



# Email Etiquette for Generation Text

By Ben Carpenter

You understand that you'll need to structure your professional emails differently than you would a text or a tweet. But unless you had the good fortune to take an "Email Etiquette 101" course in college, you might be unsure of what, exactly, you should and shouldn't do before clicking "send."

Here, are a few tips for effective email communication:

**Read your email carefully before sending it.** It takes only a few seconds to glance back over what you've written before clicking "send"—but those few seconds could save you a lot of grief! Specifically, make sure that you've entered the correct email addresses. Confirm that you've included all of the necessary information and proactively answered any questions that readers might have. Look for and correct any typos.

**Avoid using the BCC feature.** The BCC feature allows you to "blind" copy individuals on an email. In other words, if you BCC John, he'll see what you sent (and may even receive any replies to the email), but the email's other recipients won't know that John was included. Unless you're specifically instructed to BCC certain people I advise against using this feature because it can often be construed as promoting dishonesty and a lack of transparency. For instance, if people find out after the fact that John was BCCed, they may feel that you were allowing him to "spy" on a closed conversation.

**Reply to the right people.** Say your supervisor emails the whole department and asks for the previous month's billing for a certain client. In this situation, every single one of your coworkers doesn't need to know how many hours you spent on which projects, so it would make sense to avoid clicking "reply all" and reply only to your supervisor. But say you're on a ten-person team responsible for completing a project. If your reply to a group email concerns everyone, "reply all" would be appropriate. Don't overcomplicate things, just use common sense before sending.

**Keep it brief.** While email doesn't have a character limit, it's still a good idea to keep your communication as brief as possible. This will help prevent your email from becoming confusing. Moreover, the recipient will appreciate not having to spend any more time than necessary reading it. Remember, your colleagues and clients want pertinent information, not your version of the great American novel.



**Get straight to the point.** Dispense with the introductions and preambles. When you're writing an email, include the most important information at the top. This will enable the recipient to immediately ascertain what the email is about. Plus, no one appreciates having to dig through several paragraphs to figure out why someone is writing.

**Watch your tone.** Avoid using an overly familiar or informal tone, unless you've learned that a relaxed writing style is preferred within your organization. (This includes using proper grammar and avoiding abbreviations like "u," "btw," "thnx," and "lol.") Refrain from using sarcasm in emails, as it's too easily misread.

**Use a proper form of address.** You may eventually learn that a certain client prefers to be addressed by her first name, but until she makes that request, err on the side of respect by addressing your emails to "Mrs. Brown." Likewise, don't start your emails with "Hi" or "Hello" until that precedent has been set by the other party.

**Use clear subject lines.** For many people, an email's subject line is an afterthought at best, and is either left blank or filled in with a one-word description like "Meeting" or "Question." However, those subject lines don't tell the recipient anything useful about what the body of the email contains. Use keywords to craft a short description or "preview" of why you're emailing; for example: "Team meeting today at 3 p.m. in conference room," "Deadline on Smith project?" or "PowerPoint for Jones proposal attached." In addition to serving as a preview, descriptive subject lines will help recipients to navigate and search their inboxes.

**Know when email isn't best.** Yes, email may be convenient and efficient, but sometimes it just isn't as effective as picking up the phone or having a face-to-face conversation. If a subject is controversial, complex, or easily misunderstood, it's usually best resolved in real time. If a client is confused about her ordering options, call her. If your supervisor has multiple questions about the report you handed in, knock on his door. And if you have concerns about a client's possibly unethical behavior, schedule a meeting with your boss.

**About the Author:**

Ben Carpenter is author of *The Bigs: The Secrets Nobody Tells Students and Young Professionals About How to Find a Great Job, Do a Great Job, Start a Business, and Live a Happy Life* (Wiley, April 2014, ISBN: 978-1-118-91702-2, \$25.00). He began his career as a commercial lending officer at the Bankers Trust Company. Two years later he joined Bankers Trust's Primary Dealer selling U.S. Treasury bonds. After a brief stop at Morgan Stanley, Ben joined Greenwich Capital, which, during his 22-year career there, became one of the most respected and profitable firms on Wall Street. At Greenwich Capital, Ben was a salesman, trader, sales manager, co-chief operating officer, and co-CEO.

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**About the Book:**

*The Bigs: The Secrets Nobody Tells Students and Young Professionals About How to Find a Great Job, Do a Great Job, Start a Business, and Live a Happy Life* (Wiley, April 2014, ISBN: 978-1-118-91702-2, \$25.00) is available at bookstores nationwide, from major online booksellers, and direct from the publisher by calling 800-225-5945. In Canada, call 800-567-4797. For more information, please visit the book's page on [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com).