Email etiquette

Follow these basic principles when using email at work: includes refresher points on the fundamentals of email use, plus more advanced guidance on how to avoid common mistakes and convey a professional attitude.

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1. **How to write an email**

- Discuss only public matters. Occasional use of email account for private purposes is tolerated.
- Know your audience. Your email greeting and sign-off should be consistent with the level of respect and formality of the person you are communicating with.
- You should state the purpose of the email within the first two sentences. Be clear, and be up front.
- Keep emails short and to the point. Write concisely, use a lot of white space, so as not to overwhelm the recipient. Feel free to use bullet points.
- Making the effort to reply point-by-point keeps the conversation on track with fewer misunderstandings.
- Type in complete sentences with proper sentence structure to allow clear communication. Proper capitalisation and punctuation are a must.
- Do not hesitate to say “thank you”, “how are you”, or “appreciate your help”.
- Include a salutation and sign off that includes your name with every email.
- Keep your fonts, colours, and sizes classic. It is best to use 10-, 11-, or 12-point type and an easy-to-read font such as Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman.
- Refrain from sending one-liners such as “thanks” and “oh, OK”.
- Avoid using shortcuts to real words, emoticons, jargon, or slang. In work-related email it is not acceptable.
- Be careful with irony and sarcasm.

2. **Signature files**

- Keep your signature files to no more than 5-8 lines
- Limit your signature to your name, website link, Organization name, a phone number.
- Check [WHO visual identity guidelines](#) for more information.

3. **Including attachments**

- Check your email before sending to see if you wanted to send an attachment but forgot to include it.
- Refrain from sending large attachments (something over 500 KB) without warning, on weekends or after business hours when the recipient may not be there to keep their inbox clear. Sending unannounced large attachments can clog the receiver’s inbox and cause other important emails to bounce.
- When sending large attachments, always “zip” or compress them before sending.
• Generally, you should include no more than two attachments, and provide a logical name.

4. Using ‘Subject’ field

• Always include a brief Subject. Leaving Subject blank can get your email flagged as spam.
• Make sure that the Subject field accurately reflects the content of your email.
• Never open an old email, hit reply, and send a message that has nothing to do with the previous one. Your Subject line must match the message.
• Do not hesitate to change the Subject as soon as the thread or content of the email chain changes to more accurately reflect a conversation’s direction.
• Do not forget to proof a Subject line as carefully as you would proof the rest of the email.

5. Using ‘From’ field

This field is where your name and email are indicated.

• Make sure your name is displayed properly.

6. Using ‘To’ field

This field is where you place the email address of who you are trying to contact.

• Include addresses in the To: field for those who you would like a response from.

7. Using ‘CC’ field

Use this field in order to include someone else on the message, but not necessarily indicate that this message is being sent specifically “to” them. Sometimes this lets a CC’ed recipient know they are not obligated to respond.

• Include addresses in the CC: field for those who you are just informing.
• Only use CC: when it is important for those you CC to know about the contents of the email.
• Use this field when there are a handful of associates involved in a discussion that requires all be on the same page. These people know each other or have been introduced and have no problem having their email address exposed to the parties involved.
• Don’t overuse the CC: feature. This can clutter the Inboxes of those you’ve contacted.
and expose their email addresses to each other which might cause a privacy infringement problem. It can cause your emails to be ignored.

8. Using ‘BCC’ field

- A BCC: copies someone on the email just as a CC does. However, BCC’s cannot be seen by anyone in the To: or CC: field.
- Use this field when emailing a group of contacts who do not personally know each other. This is a privacy issue.
- BCC might be used to protect someone’s email from being exposed to others without their permission.
- BCC might be just a way of letting someone see a message without actually including them on all the threads to follow.
- BCC might help you simply be polite in email threads. For example, if your supervisor is introducing you to someone, it’s common courtesy to BCC your supervisor in the response.
- Make sure when using BCC: that your intentions are proper. To send BCC: to others as a way of talking behind someone’s back is inconsiderate.

9. When to use the High priority feature

- Consider the importance of your email very carefully and use this feature only on especially important occasions. If you overuse it, few people will take it seriously.
- A better solution in most cases is to use descriptive subject line that explain exactly what a message is about.
- You should not use this feature on a situation with no detrimental impact.
- You should not use this feature when you are including many people on the email (this can confuse people and have many people taking the same “important” action), unless it is to alert them to vital news or sends information that affects something they are all working on.

10. When to use the Reply option

When you click reply, you respond directly to the person who emailed you last. If you respond directly to the initial message, your reply will go to the original sender of the email. But if you respond to someone else’s email in the thread that follows, you will end up replying just to that person.

- Do not use an old email to hit reply and start typing about an entirely new topic.
• It is acceptable to edit down your replies. Removing parts of the previous email that no longer apply to your response including email headers and signature files removes the clutter.

11. When to use the Reply-All option

When you select Reply-All, you email back everyone who is either in the “To” or “CC” fields. The benefit of Reply-All is letting those in the thread know that a certain issue has been addressed.

• Refrain from using the Reply-All feature to give your opinion to those who may not be interested. You need to carefully think about whether “all” really need to know of your reply to conduct their work.
• In most cases replying to the sender alone is the best course of action.

12. Email response time

• You should do your best to respond to all your work-related emails as quickly as possible.
• Reply to your emails—even if the email wasn’t intended for you, especially if the sender is expecting a reply.

Due to busy schedules, it is not always possible to respond to emails right away. You should try to think of email response times in the following “buckets”:

Immediate Teammates
Respond within 12 hours. Most often our team is emailing us about day-to-day tasks that require our attention. Everyone on the team is more productive when communication is quick.

General Colleagues
To all other colleagues at WHO, a 24-hour response time is considered appropriate. If you honestly do not have time for a particular request that comes over email, you should respond and say so. It’s better to respond with transparency than to let an email go ignored and leave your colleague in the dark.

External Contacts
Unless marked as an urgent email or one that needs an immediate response, responding to external contacts by the end of the week in which it was sent is perfectly appropriate. For high value contacts, it may be worth responding within a 24-hour time frame.
• If you truly can’t respond properly to any of the above categories within a respectful time frame, send a quick email acknowledging that you are busy and will get back as soon as you can.

13. **Sending emails**

• Review each email before clicking Send to ensure your message is clear and relays the tone that you desire.
• Add the email address last. This prevents sending an email accidently before you have finished writing and proofing the message. Even if you reply to a message, it is good precaution to delete the recipient’s address and insert it when you are sure that the message is ready to be sent. An alternative is to draft the response in a blank email or in Word, then paste it into the reply.
• Double-check that you’ve selected the correct recipient.

14. **Forwarding emails**

• When forwarding an email you should include a personal comment to the person you are forwarding to.
• When forwarding a long email thread, a common courtesy is to summarize what’s being discussed below so the recipient knows exactly what you want from them. It is considered a bad practice to forward a multiple-chain thread with a note that just says, “see below.”
• Do not forward anything without editing out all the forwarding signs, other email addresses, headers and commentary from all the other forwarders, unless it is an important information for the recipient.
• Do not forward corporate emails to anybody besides other WHO employees or relevant stakeholders.
• If you would like your forwarded email to start a new email chain (rather than being a part of your current thread), simply include your own commentary in the subject line.
• Some emails are not intended to be forwarded. If a contact is sending you private or sensitive information, use high caution before forwarding it along. If someone asks you to refrain from forwarding emails they have that right.

15. **Using Out-of-Office replies**

If you are going to be unavailable for an extended period of time, an automated Out-of-Office reply can let people know that you will not be able to respond to their message until the date you will be in the office again.
• Specify how long you will be unavailable.
• Include another person to contact for more urgent matters. Let your colleague know in advance that they are in your Out-of-Office message.
• Include “Out-of-office” in your subject line so people can easily identify the automated response.
• Do not include more detail than needed.
• If you are taking extended leave, it may be helpful to give people a way of getting your attention for truly urgent situations.

16. Using mobile email account

• Proof your emails sent from mobile devices to avoid any typos.
• You should disable predictive text feature on your smart-phone and try to avoid using autocorrect when typing a message on your phone.
• Do not forget to include a short text signature.

17. When to pick up the phone

• When a topic has lots of parameters that need to be explained or negotiated and will generate too many questions and confusion, do not handle it via email.
• Email should not be used for last minute cancellations of meetings, lunches, interviews, and never for devastating news.

Further considerations:
• If you do not receive a reply, check to see if it was inadvertently deleted or sent to your Junk folder.
• With emotionally charged emails, wait until next morning to see if you feel the same before clicking Send.
• Take a quick look at the emails in your Deleted items folder before you delete them just in case a good email landed there by mistake.
• Keep in mind that people from different cultures speak and write differently. Miscommunication can easily occur because of that, especially in the written form when we cannot see one another’s body language. Tailor your message to the receiver’s cultural background or how well you know them.