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6 Mistakes That Look Dumb In Email

September 28, 2009 ·

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These are six things that will make you look stupid in email. In some cases, breaking these rules will make you lose your job. In others, they will simply annoy your readers. If you have any suggestions that should be added, please leave a comment.



1. Put Your Entire Message In The Subject

Just because you can see the entire subject as you type it, doesn't mean it will show up for your recipient the same way. Depending on their email program, it might even truncate it.

2. CC A Bunch Of Unrelated Recipients

If you need to send something out to a large number of people who don't already know each other, don't put them in the CC field. That broadcasts their email address to each other. There was a case a few years ago where a real estate agent did this to a group of people who were all looking for apartments in New York. People who received it were able to sell the email to other agents for thousands of dollars because it contained the email addresses of qualified leads.

You can use the BCC field if you need to send messages out to a bunch of people. Put your own email address in the TO field. That way recipients can't see each other's email addresses and no matter what they hit, any response will come back to only you.

3. Hit Reply All Instead Of Reply

I don't really know how you could do this accidentally, but I've seen it happen many times. I'm guessing that some people have mail programs where the Reply and Reply All buttons are very close together. Other times, I think people are just being lazy and hit Reply All (to 100 people) instead of taking the time to add the three people who need to see their reply.

4. Send A Message To A Superset Of People Who Need It

Lets say you have a group called "Administration" that contains the CEO, CFO, COO, CTO, CSO, and all the other "C" executives. Don't send a message to the group when it really only needs to go to a smaller number of people in the group.

Sometimes people are too lazy (or don't know how) to figure out who is in the group they are using. With Outlook, you can click on the + by the group name to show a list of everyone in the group.

5. Leave Out Punctuation

writing in all lowercase with no punctuation doesnt make you look intelligent take the time to use correct punctuation it will make your message easier to understand

Arghh. That was painful to write. Email is often considered informal, but punctuation rules are there for a reason. They really do make it easier for people to understand what you are saying. In some cases, leaving out punctuation can give your sentences an entirely different meaning.

6. Leave Out Paragraphs

Similar to leaving out punctuation, writing one big blob of text does not make your

email easy to read. In fact, many people will skip over long messages that they can't easily scan-especially if they happen to get your message on a cell phone or Blackberry.

Okay, there are my six suggestions of things to avoid in email. If you have any suggestions to add, please leave them in the comments.

Originally published January 31, 2008.

Filed Under [Technology](#)

Tagged: [email](#), [messages](#), [mistakes](#)

Comments

20 Responses to "6 Mistakes That Look Dumb In Email"

1.  [Aaron Asay](#) (1 comments) says:
[January 31, 2008 at 8:38 am](#)

What about those silly "Email Templates" that you can choose in Outlook and other programs... You know - the ones that annoy readers with extra attachments of pictures/backgrounds... Those Suck!

2.  [watershed](#) (8 comments) says:
[January 31, 2008 at 9:13 am](#)

Great list!

I've seen #3 happen SO MANY times with the professional listservs that I'm on. Most of the time this happens it is with a reply that the person obviously did not want to go out to the whole group (personal info, a personal and sometimes disparaging reply about someone or the group). It is sickening to see it happen.

So I try to make it a habit to double and triple check the "to" line before sending any email. Even with emails that aren't listserv replies- it is very easy now with email apps that fill in the "to" line as you type to end up sending something to a professional acquaintance ("Joan") rather than to your significant other ("Jo"). And think of how embarrassing that would be!

I would also add another mistake/rule- especially with professional and business emails. NEVER say something in an email about anyone else that you wouldn't want forwarded to that person. People make unknowingly (or worse, on purpose) may end up cc'ing that individual on a long train of forwards/replied emails with stuff way down at the bottom that wasn't meant for other people to read.



3. [BadManSports](#) (1 comments) says:
[January 31, 2008 at 10:01 am](#)

I LOVE when #3 happens. Watching the fallout is better than watching TMZ.



4. [Thriveal](#) (6 comments) says:
[January 31, 2008 at 8:41 pm](#)

Leaving out punctuation is a freakin' pet peve of mine. Usually, I can't even figure out what the writer is talking about!

And I agree with Aaron - the "leaves" template in some e-mail programs do not remind me of fall - they look juvenile (kind of like when I'm in a business meeting and someone's phone plays a Britney Spears song as the ringtone). I feel for that person.

Thanks, Jason M. Blumer



5. [Jay](#) (6 comments) says:
[February 2, 2008 at 5:39 am](#)

Amen!

Now, if I can only find a polite way to point a few specific people to this page without being rude about it.



6. [Julie, writer surefirewealth.com](#) (1 comments) says:
[February 4, 2008 at 6:02 am](#)

I've never known anyone who actually tried to put all of his or her message in the subject line. Unless the person is a total novice at sending emails, I don't think

he or she will make that mistake. One of my pet peeves in email is reading one that has no proper case and no punctuation marks. It makes the message seem less important.



7. *Mark Shead (622 comments) says:*

[February 5, 2008 at 10:52 am](#)

@Julie - You are lucky to not know anyone who tries to put their entire message in the subject. I see this over and over again. It always baffles me, but it happens frequently enough that I know it isn't a fluke.

@Aaron - The backgrounds can be pretty annoying-especially when they don't render correctly on your computer. I usually suggest that people keep their email formatted as simply as possible so it has the greatest chance of looking correct for the recipient. Things have improved a bit. Most email clients support html now, but it is still worth avoiding unless it really adds to your message.

@Jay - Good luck pointing things pointing things out to people. I've had the best results (in a work environment) by sending a message out to everyone from HR. Not only do you get the message to the offenders, but you create a sense of peer pressure to keep them from annoying everyone else with their bad email habits.



8. *OPTED Magazine (2 comments) says:*

[September 28, 2009 at 1:17 pm](#)

Probably goes without saying, but there is NO reason not to activate spell check for your email program (if it's available). The worst is when you have to sift through an email with multiple spelling errors – and it looks really bad if it's a work email!



9. *Janet (1 comments) says:*

[September 28, 2009 at 1:17 pm](#)

Watch what your email address is when you're sending out notes for job/internship leads. I'm wary of interviewing someone whose email address is an unprofessional "hotdude4u@whatever.com." It's easy enough to create a professional-sounding account for work-searching purposes.



10. *Jelle (2 comments) says:*
[September 28, 2009 at 2:38 pm](#)

I have a rule set up in outlook to delay sending my emails by two minutes. It's been a lifesaver.

Don't think it'll never happen to you... I used to think that, and have been grateful quite a few times that I have the delay!



11. *Mark (76 comments) says:*
[September 28, 2009 at 3:09 pm](#)

7. Putting your email address in your signature. If you sent them a message, they have your email address.



12. *Stephen (10 comments) says:*
[September 29, 2009 at 6:59 am](#)

I think that email problems largely stem from the 'P' in 'PC' - people inhabit their own little world in their computer, and fail to consider the need to communicate with others clearly, using established language rules and with consideration for their audience.

Most email problems represent either laziness or thoughtlessness on the part of the sender, both hardly endearing traits.

My pet peeves:

- 1) Failing to update the subject line when the topic of the message changes.
- 2) Failing to put a subject at all!
- 3) Me-centric subjects - If I am auditing a project called FRED, if I send the project manager an email called 'FRED project audit', the subject contains no useful information as he knows I am auditing his project and he knows the name of his project already! Similarly, if he sends me a message called 'ABC Co Audit', that tells me nothing about the email, because almost everything I do is an audit, and I know I work for ABC Co!

Forwarded emails without the dross cut out - sometimes there can be a chain of ten emails!

Forwarded emails with the message 'FYI'. These give no idea as to *why* the sender thinks that you need to be informed. These can be an underhand attempt to imply that you have agreed with the email content because you have seen it and not objected.

I also find that people treat email communication too casually, using slang and making quips that don't work when read as cold text. Moreover neither work at all with an international audience.

Then there are those stupid emoticons ... especially the animated ones. You are going to look a right fool when one of those comes up as evidence in court.

Top tip: don't write emails when in a bad mood (angry, irritated, etc), or under the influence!

Using strangely coloured text, especially pastels, makes your message look like a dodgy listing on eBay. Then of course, there are emails written in upper case NEED I SAY MORE?

Use of at least one exclamation mark (!!!!) in every sentence!!!!!!!!!!!!

I could go on, but I hate it when I get an email from someone who doesn't know when to stop.



13. *Camelia (1 comments) says:*

[September 29, 2009 at 10:50 am](#)

What bothers me the most is when the name of the addressee is miss-spelled. It is the first thing you see once you open the message. It happened to me so many times: Dear Cmaleia, Dear Camelai, etc. It is a matter of courtesy.



14. *Tim (3 comments) says:*

[September 29, 2009 at 1:00 pm](#)

More things that make email (and you) look bad...
ALL CAPS IS JUST AS BAD AS all lower case.

Replying to an existing thread/message and totally changing the subject and topic screws up a lot of mail readers. The new topic ends up getting grouped in the old thread because of how most email clients work.

Commenting on one paragraph of a long email but not editing out the irrelevant parts. Never trimming posts in general in a long exchange is bad.

Adding people who are NOT your personal friends to the list of friends you send jokes, etc.

Using your business email or your employer's email account to send jokes, etc. I am always amazed the the formal signature blocks that show up in emails with jokes, funny pictures, etc. from friends.

Just because the person before you didn't delete out dozens or hundreds of email addresses in the mail you were forwarded doesn't mean you shouldn't take time to clean it up if you are forwarding it on to more people.



15. [Mark Shead](#) (622 comments) says:
[September 29, 2009 at 8:44 pm](#)

@Camelia - Getting people's names wrong is always a bad thing regardless of the medium. 😊

@Tim - Apple Mail has a nice feature for when people start sending you jokes that you don't want. It lets you bounce the email back so it looks like they have the wrong address. I don't use it often, but it is very satisfying when I do.



16. [Mark Shead](#) (622 comments) says:
[September 30, 2009 at 7:46 am](#)

@Mark - One reason for putting your email address in the body is if the email gets printed out or forwarded on, people still know how to get ahold of you. I will sometimes include my email address and phone number in the signature if I am emailing someone for the first time, but I don't try to put it on every single message.

@Jelle - Thats interesting. I didn't know you could set Outlook up to delay sending emails. It's an excellent idea though.

@Janet - Good point. It is beneficial to put a bit more thought into what name you want to use on your email address. I prefer something like firstname.lastname@domain.com just because it is easy for anyone to remember if they know you and looks professional.



17. *Lucy (2 comments) says:*
[September 30, 2009 at 2:40 pm](#)

My pet hate is when people abbreviate “please” to “plz” or “pls” when they ask for a fairly onerous favour. It just seems rude to me - it’s worse than not saying please at all.



18. *Chuck (2 comments) says:*
[October 4, 2009 at 4:45 pm](#)

Good stuff. Another one I don’t think anyone mentioned is the person who replies without quoting your text. It’s especially frustrating when they take a week to reply and I have to go look up the original email to remember the details.



19. *CJ (3 comments) says:*
[October 5, 2009 at 11:32 am](#)

To direct people to this page and more without being rude, add something like a “tip for the day” to your signature with a link. You can change this up and give your emails some interest. Not everyone will go there, but maybe some will.

I would like to add to the email etiquette. Is it too much to ask for someone to clean up an email before forwarding? I find that most people only read the last comment anyhow so I try to sum up the email and delete most of the back and forth stuff. I may direct someone to see the comment below (delete all others) for specific stuff such as an address or change in previous information. For personal emails I would like to be able to open it and read it rather than scroll through the 500 other people’s comments that have seen it as well.....
and please stop with the chain emails. There should be punishment for anyone ages 18-60 that forwards one of these.



20. [SL](#) (1 comments) says:
[October 5, 2009 at 3:26 pm](#)

What bothers me the most is when the name of the addressee is miss-spelled. It is the first thing you see once you open the message. It happened to me so many times: Dear Cmaleia, Dear Camelai, etc. It is a matter of courtesy.

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