



Future-proof your work life and move up the ladder
with our fail-safe email guide **By Jo Usmar**

CAREERS ISSUE

Ever experienced that gut-churning panic when you realise you've whizzed off an email moaning about your boss... straight to the big chief themselves? Or absentmindedly added three kisses on the end of a message to the new guy in the office, who then overexcitedly returns the compliment? Don't despair - you're not alone.

"Most people find sending office emails complicated as there are certain professional standards expected at work, which aren't always clear cut," says Laura Stack, president of consultancy firm The Productivity Pro. So, to ensure you don't accidentally send a video of a dancing cat to your painfully serious CEO, follow our email etiquette guidelines. Not only will they see you safely through any professional situation, but they'll also help you get ahead in the office.

✉ TOTAL RECALL

E-DO To avoid an email landing in the wrong inbox, always double check the "To" box carefully just before you click send. If you're sending a potentially controversial email, be extra sure you have the right person by saving your email as a draft, doing something else for a couple of minutes then checking it through once again before you send. This pause will mean you make fewer mistakes and are far less likely to fire off your message to anyone unintended.

E-DON'T If you do make a sending slip-up, never automatically hit the "recall" button. Usually this just sends another email flagging up that you don't want your first one read; it doesn't delete the original email from the recipient's mailbox. You've basically just made whatever you sent a must-read.

E-TIP Gmail and Outlook have options to delay messages in their settings menus. This will hold up your emails for a designated number of seconds after you've hit send. So if you ping one off to the wrong person

GROUP THERAPY

E-DO You have to email 15 bigwigs who you've never met before. Gulp. "Use the subject field to indicate content and purpose, so every recipient knows it's relevant to them," Laura says. "And only hit the 'reply all' button when you need collective input or if you have something to add. People get annoyed opening emails that just say: 'Me too!'"

E-DON'T Avoid making a spelling mistake on a big group email - it just looks lazy. Run what you've written through a spell checker before sending. If you're worried about mistakes, quietly read your email out loud. According to the University of Texas' Writing Centre: "reading out loud gives [you] a chance to hear the sound of your words... to hear what you can't see, [allowing you to] find errors like misspellings or omitted words." Also, don't try to be funny unless you're 100 per cent sure what you've written is appropriate and actually guffaw-inducing.

E-TIP Don't use slang or abbreviations (such as "mega LOLz") in your messages - even if someone else in the email group does first. It could well be that there'll be someone important reading it who will disapprove.

E-ARGUMENTS DIFFUSED

E-DO Take the upper hand when an e-row threatens to spiral out of control by suggesting a face-to-face meeting instead. "Emails can't convey the nuances of verbal communication," says Laura. "So it's easy for people to take things the wrong way." It's better to talk in person, so you can read each others' body language and accurately gauge their mood.

E-DON'T Beware of using upper case in your emails. "Writing solely in capital letters looks as though you're shouting," says Laura. You'll seem aggressive to the person you're communicating with and whoever they may show it to.

E-TIP Don't Bcc someone into your argument. It'll come back to haunt you, as you'll lose control of who is seeing the row. Also, work emails aren't ever private. They're considered company property and can be retrieved, examined and used in a court of law - so be careful what you write.

78%

of office workers admit to having forwarded an email to the wrong person.*

65%

of professionals have attached an incorrect document to an email they've then sent.*

CLEVER COMPLAINTS

E-DO "If you want to make a complaint at work, don't use email as an excuse to avoid personal contact," says Laura. "But if you are going to send one, be calm and concise." If you're messaging your boss about a colleague, keep it formal - what you write will be referred to if the complaint is taken further. Back up your points with evidence and clearly state what you'd like to happen, ie: "Could we meet to discuss this further?"

E-DON'T Never copy in anyone unnecessarily, as it'll seem petty. Also, don't ever make a complaint that you don't want taken seriously - your boss will have to investigate a written gripe. If you just fancy venting, don't do it over email and don't do it to your boss.

E-TIP Studies have shown people respond positively to reading their own name**, so reference whoever you're sending the email to within your message. For example: "I thought it best to come directly to you with this, Kate."

TO KISS OR NOT TO KISS?

E-DO "Never initiate kisses on an email sign-off," says Laura. Generally, if someone puts a kiss on an email to you, responding in kind is courteous and friendly. However, don't do it if you feel uncomfortable and be especially careful with senior staff and the opposite sex.

E-DON'T Send a kiss to someone you've never met, as it can seem forward or even sycophantic.

E-TIP If you accidentally add a kiss to an email, follow it up quickly with another email (as if you'd forgotten something) without one. They'll realise it was a mistake, or won't notice the "x" at all.

'RECALLING AN EMAIL MAKES IT A MUST-READ'

GREAT GREETINGS

E-DO "Mirror the greeting of the person you're writing to," says Laura. "If they've said 'Hiya', doing the same sounds friendly."

E-DON'T Avoid using nicknames with people you don't know and never with people more senior. Calling your boss "hun" is condescending.

E-TIP Don't project a personality on to a colleague. "Hello, trouble" may cause offence. **F**

Fyi

If you want to make a good impression or get noticed, send an email early in the morning on a weekday. This will give the impression that you're efficient and keen. "Avoid sending anything in the evening because your message will be buried with the overnight spam," says Laura.

To help hide bad news in an email, whizz it over really late on Friday afternoon (about 5.59pm will work). If the recipient reads it, chances are they'll only get round to dealing with it on Monday, when it won't seem so bad.

Every company has an individual email policy. However, it's standard to expect disciplinary action against someone using emails to libel, threaten or harass other people.

