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# Managing Email Effectively

## Your 10-Minute Guide to Taming Your Inbox



Choose  
carefully how  
and when to  
use email in  
your team.

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**Email can be very useful – or a painful problem. The six simple strategies in this guide will help you and your people to use email effectively, so that you can all be more productive and feel less stressed.**

The use of email has transformed the business world, making written communication direct and quick, both within organizations and between them and their suppliers and customers. But it can become an unwelcome interruption, raise impossible expectations, create information overload, and reduce the quality of our communication.

This guide offers simple but effective tips to help managers and their teams take control of their email.

You are welcome to share it inside your organization.



Let's look at how you can take back control of your inbox, communicate more effectively, and reduce stress:

## 1. Choose Your Channel

Before you begin writing an email, consider whether you're using [the best channel for the occasion](#).

For example, if your message needs an immediate answer, consider a quick phone call or IM to ensure that it's not missed. If you're informing a colleague that a piece of work is ready for his or her attention, update your project management package instead, for all to see. But keep sensitive information confidential by arranging a one-on-one, especially if you're delivering bad news.

(This helps you to communicate with empathy, and to clarify your meaning as soon as any misunderstanding arises. It also prevents [difficult conversations](#) being shared widely, whether by accident or intent.)

Apply this principle when you **receive** an email, too. You could cut a lengthy exchange to arrange a meeting, for example, by sharing calendars, instead of simply continuing the back and forth.

## 2. Use Informative Subject Lines

How many times have you received an email with the title, "Before I forget...," "Question for you," or "Important!"? The sender knows what he means and expects you to open his message to find out.

But you need more information to help you to choose where to [focus your time and attention](#) – after all, you likely received another 50-plus emails overnight!

Bear this scenario in mind when you compose your own subject lines. Include the topic that you're discussing, any action you're requesting, and any deadline. Or, make clear that the message is just for the record with no action required.

Also, beware changing the topic of conversation mid-thread and not changing the subject line to match. This will most likely lead to confusion and misfiling. Ideally, start a new thread.

## 3. Sort, File, Forward, Action, Delete

Your confidence and mood may drop when you're faced with pages of emails awaiting your attention. How will you deal with them all and achieve what you planned for the day, too? It's easy to feel overwhelmed.

So, create a system to sort and clear your emails:

- File what you need to keep, using folders or labels.
- Forward messages that were sent to you in error.
- Star or color-code any messages requiring action, having assessed their urgency and importance, and add them to your [To-Do List](#).
- Delete or mark as spam the rest, as appropriate.

You can speed up this process by automating some of it. Create "rules" or filters to collect messages from certain people (such as your boss), on certain projects, or of certain types (social or marketing, for example).

And set up and publicize email addresses for particular types of inquiry (such as [invoices@...](#), or [greenproject@...](#)) or for certain teams ([finance@...](#), [production@...](#)). Finally, agree who in the team will respond to any group messages, to avoid conversations appearing in everyone's mailboxes.

## 4. Check Your Emails in Batches

Responding to emails one by one, as they arrive throughout the day, disrupts your other work. It means losing sight of **your** priorities and becoming a slave to your notifications. It also takes time and effort to [switch your attention to and fro](#), which is inefficient and tiring.

So, turn off your laptop or smartphone alerts, and choose for yourself when you'll check your mail, whether that's first thing in the morning, after lunch, and at the end of the day, or after a long period of focused work.

[Manage stakeholders' expectations](#) by letting them know how you're handling emails, and reassure them that you will be able to pay more concentrated attention to them as a result. Give them an alternative means to contact you when they have an urgent and important concern or request – but agree what these criteria mean!

You could set an automated reply or a standard footer that explains your approach, to ensure that people external to your team or organization understand, too.

## 5. Write Like a Pro

Remember that the recipients of your emails are as busy as you and that they might only glance at the content.

You can help them to grasp your message quickly, and improve your chances of getting the response that you would like, if you use a writing technique popular with journalists – the Inverted Pyramid.

[Inverted Pyramid Writing](#) is a simple, effective model for producing quickly digestible content by arranging your thoughts in a particular sequence.

Your opening section summarizes your entire message in just a few sentences, much like an article or broadcaster announces the news. And subsequent paragraphs present less critical information, in order of diminishing importance.

The idea is that your email recipient will have the main points of the “story,” and know what she needs to do, even if she stops reading after the first two paragraphs. If she reads on, she’ll learn more background and detail, but this will be optional for both of you.

She’ll value this logical and succinct communication style, and your emails will stand out for her in a crowded inbox. So, there’ll be less need to chase her for an answer, or to follow up with clarifications. In time, your email traffic may reduce, while you build a more [productive and positive connection](#).

Bear in mind that, to achieve this outcome, you’ll need to edit your draft emails before you press send! Be ruthless in organizing and simplifying their content while being sure to remain polite and friendly.

## 6. Agree a Team Approach

Work with your co-workers to adopt good practice across your team or department so that you’re not attempting to “hold back the tide” of emails alone.

For example:

- Agree when to use email and when to choose a different channel, including face-to-face conversations. This might involve looking at wider office culture and design.

- Agree whether and how you will use acronyms such as EOM (end of message), FYI (for your information), or NTR (no thanks required) in your subject lines.
- Agree which terms or phrases to use in your subject lines to help your recipients to sort and to prioritize.
- Agree when it’s appropriate to use group email addresses, when to “Reply All,” and what you mean by using the “To:,” “Cc:” and “Bcc:” fields.
- Agree your schedule for checking and responding to emails, how you’ll handle urgent and important exceptions, and how you’ll manage expectations.
- Practice and trial a more concise and logical style of writing such as the Inverted Pyramid.

## Key Points

Most of us feel overwhelmed by email at some point. However, when you manage it effectively, you can significantly [reduce stress](#) and boost your productivity.

To gain control of your inbox, start by checking and processing email only at certain times during the day.

Filter and organize mail to help to keep your inbox clear and your tasks in sight.

Only email when it’s the most appropriate channel to use – alternatives include instant messaging, project management software, a phone call, or a meeting.

Make your subject lines work for both you and your recipient, and keep your content to the point.

Win over colleagues to behave similarly so that you can all reduce the number of messages you send, and make those that you receive easier to handle.

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