



Guidelines for Managing Email Stress: Organization, Etiquette, & Expectations

Based on the work of the 2013 Business & Finance Leadership Academy

ORGANIZATION: Develop efficient systems to organize and process the flow of email.

- **Keep your inbox tidy.**
 - Use your email system tools to **create folders** to organize messages by category.
 - Use your email system tools to **create labels** to prioritize messages.
 - Use your email system tools to **set up filters** that will automatically route messages into folders and/or label them according to your criteria.
- **Reduce your email volume** (both sent and received).
 - **Unsubscribe** from unnecessary bulk email. You may be able to use other methods to get the same information, such as social media.
 - **Limit the use of “okay” or “thank you” messages.** As an alternative, use the phrase “Thank you in advance” when sending a request.
 - **Use the reply all option with discretion,** and only when all truly need to be included.
 - Instead of using email to collaborate on group tasks, **try using other collaboration tools** such as Google docs, M+Box, and Google hangout.
 - **Keep track of how many emails you receive and send** by using your email system tools (e.g., Gmail Meter or Outlook search folders). This will raise your email self-awareness and allow you to see the effect of any changes you make to your email habits.

ETIQUETTE: Practice good email etiquette which includes manners, courtesy, and respect.

- **Tone**
 - **Be polite.** Include a courteous greeting and closing. Remember to use good manners. A few additions of the words "please" and "thank you" go a long way.
 - **Read your email out loud to ensure the tone is what you intend.** Don't rely on formatting for emphasis, rather choose words that reflect your meaning. If you find you are feeling emotionally charged when writing an email, take a break and calm down first.
 - **Email unto others as you would have them email unto you.**
- **Content**
 - **Write clear informative subject lines and stick to one email per topic** so messages can be easily organized and retrieved.
 - **Use the “to” and “cc” lines wisely.** Those in the “to” field are usually expected to respond, while those in the “cc” field are simply being informed.
 - **Be brief,** no more than two paragraphs.

- **Clearly state the type of response you'd like to receive** to your email, by using phrases such as No response needed (NRN), No need to reply (NNTR), Please do not reply all, Please respond by Friday.
- **Always include your contact information** (at least phone and fax numbers) in your signature block so people can easily follow up with you as needed.

EXPECTATIONS: Manage your own expectations and the expectations of others.

- **Clarify expectations regarding email response time and after hours/weekend responses** through discussions with your supervisor/manager and colleagues.
- **Communicate with others about when you are generally available to read and respond to email.** For example, you could include a message in your standard signature block that states, "I check email Mon –Fri between the hours of 8am – 4pm."
- **Decide when you will read and respond to email during your workday.** Remember that you run your email; don't let your email run you.
 - **Limit multi-tasking.** Plan two to three times a day to read and respond to email. Turn off email alerts so your work is not interrupted at other times.
 - **Take email vacations.** Consider disconnecting for a half-day (or longer) "email vacation" to allow you to focus deeply on a project.
- **Thoughtfully choose the appropriate medium for your communications.**
 - Avoid using email to resolve relationship conflicts.
 - Besides e-mail, other appropriate choices are face-to-face, phone, online chat/instant messenger, and text.
 - Some clues that it's time to switch to another means of communication are:
 - When the number of emails has been excessive (more than three),
 - When the email would be too long (more than two paragraphs), or
 - When you need an immediate response.
- **Advocate for better communication.** Encourage each other to send less and talk more.