

# E-mail etiquette

By Kathleen D. Pagana, PhD, RN



**E-MAIL** has gone from being a nice-to-have form of communication to a need-to-have form of

communication in the blink of an eye. Unfortunately, the learning curve for e-mail etiquette in business communications seems a bit slower. To avoid common e-mail business blunders, try these 17 tips.

1. **Don't send confidential information.** With a single mouse click, your information can be forwarded to anyone. Make sure you would be comfortable seeing your e-mail on the front page of your local newspaper or your company's bulletin board.
2. **Don't use all uppercase or all lowercase letters.** Using all uppercase letters looks like shouting, and using all lowercase letters looks like laziness. Follow standard writing guidelines as a professional courtesy.
3. **Make your subject line specific.** A message with the generic "Hi" doesn't help the reader prioritize messages. The reader needs to know whether to read your e-mail immediately, save it for later, or delete it.
4. **Include a greeting and close.** Remember, you are communicating with a person, not a computer.
5. **Keep a business tone.** Never respond in anger or use inappropriate language. Whatever you write could come back to haunt you. Even deleted messages can be retrieved.
6. **Keep the message concise.** Try to keep the entire message viewable without scrolling. Long e-mails usually elicit a groan from the recipient. Use the phone for lengthy discussions. (See *When not to use e-mail.*)
7. **Use your signature file function.** Be sure your e-mail includes your address, e-mail address, and phone numbers. Then, the recipient can print out the e-mail and contact you by several methods. Plus, your address indicates your time zone.
8. **Double-check the recipients before sending the e-mail.** Without this check, you can easily send your e-mail to the wrong people. Have you ever intended to forward a message, but inadvertently sent it back to the sender?
9. **Avoid overusing "Reply all."** Don't annoy people by sending messages they don't need to see.
10. **Check grammar and spelling before sending an e-mail.** You can run a check of grammar and spelling,

## 17 tips for professional communication

But you should also proofread because the wrong word may be spelled correctly.

11. **Don't forward messages with pages of "mail to" information before the content.** Delete all extraneous information, such as memo to, addresses, and date lines.
12. **When responding to a question, include the question in your response.** Receiving a message that just says "yes" or "no" can confuse the reader.
13. **Don't forward inappropriate messages.** This includes chain letters, jokes in bad taste, and the like.
14. **Try to keep to a single topic.** This makes it easier for people to respond and easier to file. If this isn't possible, number your items, so both of you can respond easily.
15. **Be proactive in your responses.** Do everything you can to stop the exchange of e-mails. If you think your response will prompt a question, answer it.



## When *not* to use e-mail

Using e-mail has many advantages, but the telephone or snail mail is more appropriate for these subjects:

- Sending a thank-you note
- Resigning from a job
- Discussing confidential or sensitive information
- Sending urgent information without follow-up (Computer glitches do happen.)
- When you need an immediate response (Use the phone.)

16. **When sending an e-mail to multiple addresses, use "BCC."** People don't like having their e-mail addresses broadcast to the public.
17. **Use your auto-responder when you aren't available.** People will know you are gone for a period of time and won't wonder if you received their e-mail. Following these 17 tips will help you gain the benefits of e-mail without offending your recipient's sense of appropriateness. Remember, common courtesy and good sense go a long way in matters of e-mail etiquette. ★

Kathleen D. Pagana, PhD, RN, Keynote Speaker and Author, is a Professor Emeritus at Lycoming College and President of Pagana Seminars & Presentations. She can be contacted at [www.KathleenPagana.com](http://www.KathleenPagana.com).