A Useful Guide to Managing Email

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Part 1—Setting the scene

- How email has taken over business communications

- Why email is different from other forms of business communications

- Why email etiquette is important

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1   The email invasion

Email is now the primary means of communication in organisations. It carries reports, memos and information exchange among departments and colleagues. The once ubiquitous 'whilst-you-were-out' notes an assistant left on your desk have been replaced by email. The monthly report that landed in your desk in-tray has been replaced by email. And often, conversations that used to happen by telephone have been replaced by an exchange of emails.

Where once the in-tray was heaped up and overflowing, it's now the email Inbox that's overflowing.

Email has invaded our working life.

In this Useful Guide, the assumption is that you know how to drive your email software application; you know enough of the technical things, for example, how to launch your email application, enter email addresses and add attachments.

But knowing how to drive the software and being a good email citizen are different things.

Driving the software is analogous to passing your driving test. The goal of this Useful Guide is to help you survive in the busy motorway-like world of corporate email.

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2   The business context of email

2.1   Collaborative technology

In the context of email in business, email is a collaborative technology. It sits alongside other collaborative technologies such as the telephone, file services, and fax machines.

Email fits readily with other collaborative approaches but with increasing functionality it's becoming the one-size-fits-all approach to communicating. This may be convenient, but is this always a good thing?

Electronic mail was originally a paper-based medium. In the 1980s, a user would logon via a Teletype, then go for a coffee whilst a printer churned out a list of messages. Electronic-mail was electronic-post, it substituted postal mail where correspondents were in different places at different times. As time passed, electronic mail, or e-mail, matured along with the technology supporting it. The phrase is no longer hyphenated; it's a noun in its own right — email. Email has invaded every aspect of how we communicate with each other. Email is now in every quadrant of the time/place table below.

	Same time	**Different time**
Same place	**Same time, same place** • Face-Face meetings, • Talk to each other, • Walk over and speak with each other! *Now we ping emails across the desk*	**Same place, different time** • Sticky notes, memos • Job files (job sharing), • Messages via an intermediary. *Email is now the means for all these tasks*
Different place	**Same time, different place** • Telephone, • Conference calls and video conferencing, • Instant Messaging. • Voice over IP (eg Skype) *Now we swap emails almost in real-time*	**Different time, different place** • Email, • Voicemail, • Postal mail, • Web portals. *Email is now the dominant form of communication*

The personal and organisational challenge is not to let email become the only means of communicating. There are some messages that, if delivered by email, can have disastrous consequences, especially where feelings and emotions are involved. We cover this in §16

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2.2   The ancient language of emails

In the beginning emails had to be brief. It was a restriction imposed by the technology. It led to a culture of writing emails in highly abbreviated forms. A typical email of the time might have been …

A, spk to T abt £ b4 mvg fwd. FAIK not in c/f proj. K.

Translation — Alan, speak to Ted about budget before moving forward. For all I know, it's not in the cash flow projection. Kevin.

One can see where modern Txt-spk originated!

Messages became short, curt, and sometimes (unintentionally) rude. The consequence is that the recipient (whom you may never have met) can form an opinion about you. It might not be what you would have chosen.

2.3   Why email etiquette is important

With emails being the dominant form of business communications, they need the same care that you'd give to other forms of correspondence. You wouldn't write a sloppy letter to a customer, so you shouldn't write a sloppy email to a customer. With emails being quick and casual it's easy to be lazy and easy overlook the need for professionalism. So, why should you take care with your emails? Three good reasons to be professional with your emails are …

- **Reputation**
  Emails carry your personal reputation; they carry the brand of your organisation. It's how others perceive you. Writing an email that's a delight to receive elevates your reputation.

- **Effectiveness**
  A well-crafted email saves the need for several more. As we'll see later in this useful guide, good quality emails reduce the load on your Inbox.

- **Liability**
  Emails are regarded as company correspondence. They have the status of evidence — poorly worded, or inappropriately worded emails can land you in trouble.

Remember too, that with just a few clicks, your confidential message can be shared globally. Think carefully about what you say in an email — we cover this in more detail in §18.

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2.4   Email is different

We should finish this introductory part with a note that email is different from other forms of communications.

The table below shows a summary of differences, feel free to add your own.

	Written	Telephone	Email
Emotional content (e.g. friendly or hostile)	With longer narrative, tone can be deduced	Easy to hear tone/pitch/inflection of voice	Tone is guessed (high risk of an incorrect guess!)
Humour	With a carefully constructed script, it can be achieved.	Easily achieved with tone of voice, pace, and jocularity.	Difficult, unless the joke follows a well-known format. (eg 'a crocodile goes into a bar …')
Tone	Skilful writers use sarcasm, wit, and puns, to develop the tone of a situation. Needs many words	Tone can be heard in the inflexions of speech.	Almost impossible.
Timeliness	Delayed – by one or two days. Each turn in the conversation is delayed by days.	Instant	Fast — but speed depends on the recipient being connected
Privacy	Depends on the medium. A sealed envelope is more private than a postcard.	Very private	Almost none
Page layout	Designed and seen by the author; the reader sees the same layout.	n/a	What is displayed may be very different from the author's design
Reading	On paper – reading is usually linear – start to finish.	n/a	On-screen – reading is often scanned.
Add yours			

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2.5   This Useful Guide

There is more to email than driving the software. Email is how we express ourselves, communicate with others and manage our professional lives.

With this in mind, A Useful Guide to Managing Email offers help so that you can …

- Create emails that are a delight to receive.

- Manage the emails that you receive.

- Adjust your e-management style and change how it impacts yourself and others.

- Stay safe in the e-jungle.

In the next part of this Useful Guide, our theme is …

How to create great emails that people look forward to receiving.

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Part 2 — Sending emails that are a delight to receive

- The importance of purpose in your emails

- A toolkit for clarity

- The postcard principle

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3   Why would someone open your email?

3.1   The importance of purpose in emails

Without a purpose the email is a waste of time to compose and send. And, from the recipient's perspective, it's just more junk to interrupt their personal productivity.

What is your purpose in sending an email? All emails should have a purpose, even those you forward to others. Having a purpose helps with both the content and the subject line. The table below shows some of the main objectives of business emails.

Feel free to add your own. The important thing is to have a purpose for the message.

	To give information	To make a request	To give a response
Purpose	• Updates • News • Sales offers • Dispatch notices	• Request permission • Instructions and mandates • Invitations • Request information • Request help • Activate a process • Authorise an activity	• Recommend • Give advice • Give authorisation • Accept information • Confirm agreement • Give permission

Creating a purpose.
Use the method of asking yourself, what do I want the receiver …

- to *know*,

- to *think* or

- to *do*

… as a consequence of receiving this email?

If you can't find a purpose, don't send the email.

Thinking of purpose can be enlightening; for example, what is the *purpose* of forwarding those jokes?

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3.2 The Subject line is the first impression

According to the old cliché you only get one chance at a first impression. For an email, that first impression is the Subject Line. The subject lines are what we scan down to select an interesting email to open.

Most of us scan throughout our day. We scan headlines in newspapers, menus and faces in a crowd. We scan to choose which articles to read or scan to choose what to eat and who to speak with. We are very experienced scanners.

It's much the same when scanning down the Inbox. The subject line is the headline and you choose to open, ignore or delete, based on whether it's grabbed your attention, piqued your interest or left you cold and bored.

A well-crafted subject line increases the chance of your message being opened rather than deleted. Typically, your reader can see about twelve words (see note below). However we don't scan twelve words, we scan the first few words. Similarly newspaper headlines are typically fewer than ten words to make them easily scannable. We take a more detailed look at scanning in §4.4.

Although modern email systems can handle long subject lines, you are adding hassle to your reader who needs to scroll horizontally to see the whole subject line.

Remember …

- **A subject line is one line of text**
  If it's too long, your reader might just give up and delete it instead.

Notes
In old teletype email, lines were 80 characters in length. The usual convention was to limit the line length to 72 characters. An average of five characters per word plus a space gives twelve words per line.

If you're old enough to remember mechanical typewriters, the carriage was fitted with a bell that 'tinged' at a preset position, usually between the 60th and 72nd character position. The bell reminded the typist to operate the carriage-return bar at the end of the next word and start a new line.

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3.3   Writing an attention grabbing subject line

The approach to writing good subject lines has two parts. The first is to write it from the point of view of the recipient, the second is to use action oriented words in the form of a headline.

- **Give your reader a reason to be interested**
  You might have a purpose in sending an email, but whether a recipient is interested in receiving it is another matter. Some key questions to ask yourself are …

  - **Relevancy** — Is the subject line relevant to the recipient?

  - **Timeliness** — Is it timely from the recipient's point of view?

  - **Importance or urgency** — Is it significant to the recipient?

- **Write subject lines as headlines**
  Subject lines are initially seen out of context (often in a separate list). Write the subject line as a self-contained and scannable micro-message. Aim for about eight words as a maximum. Some key elements to a great subject line are …

  - **Business words** Use everyday business terms to make it obvious what the message is about. Clever puns or cute phrases don't work so well in business emails.

  - **Concise** Omit the articles *a, an, the,* and so on. Precise grammar and full sentences are not needed in a subject line.

  - **Value in the first words** Write the first few words to convey something of value to your recipient. Remember the recipient is scanning a long list of subject lines and they tend to look down the left-hand side of the list at the first one or two words only. Critical information belongs at the beginning of the subject line, not the end.

  - **Actions and information** Subject lines are more attractive when you include actions, imperatives, or benefit phrases. If you can, start the subject line with a verb or the key noun. A subject line made up of a string of nouns is unlikely to grab anyone's attention.

  Note — A newspaper headline is in close proximity to its associated story. This is not usually true for email subject lines; they are often presented as a list without context. The subject line has to stand on its own merit.

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5 Ws and 1H

The classic way of creating interest in any form of communication is the 5Ws and 1H method. The approach has been around for centuries and made famous in Rudyard Kipling's poem—Six Serving Men. These five W's and one H should be viewed from the recipient's perspective.

- **What** — is this email about
- **Why** — is it relevant to the recipient?
- **When** — is something going to happen/has happened?
- **How** — is the recipient going to do something?
- **Where** — is the recipient to go for the action?
- **Who** — is involved? Includes the recipient and others.

For more information see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_Honest_Serving_Men

It's almost impossible to include all these in a subject line, and to do so would overwhelm it. However, if you are able to include at least two, your subject line becomes more engaging. Compare the two emails in the screenshot below.
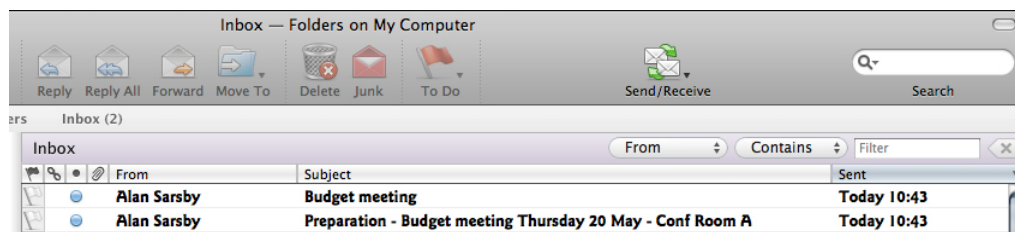
The first is an uninspiring subject line. It fails the *so what* test, if you're not involved in budgeting — *so what.* If you're in the accounting department, you might receive hundreds of similar messages *so what — which budget meeting?* The second subject line has ...

- **Action**   Preparation – a reminder
- **What**   Budget meeting
- **When**   Thursday 20 May
- **Where**   Conference room A

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Examples

Uninspiring subject line	Attention grabbing subject line
Meeting	CANCELLED - Budget meeting This Friday
Photo Club	Photo Club – Tue 1 June – Still life – Bring your camera
Agenda	Agenda for team away-day 1 March
Invoice	Please authorise - Invoice AB123 (attached)
Enquiry	Help needed – do you have 3 widgets I can borrow?
Update	Simplified procedure for buying small items
Training guide	2010 Training Brochure – Ready for distribution
Big news!	New marketing campaign for November
Payment confirmation	Payment confirmation – Order Py41414 -
Printing contact	Contact for printing November catalogue
Product	Recommend product launch 5 November
Opportunity	Invitation - Would you present at our annual service conference?
Information	May I borrow the specification for oil-free chains?
<no subject>	

A new trend, seen particularly in on-line news groups, is to append a tag to the end of a subject line to give an extra indication of what's inside. Using some of the examples from above, they might appear like this ...

Attention grabbing subject line with tag appended
Photo Club – Tue 1 June – Still life – Bring your camera [pictures]
Agenda for team away-day 1 March [pdf]
2010 Training Brochure – Ready for distribution [video link]
Simplified procedure for buying small items [link]
New marketing campaign for November [updated]

As always, remember your recipient. If these tags help, add them, if they confuse, don't.

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3.4 A few things to avoid in subject lines

Recall that the subject line is the first impression and, hopefully, you'd like to give a good first impression. To finish this section on subject lines there are a few things to avoid. Some of these may cause your recipient to press delete instantly, some are turn-offs and others might end up as spam.

- **Avoid personalisation**
  It may be tempting to include the recipient's first name in the subject line. For example *Alan -send me your CV*. But how does the recipient react to this? It can be interpreted as being over-familiar especially with unsolicited contact.
  In this example, a stranger is giving me a command — *Make sure you write this down Alan - Exclusive Writing & Notebook Deals.*

- **Avoid SHOUTING**
  Typing in all-capitals is the equivalent of shouting. We mention this again later, but the notion of shouting in a subject line is a turn-off. The one small exception, to be used sparingly, is a single word at the beginning of the subject line for extremely important messages. For example *CANCELLED-this afternoon's product review*. Even this is risky. With a message like this, a phone around might be more effective.

- **Avoid blank subject lines**
  Blank subject lines <no subject> create hassle for your reader. Without the subject line, the recipient must look elsewhere to decide whether to open it. The *From* field might help to identify whom the sender is and, from that, make a guess at its importance. But otherwise, emails with a blank subject line deserve to be moved directly to the deleted items folder. (An automatic method for this is shown in §13.2.)

- **Avoid spam trigger words**
  Spam filters also pick up words from the subject line to ascertain whether or not the message is spam. Some words trigger the spam filter. Among these are, *Sale, Free, Call now, Order, Medicines*, etc. The inclusion of an email address (a form of personalisation) is also an indicator of spam.

- **Don't write half a sentence**
  that is finished in the main body of the message. It's disorienting for the reader to backtrack from the opening words of the message to re-read the subject line. Remember, the Subject line is often separated from the message.

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3.5   Is your subject line triggering the junk filter

There are many reasons that emails end up in the junk mail folder. Did you know that the content of the subject line could trigger the incoming email to be directed towards the junk folder?

Certain words, or words in close proximity to other words, identify the email as suspicious to a spam filter. The importance of using straightforward business words in the subject line should not be underestimated. The table following shows a selection of real email titles automatically moved to the junk mail folder.

Subject lines that end up in the junk mail folder	Comment
Free stripper	The email was from a builder's supply company and the stripper was a wallpaper remover. But 'free' and 'stripper' was more than the spam filter could stand!
Are you free on June 8th Edinburgh Airport	Spam filter triggered by 'Free' in the first few words
Account Alert !	Excessive exclamations
Hello <ADDRESS style="DISPLAY: none"></ADDRESS> <CITE style="DISPLAY: none"></CITE><EM style="DISPLAY: none"></EM>	This is bulk-generated spam, but a careless programmer included the scripting variables in the subject line.
Re: Brand name luxury watches	A supplier of fake products.

There are many more reasons for moving an email into the junk folder; these include known source addresses, heuristics to detect certain patterns, and a catalogue of known scams.

It's worth checking the spam or junk folder occasionally to be sure that innocent messages haven't been captured.

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3.6   Summary — Great subject lines

- Remember that Subject Lines are often displayed as a list, separate from the email text.

- The subject line stands alone—it is a micro message from you to your reader.

- A good subject line helps your recipient to action the message. For example, where to file the email.

The benefit of a great subject line
We're all busy people, and your recipient will appreciate your professionalism in identifying the key emails from the dross.
(And as a by-product—it contributes to your personal reputation.)

One final note …

- **Remember to change the subject line when replying**
  Do you, succumb to the lazy method of finding an old email as a quick way to send an email to someone by opening it and pressing 'Reply'?

  What often happens, is that one forgets to change the subject line and the new message is not relevant to the old subject line.
  You're making it hard for your recipient.

  Checklist …

  1 — Check your Inbox and pick out the attention-grabbing subject lines.
  Use these as ideas for your own subject lines.

  2 — Check your sent items folder and pick out the attention-grabbing subject lines you have sent to other people.

  3 — Check out newspaper headlines to discover how they might be adapted for email subject lines.

  4 — Check your junk mail folder and work out why things have been moved there. Then use this knowledge to help with really great subject lines

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4 The postcard principle

4.1 How big is an e-postcard?

Many email clients offer a choice of layouts. As a user you can select, typically, which panes you see. The picture below shows a common layout.
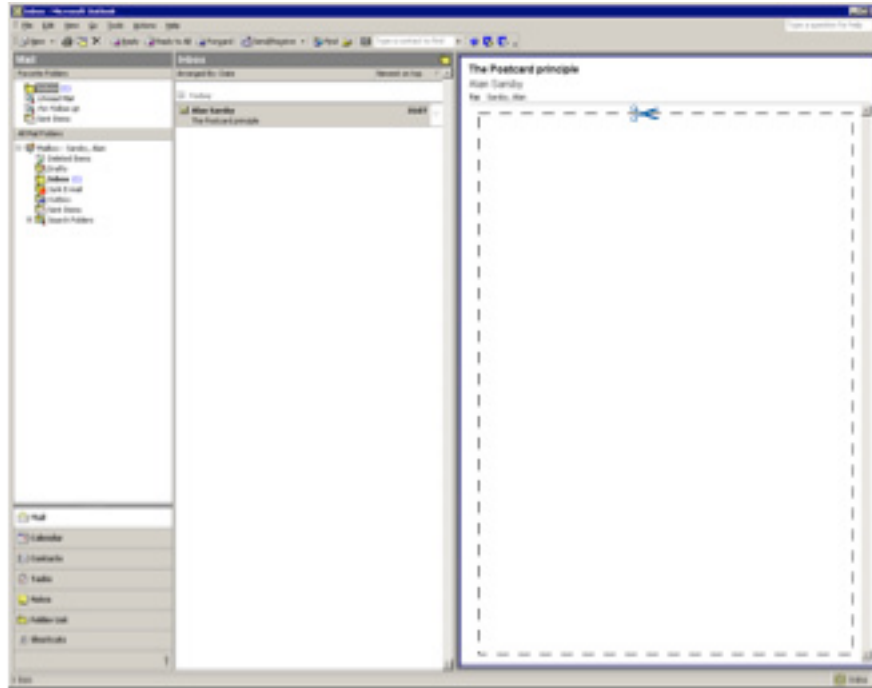
On a laptop, a common screen size for business users is 15″ This is about the same size as a piece of A4 paper.

Desk exercise …

Take a sheet of A4 paper and cut out the area of the message pane. Remember to cut off the area for headers, the status area, and scroll bars. Cut off any area you cannot type into.
How much is left for the real message?

After you've completed the exercise above, you'll probably be holding a piece of paper about the same size as a postcard. You've discovered the postcard principle. The real amount of space for an email message is about the same as that on a postcard. *So What?* The answer is that long emails are more difficult for your recipient to process. In keeping with our theme of sending emails that are a delight to receive, a successful email is short and concise.

There is another important element to the postcard principle. We'll come to that in §18.

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4.2 Principles for concise emails

"I'm sorry for writing such a long letter, but I did not have time to write a short one."

Attributed variously to Blaise Pascale, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Mark Twain, Cicero, and others

Our e-postcard limitation means we need to approach writing an email in a different way from other forms of written communication. There are three principles for writing short and effective emails.

- **One email covers one topic**
  By writing emails that cover only one topic at once you make it easy for your recipient to manage the message. For example, if you send an email containing five topics. Two are trivial and would normally be deleted, and three are important, but different, topics. Where does your recipient file it? Help your recipient by making it easy for them to process your message.

- **Make your point — then stop writing. Stop!**
  Remember that emails should have a purpose. Reach that purpose in the minimum number of words and sentences—then stop.
  The apparent empty space in the postcard may tempt you to add more, for example, social chatter (*did you see last night's football–what a goal, eh*). Don't. Stick to the point; make the point, then stop writing.

- **Write concisely**
  There is an art to writing concisely—this is so important for emails, that a whole section of this Useful Guide is devoted to it. See §5, The toolkit for clarity

Remember our goal is to create emails that are a delight to receive. And your bonus is gaining a reputation for being a good email communicator.

Checklist …

1 — Check your sent items folder. Assess yourself by comparing the ratio of those following the one-email equals one-topic with those that have multiple topics.

2 — Check some of your longer emails. Discover where you wander off-topic or where the one-topic principle can be applied.

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4.3 Structure of an email message

The best communications have been thought out and have an underlying structure. It's tempting to think that email is so casual that no planning and structure is needed. Sorry, but this is not so.

The basic structure of an email is to synchronise with the reader, then once synchronised, continue telling your message. We all know how it feels to listen to a message when the speaker has started in the middle of the story. But with an email there's no way to wave our arms in the air and ask the speaker to start again at the beginning!

Remember too, that your message is likely to be one of hundreds that the recipient is working their way through—make it easy for them.

- **Synchronise first …**
  The first line in the body of an email performs the job of synchronisation. Once read, the reader should know the context of what follows. This synchronisation phase is useful in all forms of communication, but vital in an email.

  In business, email is a fast and furious medium; your recipient may be subconsciously thinking about the previous email even though they are reading yours. Hence the first few lines in the body of the email should establish a synchronised context between you and your recipient. Some examples …

  ✗ *Yes, proceed as you suggest*
     This is almost meaningless. Use a synchronising start like this …

  ✓ *You asked about the approach to the awards ceremony – please proceed as you suggested.*
     This reminds the recipient of the context and the question (possibly asked several days earlier).

  ✗ *Thanks that great …*

  ✓ *Thanks for letting me know about the Trustees visit - it sounds great.*

  ✓ *The project Saturn board meeting is next Thursday, 25 July.*
     (Tip — if the project has a name, use it to help synchronise your recipient, who may be involved in many projects.)

- **…then tell the message**
  The postcard principle encourages brief direct delivery of the message, and this affects how your message is crafted.

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4.4 Layout for scanning

We've mentioned previously that people tend to scan when reading from a screen. So our aim is to create an email that is a delight to receive, and to compose it so the recipient can scan it. There are two main ways of achieving this — using bullet points, and using headings.

- **Bullet points**
  Bullet points have similar characteristics to subject lines. Short succinct points with the key words near the beginning of the line. Bullet points tend to be a few words or, at most, a few lines.

- **Sub headings**
  Sub headings – are like bullet points and crafted in the same manner, but instead of indicating just a few lines, they indicate a distinct topic or subsection. The 5Ws and 1H technique helps you to write scannable headings.

The example below illustrates the body of an email inviting people to a meeting. Each sub-heading indicates what type of content follows.

Example …

- A clear subject line, with an identifying project name, a 'Why' (mid stage review) and a date.

- The main body has a summary title. The tone is professional.

- Purpose
  — *persuade the sponsor to continue with the project*.

- What to bring with you
  — *two clear actions.*

- Start and finish times.
  (With a motivation to finish early!)

- The layout makes it easy to scan, and it can print on one side of paper for easy reference.

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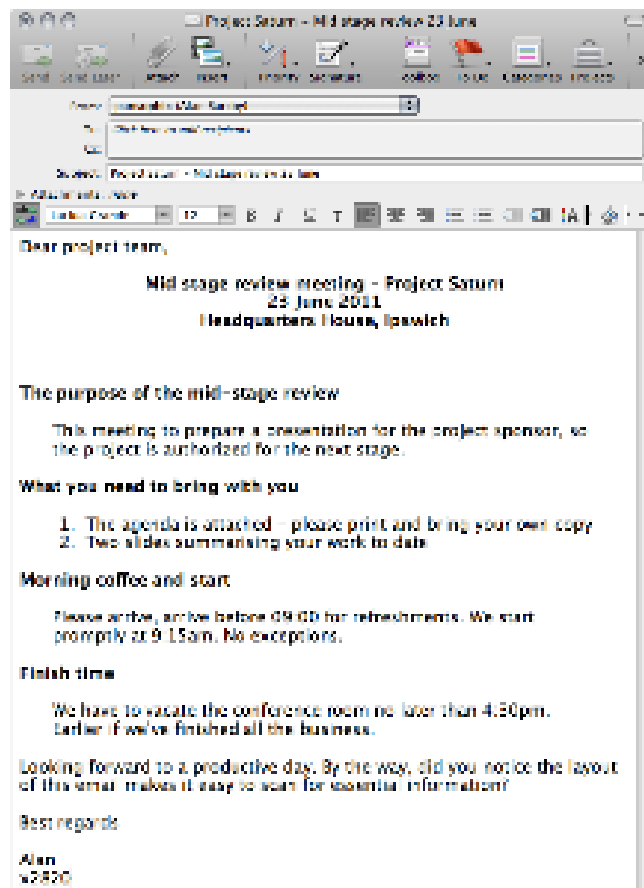
Layout for scanning makes it easier for your recipient to find the item they are looking for. For example if, on the morning of the meeting, the recipient only wants to know where to go, a simple scan down the message delivers the critical information.

Note — The importance of writing for scanning cannot be understated. Research by Nielsen [1997] suggests that 79% of people scan text on a screen and only 16% read word-by-word. Moreover, crafting the text into concise, scannable chunks, together with objective language leads to improvements of up to 124%. (Follow the link above to discover what these numbers mean.)

4.5   The postcard summary

An email is like a postcard. There is limited space to carry our message, if you write huge novel-like text, you are making it hard for your recipient to read and understand your message.

The first steps to creating emails that are a delight to receive are …

- One topic per message.

- Keep it short.

- Synchronise your recipient so they know what they are about to read.

- Put the message in a structure, so that it can …

- Be scanned, and easily acted upon.

Checklist

1 — Examine some of your recent emails in your sent items folder. Review those that were more like novels. How could they be made scannable?

2 — Review some multi-topic emails. How many could be separated into single-topic messages. Remember this makes it easier for your recipient to file the message in the right place.

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5   The toolkit for clarity

5.1   Look at your email from the recipient's perspective

What happens when your recipient doesn't understand your email? Usually one of two things …

- Your message is deleted, in which case you've failed as an effective communicator.

- Your recipient wastes their time trying to decode your intention, gives up and sends you a message back asking for clarification. You spend even more time clarifying what you meant and reply with another email. In total, three emails have been exchanged and two people have wasted valuable time. Imagine how this scales up if you sent the original email to six people. This is a cause of stress in organisations.

For emails, your challenge is applying the KISS principle and at the same time be clear and unambiguous.
Remember the postcard principle. You have limited space. Remember too, that your recipient may have a limited attention span.

Our goals for writing clear messages are …

- To remove the distractions

- To keep the message short and clear

  Note — KISS— an acronym with several (similar) meanings, for example, Keep it Short and Sweet, or Keep it Simple, Stupid!

5.2   Remove the distractions

5.2.1 Two big distractions

A distraction is anything that interferes with the understanding of the message. Two big distractions are …

- Off topic content is a distraction. Remember from §4.2 the importance of not wandering off topic.

- Spelling and grammar. Spolling mistooks and poor gramer distract the reader from your message. See what I mean?

Spelling and grammar are so important we should say a bit more about these topics …

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5.2.2 Spelling is important

Poor spelling shouts out at your recipient and, instead of reading your important email, they simply see your unprofessional approach.

A modern email application often puts squiggly red lines under words that aren't in its dictionary. There really is no excuse for sending an email with a spelling mistake. Be aware that not all email systems do the spell check automatically; it has to be initiated manually. If you forget, then off goes your email and off goes your reputation.

By the way, computer spell checking is not foolproof. The English language has little quirks waiting to thwart spelling checkers, for example …

- Words that sound alike but have different meanings
  - For example, *new and knew*
  - For example *to, too, and two*
- Words that have the same spelling, but are different in meaning and pronunciation
  - For example *lead* (noun) the metal, and *lead* (noun) as in a dog lead, or *to lead* (verb) a meeting

Just for fun work through the poem below. You'll see the words are spelt correctly but many are the wrong words.

I halve a spelling chequer,
It came with my pea see.
It plainly marks four my revue
Mistakes I dew knot sea.

Eye strike a key and type a word
And weight four it two say
Weather eye am wrong oar write
It shows me strait aweigh.

As soon as a mist ache is maid
It nose bee fore two long
And eye can put the era rite
Its rarely ever wrong.

I've scent this massage threw it,
And I'm shore your pleased too no
Its letter prefect in every weigh;
My checker tolled me sew.

A search on the internet shows many variations of this poem for example here.

To overcome this spell-checking problem, the usual advice applies …

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- Read your message out aloud, speaking every word as written — not what's inside your head.

- Save your email as a draft and come back to it a few hours or a day later. You'll be more likely to see the errors after a rest.

- For important messages, perhaps where your reputation is at risk, ask a friend to read your important email – before you send it!

Checklist

1 — Find out if your email automatically checks spelling. If it doesn't, find out how to turn spell checking on automatically, or how to do a manual spell check.

2— Find out how to add your own specialist words to the spell-checker's dictionary.

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5.2.3 Grammar can be abbreviated, but not ignored.

As we saw earlier, emails can be short and curt, but getting the basics wrong makes you look unprofessional and there goes your reputation. For example, you simply have to know about …

- **Verbs and nouns**
  Grammar doesn't come more basic than verbs and nouns.
  For example …

  - *Affect* is a verb, as in *to affect* …

  - *Effect* is a noun, as in *the effect* …

- **Apostrophes**
  An apostrophe indicates possession. For example …

  - *John's ball*

  - *its'* doesn't exist, it should be *its*

- **Elisions – missing letters**
  An elision indicates omission of letters where two words are contracted, it's an important indicator of casual rather than formal writing. The elision and apostrophe, both use a single quotation ' character. For example …

  - *it's* — it is, or it has

  - *you've* — you have

  - *you're* — you are

- **Tense**
  The three basic tenses are, *present tense*, *past tense*, and *future tense*. Using the wrong tense can easily change the meaning of your email.

  - *Fred looked at the web page I* **had** *been working on.*
    — Suggests that I worked on the web page sometime in the past.

  - *Fred looked at the web page I* **have** *been working on.*
    — Suggests that I am still working on the web page.

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Pansophix

- **Pronouns**
  A pronoun is a substitute for a real noun. The three basic categories of pronoun are *first person* indicating the speaker, the *second person* indicating the person being spoken to, and the *third person* indicating someone else. Pronouns save space, but take care with the clarity of who is accountable for an action. For example …

  - First person — *I* completed the project on Tuesday.
    It's clear that *I* refers to the sender of the email. However, if you use the first person plural *we* (*We* completed the assignment…) you may be disguising who the other person is.

  - Second person — *You* reviewed the project report on Tuesday.
    Usually it's clear who the second person is — it's the person reading the email. However, if you sent your message to multiple recipients then it's not clear to whom *you* refers.

  - Third person — *They* completed the project on Tuesday.
    Using the third person is a frequent cause of ambiguity. Because *They* refers to someone who is neither the writer, nor the recipient, it leaves open who *they* are.

Punctuation

The brevity of emails reduces the scope for punctuation errors. Even though brevity may help, one still needs to take care. Mistakes in punctuation can change the meaning and add ambiguity.
For example …

- *Save water and waste paper* could be a message to use less water and consequently use fewer paper towels. Equally it could be a message to recycle leftover used water and recycle used paper towels. Your recipient makes the choice, not you.

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Just for fun, compare the two Dear John letters that follow. Both versions have identical words, but have different punctuation. One becomes a love letter, and other a good-riddance letter.

Dear John,

I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy - will you let me be yours?

Mary

Dear John,

I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men, I yearn. For you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart, I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?

Yours, Mary

Note — The Dear John example is a grammarian's joke. It appears in several books and an internet search returns thousands of results. The source is unknown.

Grammatical errors often arise as a consequence of repeated editing. The message started out in one direction, then afterthoughts changed a part of a sentence and the whole paragraph becomes a grammatical tangle.

By now, you can a guess the suggested solution …

- **Read your message out aloud**, speaking every word as written. Do not read words that are not there. For elisions, read out the words without the omission — for example, when you see *it's*, say *it is*. If the message still makes sense, you've (*you have*) probably got it right.

- Ask a friend to read your important email – **before** you send it!

5.3   Reduce the word-count and increase the clarity

This is back to our Postcard Principle. The aim is to say what we need to say in the fewest number of words. Clarity comes from careful use of language and construction of the message.

This Useful Guide is not a textbook on writing and grammar, nor is it a useful guide to plain English. So, well mention just a few culprits of excess words and ambiguity. These are summarised below …

- **Abstract phrases — invites assumptions**
  Use concrete expressions whenever you can. If you say something like *"see you tomorrow"* what does it mean to your recipient who opens the email the following morning? A concrete phrase is *"See you on Thursday morning at 10am"* (in this case the clarity is worth the extra few words.)

- **Auxiliary verbs — need extra words**
  Auxiliary verbs need a main verb to work with, this increases the word count. For example …

  - *will contain*, could be simplified to *contains*

  - *The volume will be increased* could be simplified to *The volume is increased*, or even simpler to … *increases the volume*.

- **Circumlocutions — say it in a round about way**

  - Instead of *at a later time*, simply say *later*.

  - *"The technical advance I am waiting for on my mobile phone is the 'get to the point' button"* - Alicia Brandt

- **Double negatives — create confusion**
  Double negatives increase the word-count and reduce clarity. The interpretation of a double negative depends on the reader's version of English … two negatives can cancel each other to leave a positive; alternatively, it is a reinforcement of the negative. Your reader makes the choice, not you!

  - *I don't know nothing* – Estuary English for I don't know anything

  - *It's not unusual* – a subtle way of saying it's common.

  Note — Estuary English is a dialect associated with the East of London and the Thames estuary. The BBC television series EastEnders made the some of the dialect more common nationally. See this Wikipedia entry for more details.

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- **Internet speak — saves space but obscures meaning**
  IMNSHO this is NAGI. HTH.
  Translation — *In my not so humble opinion this is not a good idea.*
  Hope this helps. Is your recipient fluent in net-speak?

- **Jargon saves space — but adds exclusivity**
  Jargon saves space, only use jargon if you're certain that the recipient
  shares the same *meaning* of it.

- **Long words — use up more space**
  Most long words have a shorter equivalent.
  Use the shorter word.

- **Negative phrases — adds words and lose clarity**
  A negative phrase conveys what you want to restrict but leaves open
  what you'd like to achieve. Positive phrasing often requires fewer
  words. For example ...

Negative phrase	Positive phrase
Does not include	Leaves out
Not often	Rarely
Don't forget to ...	Remember to ...

Passive voice — increases words, reduces responsibility
Using the active voice for your message has a huge impact on clarity of
your message. The active voice usually needs fewer words than the passive
voice, and it adds clarity by associating the doer with the action. For
example ...

Passive voice	Active voice
The ball was thrown by John	John threw the ball
A frog was kissed	The princess kissed the frog
The application must be completed by the student and received by the bursar's office by 1 June. [17 words]	The bursar must receive your application by 1 June. [9 words]

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- **Political correctness — obscures the meaning**
  Political correctness needs more words and frequently uses coded
  euphemisms, which need de-coding by the recipient.
  Straightforward English is easier for your recipient to understand and
  less likely to be misinterpreted.

  - **Long sentences — take longer to read**
    In an email short sentences are good. A dissertation is a good place for
    erudite vocabulary and complex structures to show off your knowledge
    and increase the word count. But not in an email.

  - **Tautologies — say it twice**
    The repetition of meaning using different words. Just say things once!
    For example …

  - *added bonus* — a bonus is an added extra (for example, extra pay) so
    expanding added bonus results in *added added extra*.

5.4   A note about dates

If you include a date in your message, type the month as a word. For
example, say 5 June 2011 rather than 5/6/11. Some correspondents
interpret the all-number format as May 6, 2011.

Similarly, the international standard notation for a date such as
5 June 2011, is *2011-06-05*. It's clear, unambiguous, and common in the
technological world, but not everyone knows this. Some examples …

- 1/10/2011
  could mean: 1 October 2011, or January 1, 2011

- 5/5/2011
  could mean: 5 May 2011, or May 5, 2011 (ok, they are the same!)

- 12/13/2011
  doesn't make sense — there is no such thing as the 12 of the
  thirteenth month. Your reader has to back-track and read it again in
  the opposite direction to *assume* it means 13 December 2011.

- 2010-10-10
  This is an international date format as yyyy-mm-dd (century as four
  digits, month as two digits, and day of the month as two digits).

- 11-11-11
  There is an option in international date formats to abbreviate the
  century to two digits. However this changes the visual shape of the
  information. To UK readers, it looks like a bank's sort code so your
  recipient has to double check.

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5.5   Some tones just don't work in emails

Whilst email is quick, easy and informal, there are a few things that don't work, especially in a business context.

5.5.1 Sarcasm

For some people sarcasm is their normal mode of communicating. They find fault with everything and are generally negative. In real encounters it's easier to manage these people because we can see their expressions and others around us can provide a balancing view; but not in emails. The absence of visual and vocal clues makes it easy for even slight amounts of negativity to come across as sarcasm.

The early days of email recognised this problem, and a culture of smiley faces made up from ordinary text characters developed. These are known as emoticons, (a contraction of emotional icons)

- A straightforward smiley face is   : -)
- or for a big smile or grin   : -))
- for lightweight sarcasm, a raised eyebrow   ; -)
- for stronger sarcasm it's the devilish grin   : ->

If you've not come across these emoticons, turn your head to the left and look at the motifs again – you'll see the faces. There are more of these in Appendix 2

The trouble is that not everyone understands these little codes, so once again you're making it hard for your reader to work out what's going on or, to put it the other way around, even easier to misunderstand your intention.

These little emoticons don't excuse sarcasm. Fortunately, there is a simple cure …

- Express everything in a positive tone,
- Read your message out aloud, and
- For important emails, ask a colleague to read it. Your colleague may pick up the unintentional sarcasm that you cannot see or hear.

5.5.2 Metaphors

We use metaphors in everyday language. For example — *as useless as a chocolate teapot*.

Clearly, a chocolate teapot would melt when boiling water is poured in. Except that even this simple metaphor doesn't work where the culture is to drink iced tea, even a chocolate teapot might have a use!

There are hundreds of these metaphors — they add variety and colour to casual messages. In a professional context they don't always help with the clarity of your message and invite assumptions, which in turn invite more emails to clutter up your Inbox.

5.5.3 Business clichés

Business clichés, also known as 'consultant-speak' and 'management-speak' litter our business communications. For example, *thinking outside the box, paradigm shift*, and *take it to the next level*. These phrases sound convincing but are ambiguous and difficult to quantify.

There's a selection of these clichés in Appendix 2

5.6   Summary

Email is a written form of communication. It needs the same care you'd give to other written work.

- Look at your message from the recipients point of view

- Remove distractions

- Check your spelling and grammar — they are important

- Take care with your tone of voice

- The email postcard has very limited space — use it wisely and effectively

6   WYSIWYG – but not in emails

6.1   The recipient's perspective

The notion of What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) has been around since the 1980s. We're used to typing into our word processors or graphics applications and seeing exactly the same thing on the printed output. This is not true for emails and it's a false assumption that what you type is how the recipient sees it.

Your recipient controls how an email is viewed, not you. Some reasons for this include …

- **Different sized areas for the Postcard pane**.
  Simply re-sizing the pane causes text to re-flow to fit within the new shape.

- **Different fonts in the computer**.
  Even the same font has different versions and displays text differently. (See the next section on fonts.)

- **Different capabilities**.
  It's common to send emails using the same underlying code used in web pages. However, email applications don't support all the codes and styles of a web browser. What is displayed to your recipient is likely to be different from what is displayed on your own screen.

- **Graphics can be blocked**.
  There are very good reasons for this. See §20.3.

- **Only plain text might be displayed**.
  Some users prefer to see plain text rather than graphically rich text layouts. Your recipient controls this choice.

This list could go on and on, but hopefully you get the idea. What you see and what your recipient sees are normally different.

6.2   A note about fonts

If you've a modern computer, it probably has about a hundred fonts pre installed. Some applications install extra fonts and your corporate IT services may have added a few more. It's also possible that you have a corporate font licensed separately. The result is a good deal of creative choice. It's unlikely that your recipient has the same fonts as you — even in the same organisation where the IT folks have standard builds and configurations.

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Even the same font is likely to be a different version. The differences among versions include kerning (the space between character pairs), leading, (the space between lines), character sets (for example, ã ä ă æ   ã — and that's just a few of the letter 'a' variations).

The example below shows the result of applying a calligraphic font (very tempting to do in a signature line) and the resultant font substitution by the recipient's computer.

What you see	**What your recipient sees**
Alan	`Alan`
Formatted with the calligraphic typeface Zappfino	The recipient does not have Zappfino on their computer, so a font substitution takes place

6.3   The few compatible fonts

Consensus has it that only a few standard typefaces can be *assumed* to be on your recipient's computer. These are …

Arial	Times New Roman
Comic Sans	Tahoma
Georgia	Trebuchet
Lucida Grande	Verdana

Even this list is optimistic — it only covers Microsoft Windows and Apple Macintosh operating systems. It means that your creativity is a little stunted when it comes to emails.

Summary

Fonts in emails are a good example of where less is more. The fewer and more common the font, the more likely the message appears as you intended when your recipient reads it. Using a common font is a more reliable way to get your message across.

Notes
Just so you know — Comic Sans is a love it or hate it typeface, and many designers refuse to have it on their systems.
Just for fun go to www.comicsanscriminal.com/

By the way — the Comic Sans typeface seems popular in big organisations as a way of softening their bureaucratic image. It doesn't work, but that's another story.

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6.4   Background colours and images

A modern email application gives us many creative options to make our messages look pretty, by colouring the background, or placing a background picture. Sometimes this is helpful, and sometimes not.
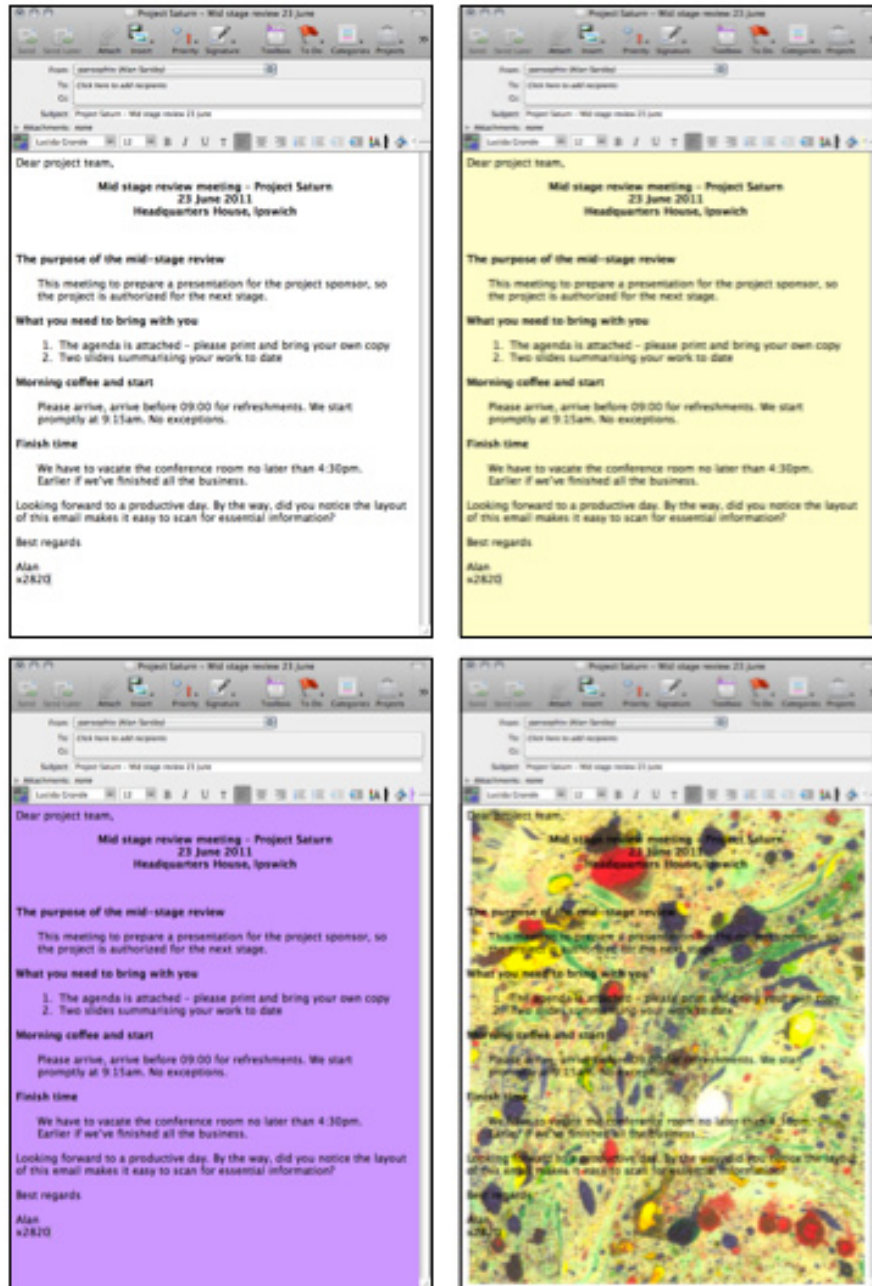
The upper two examples, plain white, and light yellow don't interfere with the message. A pale yellow or pale blue background may even help some dyslexics. The lower two examples increasingly obscure your message. Some email applications let users choose their own background colour. Your background, and the recipient's background then collide.

If in doubt — leave the background plain.

6.5   Spaces and tabs

Using the spacebar to make text align with the line above doesn't work. The font and the internal information in the font about how to space pairs of characters define the width of a space. The recipient's font is likely to be different to yours, so use the tab key instead.

6.6   Summary

- Email is a *What You See Is* **Not** *What You Get medium*. Your recipients have substantial control over how things are displayed on their screens.

- Your recipients control whether they see your graphics. They can force their system into displaying plain text only.

- You and your recipients are unlikely to have the same fonts on your systems. Even fonts with the same name (for example, Verdana) may have different versions and hence display differently.

- Unusual fonts are substituted by the recipients' systems and display differently.

- Use the common fonts only. Fancy fonts don't work.

- Never copy your corporate font to someone else — without a licence to do this it's illegal and you and your organisation are at risk.

- Don't colour the background.

- For WISIWYG — less is more. Think KISS.

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7   The Courtesy challenge

Some emails need to be sent to more than one person. Common examples are newsletters, team updates and so on. There are three ways to send one email to many recipients. The table below is a short summary of when each is appropriate.

	When to use	**When not to use**
To:	This is the normal use. To direct the email to a specific group of people, who know each other, say a project team.	When there are a large number of recipients, say, everyone in the organisation. Instead, use a mail group or a BCC list.
CC:	Additional recipients who need to know the message contents. It's also possible in some email systems to exclude the attachments from those in the cc list. Use also to inform people when they are mentioned in the email but not part of the action.	To cover your back by copying (usually senior) people into an email conversation to prevent yourself being blamed for something. You can annoy a lot of people this way. And you'll gain an unwelcome reputation. See also §13.2 and §15.3
BCC:	Large number of recipients. Use when the email addresses should be kept confidential.	To secretly copy someone in on the email. (When, *not if*, you are found-out, your reputation will be damaged.)

The abbreviation CC is from the era of the mechanical typewriter. It meant Carbon Copy. A typist would load the roller with extra sheets of paper interleaved with carbon-impregnated paper. When the letter hammer struck the ribbon, the shape of the letter would be imprinted on the outer sheet of paper this was the master or top-copy. However the force was strong enough to transfer the carbon from the impregnated paper through to the paper behind. This would become the carbon copy and was sent to specific people, usually named in the letter. Other carbon copies were known as flimsies, these were created the same way as a normal carbon copy, but on thin (inexpensive) paper. These flimsies were normally used as the office or file copy of the letter.

In email speak, CC usually means Courtesy Copy. The modern abbreviation, BCC, is Blind Courtesy Copy. The receiver only sees their own address and does not see other peoples' email addresses. This is helpful to comply with data protection and privacy policies – it prevents the email address from being shared with strangers.

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8   Sending your email to the right person

It might be obvious but you should send your email to the correct person!

For corporate email, it's likely that you'll use something like a Global Address List or a directory to search, pick and insert addressees. Be careful. Large organisations often have many John Smiths, Bill Sykes, and Tom Johnsons. One might be a director, the other a maintenance technician.

Beware of pre-defined group lists, for example, 'All networked staff'. One needs to be aware that everyone in the 'All networked staff' group may be in different geographical places, in widely different job functions. So an email concerning road works behind the London office is of no relevance to the Manchester office.

As always, keep in mind the relevance to your recipient.

In the example opposite, the sender has used a scattergun approach and sent the message to four groups in the research institution.

It's reasonable to assume that some individuals may be in more than one group, so they are going to receive multiple copies of the message.

By the way, the subject line is uninformative — you might just delete this one!

> Note — this email has been edited to protect the guilty!

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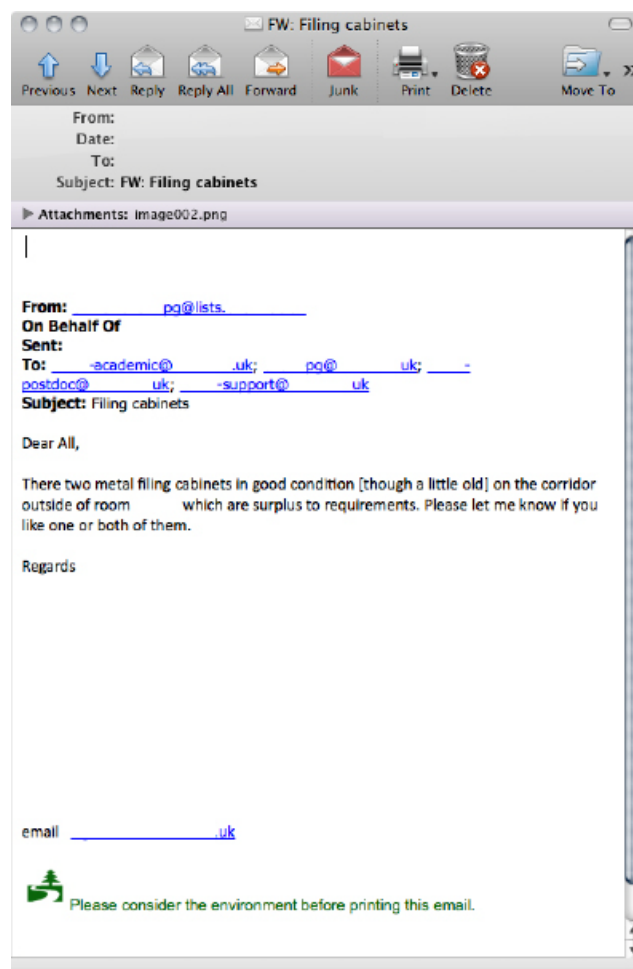
9 Two features to annoy your recipient

9.1 Priority

If you set every message to high-priority, what does it say about you? It can be interpreted as 'self important.'

Historically, priority had a network meaning. It flagged the message with a delivery target (a time). Some clever email switches were able to process the message more quickly — a kind of queue jumping — but it came at a price. If the message couldn't be delivered on time, a failure notification was sent back to the originator and the email was discarded. Setting the priority to high made the quality of service worse!

> Note — The term email switch is shorthand for the technical term Message Transfer Agent. Message transfer agents are the intermediate systems that move your email from your sending system to the destination system. An email might traverse several message transfer agents to reach the destination.

Modern email switches don't often have this kind of problem and, if a message cannot be delivered, the switch keeps on trying. Frequently these retries last for days before the switch gives up.

Nowadays, when the priority is set to something other than normal, your recipient sees an indicator showing the priority, for example, high-priority. And even this assumes that the receiver has turned on the column that displays the icon for urgent. Within the message, a different indicator shows the urgent status — and this becomes a visual distraction.
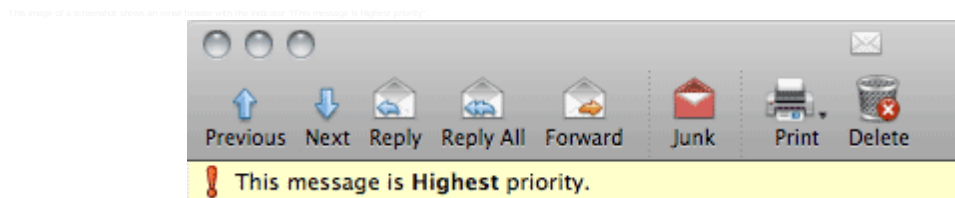
- The rule of thumb for priority is to leave it set at Normal.

- If the message really is urgent, say so in the subject line and in the main message.

- If it's really very urgent, use the telephone instead and, if it's even more important and possible, go to their office and speak with each other.

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9.2   Read receipts

Some email systems have a feature known as Read Receipt. The idea is that you send a message and, once the recipient has opened the message, you receive a 'receipt' that records the message has been read.
This is just another form of 'cover your back.'

From the recipient's perspective, it can be really annoying to receive these. The recipient is presented with a dialogue box stating that a read receipt is going to be sent back to the originator. This has two unfortunate side effects …

- It adds hassle to processing the Inbox.

- It labels you, the sender, as someone who is 'covering their back' and puts your reputation at risk.

The read receipt generally only works within a closed email domain, for example, within your organisation. It doesn't always work across email domains. It's often disabled by IT support because there are security concerns.

> Note — Spammers use the read receipt mechanism to validate an email address. Spammers sell email address by the thousand, and their selling price is higher for validated email addresses.

In the screenshot below, un-tick the read receipts box. And leave the Importance set to Normal.
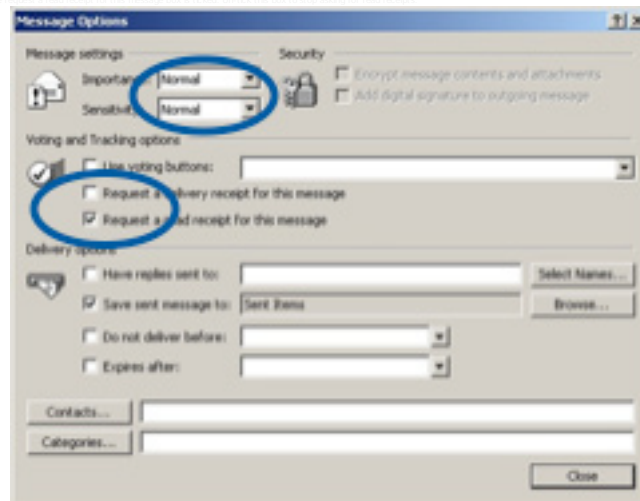
Messages with read receipts are not a delight to receive.

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10   Signatures and disclaimers

The final part of an email is the signature line. Or, more often, lines.

Signatures convey useful information that might not be in the main message, for example, your job title. In keeping with the Postcard Principle, email signatures should be short and contain essential information only.

A good rule of thumb is to keep the signature line to fewer than 5 lines. Typically this would include, your name, role, phone number(s), web site, and a marketing strapline. This rule of thumb is difficult to achieve.

Emails in a business context often include legal content, for example disclaimers and (often wordy) policy statements. Additionally regulations require information such as the registered office and vat registration to be included in business correspondence. All of which makes the signature lines quite lengthy.

It's becoming common to include graphics in a signature line, this can ease the space requirement, but keep in mind two problems. The first is that some recipients turn off images for security reasons (see §20.3). The second is that recipients can select to display emails as plain text and this doesn't show any graphics.

Finally, consider the ratio of message to signature. In the extreme (fictitious) example below, the message is one line, the signature is 16 lines — Just for fun, work it out as a percentage!

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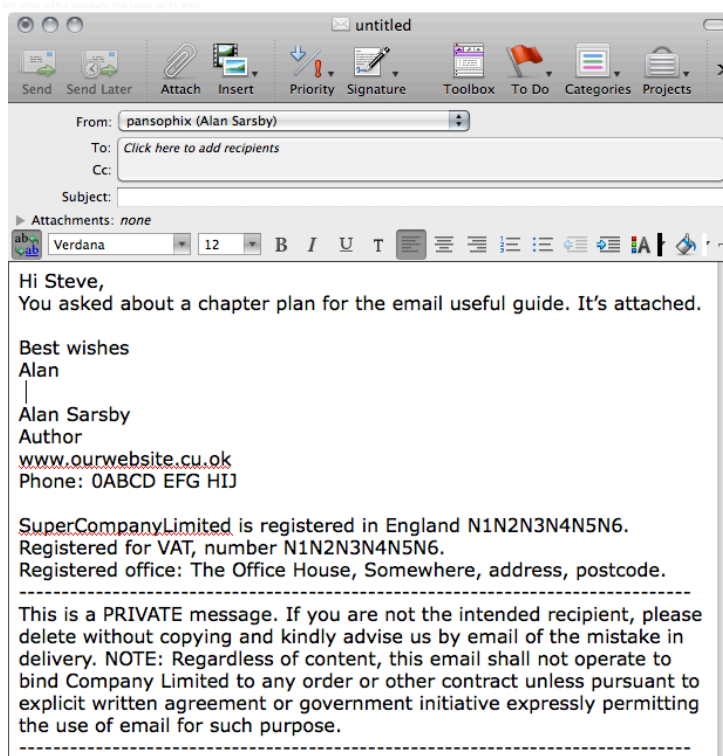
11   Checklist — Before you press send

This checklist covers the main points that help you create an email that is a delight to receive. Remember each email you send carries your personal and professional reputation. It's worth spending a few moments to get it right!

Why have you written this email?

- Is there a purpose to your email?

Subject Line

- Does it have an inspiring and relevant subject line?
- Is there value to the recipient in the first few words?

The main message

- Does the main message follow the Postcard Principle?
- Does it follow the one email, one topic rule?
- Does it start with a synchronisation?
- Is it scannable, using sub-headings and bullet points?
- Is the main message clear and concise?
- Have you used common fonts?

Addressing the email

- Is it addressed to the *fewest* number of recipients?
- Have you checked you're sending it to the right people?
- Are the addresses in the correct fields? (to: cc: and bcc:)

Signature

- Is the signature as *short* as it can be?

Finally

- Before you press Send, have you read the entire message out aloud?
- For important emails, have you asked a colleague to proof read your message?

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Part 3 —Managing the flood of emails

- How to delete emails quickly

- Use Rules to automate your Inbox

- Use folders to organise your work

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12   Put your Inbox on a diet

12.1 How many emails?

Let's assume that you are a busy person — hmm, who isn't? And let's assume that you receive approximately 25 emails each day. At the end of the week you might have 125 emails in your Inbox. That's about 500 per month. After a few months your Inbox becomes a bloated heap of messages with no relation to each other. You can't find specific messages, and you're becoming stressed.

There are three approaches to taking control of your Inbox …

- **Prevention at source**.
  Get fewer emails sent to you. Make it known that you don't want the office gossip.

- **Delete emails quickly**.
  Develop a habit of deleting more often, more quickly, and automatically. The three main tactics are …

  - See and Delete – press delete without opening.
    (Think back to the value of a great subject line.)

  - Read, react, and delete.

  - Move certain emails automatically to the deleted items folder without reading them first (they never show up in your Inbox).

- **Move emails out of your Inbox**.
  An unsorted Inbox quickly turns into a compost heap of messages; sort them into specific folders.

  - Read and move to a folder. React later.

  - Move to a folder using a Rule, and then read and react later.

  Desk exercise
  Find out how many emails you received in the previous calendar month. It's likely that you'll discover the 500 emails mentioned above is a gross underestimate!
  Assume that each email takes an average of 2½ minutes to process.
  Those 500 emails become 1250 minutes, or about 21 hours. To put it another way, that's half a week per month, just *responding* to emails.

In the busy world of corporate email, you don't have time for extended reading of emails. So, to reduce our email-driven workload, one needs to be both organised and disciplined.

12.2 Prevention at source

There are two main sources of excess emails …

- **Emails that you ask for or invite**.
  These include newsletters, monthly updates, and similar bulk-mail messages.
  Other emails you might explicitly invite include normal business activities. However, it's also a consequence of your e-management style and we'll come back to this in §15.3.

- **Emails that you don't ask for**.
  These include proper and legitimate uses of email. But, once again, there is a cultural and e-management issue; it might be the norm in your organisation to forward the jokes and cute emails. But you own your Inbox. Let it be known you don't want these time wasters.

Let's start with those newsletters. If you've ever purchased something from a web-store, you'll have seen a link along the lines of *Sign-up for our daily newsletter*. It's ever so tempting to sign-up for these, receiving exciting, fresh new emails about something interesting. Except … you only need to sign up for a few of these newsletters and your Inbox starts to put on weight. Those newsletters soon add up, maybe to hundreds of unnecessary emails each month.

To reduce the quantity of newsletter emails …

- Be very selective about signing up for newsletters.
  You really should check the originator's privacy policy. Double-check those tick boxes. By default, are you opting-in, or opting-out?

- Be very cautious about entering competitions. Often the small print requires your email and an assumed opt-in to receive messages from *'carefully selected partner companies'*. For the most part, you're inviting unsolicited emails.
  One further thought — should you be entering competitions using your official business email? It depends on your organisation's policy.

- Unsubscribe from those newsletters that have long since served their purpose. For those messages that don't have an unsubscribe link, use a rule to move them directly to the Deleted Items folder. See §13.2.

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12.3 Delete emails quickly—the power of the delete key

It's time to be ruthless, and your new best friend is the delete key. It's our first line of attack when pruning the oversized Inbox.

- **Delete without opening**
  This may seem harsh, but frequently, you can make a decision without even opening the email. If it's clear from the subject line, or sender, that you are not the intended recipient, or it's not relevant, feel free to press the delete key.

- **Open, react, then delete**
  Many emails are just for information, and often have a time-limited value. These don't need to be saved or filed, so just read and delete.

  If you need to reply, either …

  - **Do it immediately**.
    If you can process the email in a few moments, then action it immediately. Make your reply, press send, and then press delete.

    Additionally, if your email system has the "after sending move to" facility, set it so the sent message is moved to the deleted items folder.

  - **Move the message**.
    Move the original message to a folder where you can deal with it later. There's more about folders in email systems in §12.4.

- **Delete automatically**
  You'll find that some messages just keep coming no matter how you try to prevent them. There is a method in most email programs to automatically delete messages so they never end up in your Inbox. But to make use of this feature, we need to understand the concepts of Folders, and Rules.

  A short story: A friend has a way of dealing with the 2000 plus emails that are in her Inbox when she comes back from her annual vacation. It's simple. Once the server has downloaded all the messages, she selects (clicks) the first message in the Inbox, presses Control-A to select all the messages. And then, you guessed it, presses the delete key. Poof! All gone!
  It's an interesting e-management style; the assumption being if it's important, the originator will send it again.

  She's done this now for several years. She still has her job; and widely regarded as a productive and effective manager.

  Maybe this isn't a best practice, and a scan might show a few important messages. However, there's no doubt that she is in control of her Inbox, not the other way around.

12.4 Using folders

Before moving on to further uses for the delete function, we need to take a moment to understand folders in an email environment.

For the most part, folders in email systems are just like folders in your computer's operating system. However, some folders have pre-designated purposes. For example, the Inbox is a folder to which all incoming messages are routed. The Sent Items folder is where a copy of the outgoing message is put after it is sent. The Deleted Items folder is where emails are put when you delete them. (The deleted items are not actually deleted; the deleted items folder is just in the email equivalent of the wastebasket. The Deleted Items folder may be emptied manually — typically using the Empty Deleted Items command— or automatically, at predefined intervals, (or when you quit the email program, this is usually a preferences choice.)

You can create folders for your own needs, for example projects, key activities, or people.

In the example opposite, there is a folder, and sub-folders for 'Projects'. You might create a folder per project, and subfolders for the key parts.

If you are a manager of others, a useful folder is 'Team'. Subfolders might then be for each team member, or for the monthly team meetings.

An important folder, which we'll use later, is the Newsgroups/Read later. This is where we'll put the interesting, but not important messages to read at our leisure.

You can create as many folders as you choose that help with your job.

What you can put in a folder varies. Each email program is different. All can hold email messages; some can hold notes, or files. You'll need to verify this yourself.

Making good use of email folders is the first step in becoming organised.

Desk exercise

Review your email folders. Do they make sense? Take a few moments to design a folder structure in your email.

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13   Automatic organisation using rules

13.1 Introducing rules

Modern email systems have a useful feature known as Rules. A Rule is a
logical script that looks out for specific conditions and then carries out
specific actions.

The logic of rules is based on the thinking **If** 'something' ... **Then** carry out
an action. (Note some systems use **When** instead of **If** – they are
identical.) A typical rule might be ...

> **If** I get an email,
>> where the subject line contains 'monthly report'
>
> **Then** move the email,
>> to the folder 'monthly reports'
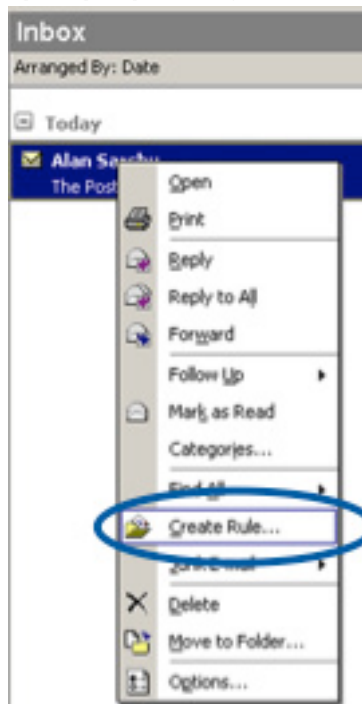
Using rules is a powerful way of keeping your
Inbox slim by moving incoming messages directly
to folders.

Rules can be created in many different ways, and
it depends on which email program you are
running.

Rules can be created directly from the main
menu, or from inside the email. One common
method is to right-click on the name of an
incoming message and select Create Rule ... from
the drop-down list.

There are other ways of accessing the Create
Rule function, usually in a Tools menu; it
depends on your email program.

Following the *Create Rule ...* link
gives a dialogue box similar to
the one here.

From here, click the appropriate
check boxes, fill in the details,
and the next time you receive a
message with those details, the
Do the following is performed.

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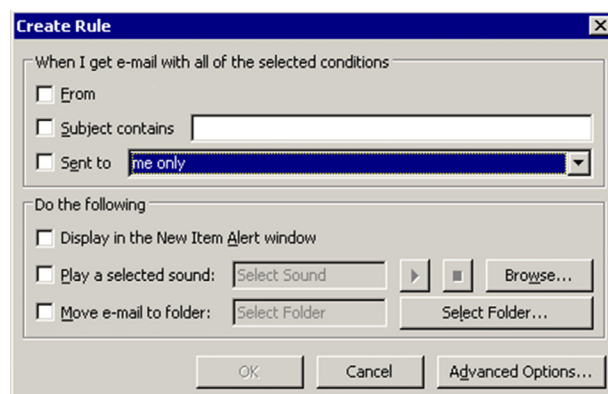
13.2 Automatically deleting emails

Let's be a bit more adventurous with rules and fulfil the promise of deleting certain emails automatically.

> But first a short story — The CEO of a large organisation was concerned about the amount of mail he was getting. Much of it was a 'cover your back' style of message (more of this behaviour later). The CEO let it be known that the emails which required action or intervention must be sent to him using the 'to' field. Any emails sent to the to him using the 'cc' field would be automatically deleted.

> This is more of leading by example, rather than a company wide policy, and as the CEO he could do this!

This automatic deletion was achieved using an email rule.
The logic is …

> **If** I get an email,
> > and I am in the cc list;
>
> **Then** move the email,
> > to the deleted items folder.

The screenshot below shows the detail of how this is achieved (this screen shot is from Microsoft Entourage; other email programs are similar).

1 The rule is given a name 'CC to Trash'

2 The **If** section has one criterion …
If any Cc recipient … contains … alan@pansophix.co.uk;

3 The **Then** section has one action …
Move [the] message to Deleted Items (on my Computer).
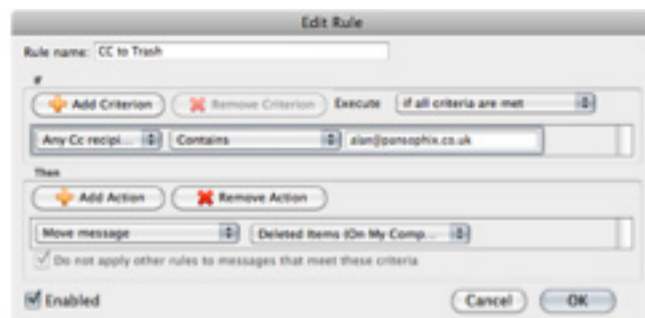
Remember the deleted items folder is just a folder like any other. The messages do not need to go via your Inbox at all.

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13.3 Multi-purpose rules

Rules can have multiple criteria. You can create a single rule to intercept all the low priority messages (for example, the newsgroups), and move them to a 'Read Later' folder.

In the following example, three different 'from' email addresses are intercepted and the message is moved directly to a folder without passing the Inbox.

1   The rule is given a name 'Apple e-news routeing'

2   The **If** section has three criteria ...
      If 'From' ... contains ... applenews.lists.apple.com;
      OR
      If 'From' ... contains ... support@mac.com;
      OR
      If 'From' ... contains ... euromailer.lists.apple.com;

3   The **Then** section has one action ...
      Move the message to the folder Apple eNews (on my Computer).
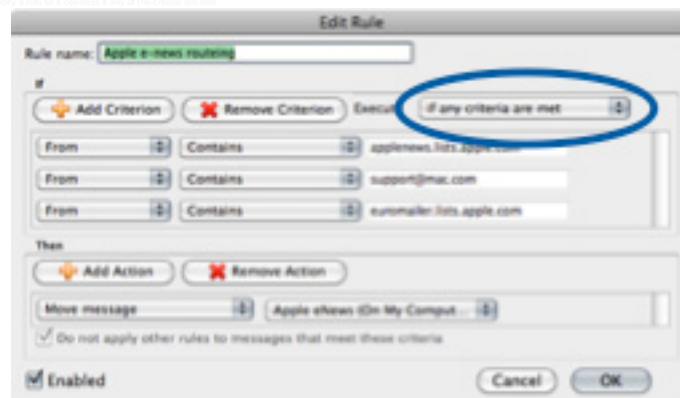
In the example above there is an OR element to the logic. This means **if** something OR something else OR something else again, is true, **then** do the action. So, whichever 'from' occurs first in the rule, the action will be done. The OR is made to happen by selecting 'if ANY criteria are met' in the drop down menu.

Alternatively, logic can utilise AND elements. For example, **if** something AND something else AND something else again, are each true (so that everything in the criteria is true), **then** do the action. In this case, the drop down should be set to 'if ALL criteria are met'.

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An important note about logic

It's best to keep your logic simple by expressing the **If** section as positive statements and restraining yourself to the two main operators of **OR** and **AND**.

Note — You may be familiar with Boolean searches in your favourite search engine that use the **OR** and **AND** operators. The other logic operators are **NOT**, **NAND**, **NOR** and **XOR**. If you're not familiar with the mathematics of logic, in particular, Boolean algebra, De Morgan's Laws, and Karnaugh maps, your Rule might give strange results. Hence the suggestion to keep it simple.

Checklist

1 — Have you designed rules to route emails directly to a dedicated folder?

2 — Have you created a 'Read Later' folder, and define a rule to move all low-priority messages into it?

13.4 Delete the attachments — keep the email

In a corporate environment, it's likely that you'll have a quota for the size of your mailbox. Attachments can use up a great deal of space and can cause you to exceed your quota, perhaps with relatively few emails.

The attachments can be deleted from the email, without deleting the email. This leaves you free to save the textual part of the email in a suitable folder, and keep the attached file in your normal folders.

Usually, you can drag-and-drop the attachment to your desktop or to a folder in your operating system. Alternatively, there is often a function in the menus to save messages to disk.

Notes

1 Did you know that when an attachment is added to an email, the size of the attachment increases by one-third? This is normal; the file is restored to its proper size when you save it to disk.

2 Did you know that a completely empty Microsoft Word document (.doc) is 20 Kilobytes long?

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14 Summary managing your incoming mail

In Part 3 of this useful guide, we've harnessed the power of deleting, and
the effectiveness of moving emails out of the Inbox to a specific folder. The
process is summarised below ...

```
                              @
                        Incoming email
                              │
                              ▼
    ┌──────────┐         ╱Rule?╲          ┌──────────────┐
    │ The Rule │◄─ Yes ─●      ●─ No ─►   │  Scan sender │
    │is applied│         ╲     ╱          │ and subject  │
    └──────────┘          ╲   ╱           │     line     │
         │                                └──────────────┘
    ┌────┼────┐                                  │
    ▼    ▼    ▼                                  ▼
┌──────┐┌──────┐┌──────┐                  ╱decide to╲
│Move to││Move to││Move to│       ┌─ Yes ─●  open    ●── No
│Deleted││Project││Read   │       │        ╲        ╱      │
│Items  ││folder ││later  │       ▼         ╲      ╱       │
└──────┘└──────┘│folder │   ╱Is a Reply╲                  │
               └──────┘    ●  needed?  ●── No              │
                           ╲          ╱     │              │
      ╱Reply in╲◄── Yes ──●  ╲        ╱      │              │
      ●under 100●            ╲      ╱       ▼              │
      ╲seconds?╱                            ╱Keep the╲     │
   No, it╲    ╱                         ●──● email?  ●─ No │
will take │   Yes                       │   ╲       ╱      │
longer    │    │    ┌──────────┐        │    ╲     ╱       │
          │    └───►│Do it now.│        │     Yes          │
          ▼         │Compose the│───────┘      │           │
    ╱Priority?╲─High─│reply,then send│          ▼           │
    ●         ●      └──────────┘      ╱Are you╲  Not really,│
    ╲        ╱                         ● sure? ●─Delete it──┤
     Low                               ╲      ╱             │
      │         ┌──────────┐            Yes                 ▼
      ▼         │Schedule  │             │             ┌────────┐
┌──────────┐    │time.Mark │             │             │delete ⊠│
│Respond   │    │as 'to-do'│             │             └────────┘
│when you've│   └──────────┘             │                  │
│time      │         │                   │                  ▼
└──────────┘         │                   │             ┌────────┐
     │               │                   │  Remember to│Deleted │
     ▼               ▼                   ▼  periodically│ Items  │
┌──────────┐    ┌──────────┐                empty the  │ folder │
│Move to a │    │Move to   │                deleted    └────────┘
│To-do-later│   │Project   │                items folder
│folder    │    │folder    │
└──────────┘    └──────────┘
```

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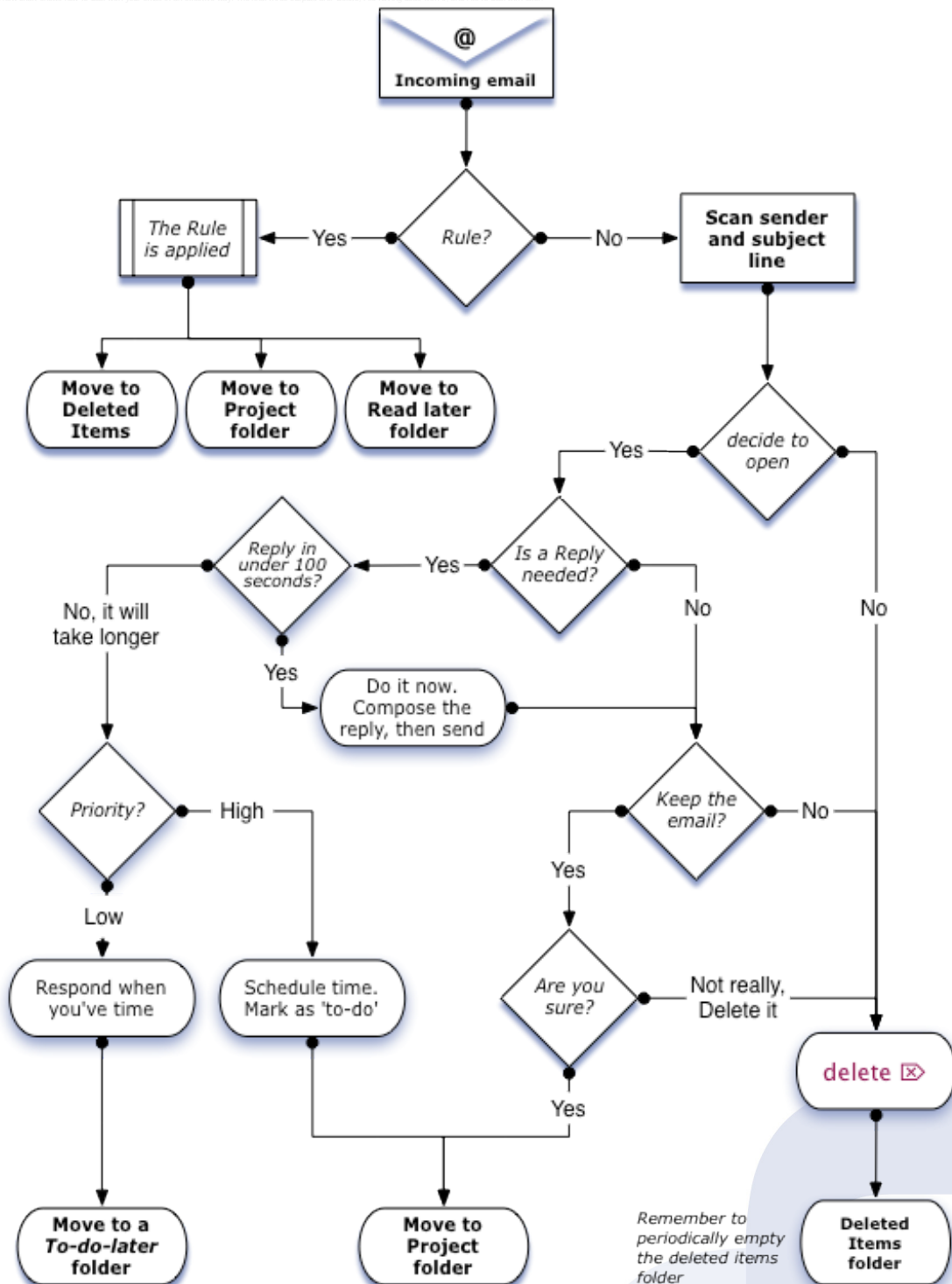
Part 4 — e-management with email

- The addiction to email — doing email instead of doing work

- The situations when one should never use email

- Postcards, publicity, and getting into trouble

Confidence through Development

15   Your e-management style

15.1 Email is addictive

Looking back at §2.1, we mentioned that email is everywhere. It has invaded most areas of communications, and in a typical office, email is the first application opened at the beginning of the day, and usually stays active for the whole day. Your email is on hot standby, ready and waiting to interrupt you.

Email can be addictive in the same way that gambling is. We're excited by the possibility of receiving an unexpected prize. In email, the equivalent is an exciting email amongst all the dross, and this drives us to check email constantly. The sad fact is that email becomes the object of our endeavours rather than the support for our endeavours. For example, on our training courses, the most often mentioned time-waster is "doing emails". More about this in §15.3.

Are you addicted?

Just for fun, try this 'am I addicted' quiz …

- Did you check email less than 15 minutes ago?

- Is your email application permanently active?

- Do you respond to the incoming email notifications?

- Do you process each email as it comes in?

- Do you detach yourself from a conversation with a colleague to check an incoming email?

- Do you take a laptop or mobile phone into meetings to check emails during the breaks (or during uninteresting agenda items in a meeting)?

- Do you check for emails before your morning coffee?

- Do you check emails as soon as you arrive home from the office?

If you're answering more 'yes' than 'no' it's possible you have a level of addiction. In this section we'll look at how your habits affect your own performance, and how your habits affect others, especially if you manage a team.

Once again, we need to restrict our scope; this Useful Guide is about managing email, not about time management. For more about time management, please see The Useful Guide to Time Management.

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15.2 Managing yourself

If you're addicted to emails, you might think s*o what?* Isn't that normal in a business environment? Well, say you're working on a spreadsheet, and you interrupt yourself every 10 minutes to check emails. Or equally, you accept the interruption of incoming emails every time you hear the ching, or see the notification. When you return your attention to the spreadsheet, it takes, typically, two minutes to regain your train of thought. For complex tasks it can take even longer.

Let's do the arithmetic — 2 minutes × 6 times per hour × 7 hours per day. That's more than an hour, possibly two, per day in lost productivity.

The solution is to realise there's no need to be constantly checking emails. It's a habit, behaviour, and it can be overcome. Some suggestions …

- **Take yourself off the grid**.
  The always-on, always present email, is a cause of interruptions. Quit your email application, and only activate it at specific times in your day. Find a schedule that matches your workstyle. Typically early morning is good because some messages may contribute to your to-do list. Midday is also a good time. Try not to check emails in the final moments of your day; it's too late to take action. Avoid the stress and go home.

- **Turn off the email notifications**.
  Reacting to the incoming email notification is inviting an interruption. Turn it off. Better still close or quit your email application.

- **Do emails between other tasks**.
  In a typical working day, we all do a variety of tasks. Concentrate on one task, and when finished, check your emails. Then turn email off. Move on to the next task. Finish it. Check email. Turn email off.

- **Use the phone more often**.
  There are many occasions when it's better to talk. More of this later.

- **Invite fewer emails**.
  We've mentioned the need for reduced emails and how to use rules to move some emails directly to the Deleted Items folder §13. There's also a behavioural aspect to fewer emails, and we'll devote a whole section to it in a moment.

- **Do lunch without email**.
  Take time to recharge yourself. Try not to take your smart phone to lunch and 'do emails' whilst eating. Similarly, don't do work emails at weekends, and definitely not whilst on vacation.

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15.3 Please drown me in CCs

In larger organisations there is often a culture of covering your back. Including people in the cc list achieves this. Earlier we told the story of the CEO who automatically deletes cc'd messages without reading them.

There is another side to the story ...

Let's say that you've asked your team members to *"copy me in, just to keep me informed."* It sounds ever so reasonable and innocent, but it doesn't scale.

Some simple arithmetic demonstrates the problem ...

- Say your team member sends an email to 3 people, and copies you in. At this point you have 1 extra message in your Inbox.

- The 3 people each respond with 'Reply All.'
  You now have 4 emails.

- If your team member sends 5 emails per day like this,
  you have 20 emails.

- If your team is 5 people, all behaving like this, your Inbox is attracting 100 emails per day, or about 500 per week.

The reason you have **500 extra emails** in your Inbox is because **you asked for them**! Re-do the 2½ minutes exercise from §12.1 and we have another 21 hours of lost productivity!

It gets worse. Let's say that one of the recipient's notices that you, as team leader, have been copied in, and in order to maintain parity, adds their own boss to the cc list. This escalation creates even more emails. It's unsustainable. You are drowning in a sea of emails.

The example is not extreme. It is an underlying cause of people 'doing emails' instead of 'doing work'. Sadly this is of our own making!

Your reputation is also at risk. With all those cc'd emails flying about you are advertising yourself as a control freak, micromanager, or as someone who doesn't trust their staff. If this applies to you, consider some management development or get a mentor.

If you really do need to cover your back, do it outside the email exchanges.

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15.4 Managing others or stealing their time?

The assumption is that email is a near-instantaneous messaging medium; you press send, and a moment later it's in the recipient's Inbox. The illusion is that it's a phone call without the speaking part! This has changed some aspects of management behaviour.

- **Demanding instant replies**.
  In the past, a message asking for thoughts might give adequate notice, but now, it's common to see a demand along the lines of *"let me have your input by 5pm."*

  And just as bad is sending an email, then phoning the recipient a few moments later to check if they've read it.

- **Hit and run delegation**
  Simply forwarding a message to a colleague as a way of delegating a task might be simple and easy for you, but not if it bypasses the normal practice of delegation.

- **Management by emailing about**
  Management by *walking* around is generally considered a good idea. It's good to be seen around the office, and good to be approachable. The nonverbal clues in a real encounter indicate what kind of response is expected. It might be a short chat or the need to book some time in the diary.

  It's not the same with email. A *'How's it going'* email contains little about what kind of response is expected. Is it a subtle demand for a status report? A status report takes time to compose. You've just stolen your recipient's time.

15.5 Summary

- Be aware that email can be addictive — if you let it.

- Manage email as a specific task. Turn it off when email is not the task.

- If you ask to be copied in just in case, you may drown in a sea of emails. The lost productivity can be substantial.

- Don't cc someone in an email unless there is a very good reason for it. Make it clear in the message why they are cc'd.

- Email is not a substitute for real management actions — seeing and speaking with your colleagues.

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16   Never use email for sensitive management tasks

Email provides the perfect excuse not to speak with people, and the ease by which emails can be sent helps us avoid speaking when we really should. This is disastrous. An email is a cold, emotionless medium, there is no way to unfold bad news gently, and as an excuse for avoiding a difficult meeting, it's frankly, inexcusable.

As a general rule, the more sensitive a message is, the less it is suited to email. Some examples …

- **Conveying bad news**.
  Delivering bad news is a distinct facilitative skill. It only works in a private, face-to-face environment where the conversation can proceed a bit at a time, and the participants can pick up visual clues from each other. Email is not that medium.

- **Criticism**
  Email is good for praise, and no good for criticism. Although hopefully, you'd never criticise anyway, a coaching style always gets better results. Coaching needs a real conversation to make it work.

- **Private and personal**
  Private details such as pay, promotion, may need writing down to be legal, but before you send this kind of information as an email, speak with the individual to set their expectations.

- **Feelings and feedback**
  For example, imagine that a colleague has asked for feedback from an unsuccessful interview. Feelings and emotions will be running high, and these can be difficult meetings to manage. This kind of meeting needs distinctive skills and approaches that cannot be achieved by email. Using email for this denies the recipient the opportunity to ask questions, understand, and learn from the feedback.

  To put it bluntly, if you are using email to avoid a difficult meeting, you're a management coward. To borrow Lord Sugar's catch line from the television series *The Apprentice* —"You're fired".

- **Confidential information**
  There are so many different forms of confidential, it's impossible to generalise. Remember once you've pressed Send, you've effectively published it. See part 2 to the postcard principle in the next section.

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17   A skilful reply

17.1 Get ready

By now, we have sorted and deleted incoming emails. The Inbox is slim and those emails that need further thought are safely in their respective folders. It's time to look at those that needed further thought.

We can reuse those 5Ws and 1H to help us deliver a skilful and business like reply.

- **Why** reply

- **When** to reply

- **Who** to reply to

- **What** is the reply

- **How** to reply

- **Where** to compose the reply

17.2 Why reply

The first step in a skilful reply is to decide whether a reply is really needed. Is there a purpose to the reply?

You may have been asked a specific question, in which case the purpose is to provide the answer. Obvious really. But it's not always clear-cut and taking a moment to use the *Know, Think, Do* method from §3.1 helps you be clear about why you are investing valuable time in the reply.

Remember you don't always have to reply. You have choices — keep it or delete it.

The delete key is a very good friend indeed!

Always have a reason to reply.

17.3 When to reply

There are two aspects to 'when'.

- **The time management aspect**
  Timeliness is important in all forms of communication. So when you reply is a balancing act between importance, urgency, and your own time. This comes down to time management and prioritising.

  - If you do choose to reply later, and later is sometime off, a holding reply reassures your recipient that you're not ignoring their message.

  - Try not to rush a reply. Rushed replies encourage mistakes. This is why it's not a good idea to check your emails just before you leave work.

- **Your personal state**
  There are times when we are all stressed, and the content of some emails make us angry. That's life. As a rule of thumb …

  - Never reply to an email if you are angry.
    Take a deep breath and save the reply for later.

  - Never rush a reply, for example to send an email before you run out of the office to catch your train.

17.4 Who to reply to

The simple rule of thumb about whom to reply to is — to the fewest necessary. If in doubt, reply to the sender only. If you see a long list of addressees, take a moment to think about who really needs to see your reply. In general …

- Reply to sender only

- Reduce the number of addresses.

- Never use the Reply All option unless you have a need for it.
  It can be hazardous.

  Sue emailed everyone in her team to say she was leaving. Jill got the job of organising the leaving card and surprise present. Jill emailed everyone to say she was organising things and a suggested amount for a surprise present.

  Except that it wasn't a surprise to Sue, because Jill clicked the Reply All button. So Sue knew all about the 'surprise'.

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17.5 Replies that are a delight to receive

The reply should be one that the recipient looks forward to reading! Use all the techniques from Part Two to craft a good reply. Even if the incoming email was poor, you can lead by example by sending a good reply (and elevating your reputation along the way). Try to compose the reply as a stand-alone message with synchronisation, message, and signature.

There's an additional aspect of the reply — it's quoting. When you click reply, most email applications take a copy of the incoming message and put this at the bottom of the new message ready for you to type the response. How this looks depends on your particular email system. It could be indented and put in a different colour, or for plain text messages each line of the incoming message is prefixed with a quoting character, usually a chevron (>). This depends on your email application and how it has been configured.

Including the incoming message is helpful because it reminds the sender what they wrote and reinforces the context and purpose of your reply. However, after a couple of exchanges in an email conversation, the quantity of quoted text becomes large compared to the new text. It's good practice (in most circumstances) to remove excess quoting. The commonly accepted indicator that text has been removed is the [snip] signal. To use this, simply select the quoted text that's not needed and replace it with [snip] — this indicates that some text has been removed — snipped out.

Sometimes, an incoming message has several questions that each needs only a short reply from you. In these cases it's generally acceptable to reply within the quoted text. Even so, your response should start with a synchronisation that points the reader to the quoted text. Remember your job is to make it easy for the receiver, so use [snip] and delete to compress the original, now quoted, text to the minimum needed.

17.6 How to reply — perhaps not by email

In §16 we discussed several examples where an email is the wrong medium for certain messages. Try not to let the quick and easy method of pressing 'Reply' lull you into situations where using the phone would be better.

17.7 Where to reply

It might seem odd to have a section on the 'where' aspect of the 5Ws. However, emails can be sent from your desk pc, your mobile phone, and your tablet device, almost everywhere on any technology.

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It might be easy to prune your Inbox on the train – quick scans and the ever-useful delete key, but it's not the place to work on company confidential messages. On the other hand, the advantage of the train is to use it as thinking time, perhaps to think about the more difficult messages.

Alternatively, you could close your eyes and use the journey to recharge your batteries so you arrive at work ready for the day.

17.8 Forwarding

There is often a need to forward the email to someone who wasn't on the original distribution.

A professional way to forward emails is to explain why you think it important to forward the message, mention the original sender in the text, and to include the original sender in the cc list. It's also a good idea to delete [snip] and generally tidy up the message to make it relevant to the new recipient.

The dark side of forwarding is that it can attract the same trouble as bcc messages. You must have a real reason for forwarding.

17.9 Summary – before you press send

- Is there a need or purpose to reply?

- Should you use the telephone instead?

- Reply to the fewest possible people.

- Double-check the 'to' and 'cc' fields to be certain who you are sending the email to.

- Reply All can be hazardous – try not to use it.

- Write the reply so that the originator looks forward to receiving it.

- Forwarding – say why – remove source addresses – clean up first

- Either move the sent message to a specific folder, or delete it. Don't leaving it cluttering up the Sent Items folder.

- Email should not be a medium for stealing other peoples' time.

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18   The postcard principle, part 2

We introduced the postcard principle earlier as a way of limiting the quantity of text that should be in an email. From this principle we developed the clarity toolkit to craft short and unambiguous emails.

We've hinted a few of times now, that there is a second aspect of the postcard principle. You may have heard the old adage …

Never write something on a postcard that you don't want the others to read.

Everyone who handles a postcard has the opportunity to read it. To put this the other way around — never write anything in an email that you wouldn't put on a postcard. Emails are postcards. Postcards are not private. Email is not private. With a few clicks your badly worded message can be in the hands of everyone in the world. Leaked emails are a fact of life in politics. Leaked emails tell the competition what you're doing.

Snottograms (emails with an ill-mannered, angry, or sarcastic message) end up in unexpected places. This example (July 2011) is a news report concerning a future Mother-in-Law giving her future Daughter-in-Law some 'advice' on social etiquette.
See … http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/13973278

Once again …
Never write anything in an email that you wouldn't put on a postcard.

There is an extra side to this non-private nature of emails. Your employer may be monitoring your email messages. Whatever you send may be silently copied to someone who has the job of watching what you say. This is legitimate — it's often needed to ensure compliance with company policies.

For those not cool users, the following graphic will also a postcard. The left side is a computer screen. The right side says, "Never write anything in an email that you wouldn't put on a postcard".

Never write anything in an email that you wouldn't put on a postcard.

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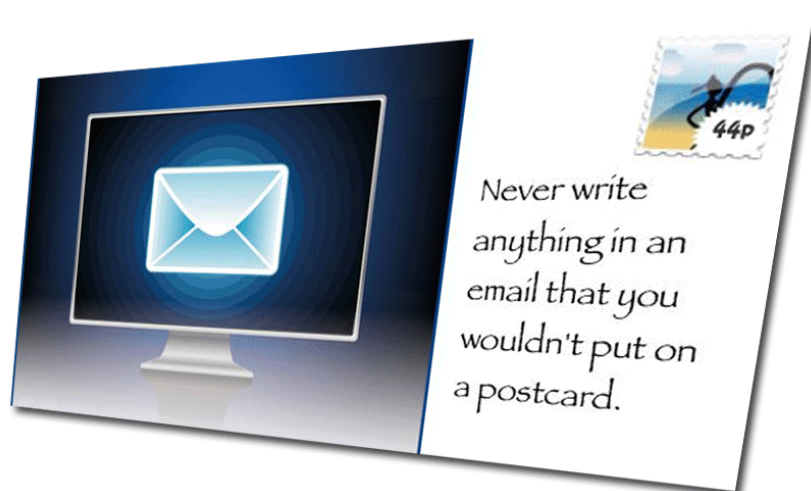
Part 5 Being a good cyber citizen

- How to be kind with your attachments

- Self-defence in the e-world

- Don't tell everybody

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19   Attachments

19.1   Benefits and curses

Attachments are both a benefit and a curse. Attachments can be almost anything — images, presentations, or working documents. On the other hand, attachments can be a nuisance to the receiver, especially if they are large, unwanted, or worse, cannot be opened.

19.2   Adding attachments

- **Is the attachment necessary**?
  An attachment of just a few sentences places an extra burden on your recipient. It may be more effective to put the text in body of the email.

- **Use a commonly understood format**.
  For example — Microsoft Office documents (.doc .xls .ppt). Portable documents, .pdf. Adobe Creative Suite documents (.psd, .ai). Industry standard files, including .jpeg/jpg for images, .mp3/.aiff files for sound, .rtfd/rtf for word processor documents, and so on. The golden rule is to be sure your reader can open the file. If in doubt, ask.

- **Can the attachment be delivered by other means**?
  Rather than attaching large files, can the attachment be delivered another way? For example — as a link in your email (if permitted in your environment), through a web portal, or through a corporate collaboration system. Instant Messaging, for example, Skype, iChat, and MSN) also support file transfer.

- **Keep the attachments small**.
  Modern email systems can handle large attached files. Up to 10Mbytes is usual. But some don't. If you have a batch of large files, send them one at a time in separate emails. Or use links. Remember, the size of the attachment increases one-third for transmission via email.

- **Don't attach application programs**.
  For example, .exe, .com, and .app, and others. If you are in a corporate environment, it's likely that your IT services will block these. More of this in §19.3.

- **Don't attach unusual files**.
  For example, if you attach a directory, some email clients automatically create an archive (for example a .zip file) but others don't. More of this in §19.3.

- **Don't attach confidential files**.
  If the content is confidential, simple attachments are risky. Some common formats carry a great deal of metadata that can betray confidentiality. More about this in §19.4

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19.3 Safe and dangerous attachments

The previous section dealt with sending attachments, this section deals with receiving attachments.

You've received an email with an attachment. Now what? Should you open it, delete, or ignore it? Why should you be bothered?

Attachments are one of the easiest ways to spread computer viruses, hoaxes, trojans and other malware. Each of these are subtly different but may cause a lot of trouble.

Some attachments are safe to open (*) and others definitely not safe. However, it's simply not possible to produce a definitive safe list.

> * To paraphrase the author Terry Pratchett *"safe … for a given value of safe."* Meaning that what *safe* means depends on the context within which *safe* is considered.

Staying safe with attachments depends on your own caution and common sense, so the way to proceed is by using a kind of triage for emails.

- **Do you know the sender?**
  Is the message with the attachment from someone you know and trust? This element of common sense works both ways.

  - For example, if a team member sends you an attachment, say an file called 'budget-2011.xls' – it's likely that you were already expecting the file and it's normal. (See below regarding Macros.)

  - For example, you receive an email from someone you know who forwards all those cutesy emails with strange attachments. You can use one of the delete tactics from §12. Then pick up the phone and mention you don't want this stuff!

- **Is the file a well-known type?**
  The table following indicates some safe and dangerous attachments. The remark above about a 'given value of safe' is especially true here.

  - One value of 'safe' is that the attachment will not transfer a virus or damage your system, for example viewing a .jpeg picture.

  - Yet another value of 'safe' is the hidden data inside the file — more about this when we look at metadata in §19.4.

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- **Are you suspicious about the file?**
  Some mail systems (and computer operating systems) try to make your life easier by hiding the file extensions — the letters that follow the final dot, for example, *.doc* Find out how to turn this feature off. You'll then be able so see more about the attachment.

  The files in the possibly dangerous column of the table shown on the next page should be treated with suspicion. A quick line of defence is to telephone the sender and find out what it is.

  Your main line of defence is, you guessed it, the delete key.

- **Is the file asking for a password?**
  If you open the file and are prompted to enter a password, especially your logon or system password, the file is highly suspicious. Delete it.

  But just to keep the balance in this section, some documents have password features, for example an Excel spreadsheet can be password protected. However you should know that it's coming. If you open a spreadsheet that unexpectedly asks you for a password, pick up the telephone and check with the originator. Otherwise, press Delete.

- **Has the attachment two extensions?**
  If a file has two extensions, for example picture.jpg.exe – it is an application trying to disguise itself as an image. Press the delete key.

  One exception to this rule of thumb is when a file has been compressed. For example, a file called financial_plan.xls.zip is an Excel spreadsheet that has been compressed to produce a .zip file. Opening this kind of file normally de-compresses the file to leave you with the original.
  But beware — if it was something like financial_plan.exe.zip — it is using the .zip extension to get past your defences. This is an application in disguise.
  You know what to do — Delete!

A useful feature of Microsoft Office files is the ability to add your own features using a language known as Visual Basic. They may be included in documents (such as a spreadsheet) where they are known as Macros. Macros have been used to carry malware. Normally, the applications warn you if the file contains a macro. If this is normal for your work, then open it. If you're not expecting this to happen, treat the file as suspicious.

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If you're working behind a corporate firewall, it is very likely that most emails will be scanned as they arrive (and sent) and offending attachments are removed before they reach you. However, it's not an excuse to be lazy or to let down your guard.

Probably safe this is not a comprehensive list	**Possibly dangerous** this is not a comprehensive list
Still Image formats .bmp .jpeg .jpg .gif .tiff .tif .png	**Executable (application) files** .exe .com .app,.js .jse
Movie files .avi .mov .rm .mp4 .m4a, .wav .wma	**Operating system files** .cmd .ins .isp .ocx .pif .reg .scr .shs
Sound files .aiff, .mp3, .wav	**Scripting or automation files** .vbs .bat .vbs .vbe
Text and display files .txt .text .rtf .rtfd .pdf	**Any file with a double extension** .jpg.vbs .txt.scr .jpg.exe .pdf.exe
Web page attachments .htm .html .webarchive	
Industry standard files Adobe files .psd .ai .indd	
Drawing files .dwg .vis .graffle	**Links to other places** .lnk .webloc
Apple files ... .pages .numbers .key	
Microsoft files .doc .docx .dot .dotx .ppt .pptx .pps, .xls, .xlsx .vsd .mpc .mpp, and others.	

Note — There are thousands of file extensions. A useful resource is on Wikipedia en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filename_extension. Alternatively use your favourite search engine to ascertain what you've been sent.

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19.4 Metadata and technical fingerprints

Metadata is data about other data. For example, a picture from your digital camera contains the image data. It also has additional data about the image data. This is the metadata.

In the example shown here, you can see what the image is (a concrete post). The metadata reveals what kind of camera I used, the settings I used, and the date the picture was taken. It might be mostly harmless, but these are things that you now know about me that you didn't know beforehand, and without knowing it, I've revealed them to you.

Unless you take steps to remove metadata, it is in almost every file you create, and it stays with the file when you attach it to an email and send it to someone else.

Some metadata is more revealing, potentially embarrassing, and gives away secrets you'd rather keep secret.

For example, in February 2003, 10 Downing Street published a document concerning Iraq. Unfortunately for the Prime Minister, the document was published as a Microsoft Word (.doc) document. Word documents carry a great deal of metadata. The metadata includes, amongst other things, a revision log, who has edited the document, which printer was used and so on. An enthusiastic journalist discovered the metadata, published the story and a political storm followed. The BBC covered this story – you can see it at news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3154479.stm.

A more technical version is located here …
www.computerbytesman.com/privacy/blair.htm.

More modern versions of Microsoft Word have security options to remove personal information; find out how to set these options on your system.

Portable documents (.pdf) carry metadata. Press Command-D (Mac) or Control-D (Windows) and you'll discover an interesting pot of information. If you generate portable documents, take control of this metadata before you send it to others.

Metadata can land you in trouble.
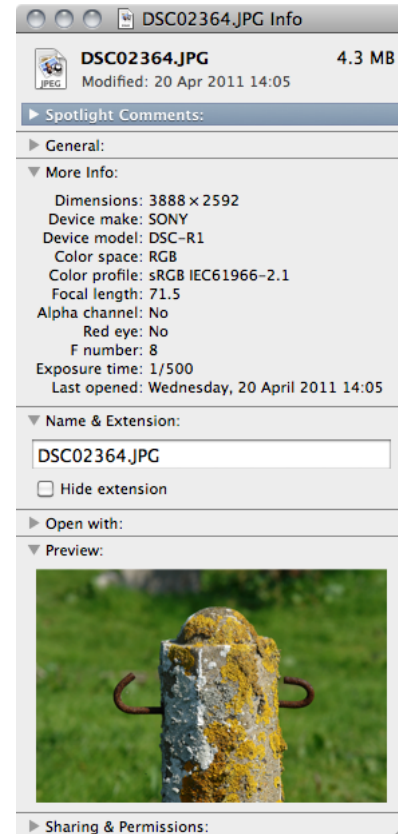
19.5 Be considerate with in-line graphics

Adding pictures to emails is simple and effective (assuming it fits with your purpose). Pictures can be added as an attachment, or added in-line with the text, often by drag-and-drop from a folder. There is a problem with adding an in-line graphic — it may be too big. Big in this case refers to the pixel dimensions of the image.

A typical computer monitor is between 1000 and 1500 pixels wide. The working space using the postcard principle reduces this to about 500 – 700 pixels. So if you drag in the image from earlier in this section, it is 3888 pixels wide and this is too big for the postcard. Your email application might be clever enough to scale the image so it fits inside your sending pane; however, the real problem is what happens when the recipient opens it. It is sometimes the case that the email application displays the pixels as they are, without scaling the image.

Your recipient only sees the top-left of the image. And unless your recipient is technically very clever, it is more difficult to save this image from the message to their computer.

Be considerate when attaching image files.
Either …

- Attach the image, as an attachment.

- If you have to put images in- line with the text, reduce the file size in a photo editor so that it fits within the width of your email postcard.

It's worth noting that some email services automatically move in- line graphics and append them as a straight attachment.

You don't get the choice; the server does this.

19.6 Havoc with version control

One thing to keep in mind, especially in a collaborative environment, is version control.

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If you've sent an attachment and you expect each recipient to work on it, you'll end up with multiple copies coming back to you. It's not too bad with two or three colleagues working on the document, but it doesn't scale up.

Make it easy for your team and be clear about what you want each person to do with the attachment.

Typical directions might be …

- To read it, (a pdf might be better in this case)
- To bring comments to the project meeting;
- To edit a specific section

Your own project management methods should have a solution for this.

19.7 Summary — attachments

- Have you been cautious and considerate with attachments?
- Have you considered what metadata is in your attachments?
- Are you ready with the delete key?

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20   Self defence for emails

20.1   The email jungle

The age of innocence in emails has long since passed. Our Inboxes have messages of dubious content. Some attempt to sell body-part enhancements, others are hoaxes, and yet others have sinister intent. This part of our Useful Guide is about staying safe in an e-world.

We look at two features that are helpful in their innocence, but are best considered from a safety and security perspective.

Then we look at the kind of emails that cause panic, some are pranks. Others have criminal intent.

20.2   Be cautious with out of office replies

Imagine you are a thief. You want to break into someone's house. What clues do you look for to be sure the occupants are not in? The householder forgot to cancel the milk, forgot to cancel the newspapers, and a lot of mail that you can see through the glass door. And the next-door neighbour simply tells you they are on vacation. Bingo. I'll come back later with the crowbar and glass cutter.

Have you thought that the same clues might be given to the thief by email?

The clues are delivered using a function usually known as out-of-office reply. When you activate an out of office function, it automatically responds to incoming messages, with a new email to a sender.

These out of office replies might be useful to let senders know that you cannot reply to their message. It prevents your contacts repeatedly sending you more and more messages, perhaps with an ever-escalating level of urgency.

But back to our thief, in out of office reply below, what might help you plan the burglary?

> Hello, for your information I am on vacation and will not be able to pick up my emails until Tuesday 16th September. For any urgent enquiries please contact the Blackthorn Centre on 01xxx abc nnn, or contact Mary, our team support officer, on 01xxx abc xyz. Thanks.

It's a role model out of office reply, it has most of the 5Ws and 1H, a date, and who to contact. So far so good, but …

If that out of office reply arrived back in my inbox and I was an unscrupulous individual or casually mentioned to someone else or it was overheard in a public place, I would now …

- Know you are on vacation.

- Think your house might be empty until 16 September.

- Telephone, Mary, and trick her into revealing extra details.

The out of office reply is also a way for spammers to validate your email address. The spammers took a guess at your address, for example combining popular first names with popular surnames and using your company or organisation domain, blasted hundreds of emails to it. A few of these pot shots get lucky and reach a real person. Then your auto reply confirms it. Your address becomes more valuable for sale to others, who then target you with more specific emails, possibly with criminal intent.

Creating a good out of office reply follows the same process as replying. The first step is having a purpose for an out of office reply. Let's assume that you have a reason; the out of office text needs to be clear and concise, but in this case, not necessarily complete. For example …

> Thank you for your message.
>
> I am not able to reply at the moment. If you need an urgent response, please contact Mary, on 01xxx abc xyz.
> Best regards
>
> Alan

Stay safe. If you need to use out of office replies, then …

- **Do not** state in your out of office auto reply …
  - Dates of your absence and return date;
  - That you are on holiday or out of the country;
  - Your home address or home telephone number.
- **Do include** another person to contact if the enquiry is urgent.
  - Make sure that person is fully **briefed in the security aspects**.

To say it again, remember that automated out of office replies are effectively advertising who you are, what you do, and the circumstances of your absence. To fraudsters and burglars, your helpful and over informative out of office reply is a gift.

- **You could use a Rule instead**

  There are situations when a reply is a desirable action; for example, important customers try to contact you whilst you're on vacation. Creating an email rule may be a better approach; for example, forwarding the incoming email from the important customer directly to a colleague. And of course you'll have briefed your colleague and your customer.

20.3 Turn off download pictures

The use of images in emails is now common especially in advertising messages. These emails use the same technology used to view a web page in a browser; it is a web page in an email.

The images can be self-contained within the email, or can be externally referenced.

It is the externally referenced images that can be dangerous. When you open the email, the image is brought in from an external web site. That image can be given a name that is unique to you, so as soon as the image is downloaded, the spammer knows you have a real email address. Your email address is sold and you become a target for spam, hoaxes, and malicious emails.
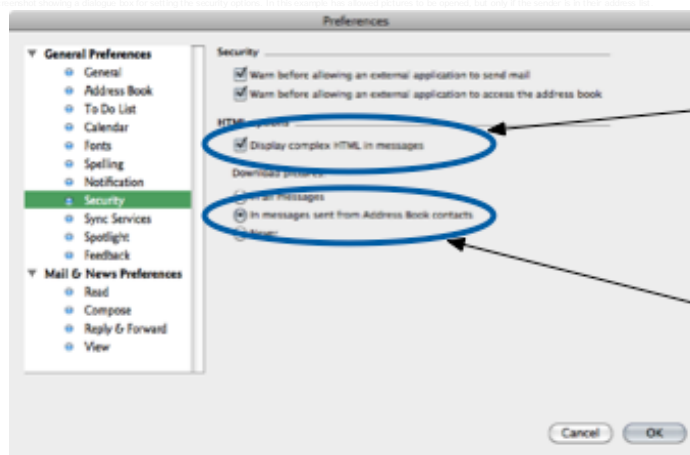
This setting enables a web page like display of an incoming email

Images will only be downloaded if the sender is in your address book.

Modern email applications include an option to turn off automatic downloads. Look in the preferences or the Tools-> Security settings to find this. In the example above, the checkbox referring to HTML controls whether you see the plain text version of the incoming email (assuming it has one embedded in the message) or whether the web-page like email is displayed. You then have options for downloading pictures.

> Note — HTML – Hyper-Text Markup Language, is the underlying technology used to code web pages. This is the web page in an email mentioned earlier.

By turning off the download images, your email displays empty placeholder spaces instead of the picture. This gives you the chance to look at the message and decide whether to download the images or, you guessed it, press delete.

Download Images

The images have not been downloaded. The images are replaced by placeholder marks.

Turning images off is a useful security measure. There's enough here to decide whether to manually download the images to complete the message, or to press delete.

Turning off images also saves space in your Inbox.

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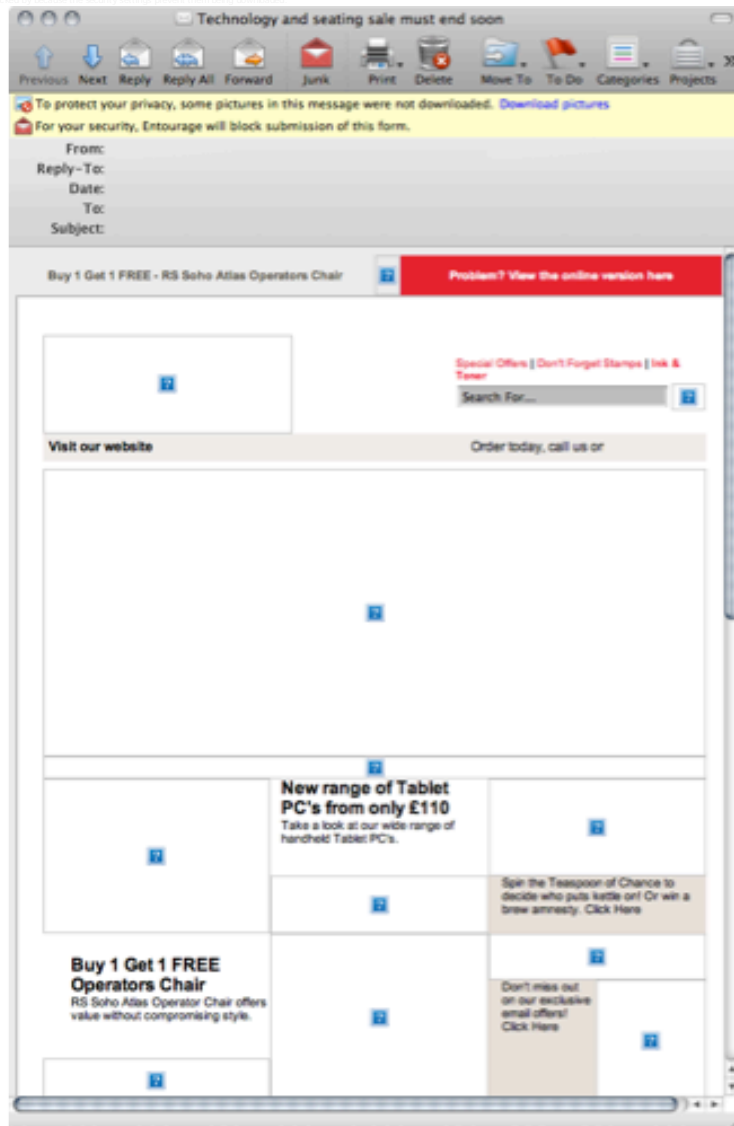
20.4 How to spot hoax emails

20.4.1   The hoax formula

Many hoaxes follow a formula. Once you're aware of the formula, it becomes easier to spot them, and press the delete key.

A common five-part formula is …

- Outline a plausible scenario

- Attribute it to an authoritative source

- Create panic/anger/fear

- Propose a magical set of actions to fix it

- Tell everyone

To send out real hoaxes, the following image shows an email with various paragraphs mapped to the hoax formula

Scenario
I gave you a virus.

Authoritative source
Norton and McAfee are well-known experts.

Create panic
Destroys the whole system. Urgency - you're safe but only for 14 days

Magic formula
*Steps 1 to 7
In step 5 you will find the file and that 'proves you're infected*

Tell everyone

To:
From:
Subject: Virus

I got this message about a virus that can produce lot of damage to your computer. If you follow the instructions which are very easy, you would be able to "clean" your computer.

Apparently the virus spreads through the address book . I got it, then may be I passed it to you too, sorry.

The name of the virus is jdbgmgr.exe and is transmitted automatically through the Messenger and addresses book of the OUTLOOK. The virus is neither detected by Norton nor by Mc Afee. It remains in lethargy ("sleeping") for 14 days and even more, before it destroys the whole system. It can be eliminated during this period.

The steps for the elimination of the virus are the following:

1. go to START and click FIND
2. in "FILES andFOLDERS" write: jdbgmgr.exe
3. be sure that it searches in "C"
4. click SEARCH NOW
5. if the virus appears (with icon of a small bear) and the name"jdbgmgr.exe" . don't open it !!! in any case !!!
6. click the right button of the mouse and destroy it
7. empty the recyclage bin

If you find the virus in your computer please send this mail to all the people in your addresses book.

thanks.

Note — This example has been around since 2002 and still turns up. By the way, the file mentioned in the hoax, jdbgmgr.exe is a harmless file present on some Microsoft Windows operating systems. Software developers use it.

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It's worth taking a page to describe how this hoax works.

- **Oh my gosh**
  The hoax starts with *I've got a virus and you've got it too.* The goal of the hoax writer is to make you worry, and create the conditions for panic. This is essential for what comes next …

- **Consolidate the panic**
  Search for this file. You find it. That proves you have the virus too. The panic sets in. Your rational processes are being shut down and you're in survival mode.

- **Authoritative source**
  Two leading experts confirm your finding. *More Panic*. You've got the virus and your life's work is about to be destroyed. *Panic is now full on*.

- **Magic action**
  But here is a magic thing you can do to fix it and everyone will be OK. In terror, you follow the instructions in the hope of being liberated from this tyranny. It works as described. Phew!

- **Tell everyone**
  The tell everyone instructions comes with detailed instructions so that you're still trapped in this traumatic ordeal – in other words the virus writer has still psychologically got you by the throat and not letting rational thought get in the way. Without thinking, you follow the instructions, and you tell everyone.

At the end of this experience, you might be thinking you've just been rescued from an imminent disaster, and by doing the good deed of letting others know of the situation, you feel much better.

Except that you've been the victim of a hoax and you've sent it on to all your friends, who then experience the horror of this hoax.

The authors of these chain-email hoaxes get their kicks from seeing their handiwork come back to them, often years later.

20.4.2 Put up your defences

Being alert and cautious is the way forward. Be sceptical …

- **Check the authoritative sources**,
  you'll find they are vague and unnamed. Examples of 'authorities' are along the lines …

    - *this came from the British Computer Society …*

    - *a friend from the local police station …*

    - *the information arrived today from Microsoft …*

    - *AOL have confirmed the severity of …* and so on

- **Does it follow a formula**?
  Another example is

    1 If you receive *Life is* beautiful.pps,

    2 don't open it,

    3 it deletes everything

    4 We must do everything possible to stop it.

    5 Tell all your friends

When you get a message that your life's work is about to be destroyed with virus, your actions should be …

- **Restore your rational thinking** — Take a moment to think – breathe deeply. Inspect the message. See it for what it is, then …

- **Check for known hoaxes and virus** — See the resources in Appendix 3.

- **Do not tell everyone!**
  Break the chain.

- **Press delete**. (You guessed that already?)

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20.5 Identifying a phish

20.5.1   The phishing formula

A more sinister version of the hoax is known as phishing – as in fishing. The fishing is an attempt to catch some essential information, typically on-line banking details, such as login and passwords. Once the phisher has this information, the money in your account is stolen. Sadly, this is not a hoax and people fall for this trick. A common formula is …

- An urgent message from xyz Bank
  (This is the authoritative source)

- Your account has been compromised and suspended for your own safety.
  (The plausible scenario and threat — you cannot get your money.)

- Follow this link to Log in and confirm your details.
  (The magic solution to regain access to your money.)

- The link takes you to a convincing fake web site and you log in. The fake web site captures your private details.
  (Carry out the magic action.)

- Your account is unlocked. Relief.
  (And the phisher steals your money a few minutes later.)

Once you recognise the formula, it's easier to deal with these phishing emails.

- **Urgent message**
  The purpose of the 'urgency' is to tempt you to open the message. If you simply delete the message (always a good idea) the phisher has failed. So, these phishing messages have urgent elements to their subject line. Examples include *account suspended …* or *Urgent Notification …* or *Restore your Account Access* … *Errors on your internet bank account*.

- **Plausible scenario**
  Several scenarios are used by the phishers. Typical scenarios include *Unusual activity*, or *unable to verify* … And often a threat *your account has been suspended*. A threat like this means you cannot use your money. Remember the purpose is to create panic so that you don't look too deeply at the critical phishing instructions.

- **A magic solution**
  The magic solution is a convenient link to the bank's web site. Where you can log in and verify your account. ***Real banks never do this***.

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Anatomy of a phishing email

Scenario
*Important subject line.
Note the exclamation!*

Download pictures
Turned off (see §20.3)

Salutation
*A clue that the sender
doesn't know your name,
so they use your email
address*

Plausible scenario
*Some changes to your
account*

A threat
*service not
interrupted*

Magic formula
*Confirm and update
by Clicking here. Implied
urgency by using* **red**

Authoritative source
*But note the spelling
error 'Costumer'.*

Extra detail
*Extra detail to make it
look genuine.*

Account Alert !

Previous Next Reply Reply All Forward Junk Print Delete Move To

To protect your privacy, some pictures in this message were not d... Download pictures

From: HSBC Bank <online@hsbc.co.uk>
Reply-To: HSBC Bank <online@hsbc.co.uk>
Date: Thursday, 28 April 2011 11:01
To: Alan Sarsby
Subject: Account Alert !

Dear alan@alansarsby.co.uk,,

This e-mail has been sent to you by HSBC Bank customer support to
inform you that we were unable to verify your account details. This
might be due to either of the following reasons:

1. A recent change in your personal information. (eg: billing address,
phone)
2. Submitting incorrect information during registration process.

Due to this, to ensure that your service is not interrupted, we request
you to confirm and update your information today by clicking here.

If you have already confirmed your information then please
disregard this message as we are processing the changes you
have made.

Regards,
HSBC Plc.
Costumer Support

Thanks for your co-operation.

© HSBC Bank plc 2011

http://yazzcolor.cl/refresh/hsbc/index____

The real link
Hovering over the link, shows its
true destination. It's not going to
the bank, but to a fake: yazzcolor.cl

Verify the link
In many email applications, hovering your cursor above a link reveals the
link details. In the example below, the real destination is shown at the
bottom of the pane. In this case to a domain registered in the Ivory Coast.

Remember: Real banks never do this.

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20.5.2 Phishing defences

Spam and phishing messages are often intercepted by the email server and routed to a junk folder (or in some cases instantly deleted by the server before you ever see them). However some get through, so in no particular order, these are a few clues to identifying phishing …

Checklist

- Is the phishing email similar to others apparently coming from different sources? Lazy phishers use the same message but with different bank details in the hope of finding one that you have money in.

- Does the salutation use your real name? If it's generic in any way, treat it as a fake.

- Does the email offer a convenient link for you to follow? It's worth saying again — *Real banks never do this*. Real banks never ask for your login and security information like this. Don't follow links (disguised in images); always type the bank's web address directly into your browser.

- Check the real underlying address of links – this is often shown in the status area of the email, or pops up in an alert box. Sometimes they are clever misspellings of a real institution. Be aware that these links can take you to a place where legal redress is not available. Be very aware that the phishers make their fake web site look like the real thing.
  If in doubt, don't.

- Professionalism – the earlier example concerning the jdbgmgr.exe hoax has many errors — typos, grammar. Delete.

- Is the email asking for your help as an intermediary? These often start with very flowery language and ask you to host some money (a very large amount of it) whilst the true owner escapes from some terrible situation. And you'll be paid handsomely for your help.
  This scam appeals to your sense of humanity to help another, or to your sense of greed to help yourself.

  There's only one action for these emails — Delete.

There are too many types to list here, but you may find the links given in the appendix worth looking at next time you receive a hoax, or a phishing.

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21   Feedback

As we are always trying to improve our Useful Guides we would appreciate any feedback you can give us on A Useful Guide to Managing Email. Please click on the link below to access our online feedback form …

http://www.pansophix.com/useful-guide-feedback.html

If we use your feedback to improve **A Useful Guide to Managing Email** we will email you a copy of the updated version.

You can access lots of free tips and tools at 247freetips.com.

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Part 6 —Appendixes

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Appendix 1— A checklist for a great email

Checklist item	Reference
New message / **Reply**	§17 — A skilful reply
Purpose	§3.1 — Know, think, do
Subject line	§3.2 — headline §3.3 — Relevant, Timely, Important
Body text	§4 — Postcard principle §5 — Toolkit for clarity §6 — What you see is not what recipient sees
Signature	§10 — Keep it simple.
Addressing, to, cc, bcc	§7 — Use the correct address field. §8 — Send to the correct person.
Proof read	§11 — Checklist §17.9 — Checklist §18 —The postcard principle - Part 2 §19 — Attachments
Sent message	

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Appendix 2 — Emoticons, net speak, and jargon

This appendix is a catalogue of a few email emoticons, net-speak jargon, and management-jargon. Depending on the circumstances, an emoticon, or a few net-speak codes may be acceptable in your email. The standards and culture of your organisation should guide you here. In any case try not to compose an entire email of codes, your recipient's delete key is always at the ready.

These are a subset of those in common use. Some may be helpful where you and your recipient both know the shorthand code; some are definitely not for use in a business context. You must be the judge.

Emoticons

By the way (BTW) your word processor may have some of these in the Auto correct function. For example typing the smiley face code :-) is automatically replaced with ☺ The ☺ and☻are real characters in some fonts. A Wikipedia page has a comprehensive listing.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_emoticons

Emoticon	Meaning
:-)	Smiley face
;-)	Wink (light sarcasm)
:-|	Indifference
:->	Devilish grin (heavy sarcasm)
:-D	Shock or surprise
:-/	Perplexed
:-(	Frown (anger or displeasure)
:-P	Wry smile
:-Q	Smoker
:-e	Disappointment
:-@	Scream
:-O	Yell
:-*	Drunk
@}-;-'---	A rose
d(^_^)b	Wearing headphones

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Net-speak

This subset, of the thousands in use, gives you a flavour of the vast range of net-speak codes.

In a particular context, you might be able to work out what they mean by taking a second run at the sentence/paragraph. Perhaps you'll notice that many of these have an element of sarcasm. In an email it's easy to be brave at a distance; would you say the same thing to the person's face?

Just for fun — create a sentence using the minimum of words and the maximum net-speak.

Net-speak code	Net speak de-coded
AAAAA	American Association Against Acronym Abuse
AAMOF	As A Matter Of Fact
AFAICS	As Far As I Can See
AFAIK	As Far As I Know
AFCPS	Any Fool Can Plainly See
ARE	Acronym-Rich Environment
ATB	All The Best
BCNU	Be seeing you
BFI	Brute Force and Ignorance
BFI	Bunch of Flipping Idiots
BKA	Better Known As
BOL	Best Of Luck
BTW	By the way
COB	Close Of Business
COTFL	Crawling On The Floor Laughing
EIF	Exercise In Futility
FWIW	For what it's worth
FYI	For your information
IIUC	If I Understand Correctly
IMBW	I May Be Wrong
IMHO	In my humble opinion

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Net-speak code	Net speak de-coded
IMNSHO	In My Not So Humble Opinion
IMNSVHO	In My Not So Very Humble Opinion
IMO	In My Opinion
LOL	Laughing Out Loud
LOL	Lots Of Love/luck
LOLA	Laughing Out Loud Again
LOLOL	Lots Of Laughing Out Loud
LTR	Later
ROTFL	Rolling on the floor laughing
RTFM	Read the Fine/funny/flipping/*!*/ manual
TNSTAAFL	There's no such thing as a free lunch
TTFN	ta ta for now
TTYL	Talk to you later

Beware of net-speak when the code has multiple meanings, for example …

You send — *Sorry I can't make it to day, I'm going to a funeral. LOL*

- What you meant was LOL *(lots of love)*

- but the recipient read LOL *(laughing out loud)*.

Remember that your recipient makes the choice of how to interpret the net- speak, not you.

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Consultant/Management speak

Here's a selection of management-speak phrases that sound inspirational or portray the speaker as an action oriented strategist, whatever one of those is! However, most are abstract fluff phrases. They don't really deserve a place in reports, and in an email where writing space and word count is at a premium. If you find yourself writing these, it's time for our best friend to take action. Head over to the delete key!

Accelerated technology/learning/deployment	Mission critical
At the end of the day,...	Move up the value chain
Best of Breed	Next Generation
Big ask	Paradigm shift
Downsizing/re-sizing/rightsizing/de-layering	Push the envelope
Drop the ball	Put a stake in the ground
Firing on all cylinders/Cooking on gas	Run it up the flagpole and see who salutes
Game changing	Sustainability
Giving 110%	Synergy
Has legs and can go really far	Take it to the Next Level
Headcount	The Elephant in the room/corner
Heads up	Thinking outside of the box
It's not rocket science	Touch base
Let's hit the ground running	Uplift the goal
Low-hanging fruit	Where the rubber meets the road
Maximise customer satisfaction/shareholder return	Win-win situation
	You can't measure it, you can't control it
Maximise leverage	We're getting some push-back

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Appendix 3— Resources

Identifying fake emails

http://www.snopes.com/computer/virus/virus.asp

http://www.sophos.com/en-us/threat-center/threat-analyses/hoaxes.aspx

Many banks have online security information on their web sites.

Online tips and tools from Pansophix

http://www.247freetips.com/tips-and-tools/downloadable-tips/

Look for

- Communication tips 1
- Communication tips 1
- Email

www.pansophix.com

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Appendix 4— The cost of doing email

This Useful Guide has mentioned the impact of unnecessary emails. This impact has been expressed in terms of time. We covered two sources of where the time goes when doing emails …

- The time it takes to process incoming emails
    - Those that come to you – §12.2
    - Those you ask for, the 'copy me in' messages – §15.3
- The lost-productivity time of emails interrupting your work.
    - §15.2 – time to regain your train of thought

Converting time to money.

As the old saying goes, time is money. So, let's convert time to money

- Convert your salary to cost of employment.
  Your salary is only one component of how much it costs to employ you. The other costs include, pension contributions, national insurance, and internal overheads (the cost of your paycheque, desk and phone, and support functions). The rule of thumb is to multiply your salary by about 1.4 to give a Total Cost of Employment figure. The value 1.4 is an approximation – it depends on many factors.

  If your salary is £25k × 1.4, your cost of employment as £35k

- Convert your gross hours to nett hours.
  You're not available to work for the whole time. There are 260 working days per year. From this, subtract the days for vacation, training, and illness. This leaves about 210 nett days for doing work.

  Your day rate is £35k ÷ 210 = £167 per day. For a 7½-hour day, it's about £22 per hour. (This is an underestimate, because we haven't factored in the unproductive time during the day; chatting, making coffee, and so on.)

- In §12.1 estimate of 21 hours per month *responding* to emails is £469. (£5630 per year).

- In §15.2 the cost of *interruptions* £17 per day. (£3570 per year.)

- In §15.3 the cost of *copy me in* emails is £95 per day (approximately £20k per year.
  Copy me in is a very expensive and unsustainable habit!

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Appendix 5— About the author

Alan Sarsby has enjoyed over forty years in many different careers. Initially in electronic engineering, IT, strategy, customer support, and project leadership.

He has developed and implemented novel approaches to enterprise design and change leadership.

Alan has extensive experience of working with multidisciplinary and geographically dispersed teams. He is a frequent conference speaker, and has had many articles published in the trade press.

Alan runs an independent training company that specialises in …

- The application of leadership and management-ship to practical situations

- Training trainers

- Making sense of messy problems, Quest and Lost in the fog projects

- Interpersonal communications and presentation skills

His clients include, commercial and industrial, charitable, and local government.

Alan may be able to help you with …

- **Training or seminars** to develop your team's effectiveness in the use of emails and business communications

- **Customised versions of this Useful Guide**. For example incorporating your organisation's policies.

Please contact Pansophix on enquiries@pansophix.com or telephone 0845 260 2820.

When not working with clients or writing, Alan is an enthusiastic photographer. He is chairman of a local Camera Club, a tutor for leisure photography at a Otley College in East Anglia, and a photographic judge.

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