

I'm not robot!

Home » Business English Tips » Writing Business Emails in English Made Easy How many business emails do you write in a day? A lot? If so, you're not alone. Email is incredibly important in the business world. 92% of people in a 2013 study thought email was a valuable tool for working with others. But 64% of people also found that email can cause accidental confusion or anger in the workplace. Oh my! How can you make sure your own emails aren't misunderstood? Maybe even more importantly, how can you make sure your emails get read? That's right. I said, "Read." These days, just pressing "send" doesn't mean your email is going to be read right away. In order to be noticed, you need to know how to get people's attention. In order to use email to communicate well, you need to write good emails. Luckily, writing a good email isn't hard. It may even be much easier than you think. Rules for Writing a Good Email "That was an awesome email." Who wouldn't want to hear that? Well, you can! All you have to do is follow these simple rules. Rule #1: Be Clear You already have the knowledge to start writing clear emails today. All it takes is using the following: Short sentences Simple language Correct grammar Rule #2: Make It Brief How much does it cost to send two emails instead of one? Nothing. So, why write about a bunch of topics in one email? Keep your emails brief by focusing on only one topic. Explain your main reason for writing in the first paragraph. Be specific about what it is you want. Kara Blackburn, a lecturer at MIT Sloan School of Management, said this about email writing: "Start by asking yourself what you want the person to do as a result of this email." Just asking that question will help focus your email. Rule #3: Write a Strong Subject Line Eighty. That's about how many emails business people receive a day, according to the Radicati Group. Imagine your email sitting in a long list of other emails. You don't have to even imagine that. Just look at your own inbox. What makes you want to open an email? Maybe the name of the person sending it. But if you're like most people, you'll open an email that has a strong subject line. Your subject line is like a headline in a newspaper. The subject line needs to attract attention and make someone want to read your email. You can write strong headlines by using the "4 U's" approach taught by American Writers & Artists trainers. The 4 U's of writing headlines are: Unique Urgent Useful Ultra-specific (very specific) Your email subject lines should definitely be useful and ultra-specific. Apply the other two U's only when it makes sense to do so. For example, if you try to make every email you send seem urgent, then none of them will really seem urgent. Also, being too unique could make your email look like spam. Oops! We don't want that to happen. Rule #4: Be Polite Would you use exclamation points and all caps in a formal letter? I don't think so. But some people think that it's okay to be overly emotional in emails. It's not. Calm down. To readers, too many exclamation points will seem like yelling. The same is true for words written in all caps. Keep your emails polite and formal. Remember, your emails may not be only for the person you send them to. Someone may press "forward." Rule #5: Create the Right Tone A good email is clear and brief, but not curt (rudely brief). Use sentence length, punctuation and polite language to create the right tone. You also need to use the right language for each part of the email. Business emails are like letters. They have a format. This includes: A salutation (a word or phrase like "Gentlemen," "Dear Sir," "Dear Madam" or "To Whom it May Concern" that is used to begin a letter) An opening sentence An ending A closing The language you use in each part adds to the email's clarity and tone. Salutation: The salutation you choose changes depending on who your audience is. It helps set your email's tone. Would you use "Hey" in the salutation of a formal email? Definitely not. Instead, you would start with "Dear" and the name of the person you're writing to. For example: "Dear Sir or Madam" (if you don't know the name of the person reading the email) "Dear Mr. Smith" "Dear Jim" (more informal) Save "Hello," "Hi" and "Hey" for when you want to create an informal tone. What do you write when your email is going to a group of people? Some common salutations for groups are: "Dear all" (more formal) "Hi everyone" (more informal) Opening Sentence: Your opening sentence is the key to writing a clear email. A good opening sentence tells the reader what the email is about. For example, if you're writing to follow up on something, you could start with any of these: "I'm just writing..." "Just a (quick) note..." "Just a short note to follow up on..." What other words can you use to write a good opening sentence? Try these, followed with your reason for writing: "I'm (just) writing to..." "Just a (quick) note to..." "Just a short email to..." In business, people tend to write emails to: Clarify something Confirm something Follow up on something Let someone know about something Answer a question Ask a question Thank someone for something Update someone One of the above will most likely be your reason for writing. File Attachments: If you've attached a file to your email, make sure you tell the person you're writing to that you have attached it. The more specific you are, the better. Being specific adds to the clarity of the email. Here's an example: "I'm sending you this week's schedule as an attachment." You can also start your sentence with: "I've attached..." "Please find attached..." "I'm attaching..." Ending: When ending an email, ask yourself what you want the reader to do. If you want them to reply to you, you can write: "I look forward to hearing from you." (formal) "Looking forward to hearing from you." (less formal) "I look forward to your reply." (formal) "Hope to hear from you soon." (informal) If you want them to contact you if they need more information, you can write: "Do not hesitate to contact me if you need any assistance." (formal) "Let me know if you need anything else." (informal) If you don't want them to do anything: "Thank you for your help/assistance." "Have a nice day/weekend." Closing: Just like your salutation, your closing will depend on how well you know the reader. Common closings include: "Sincerely" (formal) "Kind/Best/Warm regards" (less formal) You may have received emails with closings like these: "All the best!" "Best" "See you soon!" "Take care" "Bye (for now)" These closings help create a closer relationship when you already know your reader. Language Guide for Specific Email Subjects Business emails all tend to deal with one of two subjects: Giving information Asking for information Within those two subjects, there are more specific situations that will come up over and over again. Here are some tips and examples of language you can use for some of the most common situations. 1. Responding to an Inquiry If you're writing to reply to an inquiry (a request for information) you need to use the first sentence to let your reader know this is what you're doing. You're also going to want to create goodwill (friendly and good feelings) with this person who may be your client or customer. Including the following sentences in your email helps do this: "Thank you for your interest." "Thanks for choosing..." In this situation, you're probably going to be sending some type of attachment to provide information. You can use the language for sending attachments and follow it up with: "We hope you find this satisfactory." "We hope you are happy/satisfied with this." Here's an example of how you might respond to an inquiry about the cost to install windows in a house: "I'm writing to respond to your inquiry about the cost of installing windows in your house (opening sentence). Please find our price list attached (file attachment). Do not hesitate to contact me if you need any assistance. Thank you for your interest in Acme Enterprises (building goodwill/friendly ending)." 2. Informing Someone About Something While what you want to inform the reader of will change from email to email, certain key phrases can help you get your message across clearly. Here are some opening sentence phrases you can use: "I'd like to inform you of..." "I'm writing to tell you about..." "Just a note to say..." "Just to update you on..." Depending on your relationship with the reader, you can get a bit more creative. If you have a more informal relationship and know each other well, you can try using phrases like these: "Here's the low-down on..." "FYI: This is to let you know..." (FYI stands for "For Your Information.") Toward the end of your email, you may want to add: "Hope this helps." You may also want to offer to give additional information if needed: "Let me/us know if you need anything else." "Let me know if I can help you further." 3. Confirming Arrangements Writing to confirm arrangements? Let your reader(s) know this in the opening sentence: "I'd like to confirm..." "Just writing to confirm..." Or you could set a more informal tone by writing: "Tuesday is good for me." (Especially if they have already suggested Tuesday.) A nice way to end is to write: "Looking forward to seeing/meeting..." 4. Changing Arrangements Oh no! You've made arrangements and now you have to change them. How do you politely let someone know this? Any of these sentences and phrases should work: "I'm sorry but I can't do/make Tuesday..." "This is to let you know that I've had to put off/postpone..." "I'm writing to call off/cancel..." "I'm afraid I can't make/manage Wednesday. How about Friday instead?" You don't have to go into detail about why you need to change arrangements. The point of your email is simply to change arrangements. Keep it clear and brief. 5. Replying to a Previous Email When you reach out by email to someone you don't know and they write back, the polite thing to do is thank them for their time. Here's how you can do that: "Thanks/Thank you for your email..." If someone has sent you an email and you write back, you can use one of these phrases at the beginning: "In reply to your email, here are ..." "Re: your email, I..." What else can be in your reply? Well, you might have to send attachments. If so, you'll find _____ attached, valuable. There are times, however, when you might not have all of the necessary information available. Then you might have to make a promise to get back to the sender by writing: "I'll get back to you ASAP." (ASAP stands for "As Soon As Possible.") 6. Giving Good News Who doesn't want to hear good news? Set the tone for your email right away by telling your reader you're writing with good news. The words "pleased," "happy" and "delighted" work well. Include them in sentences like these: "I am/We are pleased to inform you..." "I'm happy to tell you..." "You'll be happy/delighted to hear that..." 7. Giving Bad News Certain words let people know that bad news is coming. I'm talking about words like "regret," "sorry," "afraid" and "unfortunately." Unfortunately (you see I just used one), you'll have to give bad news about business issues from time to time. Here are some sentence openings you can write to tell bad news as nicely as possible: "We regret to tell/inform you..." "I'm sorry, but..." "I'm afraid that..." "Unfortunately..." 8. Complaining Complaining can be tough. But it's easier to get what you want if you complain in a way that doesn't offend your reader. The way to do that in an email is to not be too emotional and to make your complaint clear and specific. The following phrases can help you get started: "I'm writing to complain (about...)" "I was disappointed to find/hear..." "I'm afraid that..." "Unfortunately..." 9. Making Inquiries How can you ask someone to give you information? Start by using polite language to request what you want. "I am interested in receiving/finding out..." "I would like to receive..." "I would be grateful if..." "Could/Can you please send me...?" Are you sure that the person you are writing to can help you? Don't worry if you aren't. Just ask by writing: "Would you be able to (help)...?" "Can you help?" If you need an answer quickly, don't assume the person you're writing to understands this. Let them know by writing it: "I'd appreciate a reply ASAP." 10. Requesting Action There are times when you want someone to do something for you. Here are useful phrases you can use to make your request: "Can you send _____ to me by Friday, please?" "Please get/keep in touch." "Keep me posted." Note that the word "please" can keep your request from sounding like an order. Besides the tips above, there are many resources online that can help you write an excellent business email. For example, the videos "Writing a Business Email" and the more general "Practice Your Business Writing" on FluentU have plenty of ideas you can use to improve your email writing. The FluentU program has many other videos to learn from, like movie trailers, news segments, clips from educational programming and an entire business category with hundreds of videos—all organized by difficulty level. The program will show you the definition of any word in a video, and let you add it as a flashcard for later study with personalized quizzes. You can make a flashcard deck for business vocabulary or business email vocabulary, specifically. From here, you'll also see other videos that use the words for additional context. And since we often write emails from our phones, it's a good thing that FluentU can also come on the go with you through any browser, the iOS or the Android apps. Common Acronyms Used in Emails Have you ever seen "ASAP" "BTW," or "FYI" in emails? Probably so. They're acronyms, meaning they're made up of the first letters of phrases or words. Often, they're made up of the first letters of words in a particular phrase. We've already looked at a couple of these, but here's a quick review: ASAP: As Soon As Possible BTW: By The Way FYI: For Your Information Final Checklist for Emails You've followed the rules and used the language guide. Now it's time to see if you've written a good email. Use this list to check before you send it: Does your subject line explain what's in the email? Does your email start with a salutation? Have you explained why you're writing in the first sentence? Have you written short paragraphs that are spaced apart and easy to read? Have you mentioned your attachments? Are any requests you made clear? Does your email end with a simple closing? Did you answer, "Yes" to everything? Then congratulations! You've written a good email. Tracy Owens is a TEFL Certified Trainer and a Visiting Professor at DeVry University in Orlando, Florida. She has an MBA from Duke University's Fuqua School of Business. Continuous emails flow out of her computer daily.

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