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Special Report: 7 Tips for Writing Emails that Get Results



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Now let's get to your special report: 7 Tips for Writing Emails that Get Results....

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INTRODUCTION

You need help from a colleague. You determine the best way to ask is by email. But how do you craft that email message to ensure you get the results you need, when you need them?

If you take only one lesson from this report on emails that get results, let it be this: Your email recipients, like you, are extremely busy. They want to receive only emails relevant to them. And they want those emails written clearly, to the point, and in the fewest words possible.

Keep this in mind when you write – and your emails will be more effective, your recipients will give your messages higher priority, and you'll get results.

7 TIPS FOR WRITING EMAILS THAT GET RESULTS

1. Keep your message to a single screen

Your colleagues are busy. In the first split-second after they open your email, they will scan the message to determine whether or not they have time to read it that moment. Imagine your recipient taking a still photo of your email and forming their first impression of it. What do you want in that photo?

If your email's text is too long to be viewed completely within the initial screen, your recipient will be instantly turned off. If they're focused on anything else at the moment, chances are good they will close your message to deal with it later. Worse, when they re-open the message, it will turn them off all over again.

Your message should be only as long as you need to communicate the information to your recipient. If you need more than an entire email screen, you should instead communicate by phone or face-to-face.

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2. Stick to a single theme

Have you ever received an email asking for a copy of the new expense form, and also asking what you think of the revised vacation policy, and ending with a question about the upcoming task-force meeting?

Your emails should contain only one theme – one question, request, or piece of information. This allows your recipient to treat the email as a single action item.

If you give each email you write a single thing to accomplish, they will get answered much more quickly, and your professional reputation will increase too.

3. Write a descriptive subject line

For busy professionals, an email's subject line gives them a helpful split-second opportunity to assess and decide what to do with the message.

Writing a vague email subject – such as “Issues” or “Some thoughts” – is like writing a message longer than a full screen. Your recipient will scan it, develop a negative first impression – and probably put it off for later.

If you want your colleagues to open your email quickly, take action – and learn to trust new messages from you – give your subject lines some serious thought.

You want your subject to communicate as much as possible about the email itself – so your recipient opens it already feeling familiar and comfortable with what's in it.

If you're sending a document, don't simply write “Document” or “File” in the subject. Write “Expense Form-May 2010.”

If you'd like suggestions for a name for a training session you're putting on, don't write your subject as “Question.” Write “What I should call my Conflict training?”

A final thought: Keep your subject short enough that your recipient can read it all from their inbox display (without opening the email). Use your own email inbox as a reference – send yourself an email with your subject line. Can you read it?

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4. Keep your paragraphs to a few lines

Your recipient will open and quickly scan your message. One way to make it inviting to read is to keep each paragraph to just two or three lines. Long, blocky paragraphs are a big turnoff and tend not to get read right away.

This also shows respect for you email readers' time. Your readers will recognize that you are taking time on *your* end – chipping away all but the email's essential details – to save *them* time reading it.

Over time, this thoughtful strategy will teach your email recipients to view your emails with more trust and a higher priority.

5. Include a clear request for action or next step

Have you ever finished reading an email and wondered, "What am I supposed to do with this?"

If you want your email recipient to take action, make that request explicit.

A great way to do this is to make your request for action stand out physically in the email. For example, include a line all by itself like:

"Please send Carla and Roy the conference dial-in number."

Or...

"Would you send me the latest employee manual?"

You can even bold your action request, if it's short enough. (Too much bolded text is difficult to read and a real turnoff.) That way, your recipient can scan your message and, within just a second, have an idea of what you're looking for.

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6. Be explicit about deadlines for action

A second part to the rule about including a clear next action in your email is to tell your recipient *when* you need them to take that action.

Like your action request, the more your deadline physically stands out, the better. For example:

“I need your bio (50 words max) by Friday, June 12, at 12:00 PST.”

Or...

“Please make your edits to the attached draft and send back this week.”

This strategy, like keeping your message brief and paragraphs short, is another way to show your recipients you know they’re busy and that you respect their time.

As a result, your recipients’ respect for you will increase as well. And over time, your emails will get opened – and acted on – as quickly as you need them to.

7. Include some warmth to make a connection

Finally, keep in mind that making your work-related email as efficient and easy to read as possible does *not* mean writing them as cold, clinical demands.

Yes, your recipients are busy and will want to dispense with your email as quickly and with as little effort as possible. So you don’t want to load your message with a lot of unnecessary back-story. But it is a good idea to include just a little extra detail to make your email warm and friendly.

So, what’s the right amount of detail to add? You’ll have to make that judgment. Usually, though, you should be able to do it in just a line or two.

For example, if you’re writing to ask a colleague for a document you need for a meeting, you won’t need to include all the information about the meeting. Your colleague will view having to read that information as a waste of their time.

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On the other hand, you don't want to strip all the personality out of your message – and just write, "Send me the XYZ document by 10am tomorrow."

The answer? Add a little detail to explain why you're making the request, like this:

Hi Mike,

Would you send me the latest vendor application form?

I've got a Purchasing meeting in the morning, and someone will ask about it. You know how all-over-the-place those meetings are.

Please shoot it to me before 10am tomorrow.

Thanks!

Matt

This keeps your message short and to the point, but it also shows your recipient you have a valid reason for asking for help. That's yet another way to show you respect their time – and your recipient will return the favor by taking action.

SHARE THIS REPORT

I hope you've found this special report useful. In fact, you have my permission to share it in any way you choose – such as emailing it to colleagues, posting it on your agency's website or intranet, publishing it in a newsletter, or simply printing copies of the document and sharing them.

All I ask is that you do not make any changes to the material and that you share the document in full.

To your writing!

Robbie Hyman