



JOHNS HOPKINS
BLOOMBERG
SCHOOL of PUBLIC HEALTH

Department of Epidemiology
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
415 N. Washington Street, 2nd Floor
Baltimore, Maryland 21231

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Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: e-mail etiquette and good practice procedures

The foundation for e-mails is linked computers. The internet came in the early 1960s with the advent of time share large scale computers with ability to link users.

Ray Tomlinson, a computer engineer working for Bolt Beranek and Newman in Cambridge, Massachusetts, developed a system for sending messages between computers that used the @ symbol to identify addresses. The first workable prototype of the internet came in the late 1960s with the creation of ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) funded by the U.S. Department of Defense. e-mail transfers between separate computer systems began shortly thereafter.

The first e-mail (via ARPANET) by a head of state was from Queen Elizabeth II (26 March 1976) when visiting the Royal Signals and Radar Establishment, a telecommunications research centre in Malvern, England.

e-mails and text messages have rendered letter writing an endangered art form. When is the last time you got a letter?

e-mail is meant for short communications. If your e-mail is more than a couple paragraphs, it is too long and unlikely to be read. Take a machete to it.

If you Google “e-mail etiquette” you will find several sites dealing with the topic. The list below is an edited version from one of those sites (<https://www.inc.com/business-insider/email-etiquette-rules.html>).

1. Include a clear subject line.
2. Use an e-mail address that gives your name and address.
3. Think twice before hitting "Reply all".
4. Include a signature block that gives your full name, title, and address.
5. Use professional salutations.
6. Use exclamation points sparingly.
7. Be sparing of humor. When in doubt, leave it out.
8. Know that people from different cultures speak and write differently.
9. Reply to e-mails in a timely fashion.
10. Proofread before sending; do not rely on spell-checkers; read and reread, preferably aloud, before sending.
11. Add the e-mail address last (to avoid errant e-mails).
12. Double-check that you have selected the correct recipients before sending.
13. Keep fonts classic; 10 or 12 point ; Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman; color black.
14. Keep tabs on tone.
15. Nothing is confidential; write accordingly.

My pet peeves

“Reply all” vs “Reply”

“Reply all” only if response pertinent to everybody on the distribution list; otherwise “Reply”

Not changing subject line when subject has changed in chain of e-mails

Frustrating; makes it difficult to find relevant e-mails

e-mail from unknown person

Delete without opening

Changing password

My institution requires change every 6 months; major PITA!

Good rules

Confidentiality

Assume everything you write is discoverable. There are plenty of stories to underscore the point.

Most recently an NFL league investigation revealed that Jon Gruden, head coach of the Las Vegas Raiders, had used racist, misogynistic, and homophobic language in e-mails in 2011 while working for ESPN. He resigned as coach 11 October 2021.

Errant e-mail

There are ways to retract errant e-mails, but that generally draws more attention to them. Hence, once you hit the send key, it is gone so check before sending. Most errant e-mails are from being in a rush. You can reduce the risk of errant e-mails by leaving the “To field” empty until the e-mail has been checked, read, and ready to send.

Breach of confidentiality

Broadly, a breach is whenever personal information is transmitted to others. In e-mailing it happens most often with attachments to e-mails containing personal information errantly sent to others. Transmission of health information to others is a HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) violation and can lead to admonishments and fines.

e-mailing angry

Don't. Wait at least 24 hours. Consider picking up the phone instead of e-mailing.