

# **Email Etiquette (Netiquette) Guidance**

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# Email Etiquette (Netiquette) Guidance

## 1 Aim of Guidelines/Policy

This Guidance is intended for all staff using the Email Business Tools provided by the Care Trust. In following this guidance staff will reduce the likelihood of misunderstanding, unintentional rudeness or offence when communicating using email.

## 2 Introduction/ Background

Email is an evolving communication media and although it shares many of the qualities of the telephone, letter and face-to-face conversation, it is different in its etiquette.

More established media have defined etiquette that we all recognise; stating your name when you answer the phone, signing your name to letters you write or saying goodbye at the end of a conversation. Besides from being polite, this etiquette provides the important framework with which people communicate with each other. Email is new, and therefore people are not sure how to communicate with it, which leads to confusion, misunderstanding and possibly hurt feelings where none were intended. Gradually a worldwide email etiquette is developing, and as such the Care Trust is recommending, but not enforcing, the following guidance for the use of email.

The guidance offered below is at times contradictory. Particularly in respect to the number of emails vs. the size vs. separation of topics one must attempt to strike a reasonable balance. The Care Trust recognises that not everyone will be appreciative of staff's efforts to respect the etiquette below, but if staff attempt to follow this guidance and other relevant policies/obligations it will provide support and assistance where appropriate.

This policy draws from a variety of sources, although is primarily developed from the guidance of:

- Example of an Acceptable Use Policy, (e-Government Unit, May 2002, [e-government.cabinetoffice.gov.uk](http://e-government.cabinetoffice.gov.uk))
- Network Etiquette - for Email and Newsgroups (Alex Reid, Oxford University Computing Services, November 1998, [www.ox.ac.uk](http://www.ox.ac.uk))
- Email Etiquette (London School of Economics and Political Science, August 2004, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/>)

# PLEASE REMEMBER – THIS IS NOT A POLICY, IT IS ONLY GOOD ADVICE

## 3 Guideline statements

- 3.1 Audience** This Guidance is applicable to any and all staff members of the Care Trust that uses the Email Business Tool
- 3.2 Good Practice** Because the use of Email creates artefacts (electronic documents), there are some good practice guidelines to follow in order to manage and help other people manage the Email tools.
- 3.2.1** Have a clear subject, title or topic line  
It is frustrating for those who receive a lot of email not to be able to quickly gauge the relevance and subject matter of a message they have received. Similarly searching for a previously opened ambiguously titled message amongst other ambiguously titled messages wastes time. The subject/topic/title line of an Email should therefore be worded clearly and accurately to represent the content of your message. Consider this carefully when replying or forwarding an email, as you have the opportunity to make changes to the title.
- 3.2.2** One message, one topic  
Don't try to cram multiple topics into one message, particularly if you require replies to different questions. It is usually less anxiety producing and easier to read when receiving several shorter emails rather than one long one. It also makes it easier for your recipient to manage their emails, as specific messages can be categorised easily.
- 3.2.3** Be responsive  
People expect a reply to most messages. Ensure you check your email account regularly and when you receive a message attempt to read and respond to it within a reasonable amount of time (couple of days at most). Even if you cannot thoroughly read it or create a response it is polite to send a short reply to the sender to let them know you have received the email and will provide a proper reply when you can. It would be a good idea to offer a date or time as to when they can expect a reply from you.  
When you are away from your email system for a reasonable amount of time, be sure to have an automated response or colleague responding for you, to tell senders that you are away and when you will be back.
- 3.2.4** Stay organised  
It is a very good idea to manage your email folders. Delete unwanted and unimportant emails (keeping in mind any policies required to keep records) and organise and archive your remaining messages in a logical fashion. This helps you keep track of your email, and in the event that you are away and someone needs access to your messages, they will have a reasonable chance of finding what they are looking for.
- 3.2.5** Write emails as though the public could see them  
There are a variety of legitimate and illegitimate ways an email could be seen by people you had not intended to see it. Regardless of how it ended up being seen the embarrassment and potential consequences

will be yours. It is therefore recommended that when you write emails to assume they will be seen by people other than your intended recipients. If the information you are sending is confidential or private it may be best to consider other methods of communication, such as the postal service.

- 3.3 Always read your email before sending** Read your email before you send it. This will help you catch any mistakes and keep your recipients from being confused. Particularly if you wrote it in the heat of the moment or off the cuff you may want to rethink the tone and content. Remember that once you send something, you've lost control of the information. It is also a good idea to check your intended recipients, particularly when replying.
- 3.4 Express yourself Clearly** Even though Email is as quick and easy as the telephone it has similarity to letters in its lack of ability to convey a sense of how you are trying to say something. This can lead to confusion or hurt feelings. This section offers guidance to reduce that risk.
- 3.4.1 Be Explicit** When writing Emails it is very important to explicitly convey the sense in which you write it. Readers of your Emails may easily get the wrong impression, particularly if you use irony or humour in your messages. Although not particularly professional, and to some people annoying, the use of emoticons (emotional icons) provides some ability to insert a sense of how you are saying something. An example of a simple emoticon is the "smiley face" :-)  
Emoticons can have a specific meaning so it is not recommended to use complex ones without knowing their specific etiquette.
- 3.4.2 Cautiously include Personality** Writing the way you speak is a very natural way of writing. However those not familiar with who you are will most likely not be able to appreciate the extra personality you put into messages. It is a good idea not to write in your personal style unless you know the person you are sending the mail to you and you are sure that message will go to no one else.
- 3.5 Keep it Brief** Most people do not enjoy reading emails off of a computer screen, particularly if they are longer than the visible height of the screen. Where possible, keep it short. The following section has some helpful suggestions on how to do so.
- 3.5.1 Paste only the useful bits for a reply** When replying to a statement and pasting the original statement into your message, only use the most relevant bits of it, rather than the whole of the original message.
- 3.5.2 Break up the block of text** If write a long message, ensure there is appropriate indentations or line spaces to keep the text from become one giant block of works. Give your recipient's eyes some reference points.
- 3.6 Keep them Few** Email is so easy and convenient to use people tend to send them without considering how many emails their recipient may get in a day.

The following section offers advice to keep the number of emails everyone gets down.

If you are getting too many emails, Section 3.11 provides some etiquette on how to ask people to reduce the amount of emails they send to you.

- 3.6.1 Don't send more messages than you need to  
Make sure that the messages you are sending are necessary. Many people receive lots of emails, so they find it difficult to answer all the emails and get their work done.
- 3.6.2 Don't include more people than necessary  
Only include relevant people. For instance if you are writing to someone for a request, you probably don't need to include his or her line manager as well. Or where your conversation has a lot of messages going back and forth between a limited number of people, don't include the people who are not involved with the conversation as a whole. Whenever possible, cut the number of people on the to: and cc: lists to only those necessary. Remember that you can always send the email later if they need to know the whole conversation.
- 3.6.3 Use other methods of communication  
If you send a lot of email to one person, consider if it would be better to use the telephone or have a meeting.
- 3.6.4 Inappropriate authority figure inclusion  
A common type of email that is usually unnecessary is the "mob-mail"; an email that includes lots of people in its "to:" and "cc:" lists in order to solicit support or add the threat or weight of authority. Usually these extra people do not appreciate being included and would rather stay out of the conversation until they are needed. Remember that if you do need other people's support you can always send the whole email later with an explanation of the issue. Alternatively remember that if you are included in a "mob-mail" it is not impolite to excuse yourself from the conversation. Finally if you are on the receiving end of the email it is unusually not impolite to strip the unnecessary people from the "to:" and "cc:" lists down to the people who are directly participating in the conversation or issue. Check the email chain to see who is part of the conversation.
- 3.6.5 Be prepared to stop when asked  
Too much information is the problem of the modern workplace. Some people receive a lot of email, so much that it becomes an impediment to carrying out the rest of their work. In these situations they may contact you to ask for a reduction in the amount of emails. If this happens treat the request with respect because the alternative for the person is to simply ignore or start deleting your emails without even reading them! If this does happen to you it is best to contact the person and try to work out a compromise. This could be by trying to use a different communication method, or to ask them what emails you send they find unnecessary, or if the volume is too much, how you could reduce it without compromising the information you feel is important to provide. Ultimately if they ask you to stop sending types of information, reduce the volume to some sort of schedule or to use a different communication method this is their choice and they have taken responsibility for any information that they may miss in your changed communication. If you

feel this is a risk to yourself ask that they put their request in writing (or an email)

### **3.7 Keep it Simple**

Email tools usually provide a variety of ways to format the messages you send. Not all of the options available aid in communication and changes from the standard template of black lettering in a standard font on a white background should be used sparingly. The following section offers things to consider:

#### 3.7.1 Make it readable

Colour changes to the text and backgrounds are often available in Email tools. If you choose to change the colours of such things, make sure that the end product is easy to read. For instance, yellow text on a white background is not particularly easy to see.

Additionally, there may be a variety of fonts to use. Although it can be fun to change fonts, remember that deviation from the standard Arial or Times New Roman can be annoying to some people, and may give the wrong impression depending on the style of font. Remember that Arial Text is easiest to read on a computer screen, while Times New Roman is best on a printed page.

#### 3.7.2 DON'T USE ALL CAPITALS or all lower case

Using all capitals is the equivalent of Shouting. Using all lower case letters looks lazy and unprofessional, but has no particular meaning.

#### 3.7.3 Use correct punctuation

Punctuation is an important part of written communication. Strange punctuations are as bad as missing punctuations. Most people will appreciate not having to decipher your message due to punctuation mistakes.

#### 3.7.4 Pictures and HTML are not always possible

Remember that not everyone has a sophisticated email tool that can receive pictures or HTML code. Some organisations specifically convert emails into plain text, and if you have a fancy email the formatting and visuals can be lost, or worse the message disappears.

### **3.8 Use Flags and Receipts correctly**

Flags to indicate message content and read or receive receipts are useful tools, however they can be seen as annoying when used inappropriately. Consider the following:

#### 3.8.1 Receipts are like watching someone

Read and Receive receipts are useful tools for you to know if someone has opened or received your email. However they can be seen as a tool to monitoring someone, particularly if placed on every message. Use receipts only when necessary, usually only to confirm the most important of emails. Similarly if your email system requests a receipt from you it is polite to send one, even if you find it annoying. It is better to ask someone to not use the receipts rather than not sending them.

#### 3.8.2 Flags are useful

Flagging a message as something is a helpful tool for the recipient. Using flags helps to classify the messages they receive and the expectations of the message. It is not recommended however to always use a message timer or due date as most people do not like reminders that they have not created for themselves.



Urgent or importance flags should be used correctly. Marking every email you send to someone as urgent and/or high importance reduces the likelihood that they will respect that flag in future. Ideally it would be best to speak with the person you are communicating with to see what they would like flagged as urgent and important.

Similarly if you receive an email that has a flag on it, it is polite to respect that flag even if you think it is inappropriate. It is better to provide someone an explanation of how you'd like them to use the flags for email they send to you rather than to ignore them.

### **3.9 Common Courtesies**

This section deals with common courtesies to people who you are having an email conversations with

#### 3.9.1 Be tolerant

Everyone is new once and we all make mistakes. Be tolerant.

#### 3.9.2 Ignore or delete what is asked of you

If someone asks you to ignore a message that they sent or to delete something without reading it is common courtesy to do so. If you have read it already and it was obviously not for you it is polite to pretend it did not exist.

#### 3.9.3 Email erroneously sent to you

If you receive email addressed to you by mistake (For instance, you share the same name as the other person) it is polite to inform the sender that they have sent the email to the wrong person. Note that to keep, act upon and/or forward an email not intended for you may be breaking the law.

#### 3.9.4 Don't be Rude, Abusive or Defamatory

As with other forms of communication, it is at least impolite to be rude, abusive or defamatory in an email. You should also be aware that it may be against the law, and that emails are legitimate legal documents that may be used in court.

### **3.10 Common Courtesies to Other People**

This section deals with common courtesies to people who are not part of your email conversations

#### 3.10.1 Including others you've spoken of

If you mention another person in your message, and it is appropriate to do so, send them a copy of the message by placing their email address in the "CC" field.

#### 3.10.2 Don't use other people's words without acknowledgement

It is very easy to copy and paste other people's messages into your own. When doing so it is polite to indicate whose words you've used are so as not to plagiarise.

#### 3.10.3 Don't change someone else's words

If you do copy another person's words into your message, it is best to leave them exactly as the other person wrote them or indicate where you have made changes. Remember that changing them may inadvertently change the message and you would be misrepresenting what they had said.

#### 3.10.4 Don't pretend to be something you

This is rather obvious. Asides from potentially breaking the law, pretending you are something or someone else breaks the trust

aren't

dependent for Email. Since no one can see who you are or where you are, they have to trust what you say in the Email is the truth.

### **3.11 What to do when you are receiving too many emails**

Email is like the post: you can't stop a letter until it gets to your door. Email is even easier and more available than the post, which means you can get a lot more emails arriving on your "doorstep".

This section provides some guidance and etiquette on how to ask people to reduce the number of emails they send to you.

#### **3.11.1 Take control of your inbox**

Unfortunately the only person that can effectively manage the number of emails you receive is yourself. No one else knows where they are coming from or what information will be important to you.

If you find that you are receiving too many emails you are able to politely ask those sending you the emails to reduce the number they are sending.

Be careful when requesting a reduction or complete stop of incoming emails because you may inadvertently make people cautious about sending any email to you at all. It is best to sort out a communication strategy, outlining what information you want to receive, what is appropriate for email or another communication method (i.e.: telephone), and how often or under what conditions you'd like to receive it. It is best to provide these instructions in writing to avoid confusion.

#### **3.11.2 Ignore and Delete at your peril**

It is highly impolite to ignore or delete emails without reading them. Ignoring or deleting a message is equal to burning letters without opening them or hanging up while having a conversation on the phone. Besides from the impoliteness it is not recommended to delete or ignore unread emails because you cannot be sure of what they contain. The person sending you the information sent it to you because they felt you should have it. The sender's duty is only to get the information to you, and if you don't read the email then the consequences are yours. At the very worst people may simply stop sending you emails, since they will assume that you are ignoring them. This is a risky strategy of reducing you email intake, as people will likely stop sending you important information as well.

#### **3.11.3 Staying organised**

Staying organised can help you reduce the burden of receiving emails. Most email programs have an automatic rules function that will sort emails into categories for you. Categorising you emails can make your inbox less daunting to tackle.

#### **3.11.4 Getting back what you put in**

Remember that if you send lots of emails, you will most likely receive a lot of emails. If email does not need a reply then make this obvious.

## **4 Review**

Date/Trigger	Review Areas
<i>Time Independent Reviews</i>	
Probably none	
<i>Timed Reviews</i>	
Yearly Review, Sept every year	All applicable areas

## POLICY FEEDBACK FORM

POLICY TITLE	
POLICY REFERENCE	
DATE FOR REVIEW	
DATE FOR COMMENTS	

COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS FOR POLICY REVIEW:

**Areas to consider:** local service developments, impact of policy on practice,