There’s an epidemic out there—an epidemic of bad emails.

I really realized it after about the fifth time my boss commented on an email I sent her to look over: “That’s a really good email!” I hadn’t thought it was anything special, until I started to pay closer attention to the emails I was receiving. There were horrible grammar errors, embarrassing spelling mistakes, incorrect names, emoticons, lack of proper greetings or pleasantries, and plain old bad writing. I could go on and on.

It’s not that we’re incompetent, people. We’re just not putting the care into our emails that many of them deserve. The care, say, an editor might give an article.

So, to help us all improve our workplace communication, here is the editor’s guide to writing emails that will earn you respect (and responses). Keep these ideas in mind next time you’re going through your inbox—and see what an impact a few small changes have.

**Slow Down**

I know we’re all on a race to get to inbox zero. And sure, in some cases, firing off a quick email makes sense: when you’re in the middle of a long thread of
communication with a close colleague, when you’re just firing off a document to your boss, and the like.

But, for the most part, effective communication (and good writing) takes time. It takes time to formulate your thoughts, to figure out what you’re actually trying to say, and to write your message out in a clear way. And ultimately, that’s what email is—a form of communication. Not a task.

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So, next time you have to write a more in-depth email to someone, give it the time it deserves. Block it out on your calendar if you have to. And I’m not talking five minutes per email—it’s not unusual for me to spend upwards of 15 minutes on a good email, especially if it’s my first communication with someone I want to impress. Let yourself have that time, and don’t feel like you’re being slow or unproductive. Feel like you’re doing it right.

RELATED: The Email Management Mistake That’s Costing You

Make Sure it Has a Beginning, Middle, and End

Just because we live in a 140-character world, doesn’t mean your emails should be that way. In fact, we’re going to have a little throwback to high school English here and the classic hamburger-style essay; that is, every essay needs an intro, a body, and a conclusion.

You should think about your emails having the same structure. Each section doesn’t have to be long, but especially in an initial communication, it should be there. So, what should each section include?

Intro
Always start with a greeting—it may feel archaic, but it really makes a difference. Then, depending on the nature of your relationship, the opening paragraph is a great place for a friendly greeting (“I hope your job search is going well!”), a reminder of the context of your conversation (“It was so nice getting to chat with you last week.”), or a preface about why you’re reaching out (“I wanted to touch base about...”).

Body

This is where you get to the crux of your email. The most important thing to remember here is to give your recipients all the information they need to take whatever action you’re asking of them. This includes giving any contextual information, details, or data that’s necessary, and presenting it in a logical, cohesive way. If the email is being sent to convey information or a decision (rather than ask a favor), make sure to include reasoning or explanation.

**Related:** 6 Ways to Get Your Emails Read

Conclusion

The conclusion of emails is a bit different than the conclusion of essays. Instead of summarizing what you already talked about, you should be wrapping it up with action steps. If you’re asking to meet for coffee, propose a date and time. If you’re getting input for a project, remind your colleague exactly what you need and when. And, if you’re just giving information, remind your contact that he or she is welcome to come to you with any questions. Finally, at least in your initial email, always close with a greeting and full signature.

It may seem like a lot, but as I said, it doesn’t have to be long. For example, this is an email I might send to someone I want to grab coffee with:

“Hey Dave!

It’s so nice to meet you! It was so great getting to chat with Alex, and when she mentioned she knew you I jumped on it.”
I love what you guys are doing at your company, and it would be awesome to chat with you about how you think about online publishing, your recent re-design, and other things about the work that we both spend our lives doing.

Do you think you’d have a bit of time in the coming weeks to meet up? I’d be happy to swing by your offices or grab coffee—whatever is most convenient for you!

Best, and happy Monday.

Erin

So much better than, "Hey Dave, want to grab coffee sometime?" right?

Proofread and Fact Check

Once you’re done typing your email, you shouldn’t just send it off into the world. Always re-read your emails, at least once. Besides just checking for basic spelling and grammar mistakes, you’re also fact checking things like name spellings, events you refer to, or dates you mention. Addressing an email “Hey Jon,” when it should be “Hey John,” might seem like a small thing, but your contact will notice—and first impressions make a huge difference.

This is also a good point to think about the tone of your email. Does it sound too business-like when you’re just trying to be friendly? Are you too enthusiastic with the exclamation points and emoticons at the expense of professionalism? Try to step back and consider how someone reading the email for the first time will react to it—and adjust accordingly. For particularly important emails, I also ask someone else to look it over for me—an extra set of editorial eyes has never hurt anyone.

Think How You Would Feel if it Went Public
Finally, before hitting send, think about how you would feel if this email was read by anyone but the person you’re sending it to. What if, somehow, it landed in your boss’ inbox? What if it got published on the web? (Hey, it happens.) This is a great final gut-check to make sure your emails sound respectful and professional and ultimately represent how you want to be portraying yourself to the world.

**RELATED:** *Finally! The 23 Unwritten Rules of Email*

I know, it sounds like a lot of work to put into one email. But with the number of bad emails we all get every day, people really will notice the difference when a good one lands in their inbox. And that could be the difference between getting ignored and getting what you want.

*This article was originally published on The Daily Muse.*

*As an Editor at The Daily Muse, Erin Greenawald has an unhealthy adoration of taking sentences and making them shine. In her search to figure out what she wanted to do with her life, Erin journeyed to the Galapagos to try her hand at environmental filmmaking, jetted to Copenhagen to study Urban Design, and spent hours in the kitchen contemplating quitting it all for culinary school. Follow her continued adventures on Twitter [@erinaceously](https://twitter.com/erinaceously).*

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