



**“I don’t wake up at night to check my e-mail.
I automatically have it forwarded to the
people in my dreams and they read it to me.”**

“Whilst email can be a valuable communication tool, it's clear that it's a source of stress of frustration for many of us,”

Dr Richard MacKinnon
Future Work Centre

How to reduce the stress caused by Emails

Catalyst Mediation Training 2018©

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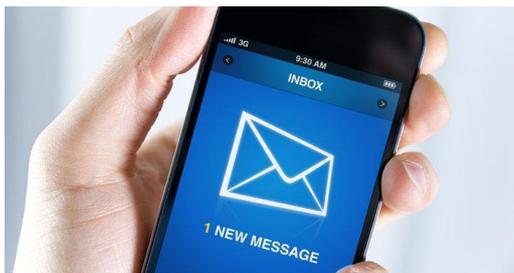
Emails As A Source of Stress

A 2018 report from the London-based Future Work Centre, which conducts psychological research on people's workplace experiences, said emails were a "double-edged sword" that provided a useful means of communication but could also be a source of stress.

The team surveyed almost 2,000 working people across a range of industries and occupations in the UK about the pros and cons of using email.



- ✦ *Higher email pressure was associated with more examples of work having a negative effect on home life, and home life having a negative impact on performance at work.*
- ✦ *They found that two of the most stressful habits were leaving email on all day and checking emails early in the morning and late at night.*
- ✦ *There was a "strong relationship" between use of the "push" feature that automatically updates emails on devices as soon as they arrive and the stress of perceived email pressure.*



Lead author Dr Richard MacKinnon said

"The people who reported it being most useful to them also reported the highest levels of email stress. But the habits we develop, the emotional reactions we have to messages and the unwritten organisational etiquette around email, combine into a toxic source of stress which could be negatively impacting our productivity and wellbeing."

According to the findings presented at the British Psychological Society's Division of Occupational Psychology annual meeting in Nottingham, they recommended that people read e-mails at limited times during the day versus continually checking for them.

In a two-week experiment, researchers asked adults to check their inbox three times a day for a week and another group of adults to check as often as they wanted. The next week, they reversed the instructions for the groups.

- ✦ *Employees who checked their e-mail only three times a day reported being far less stressed after one week than employees told to check e-mail freely.*
- ✦ *The "e-mail-minimalisers" answered roughly as many e-mails as those who checked e-mail often, but in 20 percent less time.*

The report suggested **managing the stresses of constant email communication** by

- ✦ *limiting how often the app is checked to twice a day*
- ✦ *saying the times when emails will be checked in closing email signatures*
- ✦ *agreeing with colleagues circumstances which use an email vs a phone call.*
- ✦ *setting Out Of Office replies more frequently and*
- ✦ *turning off notification sounds on mobile phones*



Before your fingers touch the keyboard

What do you want to achieve?

An email is a communication which will generate a behavioural response – boredom, interest, considered reply, action. Which do you want? Is an Email the best way to get it?

Most professional relationships rely on respect and trust between the individuals and this is generated fastest by face to face discussions – in formal meetings, in the corridor or by the coffee machine.

Remember CBWA – Communicating by Wandering About. If in doubt find the person and talk to them. It may be far quicker in the long run than a series of emails that take days to be read and responded to.

Or give the wrong impression, which you then have to spend time correcting.



To provide information?

Long emails turn most people off. If you have a lot to impart, consider a document attachment with a short email outlining the content and the timing of any response required in the subject line. Consider an Executive Summary in the Attachment and repeat it in the email.

To generate action?

Do they have the information they require or will it be in the email? If in the email consider an attachment as above. Be clear in your Subject Heading whether you require a Response or Action so this alerts recipients to open it quickly or not.

- ☀ **“Notes for Meeting on 29th June. No action required”**
- ☀ **“Decision Requested on Meeting Agenda Points – Please Respond by Midnight 25th June”**

To confirm a conversation?

This can be a timely, useful aide memoire if the points are few and simple, but this would not replace minutes of a meeting. Be careful of the language – remember the other person may have a different memory of what was discussed and you will get a better response if you are asking them to check their understanding against yours. Adding a ? at the end of a sentence invites them to think and respond.

Use respectful agreement seeking phrases such as :

☀ I think we covered the following. Please add anything I have missed.	☀ You raised the point that and we agreed to
☀ I think we agreed that	☀ We decided to inform these people:
☀ We agreed you would raise these points on the 25th June. If we can help let me know?	☀ We would meet to monitor progress at 09.30 on the 25th in meeting room 3, which I will book.

To give praise?

It seems a good idea to publicise good work. Always give praise personally first and check with them that telling others is OK. Some people find mass email praise shallow or embarrassing and definitely impersonal.

To give bad news?

NEVER IN AN EMAIL. It makes you look like a coward, unfeeling and impersonal. Always do this face to face.

You Have Decided to write an Email

Be clear in your subject line.

With inboxes being clogged by hundreds of e-mails a day, it's crucial that your subject line gets to the point. It should be reasonably simple and descriptive of what you have written about. An e-mail with a vague, or obscure subject will be left unopened. Also, proof your subject line carefully.

Tell Recipients if Action is Required or is the Content FYI

Be clear in your heading what you want the recipient to do and how quickly so they can prioritise when to open it.

Your subject line must match the message.

Never open an old e-mail, hit Reply, and send a message that has nothing to do with the previous one. Do not hesitate to change the subject as soon as the thread or content of the e-mail chain changes.



Don't get mistaken for Spam.

Avoid subject lines that are in all caps, all lower case, and those that include URLs and exclamation points - which tend to look like Spam to the recipient.

Beware the "Reply All"

Send or copy others only on a "need to know" basis. Before you click Reply All or put names on the Cc or Bcc lines, ask yourself if all the recipients require the information in your message. If they don't, why send it? Take time to send your messages to the right people.

Evaluate the importance of your e-mail.

Don't overuse the high priority option. If you overuse this feature, few people will take it seriously. A better solution is to use descriptive subject lines that explain exactly what a message is about.

What subjects

Only discuss public matters.

We all know stories about a "private" e-mail that was passed around the organisation, and in some cases, all over the Internet. One of the most important things to consider when it comes to e-mail etiquette is whether the matter you're discussing is a public one, or something that should be talked about face to face.

Confidential information.

Refrain from discussing confidential information in e-mails such as someone's salary or performance information or the particulars of a highly-sensitive discussion or process. Should the e-mail get into the wrong person's hands, you could face serious - even legal - repercussions.



Don't "e-mail angry."

E-mailing with bad news, expressing anger, reprimanding someone, disparaging other people in e-mails are all major no-no's. Because e-mail can seem so informal, many people fall into this trap.

Always remember that e-mail correspondence lasts forever.

Email Language

Keep it short and get to the point.

The long e-mail is a thing of the past.

- ✦ Write concisely, with lots of white space, so as to not overwhelm the recipient.
- ✦ Make sure when you look at what you're sending it doesn't look like a burden to read.
- ✦ Feel free to use bullet points.
- ✦ State the purpose of the e-mail within the first two sentences. Be clear and be up front.

Avoid Parental Language

Avoid using expressions such as:

- ✦ You need to
- ✦ You should
- ✦ I think you



Transactional Analysis would say these are Parental expressions that suggest you are better than the recipient, so you appear condescending or belittling. The result is the recipient of your email could go into Child, and reject your message, with some "digital" communication of their own!

Know your audience.

Your e-mail greeting and sign-off should be consistent with the level of respect and formality of the recipient. Also, write for the person who will be reading it - if they tend to be very polite and formal, write in that language. The same goes for a receiver who tends to be more informal and relaxed.

Always include a signature.

You never want someone to have to look up how to get in touch with you. Depending on your organisation's policy, include all of your social media information in your signature as well. Not including a telephone number makes you look distant and trying to be unreachable, which can be frustrating. If you have a switchboard, include that number so they can take calls when you are busy.

Only use an auto-responder when necessary.

An automatic response that says, "Thank you for your e-mail message. I will respond to you as soon as I can" is useless. Be specific about when you will be able to read their email. One thing an auto-response messages do well is alert spammers that your e-mail is real and that they can add you to their spam list.

Avoid using shortcuts to real words, emoticons, jargon, or slang.

Using shortcuts such as "4 u" (instead of "for you"), "Gr8" (for great) in business-related e-mail is not acceptable. If you wouldn't put a smiley face or emoticon on your business correspondence, you shouldn't put it in an e-mail message to a colleague. Any of these could make you look less than professional.



Use exclamation points sparingly!!!

One is the maximum number in a professional e-mail, lest you look childish and unprofessional.

Sending one-liners.

"Thanks," and "Oh, OK" do not advance the conversation in any way. Put "No Reply Necessary" or "FYI Only" at the top of the e-mail when you don't anticipate a response.

Respond in a timely fashion.

Unless you work in an emergency capacity, it's not necessary to be available the instant an e-mail arrives. Depending on the request in the subject and the sender, responding within 24 to 48 hours is acceptable.

Keep it clean.

Do not send replies with a long e-mail chain that includes excessive carets (>>>), or pages and pages of e-mail addresses or legal disclaimers from previous emails in the chain. You can get rid of carets by selecting the text, **Ctrl+F** to use the Find and Replace command to find a caret and replace all of them with nothing. You can get rid of all the e-mail addresses just by deleting. Clean it before you send it.

Attachments

Sending unannounced large attachments can clog the receiver's inbox and cause other important e-mails to bounce. If you are sending something that is over 500KB ask,

☀ **'Would you mind if I sent you an attachment? When would be the best time for you?'**

Before You Send

Read it to Yourself

- ☀ *Does it say what you meant it to say?*
- ☀ *If you were the recipient how would you respond?*

Edit it down

- ☀ *Shorten sentences by deleting additional words or adjectives where possible.*
- ☀ *Is everything in it relevant, or have you gone off at a tangent half way through?*

The Really Button

Final check – imagine just as you put the cursor on Send another button appears in its place. The “Really?” button. If your considered answer is Yes, hit send.

Really?

Summary

- ☀ *Write a short but descriptive subject line. Choose utility over creativity.*
- ☀ *Copy people judiciously. Include only those who require the information*
- ☀ *Honour e-requests as dependably as requests made face-to-face.*
- ☀ *If you're in doubt about your humour, sarcasm, or criticism, then reread, rethink, and resist the temptation.*
- ☀ *If you're uncertain about your tone, save the message and review it later with a fresh perspective before sending it.*
- ☀ *Consider the time of day you send an e-mail. You can write it now but maybe send it later using delayed delivery.*
- ☀ *Be clear about times, dates, time zones, and any acronyms.*
- ☀ *Before responding to an e-mail, read completely through it.*

- ✿ *Don't mark an e-mail as "urgent" unless it's truly necessary; let the recipient decide for him or herself if it's really "URGENT!!!"*
- ✿ *Avoid using "Notify sender" and follow-up flags.*
- ✿ *Include a signature block with your full name, title, and contact information, especially if the person you're corresponding with has provided this.*
- ✿ *Never send anything to a business e-mail address that the recipient would be embarrassed to have the entire organization read.*
- ✿ *Make sure you put the names in your "To:" field in the proper order, typically by rank or according to the varying degree of responsibility people bear for handling a situation.*
- ✿ *Consider whether an apology is best delivered via e-mail. It might be a great way to start an apology that you later continue in person. If you choose this strategy, include "apology" or "sorry" in the subject line to ensure the recipient opens it.*
- ✿ *Don't select "Reply all" unless absolutely appropriate.*
- ✿ *Don't WRITE MESSAGES IN ALL CAPS.*
- ✿ *Don't forward e-mails to make someone look bad.*
- ✿ *Don't write things in an e-mail that you wouldn't say to a person's face.*
- ✿ *Don't use exclamation points to convey negative emotion. And in serious correspondence, don't use more than one at a time.*