



Faculty of Engineering
and Applied Science

COMPOSING PROFESSIONAL E-MAILS: THE BODY

The body is the main part of the e-mail. Today, many necessary interactions take place solely through e-mail, which means that composing them properly is of the utmost importance. This document contains some tips for making your message both read and understood.

PARAGRAPHING

There is a tendency for people to hate seeing “walls of text.” This is especially true in e-mails. When an e-mail is longer than a couple of sentences, there is a preference for the e-mail to be broken into shorter paragraphs rather than a single, long one. Longer e-mails with a single paragraph are likely to be read begrudgingly or not read at all.

Try to make each paragraph contain only one main point. Trying to include too many points in a paragraph will force the reader to work harder to understand the message.

CONCISENESS AND CLARITY

Even using shorter paragraphs will not counteract the problem of having a needlessly lengthy e-mail. Always aim for your writing to be lean. Avoid using expressions that require several words when a single word will suffice. Don't repeat yourself unnecessarily.

Some strategies can aid both making the writing concise and clear. For one, make use of bold, italics, and colouring to highlight important words/points. Use bullets or numbering if their use makes logical sense.

GIVING CONTEXT

While you do want to keep the e-mail short, don't forget to give context when required. This may involve stating who you are and the purpose of your e-mail in the beginning. Presuming that the recipient knows both of these things can lead to confusion. This is especially true when the person receiving the e-mail teaches multiple classes or corresponds with dozens of people by e-mail daily.

TONE

It goes without saying that e-mail is unlike face-to-face conversation. A large part of our messages come from how we say things rather than the actual words that we say. Be conscious of potential misinterpretations of your message. Also, strive to be polite and assertive rather than crude and aggressive. For example, you should ask if someone can help you rather than commanding someone to do so.

Be careful with joking, especially sarcasm. Absent of vocal tones and facial expressions, distinguishing an honest statement of fact from a joke is often difficult.

FORMALITY

The level of formality depends on the relationship between the sender and the recipient. In professional settings, slang terms should be avoided, and expletives are forbidden. Write in full words rather than contractions. Some acronyms and abbreviations do have a place in professional e-mails. Some examples are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Acceptable and Unacceptable Abbreviations for E-Mails

Acceptable	Unacceptable
FYI	LOL
ASAP	UR
RE:	R U
RSVP	THX
TBA/TBD	Gonna
	TTYL
	XOXO

The use of emoticons is more of a grey area. In some situations, they are very useful when indicating positive or negative emotions. The winky face is particularly useful when a sentence is facetious. However, not all emoticons have a place in e-mails, and their overuse may be perceived as immature. Also, some e-mail programs are unable to display symbols, so the emoticon might not be displayed.

GRAMMAR

Regardless of the format, there is no excuse for poor grammar. Treat e-mails as if they were papers, and use grammar checking programs like Grammarly to check for errors. Programs like these are not limited to just grammar checking. Grammarly, for example, checks the tone of the e-mail to make sure it is appropriate and offers suggestions for conciseness and clarity.

If you are a student in the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science at Memorial and you do not have a Grammarly Premium account, contact the Technical Communications Coordinator, [Mark Picco](#), to get access.