Email – To Do

1. Double-check every e-mail address before sending your message.

2. Use a subject line – a word or phrase to let your reader know instantly what the email is about. Examples:
    - Your Input Matters
    - Urgent
    - Benefits Hotline
    - The check's in the mail
    - Change in Corporate meeting
    - Action Required
    - FYI
    - Personal

3. Start with person's name, or "Hi," or "Hello." The "Dear" is generally too formal for email.

4. Be brief, direct, and clear. Emails are more like memos than letters, and more like conversations than memos. Get to the point as quickly as possible. Readers should not need to scroll. A good rule is less than 25 lines of text. If longer, send it as an attachment with a brief cover message in the email.

5. Return emails in the same day that you would a phone call. If you can't immediately answer the question, send a reply saying the message was received and you will send the requested information later. Use the "out of office assistant" when you can not check email.

6. Use capitalization and punctuation in the same way that you would in any other document. However, you can be more informal, simple, and brief with email.

7. Mark your message "urgent," if it truly is, or it may get lost in a series of email messages.

8. Send copies of your email only to those who need to receive them. Much email received in companies is unnecessary and inappropriate to the receiver.

9. Type your name at the end.

10. Check for accuracy before you send.

11. Use language that is natural and comfortable for you. Where in a letter you might write "I will," in an email write "I'll."

12. Be discreet. Email can show up in odd and embarrassing places. People you never expect to read your message may see it.

13. Decide on who you are sending it to before formatting. An email to a boss may be more formal and brief, versus an email to a close colleague.

14. If you send an email to more than 5 people, put their names in a group.

15. Name the attachment with a clear title.

16. In the content of your email, tell the recipient what you are sending them. "The file attached is called 'communications.doc' and it is in MSWord 2000."

17. Check out what size attachments a person can receive before sending a large file.

18. If using a longer email, place an executive summary at the top with a table of contents. If a response is required, put this at the top in the executive summary.

19. Realize that "bcc" means that the sender wanted you to see it, but not others to see it. Use sparingly.

20. Schedule appointed times to check email, if possible.

Email – Don't Do

1. If the relationship with the person is professional, don't use emoticons.

2. Don't "flame" – a virtual term for venting emotion online or sending inflammatory emails. Ask yourself:
    - Would I say this to this person's face?
    - Am I putting the receiver in an awkward position?
    - How would I feel if I got this email?
    - Is this the most professional way to handle this piece of communication?

3. Don't send an email when the information could be misinterpreted. Such as,
    - Disciplinary action
    - Conflicts about grades or personal information
    - Concerns about fellow classmates/workmates
    - Complaints

4. If truly urgent, don't send an email. There is no guarantee it will be read immediately.

5. Don't use email for big news, such as a death notice, new company president, or serious illness.

6. Don't use all capital letters. People will think you are YELLING!

7. Don't forward any email without the original sender's permission. Similarly, do not share others' email addresses without checking with them first.

8. Don't waste people's time with unnecessary or trivial emails.

9. Don't email "up" – to your boss or boss's boss – to make a point.

10. If you realize that the message is not being understood, don't keep emailing. Pick up the telephone and call the person.

11. Don't overuse exclamation points!!!

Adapt Your Message, Style and Format to Your Audience

1. What will be the Audience's Initial Reaction to the Message?

Important or not important to the reader? If not important,

- In subject line or 1st paragraph, indicate that this message is important or relevant with phrases such as, "Your input needed," "Your response matters," or "Vote now."
- Make the action as easy as possible.
- Suggest a realistic deadline for action.
- Keep the message as short as possible.

Do the people you are writing to like you? If no,

- Avoid phrases that could seem condescending, arrogant, rude, hostile or uncaring.
- Use positive words to counteract the natural tendency to sound defensive.
- Develop logic and reader benefits fully.

2. How much information does the audience need?

How much do they already know about the subject? If new,

- Be clear. Define terms, explain concepts, and use examples.
- Link new info to old info that the reader already knows.
- Use paragraphs and headings to break up new information into related chucks so that information is easier to digest.
- Test a draft of your document with a subset of your intended audience to see whether the audience can understand and use what you've written.

3. What obstacles must you remove?

If audience is opposed,

- Start your message with any areas of agreement or common ground.
- Be clear and unambiguous. Points that might be clear to a neutral reader can be misread by someone with a chip on his or her shoulder.
- Avoid statements that will anger the audience.
- Limit your statement or request to the smallest possible area. If parts of your message could be delivered later, postpone them.

Is it easy for the audience to do? If not,

- Make the action as easy as possible. Provide a form that can be filled out quickly.
- Break down actions into a check list.
- Show that what you ask is consistent with some aspect of what the audience believes/values.
- Show how the person will benefit.

4. What expectations does the audience have about the appropriate language, structure, and form for messages?

What style of writing is preferred – formal or informal?
What "red flag" words would create a negative response?
What is the corporate culture?

Kimberly Pace. 2011.