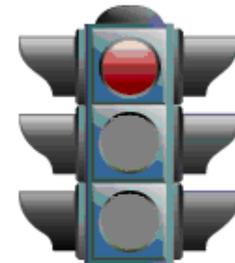
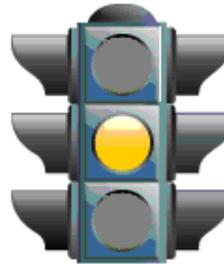
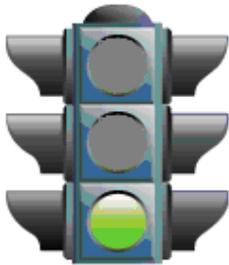
However, the most important thing to be aware of in the use of emails is that it is a text based method of communication. This has several implications:

- Your message might be read by someone who is not the intended recipient
- The person reading the email will be influenced by his or her mood at the time of reading
- Your tone of voice and body language are not reflected in an email
- Your message can be forwarded to others, copied or even modified in a way you cannot control
- Emails can be very impersonal – it’s almost like putting a post-it on someone’s desk

The key is to remember that email is a tool. Used appropriately, it can be a wonderful way of communicating effectively, can help our lives and our workplaces become efficient and productive. Used inappropriately, it can lead to damaged relationships, friendships being lost, legal complications and ultimately the loss of someone’s job.

As a text-based method of communication, it is important to consider if it is the best method for you at that time. Just because it is quick, does not mean it is best. In fact, sometimes it is because it is quick that it is not the best method. As human beings we all need time to think about things, process information and consider the implications of our words and actions. Pressing “reply” or worse, “reply to all” can lead to many misunderstandings that can take days, weeks or even longer to resolve. Just because we can, does not mean we should!

The following is to help you consider how and when you use Email based on some general principles. You should take care that these recommendations suit your own organisation. You are welcome to use this page as a quick guide for yourself as an individual or for an organisation.



Should be okay...

- Dates of next meeting
- Request for information
- Forwarding links or references
- Thanking people for attendance

Take care...

- Minutes of meetings
- Suggesting a course of action
- Summary of discussions
- Financial or statistical information
- Asking for opinions
- Project updates

Danger! Do not send...

- Resolving a conflict
- Criticising something or someone
- Confidential information
- Things you wouldn't want your mother to hear about...