Email Etiquette: Do's and Don'ts

Do's

DO include a heading in the subject line. With the number of emails and viruses that populate inboxes, realize the significance of the subject line. A subject header is essential if you want someone to read your message.

DO make the subject line meaningful. A "Hi" or "Hello" won't do. The recipient decides in which order to read your message- or whether to read it all- based on who sent it and what it's about.

DO personalize your message to the recipient. Although email is informal, it still requires a personal greeting, such as, "Dear Ms. Jones," or "Hi, Jack." Failure to include a greeting can make your message seem cold.

DO account for tone. When you communicate in person, more than 90% of your message is non-verbal. Email has no tell-tale body language! The reader cannot see your face or hear the tone of your voice, so choose your words carefully and thoughtfully.

DO look at your email address and determine how it represents you. Names such as "soccerguy8" don't sound professional. Students sometimes embarrass themselves by communicating with an employer using an inappropriate address.

DO include your name or a signature with additional details and contact information. The recipient may want to communicate by means other than email.

Don'ts

DON'T forget to check for spelling and grammar. If you think this form of communication does not have to be letter perfect, think again! It represents you. Poorly written messages may indicate a poor caliber of work in other ways. Use proper capitalization, punctuation and usage, and always check your spelling.

DON'T write the great American novel. Email is intended to be a brief communication. Keep the message short and concise. Use only a few, brief paragraphs.

DON'T forward email without permission. Why take responsibility for passing along something that was addressed only to you? Often, confidential information becomes public knowledge because of someone's lack of judgment. Unless you were asked to forward something, don't do so without permission!

DON'T "reply to all" unless you are sending a response appropriate for group viewing.

DON'T fill in the "TO" line until you've written and proofed/edited your message. Is the information accurate? Grammatically correct? In an appropriate tone? If you enter the "TO" information first, a slip of the finger can send a message before its time!

DON'T think that no one but the intended recipient will see your email. After a message leaves your mailbox, you have no idea where it may go. Don't use email to send anything that you wouldn't want to be seen in public.