Email Etiquette

It is commonplace for University members to communicate regularly by email and to consider this a natural means of communication.

Writing emails in and for the workplace requires a different etiquette to that used when emailing or messaging friends, and it is important to develop good practice. Emails which are written with professionalism are bound to leave a good impression and get a quicker, more thorough response: emails which suggest ignorance, carelessness or lack of foresight will alienate the recipient and are likely to be less effective.

Because your correspondence says a lot about you both personally and professionally, we ask our staff and students to pay attention to the following guidelines when composing emails.

* Do pay attention to the recipient’s name and title (including the spelling of names). These include: Prof (for staff who hold Chairs in their field); Dr (for staff with PhDs); Mr; Miss / Ms; Mrs. Getting such details correct suggests that you have not rushed the email. These details are easy to check via the institution’s directory.
* Don’t address someone by their first name unless you are on quite familiar terms with them. Usually, if someone signs off with both their first and family names, this is an indication of formality, and you should reply by addressing that person with their title and surname. If someone signs off with just their first name, they are probably inviting you to call them by their first name, but if in any doubt, use the more formal form of address.
* Do open with a polite address, i.e. ‘Dear Dr Smith’, ‘Dear Robert’, etc.
* Don’t begin emails with overly familiar openers, e.g. ‘Hey John’, ‘Dear Dr John Smith’, ‘Hiya You’, ‘John Smith, hello’, etc.
* For students, try to include a brief signature (including your degree programme and year of study) on your emails to help the recipient understand who it is from, especially if the person is unknown to you. Staff signatures should abide by the guidelines set out by [Communications](https://www.sgul.ac.uk/about/our-professional-services/ercm/communications-advice-for-staff/brand-and-house-style-guidelines).
* Don’t sign off in an overly familiar way.

Overall Tone & Manner

* Do be polite and respectful, and use good judgement.
* Don’t send emails that sound curt, abusive, or demanding, or make unnecessarily personal remarks.
* Refrain from anything which could be considered inflammatory e.g. the use of red letter, capitals and multiple explanations marks.
* Emojis should not be used.
* Do be patient and allow a reasonable time for a response (any urgent matters may well require a phone call); Holiday periods may require more time, although some staff may continue to work during the holidays with their research and administrative commitments.
* Don’t bombard your addressee with emails, especially at weekends when members of staff will be out of their office.
* Do think about the message’s content before you send: ask yourself if the answer to your question involves information that could be found online or elsewhere within the university.
* Don’t fire off emails without any structure, as this makes a message difficult to follow. Keep punctuation clear and spelling sound, avoid shorthand, and use paragraphs to separate your points. Finally, always reread your message before hitting the send button.
* Do make sure that the content is relevant to the recipient(s) and ensure that it is clearly identified in the subject line. Don’t reply to an old message in order to raise a completely different topic: it will be less confusing to begin a new thread with its own subject line.
* Don’t send off an email to the first member of staff who comes into your head: whilst that person may be known to you, they may not be the best person to contact for you to get the most appropriate response.
* When asking a recipient in a multiple recipient email to perform a function or do some work on your behalf, please be explicit as to who you would like to perform that function, as being general will often result in either the function being delayed or not performed at all.
* Do make sure to use the CC and BCC fields correctly. People added to the CC field will not necessarily be expected to take any action or reply to the message, but their addresses will be visible to all recipients of the email.
* Use of photos should be encouraged but they should be professional photos of the individual where possible.
* BCC should be used when email addresses need to be protected, i.e. when emailing groups of people that include non-sgul recipients or you are sending to people's personal email addresses, and where the recipients are not already known to each other.