E-MAIL

♣ How to Properly Write a Formal Email:

Formal emails are often called for when you're sending an email to someone you don't know well. A formal email is also the right choice for some business situations. If you're not sure whether to send a formal or informal email, it's usually better to send a formal message.

A. What Is a Formal Email?

A formal email is typically sent to someone you don't know well or to someone who's in authority. Examples of someone who you might send a formal email to include your professor, a public official, or even a company you're doing business with.

If your workplace has a formal environment, use formal emails with your boss and colleagues unless you're told to do otherwise. Many workplaces are moving towards a more casual environment and this often carries over to email communications. If you're not sure what's right for your workplace, ask.

B. Casual Versus Formal Email: What's the Difference?

A formal email differs from a casual email. A casual email usually goes to a person you know well—often it's someone you're on good terms with such as a friend or family member. When sending a casual email, you don't need to worry as much about structure and tone.

In fact, part of what makes a formal email different from a casual email is the structure. A formal email has a very defined structure, with a definite salutation (the opening part of the email), signature section, opening sentence, and body.

You also use language differently in a formal email than in a casual email. Avoid using abbreviations, contractions, slang, emoticons, and other informal terminology. The tone of a formal email is different as well. An informal email may not even use complete sentences or proper grammar, but a formal email always does.

Example of formal email language:

The meeting is scheduled for December 5th at 9:30 a.m. All students must attend. Your project updates are needed.

Compare the formal language with the informal email language in this email:

Required meeting—Dec 5, 9:30 a.m. Updates needed. See ya there. :)

Both statements share the same information. But the tone of the first is much more formal. Notice the incomplete sentence, slang, and emoticon in the informal example.

C. *Writing a Formal Email (The Do's and Don'ts of Email Etiquette)*

While an informal email can often be sent quickly, writing a formal email typically takes a bit more thought and a bit more time. Careful consideration needs to be given to each email element.

With that in mind, let's take a closer look at some common elements of a formal email:

1. *Do* have a clear subject line.

Most of us have to compete with the hundreds of emails clogging our inbox every day, so the clearer your subject line, the more likely your message will be read. For example, if you're sending a proposal to someone, be specific and write, "The Fitch Proposal Is Attached."

The subject line is what the reader sees in their inbox. If the subject line is misleading or missing information, your email may not get read. The message may even be sent to spam. The more formal your email is, the more detailed your subject line should be. But beware of making your subject line too long.

Here's an example of a formal email subject line:

Required Student Meeting: December 5th, 9:30 a.m.

Compare that subject line with this informal email subject line:

Upcoming Meeting

Notice that the first subject line is more informative and complete. The informal subject line, sent to someone you know well, just barely touches on the topic.

2. Salutation (*Do* use a professional salutation)

Using "Hey," "Yo," or "Hiya" isn't professional, no matter how well you know the recipient. Use "Hi" or "Hello" instead. To be more formal, use "Dear (insert name)." Using the person's name in the salutation -- "Hello Robert" -- is quite appropriate, but remember not to shorten a person's name unless you're given permission to do so.

The salutation directly addresses the person you're sending the email to. It's always used in formal email messages, but sometimes skipped in informal messages. Here are some examples of formal and informal salutations:

If you're sending the email to a group, address the entire group. Here's an example:

Dear Students,

If you've got the person's name you want to send the email too, it's proper to use their name along with any title the person has. Here's a sample formal salutation for an individual:

Dear Professor Smith,

If you don't know the name of the person you're trying to reach, you should make every effort to discover that information. As a last resort, it's okay (but less effective) to address the email to the title of the person you hope to reach. Here's an example of a formal salutation without a name:

Dear Human Resources Director,

In rare instances where you don't know a person's name or title, it's okay to use this salutation:

To whom it may concern,

Contrast the formal salutation examples with the following informal salutations:

Informal Salutation for a Group
Hey Class!

Informal Salutation for an Individual
Hello Taylor,

As you can see, the formal and informal salutations are very different.

3. Introduction

The opening of a formal email often requires the sender to introduce themselves. In contrast, informal emails are sent to someone you know and the introduction isn't needed.

Here's an example of an opening in a formal email:

My name is Jordan Smith. I am the professor of Statistics for XYZ University. This message is for all current students.

4. Body

The body of a formal email typically elaborates on the purpose of the email. Elaboration may not be needed in an informal email. Although the body contains detailed information, it's important to write clearly and concisely in a formal email. Remember your reader isn't familiar with you and may not be familiar with your topic. You don't want your email recipient to misunderstand an important point.

5. Closing

How you end a formal email is equally important. Since the email closing is the last thing your recipient looks at, your email closing can leave a lasting impression.

A good formal email closing also reminds the reader who you are since it should include your full name, contact information, and title (if appropriate). If you can, use a professional signature template for added impact. (*Learn more about signature templates in the next section.*)

In contrast, an email closing may be extremely casual for an informal email. In some instances where the recipient is well known to you, you may even omit the email closing.

The most common way to start a formal email closing is with the word "Sincerely." It may be a common closing, but it's also a safe closing.

Here's an example of a formal email closing:

Sincerely,

Jordan Smith
Professor of Statistics, XYZ College
[Email address goes here]
[Phone number goes here]

6. Signature.

Your email closing should be formal, not informal. Use your first and last name. If you're writing on behalf of an organization and you know the title of the person, you're sending the email to, use it.

Your email font choice is also important when you're formatting a formal email. Although many modern email platforms allow you to use many different fonts, it's best to stick with a common, readable font like Verdana, Calibri, Times New Roman or Georgia. Helvetica and Arial are common sans-serif fonts you could use as well.

Avoid novelty fonts like Comic Sans, handwriting fonts like Bradley Hand, and script fonts like Brush Script. Remember that if you choose an unusual font for your formal email, that font may not be supported by some email platforms.

Also, stick to one or two fonts in your formal email. Using too many different fonts can make your email look too casual. Too many fonts may even make your formal email less readable.

7. Don't use humor.

Humor does not translate well via email. What you think is funny has a good chance of being misinterpreted by the other party, or taken as sarcasm, without the accompanying vocal tone and facial expressions. When in doubt, leave humor out of business communications.

8. *Do* proofread your message.

Don't be surprised if you're judged by the way you compose an email. For example, if your email is littered with misspelled words and grammatical errors, you may be perceived as sloppy, careless, or even uneducated. Check your spelling, grammar and message before hitting "send."

9. *Don't* assume the recipient knows what you are talking about.

Create your message as a stand-alone note, even if it is in response to a chain of emails. This means no "one-liners." Include the subject and any references to previous emails, research or conversations. It can be frustrating and time consuming to look back at the chain to brush up on the context. Your recipient may have hundreds of emails coming in each day and likely won't remember the chain of events leading up to your email.

10. *Do* reply to all emails.

Give a timely and polite reply to each legitimate email addressed to you. Even if you do not have an answer at the moment, take a second to write a response letting the sender know you received their email. Inform the sender if their email was sent to the wrong recipient, too.

11. *Don't* shoot from the lip.

Never send an angry email, or give a quick, flip response. Give your message some thoughtful consideration before sending it. If you feel angry, put your message into the "drafts" folder, and review it again later when you are calmer and have time to formulate an appropriate response.

12. *Do* keep private material confidential.

It is far too easy to share emails, even inadvertently. If you have to share highly personal or confidential information, do so in person or over the phone. Ask permission before posting sensitive material either in the body of the email or in an attachment.

13. *Don't!* overuse exclamation points.

Exclamation points and other indications of excitement such as emoticons, abbreviations like LOL, and all CAPITALS do not translate well in business communications. Leave them off unless you know the recipient extremely well. It's also not professional to use a string of exclamation points!!!!!

It may take some practice to keep your emails professional and to the point, but you will look more polished and organized in the long run.

14. Once you've written and formatted your formal email, you're almost ready to send your message. But before you press that Send button, review your email carefully. Look for:

- Spelling errors
- Mistakes in a name
- Typos
- Grammatical errors

Remember, a sloppy email full of mistakes makes a bad impression.

Also, pay attention to the email address you're using to send the email if you want to be taken seriously. Many of us created email addresses when we younger that aren't appropriate for formal emails. If you can get it, your email address for formal emails should be a variation of your name without any extra characters.

Here are some examples of appropriate and inappropriate email address:

Email Address #1
 KittenL0ver73%@example.com

Save this type of email address for casual emails to your family and friends.

Email Address #2
TaylorJones@example.com

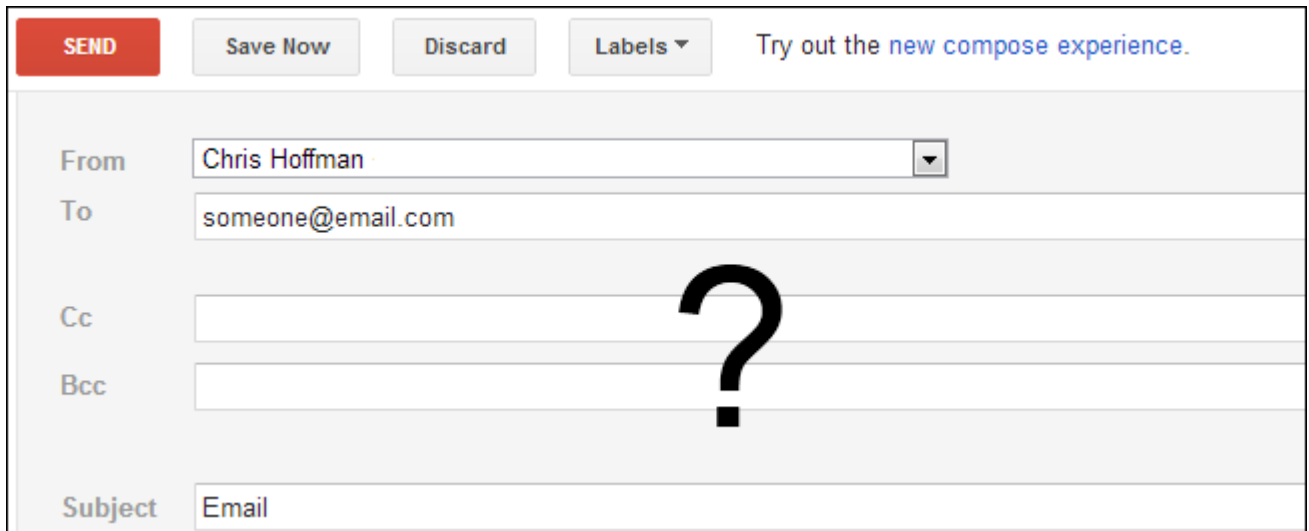This email address can be used for formal and professional emails.

Note: *These email addresses used here and throughout this article are for example purposes only. They aren't intended to represent real email addresses.*

If you're a student or writing on behalf of an organization, it's a good idea to use the email provided by your educational institution or the organization

you're representing. Most colleges, for example, provide their students with email addresses in the format:

firstnamelastname@collegename.edu

⬥ What's the Difference Between CC and BCC When Sending an Email?

The CC and BCC fields when sending email work similarly. CC stands for "carbon copy," while BCC stands for "blind carbon copy." Though these terms may have been immediately obvious when email was invented, they're antiquated today.

CC and BCC are both ways of sending copies of an email to additional people. However, you can also send copies of an email to additional people by specifying multiple addresses in the To field.

CC vs. BCC

When you CC people on an email, the CC list is visible to all other recipients. For example, if you CC bob@example.com and jake@example.com on an email, Bob and Jake will both know that the other received the email, as well.

BCC stands for "blind carbon copy." Unlike with CC, no one but the sender can see the list of BCC recipients. For example, if you have bob@example.com and jake@example.com in the BCC list, neither Bob nor Jake will know that the other received the email.
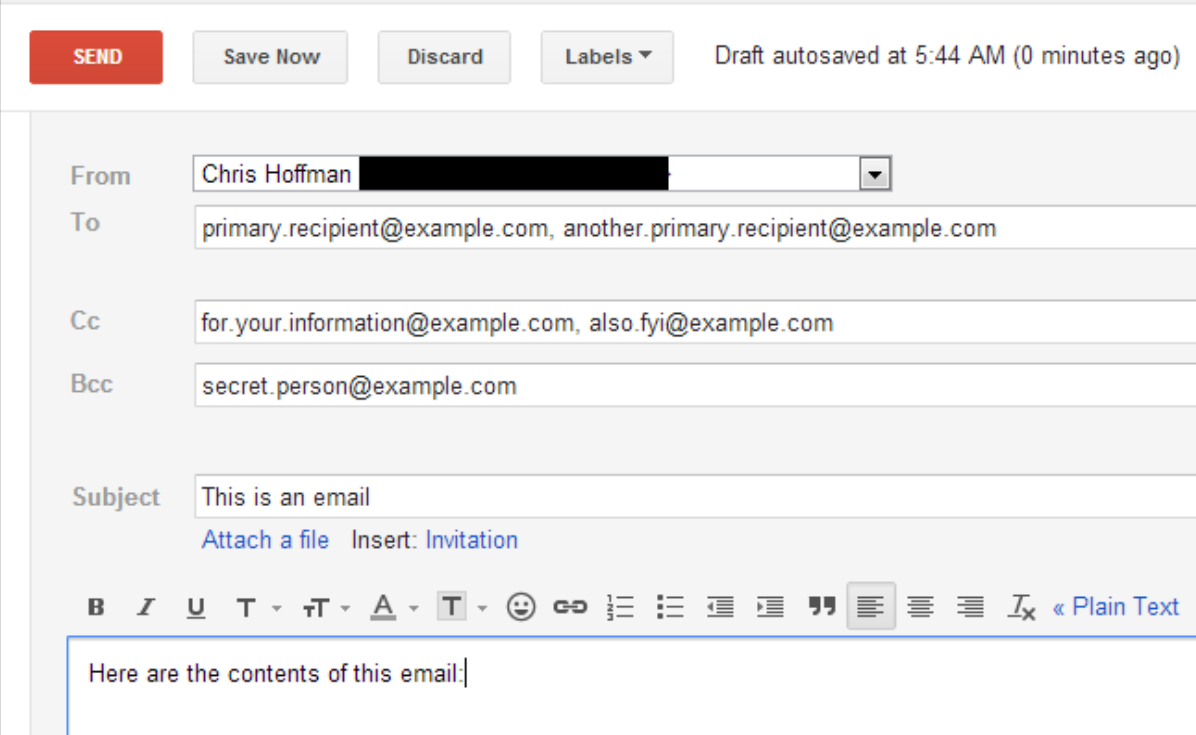
Someone on the BCC list can see everything else, including the CC list and the contents of the email. However, the BCC list is secret—no one can see this list except the sender. If a person is on the BCC list, they'll see only their own email on the BCC list.

To vs. CC

The To and CC fields work similarly. Whether you put four email addresses in the To field or put one email address in the To field and three in the CC field, the four people will all receive the same email. They'll also be able to see the email address of every other recipients in the To and CC fields.

When it comes to email etiquette, the To field is generally for the main recipients of your email. The CC field is for sending a copy to other interested parties for their information. This isn't a concrete rule, and usage of To and CC varies.

For example, let's say your boss wants you to email a customer in response to a complaint. You'd put the customer's email address in the To field and your boss's email address in the CC field, so your boss would receive a copy of the email. If you didn't want the customer to see your boss's email address, you'd put your boss's address in the BCC field instead.

When to Use CC and BCC

CC is useful when:

- You want someone else to receive a copy of an email, but they aren't one of the primary recipients.
- You want the recipients of the message to know the other people who have been sent the message.

BCC is useful when:

- You want someone else to receive an email, but you don't want the primary recipients of the email to see you've sent this other person a copy. For example, if you're having a problem with a fellow employee, you might send them an email about it and BCC the human resources department. HR would receive a copy for their records, but your fellow employee wouldn't be aware of this.

- You want to send a copy of an email to a large number of people. For example, if you have a mailing list with a large number of people, you could include them in the BCC field. No one would be able to see anyone else's email address. If you CC'd these people instead, you would be exposing their email addresses and they'd see a long list of CC'd emails in their email program. You could even put your own email address in the To field and include every other address in the BCC field, hiding everyone's email address from each other.

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