

SHIRLEY TAYLOR



EMAIL ESSENTIALS

HOW TO WRITE EFFECTIVE EMAILS AND BUILD GREAT RELATIONSHIPS ONE MESSAGE AT A TIME

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SHIRLEY TAYLOR

Marshall Cavendish Business 

Reading, writing and managing email is taking up an increasing amount of our time. But are we getting it right?

Just as body language helps you to make an impression in person, what you write and how you write it affects what people think of you and your organisation. Be it a thank you note, a meeting reminder, a proposal or a sales pitch, a well-written message will make people want to do business with you. It will also help you achieve the results you want.

In *Email Essentials*, bestselling author, professional speaker and trainer Shirley Taylor provides step-by-step pointers that you can put into practice right away. Learn how to phrase and structure your messages, create online rapport, touch up your tone, build trust, and much more. You'll also find sample emails and useful formulas that will help you write persuasive or challenging messages like reminders and follow-ups, replies to complaints, and how to say 'no' nicely.

Email Essentials is your invaluable guide to crafting simple yet effective emails for any situation.

"No matter how much we love technology, we must never forget the importance of the human touch." – Shirley Taylor



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EMAIL ESSENTIALS

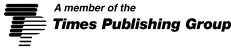
HOW TO WRITE EFFECTIVE EMAILS AND BUILD
GREAT RELATIONSHIPS ONE MESSAGE AT A TIME

SHIRLEY TAYLOR

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INTRODUCTION

EMAIL IS POSSIBLY one of the greatest inventions of our lifetime. It's having a phenomenal effect on the way we communicate, but that may not always be for the better! Reading, writing and managing email is taking an increasing amount of our time. However, research shows that the major cause of email stress is not its volume but its inappropriate use as a communication tool.

More of us are using email to stay in touch while we are travelling or working from home. We are using desktops and laptops as well as tablets and smart phones. We use email to communicate with friends and family, as well as business clients and colleagues, often all over the globe. People whose jobs never used to involve writing skills are now finding themselves replying to dozens of emails every day.

Most of us comment about the increasing quantity of the messages we receive and the pressure we are under to respond quickly. However, under such pressure, what is happening to the quality of the messages we exchange?

Just as a handshake and eye contact say something about you when you meet someone in person, the approach you take in an email gives an impression as well. Whether you are writing a thank you note, a meeting reminder, a proposal or a sales pitch, what you write and how you write it affects what people think of you, and it affects the image of your organisation.

A well-written message that looks and sounds professional will make it easier for people to want to do business with you. It will help people feel good about communicating with you. It will also help you achieve the right response and get great results.

The fact that you've picked up this book means that you want to make email work more effectively for you. You are interested in using email thoughtfully, presenting yourself and your organisation in a positive light. In this book you will find all the help you need, from managing your mailbox to writing great messages, structuring messages logically, using plain English, touching up your tone, and much more.

You'll also notice some key features that highlight important learning points:



MYTH BUSTER

Here you will find a statement that is not true, with notes on the true facts of the matter.



FAST FACT

Useful snippets of information or special points to remember.



AHA! MOMENT

This is a 'lightbulb' moment, when we note something you may be able to conclude from a discussion. Don't forget to note your own 'Aha! Moments', perhaps when you receive some extra insight that clarifies an important point.



TRY THIS

Here you'll find a suggestion for how you can put a special point into practice, either at home or at work.



DANGER ZONE

You'll find some words of warning here, such as things to avoid or precautions to take.



STAR TIPS

At the end of each chapter you'll find a list of Star Tips — important notes to remind you about the key points.

I hope you'll practise the guidelines I've shared in this book. There are lots of samples in here too, as well as formulas for various scenarios that I know you'll find useful.

Start turning the pages and enjoy the huge rewards it will bring!

Shirley Taylor

ASSESS YOURSELF

What is your current understanding of email?

1. Why shouldn't you type your messages in ALL CAPS?

- a) ALL CAPS implies that you are shouting or yelling.
- b) It causes a strain on the reader's eyes and makes reading more difficult.
- c) It makes you look lazy and uneducated.
- d) All of the above.

2. The most important thing to do with every email message is:

- a) Use spellcheck, write in full sentences and use proper grammar.
- b) Use proper paragraphs and leave a space between paragraphs.
- c) Make sure the email address is correct.
- d) All of the above.

3. You should only forward an email when:

- a) You feel it is important.
- b) You know the other person should have the information.
- c) You include a personal comment about why you are forwarding this message to this specific person.
- d) The topic is commendable and important for other people to read.

4. Which one of these would you say is correct?

- a) It's OK to use big words and long sentences occasionally.
- b) Abbreviations, jargon and buzz words are fine to use in writing.
- c) It's important to use formal, template writing to impress readers.
- d) Passive voice is appropriate for email writing.

5. If you can't reply to a message straight away, what should you do?

- a) Send a brief acknowledgement and say you'll reply as soon as possible.
- b) Carry on with your other work; you'll get round to it later.
- c) Put it in a special 'KIV' or 'Pending' folder.
- d) Delete it.

6. When is it alright to contact people by email about your business?

- a) When you know they really need your service.
- b) Anytime at all — after all, lots of companies do 'cold calling' on the telephone.
- c) Only when they call or email you and ask you for information.
- d) When you know you can save them money.

7. A good way to check the user-friendliness of your message is to:

- a) Use lots of abbreviations so the message is short and simple.
- b) Run spellcheck because that finds all the errors.
- c) Write it all in one paragraph so the message is not too long.
- d) Read it out loud with proper tone as if you are speaking to the recipient.

8. A good subject line is:

- a) Lengthy, to give as much information as possible.
- b) Specific, meaningful, appropriate, relevant and thoughtful.
- c) One or two words only.
- d) You don't always need to use a subject line.

9. When you are angry about an issue, the best thing to do is:

- a) Write an email immediately while it's still at the top of your mind.
- b) Draft an email and come back to it after an hour, when you will make changes.
- c) Go to the water cooler and tell all your friends about it.
- d) Pick up the phone and give the guy a piece of your mind.

10. You can create good rapport with clients by:

- a) Always sending email instead of picking up the phone.
- b) Using standard, traditional phrases and corporate templates.
- c) Using friendly language and a natural style, as if having a conversation.
- d) Being very serious and formal in all your emails.

How did you do?

1. The correct answer is (d). ALL CAPS means much more than shouting. Learn more about what's right and what's not in Chapters 1 and 5.
2. Did you answer (d)? All these things are important. See Chapter 1 for a list of common complaints about email in practice.
3. It is always good to know why you are receiving a specific email, so please follow the advice in (c). If you need more help, Chapter 2 is for you.
4. Sorry if you were tricked here, but none of these are correct. It's essential to use plain English today. Find out more in Chapter 6.
5. It's good manners to send a brief acknowledgement, so (a) is the correct answer here. See Chapter 1 for an example.
6. Please don't spam. The correct answer is (c). Learn more about email netiquette in Chapter 3.
7. The golden rule of writing today is to write as if you are speaking, so I do hope you answered (d). Learn more about writing great messages in Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.
8. A good subject line is SMART — so the answer is (b). Spruce up your writing skills by referring to Chapter 4.
9. The sensible answer is (b). In email messages, all you have are words, so you must really work on how they will come across to your reader. Touch up your tone in Chapter 8.

For Review Only

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10. Yes, (c) is the answer here. You will create a good rapport with everyone if you use a friendly style as if you are having a conversation. Find out more about building great relationships with your readers in Chapter 7.

EMAIL – THE PITFALLS AND POTENTIAL

*Computers crash, people die, relationships fall apart.
The best we can do is breathe and reboot.*

— Carrie Bradshaw, from *Sex and the City*

THE INTERNET IS a place where global information and communication is constantly expanding and evolving. Just as with any culture, there are customs that provide guidelines and cohesiveness to the people involved. That's what this book is all about — helping you understand the rules of the road for email as well as the pitfalls and the potential.

The impact of email on business

Email has had a significant impact on the workplace, and has dramatically changed the way we work. It has certainly helped to

reduce the amount of paper correspondence, but on the other hand it has also diminished our face-to-face interactions. For some people, email makes life easier. However, others are feeling the personal disconnection that results from overusing email compared to face-to-face interactions.

Good or bad, email is continuing to impact our daily lives. Let's look at some of the impacts:

1. Email overload

Email overload is a growing problem for most people. Employees are sometimes so overwhelmed with catching up on email that they neglect other critical job duties. Managers are spending so much time reading and replying to emails that they have less time to coach, train and motivate their staff.



FAST FACT

According to research by The Radicati Group, Inc, by the end of 2019 the number of worldwide users of email will exceed 219 million, and over one-third of the worldwide population will be using email. It is expected that over 246 billion emails will be sent per day. And it is estimated that each business email user will be sending and receiving approximately 126 email messages per day.

2. Impact on memory

Very often, working with email means you have to develop a good memory. We tend not to print out as many messages as we perhaps should. Also, many companies implement a system in which old messages (say 30 days old) may be deleted automatically from workstations so that the hard disk is not clogged up unnecessarily. Protect yourself by saving paper copies of important messages.

3. Choosing email over telephone

Many people are sending email messages instead of picking up the phone. This is a common complaint when I talk to clients to discuss potential in-house training. On email it may take several back-and-forth messages to reach a satisfactory conclusion when the issue could be resolved in one phone call. Sending emails when a fast response is needed is just not effective. When time is critical, talking with someone in person or making a phone call is much more effective.

4. Virtual teams

Email has enabled companies to have more diverse work teams, spread out over different locations, often in different countries. Team members can interact and collaborate without needing face-to-face contact. These teams are using software so they share files and hold virtual meetings. But of course email also goes back and forth.

5. Less personalisation

A big drawback of the huge growth in email has been less use of more personalised communication. Employees may overuse email for contacting prospective clients where telephone contact would be much more instant. Work colleagues often prefer to sit at their desks and send emails rather than walking across the office to interact personally with team members. Personal interaction would enable immediate feedback, both verbally and non-verbally. This just isn't possible with email. Overuse of email is very often not helping to build rapport and develop relationships with people. Therefore, the effectiveness of this communication is often reduced.



DANGER ZONE

Email may be a very powerful form of communication, but it can also result in people feeling very disconnected.

6. Misinterpretation

It's very difficult to convey tone in an email, so a reader may not read something in the way you thought you wrote it. This could lead to misunderstanding or conflict. It's so much easier to express the real meaning behind your message when you're looking someone in the eye. Even on the phone you can hear tone of voice and feel emotions. Email can make it too easy to avoid face-to-face discussions and send messages that lack any feeling. So despite the benefits of email, it can lead to feeling disconnected, often making the workplace feel cold and impersonal.

7. No real guidelines

As there have been no real guidelines laid down on how to work with email or how to write email messages, some frustrations are inevitable. A major problem for some people is simply being unable to adjust their communication styles to this new medium. When email is used effectively it can be very powerful indeed. However, when it is used ineffectively it can be costly, annoying and damaging to a company's reputation.



MYTH BUSTER

We don't need training in how to use email. We can pick it up with experience.

Wrong! Many organisations provide a wide range of training for employees — from supervisory training to communication skills, from leadership skills to powerful presentations. In view of the increasing impact that communication has on business, I'm glad to see that many companies are providing training in effective business writing, not only for business letters and reports, but also for email.

Why do we love email?

In terms of the time factor alone, it's easy to see why email is the preferred choice for written communication. Let's take a look at some more reasons why we love email:

- It's written. You can edit and check it before you send it. The recipient can read it, forward it to someone else, perhaps print it out and file it away.
- It's time-zone friendly. Email is great for international communication over different time zones.
- It's quick. Messages are usually delivered in seconds. They may not be read so quickly, but they will be in the recipient's inbox.
- It's cheap. Of course you need to buy a computer and a modem, and (sometimes) pay an Internet service provider. But no matter where your recipient is, each message should cost very little.
- It's flexible. You can forward or send multiple copies of messages easily, and attach documents to messages without any hassle.
- You can attach files. As long as your recipient has the software to open it, you can attach a spreadsheet, a report, photographs, a game, a video — virtually anything!
- It's non-intrusive. You decide when to read your mail and when to reply.

- It can be prioritised. When you open your email first thing in the morning you can prioritise your email-related work for the day. Simple or urgent tasks can be dealt with quickly before getting involved in more heavy-duty or non-urgent work.
- You see the history of each communication. This is a great tool so you can scroll down and remind yourself about previous discussions on the topic.



DANGER ZONE

Avoid the temptation of keeping your email alert switched on the whole time. If you are working on an important report or spreadsheet, you need to focus. You can't concentrate if your pop-up keeps popping up every few minutes, or if that 'ding' keeps 'dinging'! Be sensible and switch off your email alert when you need to focus.



Why don't we love email?

I did a survey asking people about problems they are experiencing with email. Here is a summary of what I discovered:

1. Constant interruptions to your working day

Most email programs have an instant messaging facility that means you are interrupted regularly by an alert like a little buzz or a ping. These interruptions can interfere with your planned work and add frustration and stress to your day. In some companies, however, staff say they must leave their alert on all the time because their boss insists, just in case something urgent is missed. Unless it's a specific requirement of your job, I strongly suggest that you consider switching off your email alert — you will be able to focus on your report or your spreadsheet, and you will feel a greater sense of achievement by doing so. Then when you need a break from your project, you can go back to your email and give it your full attention.

2. It wastes time

Composing and replying to emails can sometimes take up a lot of time that could be better spent on your real job. However, it is common courtesy to reply to email as soon as possible, even if it's just an acknowledgement saying you will give the matter more attention and get back to the writer later:

Hi Janet

Thanks for your message. Can you please give me a few days to look into this, and I'll get back to you by Thursday.

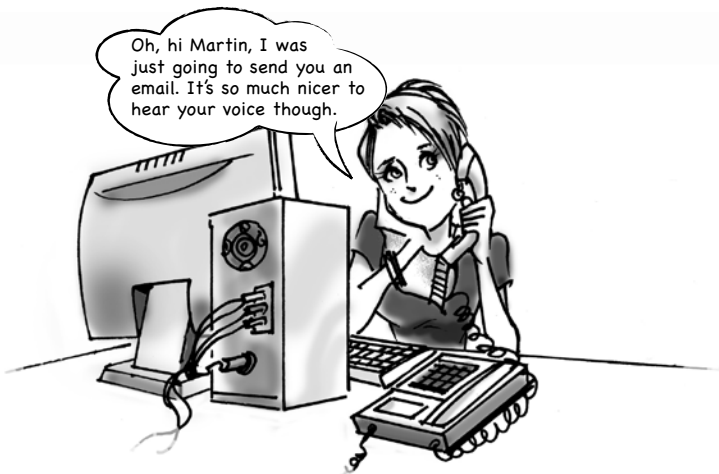
Many thanks

Wendy

I like this advice from one of my workshop participants, who told me that he tries never to click on an email message more than twice. He said, 'I always try to respond as soon as I've read a message, or delete it. If I'm pushed for time, I scan all my messages and then answer the urgent ones straight away. I deal with the others whenever I have a free moment.'

3. It's not always the best choice of medium

It can sometimes take the exchange of many email messages to resolve a situation or a problem that could have been dealt with swiftly and efficiently by a telephone call or face-to-face discussion. Before you send an email message, ask yourself if it really is the best way to deliver the message. It may be convenient and quick, but it would not be suitable, for example, for passing on bad news or dealing with an uncomfortable situation. In such cases, a call or a discussion in person may be much better.



AHA! MOMENT

Handling a delicate or sensitive situation is better done by the human voice, either in person or on the phone, as it can convey sympathy and/or other emotions.

4. Confidentiality can be a problem

Keeping something confidential is almost impossible with email. Your employer may have the right to read, without your consent or knowledge, any email messages you send or receive at work. Therefore, be careful what you write, in case it comes back to haunt you!

5. Email overload

The traffic problem seems to be one of the main issues with email. Some managers receive hundreds of messages every day, so ways to deal with this overload must be developed. It's too easy to forward messages on to lots of people, 'just in case', whether or not they really need to see them. This can cause extreme annoyance as well as overloading networks, not to mention being a complete waste of people's time.



FAST FACT

Many organisations issue instructions to their employees to keep individual mailbox size down. Once a mailbox exceeds that limit, employees are unable to send out or receive messages. This forces staff to keep their mailboxes to a manageable size, and enforces good house-keeping habits. This system works very well in most organisations and is also cost-effective.

6. Overflowing inboxes

Email messages that are not deleted are causing not a paper mountain but an electronic mountain, so you must do your filing regularly. Make some time to go through messages and delete those you no longer need. And if you receive copies of email messages that you don't really need to see, tell the sender so that it doesn't happen again:

Hi John

You have been copying me in on this correspondence for some time, but I really don't need to receive them. Please don't include me in the cc list of these and similar messages in future.

Many thanks

Lay Hong

7. Increased stress levels

It's official. Research shows that one of the top 10 causes of workplace stress is the pressure of keeping up with email messages. This ranks higher than having a bad relationship with your boss and dealing with customer complaints! It's a real problem. Let experience point the way to letting email work for you, instead of against you.

8. More haste, less speed

Many people feel that because it's email, it has to be acted on instantly. This is adding to the pressures that people already face. Not only this, but because email is seen as urgent, some writers don't take much care with spelling, punctuation, grammar or structure. So what's happening is that rushed messages become garbled, with spelling, grammar and punctuation errors, poor structure, and with no real focus. The end result is that such messages are not effective and lead to that inevitable 'ding-dong' of further emails to clarify!

9. Junk email or spam

Some people are using email to send unsolicited advertising, called ‘junk email’ or ‘spam’. Modern anti-spam filters block more than 99 per cent of junk messages, but spam is still a big business. Unsolicited junk mail accounts for 86 per cent of the world’s email traffic, with about 400 billion spam messages sent every day, according to Talos, a digital threat research division of Cisco Systems.



10. Death of conversation

People who used to speak to each other regularly are nowadays communicating via email. Sometimes when my phone rings and it’s a person I usually communicate with on email, I say, ‘Oh hello, a real voice! How wonderful to *talk* to you!’ So please, pick up the telephone now and again — it’s great to talk!



AHA! MOMENT

Email is a ‘double-edged sword’. There are many things to love about email, but there are many things we need to be very cautious and careful about. It’s important to learn to use email well.

Email enhances efficiency

It's important to continually keep up with the technology that makes it easier to stay in touch with customers and colleagues. But email should not be taken for granted. This fabulous technology should be looked upon as a tool to enhance communication rather than a replacement for communication. Email is a wonderful tool that makes it possible for us to achieve more, with greater efficiency and professionalism. Remember, though, that email is only a supplement and should never replace human interaction.

Let's look at just a few other ways in which email is helping us to increase our efficiency:

- **Connection to people and information:** Email helps you to stay informed and keeps other people informed more effectively than would be possible if we didn't have it.
- **Improved project management:** With such a global community these days, working together on a project can prove to be quite difficult when people are in different companies, places and time zones. Email makes this process so much easier.
- **Team building:** Email is helping to make group work more effective. All team members must be briefed with a common set of objectives so that they realise the importance of replying promptly to all team mail. They also need compatible software so that they can attach and read all the documents that will be distributed to members.
- **Global communication:** With Internet connections, it's possible to reach out way beyond the boundaries of your organisation. You can join discussion groups and mailing lists relating

to your specific interests, and subsequently engage in discussions with thousands of people around the world.

- **Better record management:** With email now often replacing telephone conversations, letters and memos, much of the information is in one place, so it becomes easier to manage. All messages regarding a specific topic can be kept in a special folder. Alternatively a search will quickly call up all the messages that meet certain criteria.
- **Virtual meetings:** Before email came about, many more meetings took place. It is sometimes quite difficult to get lots of people together at the same venue and time, and with pressures of work, it could be a week or more before everyone involved could get together. Email solves this problem. A message can be sent to everyone involved, the issue or problem can be discussed with everyone being copied, and a lot of time can be saved.
- **Collaborative work:** Email makes it easy and cheap to share photographs, graphics, files, even video. Whether your colleague is in the next office or at the other side of the world, distance is no longer an issue. As long as everyone has compatible versions of the necessary software, it's easy to attach anything to an email message.



AHA! MOMENT

While it's important to keep up-to-date with technology, this shouldn't be taken to the extent that we avoid talking to our customers and colleagues personally. Email is a supplement to, not a replacement for, interaction. It's a useful tool that helps us to create more time and more opportunities for everyone in the organisation to do even better.

Handheld electronic devices

Email doesn't only come to our desks. Many of us now carry email around with us on our mobile phones. This often results in being on call 24 hours a day, every day, even on weekends. Apart from never being free from the demands of work, this also leads to another problem: messages typed with our thumbs often contain errors and can end up becoming quite terse. You might include a tagline such as 'Sent from my iPhone', thinking that your recipient may be more forgiving of mistakes or brusqueness. However, I'm not convinced that this will always work.

A friend recently told me that he now does 75 per cent of his emailing through his mobile phone and that he has to adapt his language for this new medium. Things he would not normally do on his computer, such as abbreviating words or not starting off with a greeting, he is actually doing on his electronic device.

Consider this message that he may have sent if he'd been sitting at his computer:

Hi John

Great to hear from you. I'm glad you can come down to Singapore next week to discuss this exciting project. If you can let me have your proposal within the next couple of days, I can discuss it with our management and send you any urgent questions before we meet.

Look forward to seeing you.

Michael

If sending this same message from his electronic device, the message would become:

Pls send yr proposal so I can put to mgmt and send you any q's.

Tnks.

(Sent from my iPhone)

You can see what I mean about the message becoming terse, not to mention abbreviated. It could actually ruin the personal rapport that he may have built up with this recipient. Such abbreviated messages may also lead to more back-and-forth emailing for clarification, which would not be necessary if he had either picked up the phone or waited till he could give the message a more considered response.

Another concern is the tendency to become addicted to checking our handhelds constantly. Imagine you are downtown on your way to an appointment and you bump into a client. While you're standing on the street having a discussion with her, she sneaks a peek at her electronic device. How would you feel about that? Not impressed, right? Never underestimate the importance of body language, especially in making eye contact — and that means with the other person, not with your mobile phone!

It's worse if you check your email on your electronic device in formal meetings, or sneakily try to send a text message imagining that no one will notice. Everyone notices!



DANGER ZONE

Etiquette applies to handhelds too. Avoid checking your handheld during dinner, at a movie or concert, in a meeting, in the playground with your children, or when out on a date!

What goes wrong in written communication?

I'm sure we must all have received written communication that failed to achieve its objectives. Whether it's email, letters, memos or faxes, have you ever received any communication that failed in these areas?

- Your gender is changed to Mr instead of Mrs or Miss.
- The purpose of the message is not clearly stated.
- The response required is not clearly stated.
- The message is all jumbled up with no thought given to structure.
- The writer uses long sentences and long paragraphs that look uninviting.
- The message is full of long-winded jargon and redundancies.
- The tone is wrong — critical, patronising or intimidating.
- Vital details are missing, so you have to send another message to clarify.

Why do these problems happen? One reason is that, as a sender, you are not there physically to help to put your message across with body language, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and your personality. Some other reasons are:

- It takes time to write and to reply. Some messages need more thought than others to work out exactly what you want or need to say.

- You may be trying to think up too many words that will look impressive.
- If your thinking is muddled, the structure of your message will be muddled too.
- If you are thinking as you write, sometimes you will waffle and your writing can become unclear and confusing.

All these problems can be improved with experience, with constant awareness, and by taking a sincere interest in the way you write.

Turning problems into potential

So now we all have a good understanding of the problems that can happen with email. We also know how to turn them all around to make use of the full potential of this wonderful communication medium. Here are some suggestions:

1. Remember you are talking to a human being

When you are holding a conversation online (and in effect that's what an email exchange is) it's easy for your correspondent to misinterpret your meaning, and vice versa. You can't use facial expressions, gestures or tone of voice to communicate your meanings as you can in a real conversation. Written words are all you have, so make the most of them. Put yourself in the other person's place and imagine how you would feel on receiving that message. While it's good to stand up for yourself, it is important to try not to hurt other people's feelings.

The key here is to think before you click that 'Send' button. Ask yourself, 'Would I say this to the person's face?' If not, then you must edit, rewrite and reread. Don't send your message until you are quite sure

that you would feel just as comfortable saying the words to the person face-to-face.

2. Make your message clear and to the point

In Chapters 4 and 5, we'll look in detail at how to compose effective email messages. The main rule to remember is to make sure your messages are clear and logical. Long words in lengthy sentences will not impress — they will confuse. So pay attention to the content of your writing as well as to the structure and flow of your message.

In email we are all judged by one thing alone — the quality of our writing. Learn to love the written word, learn to play with the written word, learn to make the most of the written word. And please: use initial capitals just as you would in a traditional letter, and avoid using hard-to-understand abbreviations, which will only confuse and annoy your reader.

A friend told me that she received a professional enquiry that was written in very, very casual, almost instant-messenger-like language. This made my friend feel that the sender was not so proficient or respectful, and probably less educated. My friend then called her to discuss the matter rather than email a response, and during their conversation she found the lady to be very pleasant and friendly. My friend decided to tell her the different impression she'd received from her email, and the lady was horrified and very glad of the opportunity to do something about it. Ever since then, her subsequent emails have been clear and concise, and very effective indeed.

3. Make your message look good

I know part of the beauty of email is its speed, but how long does it take to write 'Dear Tom' or finish off by writing your name? How long does it take to start a new paragraph every few lines? How long does it take to put a blank line between those paragraphs? Get into these good habits from now on. Looking good online (format and structure)

goes hand in hand with sounding good (composition and tone), and these give your reader a good impression of you.

4. Respect your reader's time

Research shows that we all have more work to do and less time to do it. The number of email messages in a person's inbox only adds to this already weighty workload. So show some respect for your reader by keeping your messages brief and concise, including all the relevant details, structuring them logically, using an appropriate salutation and close, and including a clear and specific subject line.

5. Think twice before you hit 'Send'

Before sending any message, think twice before you hit 'Send'. I always suggest to my training participants that they need to take off their own head and put on the head of the reader. Read it through carefully, as if you were the reader, and ask yourself:

- Is it easy to read?
- Is my meaning quite clear?
- Is the content hurtful or offensive?
- Is the tone appropriate?
- Is the action stated clearly?
- Is the message right for email? Or would a letter, phone call or face-to-face discussion be better?

International considerations

In my workshops I'm often asked what it means when someone begins an email with 'I hope this email finds you well'. This seems to be a very misunderstood greeting, but it simply means 'I hope you are fine today'.

This emphasises the importance of using appropriate language when emailing people from another country, or whose mother tongue may not be English. Be cautious about overusing idiomatic phrases that everyone around you understands but may be difficult to understand by someone not absolutely fluent in your language.

In general, when emailing people whose mother tongue is not English, it is best to use short, simple sentences that will be much easier to understand. Keep your messages as short as possible without letting meaning suffer and use simple words instead of long ones. Niceties are acceptable, to a point, but please don't overdo it. Learn more about simplifying your language in Chapter 5.

When crossing international boundaries with your emails, it's better to be a little more cautious and use a slightly more formal tone for your messages at first. It will then be easy to progress from formal to friendly as you get to know your recipient better. It would weaken your position if you had to step backwards from friendly to formal.



STAR TIPS

for making the most of email

1. Adapt your communication style to make email work for you, not against you.
 2. Use email appropriately to enhance your reputation and your organisation's image.
 3. Switch off your email alert when you need to concentrate or focus on an important project.
 4. Consider if a quick word with a colleague or a simple phone call to a client could resolve an issue more efficiently than using email.
 5. Enhance relationships with colleagues and clients by using email effectively.
 6. Pay attention to the tone, language and structure of your emails, as all these impact your reader.
 7. Don't let email be a replacement for communication. It is a tool for enhancing communication.
 8. When emailing across cultures, keep your language simple and your sentences short.
 9. Avoid constantly checking email on your handheld. It will make you seem rude and antisocial.
 10. Be cautious when using colloquial phrases in email — your reader may not understand them.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



No matter how much we love technology, we must never forget the importance of the human touch.

— Shirley Taylor

SHIRLEY TAYLOR has established herself as a leading authority on modern business writing and communication skills. She is the author of six successful books on communication skills, including the international bestseller, *Model Business Letters, Emails and Other Business Documents*, which is now in its seventh edition, having sold over half a million copies worldwide.

Originally from the UK, Shirley has lived and worked in Singapore, Bahrain and Canada. She has over 30 years of experience in teaching and training. After making Singapore her home in 2002, Shirley established her own company in 2006. STTS Training Pte Ltd has quickly become highly regarded as specialists in leadership and communication training and speaking.

Shirley conducts her own popular public and in-house workshops on business writing and email, as well as communication and success skills. Having learnt

a lot from her workshop participants over the years, Shirley has put much of her experience into the pages of this book.

Shirley is also a motivational and success keynote speaker for corporate conferences and events. She puts a lot of passion and energy into her presentations to make sure they are entertaining, practical and informative, as well as a lot of fun.

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- Live Training with popular public workshops and in-house training with professional trainers
- Virtual Training with Shirley Taylor's interactive online virtual training program 'Business Writing That Works'
- Keynotes with inspirational professional speakers
- Online webinars to experience while sitting at your desk

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