

Email Etiquette for Journalists

Tools of the Trade · By Simon Townsend · 6 min read

Email etiquette

By SIMON TOWNSEND

It's impossible to be a fast and effective journalist unless you make full use of the internet and email. Please use email intelligently and don't treat it like a toy, or like SMS messaging on mobiles between nine-year-olds.

1. Don't start an email with the word "Dear". These days many publications discourage the use of the salutation "Dear" because it's seen as old-worldly. (Is this person really "dear" to you?)
1. "Hiya", "G'day" and "Greetings!!!!" is overly-familiar and unnecessarily friendly. This is a business email, not a postcard to a loved one.
1. Start with the person's name. Just "Bob" or "Ms Jones" will do. But DO start with the person's name. Do not launch immediately into your message as this is too abrupt.
1. NEVER WRITE AN EMAIL ALL IN CAPITAL LETTERS. IT MAKES YOU LOOK LIKE A DILL WHO CAN'T SPELL AND IT MAKES YOU LOOK LIKE YOU'RE SHOUTING!!! And don't write in small letters when capitals are required. For instance don't write "i" when you mean "I". It makes you look lazy - too lazy to press the shift key while pressing the "I" key.
1. Never write an email in anger. NEVER BE RUDE AND INSULTING?YOU'LL REGRET IT. Many people say if you write an email in anger, keep it for 24 hours and then see if you still want to send it. Better idea: don't write it in the first place. Instead, wait 24 hours and write a strong email, making your point, but not in anger.
1. Check you emails at least twice a day. Be known as a person who gets back QUICKLY on each and EVERY email. Reply to every email, even the ones not requiring a reply. Be known as a person who answers every email, no matter what. Just: Bob:

Thanks for information.

Stella

1. Journalists must write emails in normal English, not this kind of nonsense:

hi gordo mate !!!

hv snt stry 2 u let me no wht u thnk

luv chris xxx ???

Write:

Gordon

Emailed my Cairo story to your office 7am today.

Please let me know your opinion.

Chris Smith

1. It's amazing that a journalist could write a professional article with correct spelling, punctuation and grammar, with a covering letter with similar perfect writing. But when it comes to emails, some journalists lapse back into this silly goo-goo baby-talk. Some journalists, experienced with the internet, emails and modern text-messaging can't get away from this airhead kind of message-writing. They'd rather write: CU2NYT than "See you tonight." Don't do it. Be professional, and appear professional at all times. Emails MUST be written as correctly as you'd write a formal letter.

1. It's just as easy to write with no contractions, and with correct spelling, capitalisation and punctuation. It surprises me that some successful journalists in prestigious fulltime jobs, write their emails lazily like this. Re-read your emails before sending them, making sure you have no typos, no spelling errors. Your emails

must be as professional-looking as any formal letter you send. And don't use smiley faces and emoticons and other nonsense like :-) and ??? That's for children.

1. How to automatically spell-check your emails: 1.Be in Microsoft Outlook (not in an email). 2.Click on Tools. 3.Click on Options. 4.Click on the tab named Spelling. 5.Tick the first two boxes. 6.Leave the third and fourth box empty. 7.Tick the last box. 8.Go to the bottom panel called Language and make sure you've selected "English (Australia)" 9.Click Apply. 11.Click OK. Each time you hit "Send" a box will appear asking if you want spelling corrections. You click on "Ignore" or "Change" accordingly.

1. This is just a personal opinion, but I can't stand it when people send me an email with a demand for a receipt. I never respond with a return receipt. I think it's impertinent to demand to know that I have received an email and to demand a receipt from me. It may not worry you to receive a demand for a receipt, but be careful about demanding it from others, as you may run into Grumpy Old Men like me who resent it.

1. Also I detest it when people send out EVERY email with a red exclamation mark, indicating that this email is of ultra importance and super urgency. Of course, it never is. It's usually a mass email

sent to hundreds of people and is of NO importance to me. Don't put exclamation marks on your emails, as again, you may run into Grumpy Old Men like me.

1. Please don't send-on "chain emails". That's where the email arriving for you asks you to send \$10 to the person at the top of a list of five, and 5 each to 200 other people. You put your name at the bottom of the list of five, and soon you'll receive \$77,760 for an outlay of \$211.48. It's all crap. You make yourself look like a dill to get involved and attempt to dupe your friends.
1. Here's why your full name should be your email address. Editors of busy, mainstream publications receive so much email that they delete anything unfamiliar or unexpected without opening it, without even glancing at it. If an editor is expecting something from YOU, the editor will be looking for your name in his/her "Inbox" in the "From" column. In the "Subject" column should be a short description of your article (not friendly or funny greetings). Write something like: Italian holiday, 1550words?or?Murder trial 1000 words? Not: "Hi there!!" or "Greetings from Woy Woy!" If your email address is something cute or personal like goofy@ozemail.com or "biglover" or "wookie" or "snookums", your editor hasn't got time or patience to work out what it's all about and will delete your email without opening it or even glancing at it. It's most important that when sending an email your name should appear in the recipient's email "From" column. Your proper first name and correct surname, not some funny remark like "Hi from Harry" or "Snookums Here!!". Say your name is Nicky Jones. To make sure Nicky Jones appears in your recipient's "From" column do this: in your email mode go to "Tools", then "Accounts", then "Mail", then "Properties", then "General", then "User information" and after "Name" type Nicky Jones and tick the box that says "Include this account when receiving mail". Your NAME in freelance work is all important.
1. When you become successful you may sell a lot of work to one editor and NEVER meet your editor, who never gets to know your face. The editor associates your NAME with material wanted for the publication. One of the reasons I urge students to put their names in the largest typeface on letterheads is because you must drive YOUR NAME into your editor's brain. The best email address is your first and last name, as it appears in your by-line, separated by a dot. Such as nicky.jones@aol.com Why? It's clear, requires no interpretation and it's professional. Don't use a hyphen, slash, asterisk or anything other than a dot, because a DOT is common in email and website addresses. I believe some of the free email providers won't allow the use of dots. Find a provider that allows dots in your email address. I advise you to NOT use an underscore as a separator such as nicky_jones. Why? Because in writing addresses your computer automatically underscores the whole address like this nicky_jones@yahoo.com and your single underscore disappears and people are unsure whether you've mistakenly put in a space (no email or website addresses have spaces).
1. And don't please, share your email address with another person such as bill&mary.brown@bigpond.com Why? This is about professionalism. You wouldn't put your mother's or your lover's or your spouse's or your budgie's name on your business card, so don't put another name on your most valuable contact point - your email address. Simon

Rental receipt

Received \$1,350 cash for rental of Unit 36 at Museum Towers for period 23 September 2011 to 7 October 2011.

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Landlord

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