

E-ETIQUETTE: A QUICK GUIDE TO E-MAILING FOR OBERLIN COLLEGE STUDENTS

The Center for Leadership in Health Promotion at Oberlin College Spring 2008

E-etiquette is a loosely defined set of e-mail manners, especially relevant in professional and academic realms. While e-mail is generally more informal than other methods of communication, it is still necessary to keep courtesy, respect, and ethics in mind. E-mail also demands a few of its own unique manners that many people overlook.

STUDENTS

The Basics

- Start each new correspondence with a greeting or acknowledgement of recipient.
- Say ‘please’ and ‘thank you.’
- Subject line should be topic-appropriate and specific. (i.e.: “Staff meeting, 4/10, 3pm, RSVP” is a better subject line than “meeting”)
- Return e-mail promptly, like a phone call. If you don’t have time, send a quick note saying you will respond ASAP.
- If someone requests an RSVP, it is polite to respond in a timely manner.
- Do not forward an email without permission.

The Text

- Use standard spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Set up your email spell-checker. Resist the urge to click send without proof reading.
- Consider email a form of letter writing and resist the urge to be too informal in style or format.
- Capitalization is considered SHOUTING. It can be considered rude and ineffective.
- Send e-mails in plain text format rather than HTML; most, though not all email clients can read HTML format.

Your Email Personality

- Always remember to keep your recipient (and your relationship with them) in mind when crafting the tone of your email.
- The tone you use in speech can be difficult to get across in email - sarcasm and dry humor often fail.
- Emoticons (smiley faces, etc.) can indeed add a nice touch but should be used sparingly and only in informal messages.
- Avoid venting emotion online. Email is not an appropriate or efficient sphere for interpersonal conflict resolution, complaints, or disciplinary action; be careful not to alienate your reader and potentially make the problem worse.
- Resolving conflict using email communication is difficult. Pick up the phone or speak face-to-face instead.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND TIME CONCERNS

Many e-mail servers have a quota, which, if full, can prevent someone from receiving incoming messages. Keep the size (in computer-disk size, generally kilobytes) in mind when composing messages.

- Send only worthwhile messages – avoid spam, jokes, and chain letters.
- Include a complete copy of the previously sent message when replying. It can be hard to keep track of electronic conversations, especially considering the large amounts of email that students/faculty/staff already have to deal with.
- Ask for permission before sending large attachments.
- Don't use reply receipts too frequently; they're annoying and can seem to some rude.
- Use the 'priority message' option sparingly, only when truly necessary; if overused, it becomes meaningless.
- Deadlines or a request for a response should be announced at the beginning of e-mail; they are less likely to be noticed if they are embedded in the text or stuck at the bottom of a message.

SOME USEFUL RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON E-ETIQUETTE

<http://www.its.uiowa.edu/commteam/email.shtml>
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/pw/p_emaillett.html
<http://www.cs.queensu.ca/FAQs/email/etiquette.html>
http://www.cit.gu.edu.au/~davidt/email_etiquette.htm
<http://plaza.ufl.edu/dmathias/presentations/email.pdf>

Students: For questions about email protocol, feel free to email life.skills@oberlin.edu and a peer educator can provide assistance.