STUDENT NOTES FOR SUCCESS

No 20

Sending the right message: communicating via email

Email - so easy to send and read, so difficult to do well! Generally, this is a form of communication that many people read and send in a hurry. However, email is so important in the world of business that employers are spending a lot of money in training their employees to do it well.

All student emails at Curtin University must be sent through the Oasis system, which creates an official record of your communication and any attached documents. There are several parts to any email:

- title
- salutation
- message tone, language, and content, and
- signing off.

Many emails also have attachments. Be aware of what you attach and who might read it in order to avoid offence.

Giving your email a title

To attract the reader's attention, your email title should be succinct but still inform the reader of the sender details, and the email purpose.

Sender details and purpose of email

If the intended email recipient knows you by a different chosen name, then start with that name. For example if your Oasis email address is [ChenXiu.Lee@postgrad.curtin.edu.au] but you prefer to use the name *Christine*, then start the email name with that name. Your email title should also indicate content or subject matter

Example

Email title: Christine-Lab session report
Christine-Monday appointment

Salutations

A salutation is the title that we use to address a person. This could be Mr, Mrs, Ms, Dr, Professor or the like. In professional relationships, for example a student writing to a lecturer, it is considered good manners to use that person's title (Dear Dr Smith) unless that person has said

"call me David"; then you can address them as 'Dear David'. You can check a person's title by going to the Curtin search tools. Making the effort to address a person by name and title can greatly enhance their interest in your email.

Message tone, language and content

How we say something is just as important as what we say. Our tone, or the words we use, can make someone happy or angry at us. Before sending any email, read it carefully a few times to see if what you are saying, and how you are saying it, might be interpreted in ways that you had not intended. Aim for a pleasant tone in the same way that you might speak in a polite way to a friend or valued family member. Once you have sent the email, it is too late to say "I didn't mean it that way!" or to add something you have forgotten. Try to write in a polite, unambiguous manner; your reader will not be able to see your facial expression or hear the tone of your voice to help them interpret whether you are angry, joking or serious.

Avoid using capital letters unless you feel it is really necessary. In online communication, capitals are interpreted as shouting at the recipient. Telephone text type language or signs and numbers should also be avoided. In addition, make sure that you spell-check your email or document before sending it.

Every email that you send should have a clear purpose. Mostly people using email read quickly or scan through a document looking to see what they might need to deal with, any action that they need to take, and when that must be completed by. Use the following as a checklist for your emails.

Have you:

- used the correct email address?
- used a respectful greeting to begin?
- used clear language, correct spelling and grammar?
- made clear the purpose of your email?
- politely indicated the need for reply or action?
- expressed any request for further contact also in a polite tone?
- referred to any attachments in the email?

Once you have sent your email, be patient! The intended recipient may not act on that message immediately. Allow for time differences in people's lives and working patterns.

Signing off

Courtesy is a powerful tool for achieving favour in your dealings with others – and even more so in an email, because the recipient cannot hear your voice or see your smile when they read your message. In ending your email, sign off in a polite and respectful manner:

Example

All the best, Christine (casual)

Best regards or Kind regards, Tom Smith (more formal)

Thank you for your assistance in this matter, Diana Lim (very formal)

Email attachments

When sending attachments consider the size of each file and whether it might take the recipient's mail server a long time to download. If you must send multiple attachments, it is wise to spread these over several emails, each with a message to indicate the names and number of files attached. Avoid sending your email in a hurry and omitting to attach the document mentioned in the email.

Naming your attachment

Ensure that you name your attachments so that they are clearly identifiable to the recipient. Each attachment's name should indicate:

- who owns the document
- the unit of study (if appropriate)
- the document type (e.g. report, spreadsheet, pictures, letter of application)
- any specific purpose number or code (e.g. job applications etc.)

Every attachment should have some form of title page or at least a main heading to identify the document when printed. Every page should also have a header or footer with the document's name, author name, and page number so that, if separated when printed on communal equipment, nothing is lost.
Attachment file names might be as follows:

Examples

Christine-Man100-Ass1.doc

Christine-Group pres PP slides.ppt

Christine-Letter-Ref no379.doc

Christine-Job application Ref no379.doc.

Finally, before pressing the *send* button, pause, take the time to proof read your email to pick up any ambiguities or omissions, and only proceed when you are quite confident about the message you are sending.

Find out more at the CBS Academic Communication Development website:
https://businesslaw.curtin.edu.au/study/student-experience/academic-communication-development/

You might also be interested in *Handy Handout 19. Ways of Speaking Online.*

Contact us at:
AcademicCommunicationDevelopment@curtin.edu.au