

Guidelines on Email Etiquette

The purpose of email is to get your message across clearly to the people who need the information you are providing.

To help with this please remember:

- an email is of no use if it's not read;
- people are busy and don't want to receive irrelevant emails;
- emails are more effective if simply written;
- emails, especially to people outside AFTRS, should always be professional;
- the laws applying to copyright, harassment, obscenity and defamation apply to emails (sending or forwarding one libellous or offensive remark in an email can result in a court case against you and AFTRS), and
- on some occasions it is better to speak directly to someone.

These guidelines on email etiquette are designed to assist in communicating effectively. They should be read in conjunction with the Information Technology Policy.

1. Addressing the email

Please check that you are sending your email to the correct person or group. This is particularly important with the AFTRS system which may automatically complete an email address for you from your address book or the internal directory.

2. Email sent to the wrong person?

If you find an email has been misdelivered send an apology to the person or group.

3. Using "to" and "cc"

You should only use "to" for the people you are directly addressing. You should use "cc" for the people you are indirectly addressing e.g. for their information only. Use "cc" sparingly and only if that person needs to know about the topic. Indiscriminate copying of email clogs inboxes and encourages people to ignore messages they should read.

4. When do I use "bcc"?

When you use the "bcc" field the other recipients of the email cannot see everyone the email has been sent to.

It is best to use the “bcc” field when sending bulk email: especially to addresses outside AFTRS. This helps to maintain the recipient’s privacy from spammers.

There are other occasions when you may choose to use “bcc” e.g. when you request information from a group of people with something in common, but the fact they have something in common is confidential even from each other. You should, however, be careful in the use of “bcc” as where recipients are not aware of everyone who’ll be reading their reply it may be considered unethical.

5. When should I create a mailing list?

If you regularly send emails to a group of people think about creating a mailing list. This has the advantage of avoiding a long list of recipients at the top of the email as well as ensuring you don’t accidentally leave a recipient out on an important email.

6. Using “reply to all”.

Please be careful in using “reply to all”. Make sure all the people you are replying to are actually interested in your reply. Quite often you only need to reply to the sender. Using “reply to all” at the wrong time could be very embarrassing for you and annoying for others.

7. When do I use the “debate” address?

The “debate” group was set up for discussion between staff and students on topics of general interest but which do not relate directly to the day-to-day operations of the School. It is the forum for debate on all issues. If you are not sure everyone would be interested in your comments, use the “debate” address.

8. Using “high priority”, “urgent” and delivery and read receipts

Save “urgent” and “high priority” for things that really are. If you get a reputation for overusing them you won’t be believed when you really need to be.

There are also times when it may be necessary to know when an email is delivered and read e.g. for legal reasons. For any other situation try not to use the delivery and read receipts. Some software doesn’t support them and it tends to annoy people. It also only shows that an email was opened, not whether it was read. Consider asking the person to confirm they’ve read the email instead.

9. The subject line.

Always include a short but relevant subject line. This shows up in the recipient's inbox and people decide whether to delete the email on that basis. Include as much information as is necessary for it to be meaningful for both you and the recipient.

If you include the entire message on the subject line follow it with "eom". This will mean the recipient doesn't have to waste their time opening the email to see if there is more information.

10. Writing emails.

As a general rule emails should be personally addressed and the content should be relevant to the recipient. Basic courtesy should apply. Begin and finish each message with an appropriate greeting and don't forget to say please and thank you. Be careful not to appear over-familiar with the recipient, especially if they are a stranger.

11. Layout

Reading from a screen is more difficult than reading from paper and long emails can discourage recipients. An easy to read layout is very important. Use short paragraphs with blank lines between them. When making separate points number them or use bullets so they are easily identifiable. Avoid using tabs as different programs show them differently.

Remember that when you use formatting in your emails the recipient might not be able to see the fonts and layout as you intended. Some only receive plain text so use rich text and HTML sparingly. If you use colours make sure they are easy to read on the background.

Don't use too many fancy backgrounds or large pictures as not every recipient will be able or want to view them and they significantly increase the size of the email file.

12. Writing the email

Some tips for writing your email so it will be read, understood and acted upon.

- Keep to one subject per email wherever possible to avoid confusion.
- Try to match your message length to the tenor of the conversation e.g. keep quick replies short.
- Be concise and to the point. People are less likely to read everything in a long email and may miss important things.
- Keep your sentences to 20 words at most. They're easier to read onscreen.

- Put your most important points in the first paragraph: then support them in the others. Recipients often scan the first paragraph to decide whether to read on.
- Use correct grammar, punctuation and spelling. This shows professionalism. Emails without correct punctuation are hard to read and the meaning can be changed. Do not correct grammar, punctuation and spelling in the emails you receive.
- Spell out the month to avoid confusion e.g. 24 Jun 2008.
- Try and use gender neutral language.
- Separate opinion from facts.
- Make links clickable.
- Use extreme caution with humour and sarcasm. Without voice inflection and body language email messages are easily misinterpreted.
- Never write and send an email when you're upset with the recipient. Emails last a long time, can be printed out and circulated, and can become more important than ever intended.
- Check your email before you send it out!

11. Abbreviations, acronyms and emoticons.

Only use abbreviations and acronyms if you are sure your recipients will know what they mean. This is especially important with internet related abbreviations and acronyms such as LOL. If recipients don't understand them they will be, at best, confused.

One of the problems with email is the lack of voice inflection, facial expression and body language you would normally have in a face to face conversation. Emoticons (smiley faces) are often used to clarify intent. Be careful not to overuse emoticons or send them to recipients who may not be familiar with them. If you feel you need to use an emoticon to soften a comment – don't make the comment.

12. Signatures

The signature is the small block of text at the end of your message. It should identify you and provide contact information (other than the email address). If you choose to add a quote, keep it short. It shouldn't be longer than the message. The signature can also be an opportunity to advertise something that is coming up in the near future, but make sure you remove it after the event.

13. Attachments

Being able to attach documents to emails is a great feature but do not abuse it. Don't send large attachments without the recipient's permission. This can slow down mail, lock them out of their mailbox, or be rejected by the system. Split the attachment across more than one email if necessary. Be aware that

some people will not open an attachment unless they are expecting it as they are concerned about viruses.

14. Forwarding

Think before you forward an email and explain to the recipient why you are sending it.

You should get permission from the author before forwarding an email, make sure you acknowledge their words, and keep the words and meaning exactly as they intended. Also keep in mind that you may be infringing copyright laws.

Be careful you are only forwarding messages to those that want to receive them. Many people are sick and tired of receiving daily chain letters or emails, no matter how serious or funny they may seem to you. Also be sure to strip all the extraneous information and characters from the message before forwarding it.

If you forward an email to a more appropriate person e.g. to answer a query, make sure you let the sender know who to expect a reply from.

15. Message threads

When you reply to an email you should only include the original email in your reply i.e. use “reply” instead of “new mail”, if the full text is required to give context, but be mindful of the length the message can become and the burden this can place on the recipient and the system. At the very least, however, you should include sufficient information from the original email (denoted as such) to provide context for your response and to mean the recipient doesn’t need to spend time trying to find the original email.

16. Email responses

Check your email regularly and respond as soon as practical even if it is just an acknowledgement that lets the sender know you’ve received their message. Ignoring an email is discourteous.

When replying to an email you should answer all questions and try to pre-empt further questions. People will be appreciative.

If you receive a message intended for another person, forward it with a brief explanation. Don’t just ignore it.

If you send an email that doesn’t need a response, indicate this in the subject line or text e.g. “FYI” or “no reply necessary”.

Email is about dealing with communication when you are able to, so don't assume you are being ignored if you don't get a response in 10 minutes. Plan ahead. For urgent matters it is often better to phone.

Be patient. Wait before re-sending a message or following it up.

Never assume a message has been read just because you sent it. Follow up important emails with a phone call.

If you receive an email that makes you angry, don't reply immediately. You may regret it. Take some time then re-read the email. Consider that you may have misinterpreted the sender's meaning. If you still feel you need to respond, think about having a conversation instead (break the cycle of message and response) or have someone objective pre-read your response. Remember – once an email is sent it can't be recalled.

17. Spam and related

- Never answer spam. Your response will confirm your email address. Delete the message instead as it may contain viruses.
- Don't forward chain letters. They are hoaxes. Delete them as soon as you receive them as they may contain viruses.
- Immediately delete emails with attachments from senders you do not recognise. They are probably spam and may contain viruses.
- Do not click open web links in messages from unknown sources.
- Do not forward emails warning of new viruses. These are almost always hoaxes and may contain viruses. Contact MIT if you are unsure. MIT will advise of any real concerns.

18. Confidentiality

You should be aware that there is no such thing as a completely private email. At the very least most can be read by the service provider and all can be subpoenaed. Do not use email to discuss sensitive or confidential information, especially not with third parties. Also be sure not to make personal remarks about a third party. Email messages have a habit of coming back to haunt you.

19. When it's not appropriate to send an email

Email is an enormously effective and convenient way of communicating. There are, however, times when it is much more appropriate to discuss things personally either by phone or face to face. These include:

- when the matter is urgent and it can't wait until someone reads their email;
- during negotiations;
- to communicate complaints or dissatisfaction, and
- to deliver bad news.



Communicating in person rather than with email will allow the opportunity to quickly clear up misunderstandings or show that you care about a recipient's feelings.

