

Style Guide sample extracts

1. RULES: Using email effectively – dos and don'ts

Emails are generally less formal than letters; readers expect the tone to be more conversational. However, their apparent informality can create problems in a work context. Always remember that external and internal emails are 'on the record' and, as such, have legal status if there is ever a dispute and discovery of documents is sought.

Remember that people tend to scan emails rather than read every word, so keep them as short and clear as possible. The word *email* doesn't have a hyphen.

Basic guidelines and 'netiquette' are detailed below. For advice on words that are acceptable in emails, see 'Use the right word for the job' ([link](#)).

Do:

- Re-read and spell-check every email before hitting send
- Ensure the subject line is accurate and relevant to the readers' needs
- Put the most important information at the beginning
- Emphasise key points (such as deadlines) with bold or underlining
- Use bullet points/ numbered lists for actions required
- Use contractions (isn't, won't etc.) if you know the recipient well or want to ensure the tone is very chatty
- Keep the subject line up to date and start a new chain if the subject changes
- Start with a friendly tone (depending on how well you know the recipient):
 - Hi Sinead / Hello Sinead / Dear Sinead
 - Dear Ms Breen / Hello Ms Breen
 - Dear all
 - Good morning Sinead (*if you know the recipient will read it in the morning*)
- Sign off with a friendly tone (depending on how well you know the recipient and whether the email is internal or external):
 - Kind regards
 - All the best
 - Many thanks
 - Have a good weekend

Don't:

- Use text language

- Forget to check your grammar and spelling
- TYPE IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS AS IT SOUNDS LIKE SHOUTING
- Respond to an email when you are annoyed (take time to cool off)
- Forget to check that attachments are actually attached
- CC people who don't really need the information in the email.
- Use emoticons, smileys and jokes.

2. RULES: Numbers and dates (extract)

There is a correct style for the use of numbers, dates and quantities in writing. Inconsistency looks unprofessional so we need to follow the style below in all our reports, letters etc.

age ranges Ages are written like this, with no apostrophes:

✓ **In your 20s and 30s, you . . .**

Often the word age can be omitted.

✗ *When you reach the age of 65 . . .*

✓ **When you reach 65**

dates are written like this: **4 December 2008**. Do not use superscript 'th', 'st', 'nd' or 'rd' after the number; do not use 'the' before the number; do not use 'of' after the number. Include the day of the week if this will be useful to the reader (e.g. if the date is an indication of a future event or a deadline): **Wednesday, 4 January**.

For **decades**, don't use an apostrophe: 1990s.

When writing about periods of time, use either the words *from* and *to* or a dash – not both.

✗ *from 3-5 June 2011*

✓ **from 3 June to 5 July 2011**

✗ *from December 2006-August 2011*

✓ **from December 2006 to August 2011**

✓ **December – August 2011**

Similarly, do not combine *between* and the dash:

✗ *between 1st June-15th July*

✓ **between 1 June and 15 July**

✓ **1 June – 15 July**

decimals: when using decimals less than one, use 0 before the decimal point: **0.4%** instead of *.4%*. Do not use a comma for the decimal point.

monies is old-fashioned. If you mean money, write **money** (or **payments, grants, fees, contributions, deductions**, etc.)

numbers are spelled out from zero to nine, then digits are used from 10 upwards. Use commas in numbers greater than 999 (e.g. 2,139 instead of 2139).

Exceptions

- Where one number in a series is greater than 10, use figures for all the numbers:
2, 9, 34, 78 and 150.
 - ✓ **There were 9 pedestrians, 22 cyclists, 3 horses, 12 trucks and 1,120 cars on the bridge when it collapsed.**
- At the start of a sentence, spell out the number or re-word the sentence:
 - ✓ **Twenty-two members of staff attended the information session.**
 - ✓ **Some 1,200 leaflets were distributed.**
- For clarity:
 - ✓ **She submitted 20 twelve-page reports.**

N.B. When writing numbers between 21 and 99 (e.g. at the start of a sentence), remember to use a hyphen: **Twenty-six** people . . . / **Fifty-five** computers. . . / **Ninety-nine** booklets . . .

ordinal numbers **first, second** etc. are spelled out up to **ninth**. After that, use digits: **10th, 11th, 51st** until you reach **millionth, billionth**. Do not use *firstly, secondly* etc.

per annum is best avoided. Prefer **a year** or **annually**.

percentages are written like this: **10%** (not *10 per cent*).

3. STYLE: Use the best word for the job

Keeping it plain and simple, without 'dumbing down' is always best. It's also crucial that the words you choose are used correctly and appropriately.

Your 'tone of voice' is important too. So whether you're writing to colleagues or to the

public, you need to use language that is professional and business-like – but that doesn't mean using very formal or old-fashioned language.

Not sure of the best word for the job? Search this A-Z of words to avoid and suggestions for alternatives.

abovementioned or **the above** are often wasted words; cut them or rewrite the sentence.

accommodate and **accommodation** have a double 'c' and 'm'.

accordingly can seem rather formal. Other options include: **so** and **therefore** – or nothing.

✗ *Payment has been received and accordingly the receipt will be sent immediately.*

✓ Many thanks for the payment. We will send the receipt immediately.

acknowledge is old-fashioned and should be avoided in letters and emails.

✗ *I acknowledge receipt of your letter.*

✓ **Thank you for your letter concerning . . .** (for letters)

✓ **Thank you for contacting us.**

✓ **Thanks for your email / the information / clarifying the issue.** (an informal style for emails)

acquire is over-formal. Alternatives include **buy, earn, win, obtain** or **get**.

addendum becomes **addendums** in the plural.

advise means to give advice. Don't use it when you mean **inform** or **tell**.

✓ **The financial consultant advised me to switch between investment funds.**

✗ *Please be advised your proposal form is enclosed.*

✓ **I am enclosing your proposal form / Your proposal form is enclosed.**

✗ *Please be advised that our rules stipulate that . . .*

✓ **Please note that the rules for the scheme state . . .**

adviser is correct; do not use *advisor*.

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