

Art History & Visual Studies Email Guidelines

formerly History in Art

“Face-to-face communication is still the best way to solve a problem, create camaraderie and spread goodwill.”

-Giovinella Gonthier, Rude Awakenings

E-mail:

- has no verbal clues or nuances
- has no body language
- can be easily misconstrued
- can be conceived in haste and too casually for the workplace
- can be combative, complex, emotional or ambiguous
- can be hazardous to relationships and careers

E-MAIL AND EMOTION

- The human touch is often missing in e-mail as there is no immediate give and take as there is in conversation. Curt e-mails can be interpreted as ‘snippy’. Work to improve your e-mails or use the phone or talk in person.
- Flaming is venting emotions online. Typing in all capital letters is the equivalent of shouting; and besides, all caps are hard to read.
- Humor, irony and sarcasm are difficult to express.
- If you receive an e-mail that sets you off type a response and put it in your draft folder. Think about it – you may decide to trash it. Sometimes just the act of typing it provides some relief. Often it’s better to pick up the telephone or if possible, go talk to the person. Work to resolve the conflict.
- E-mail messages can be sent to people we never anticipated. If information is sensitive, confidential or heated, don’t use e-mail.

COMPOSING E-MAIL

SUBJECT LINE

People get lots of e-mail and it is very helpful if the subject line reflects the nature of the message.

SALUTATION

Rather than launching into the message, begin with ‘Greetings Leo’ or ‘Dear Jill’. A salutation adds some warmth to a very one-dimensional method of communication.

MESSAGE

Identify yourself clearly when sending a message. Include a telephone number in your message so the recipient can contact you by phone if he or she decides a conversation would be a more effective way to deal with the issue.

Convey the intent of the message in the first couple of sentences. It is generally better for each message to focus on a single issue. Often a long message is not read carefully and important issues, questions or requested actions can be missed if they are buried in a long stream of text. Give the recipient a clear indication of what action (if any) you are requesting.

It is common to dash off informal messages using abbreviations, slang, careless grammar and spelling, and short cuts when writing to someone on personal matters. Use formal language when your reader expects a more formal approach and when the e-mail is more than a transient exchange. E-mail communications on University business should adopt a professional tone and care must be taken to ensure the message accurately conveys your intent.

SIGNATURE

Your e-mail signature should contain your name, title and organization, street address, e-mail address and telephone. Your organization's website is a nice addition. Quotes or sayings are not appropriate on workplace signatures.

SENDING E-MAIL

Some messages and discussions don't work well over e-mail. If you are using e-mail to avoid face-to-face discussion, you probably shouldn't.

E-mail isn't private. It can be printed and forwarded beyond your control. Send only what you would want to see posted in public with your name attached.

Flame e-mails are potentially very hurtful, are usually regretted after the fact, and don't convey a very thoughtful and considered approach to an issue. A recipient can form a lasting impression from a flame.

The University, the Faculty and the Departments have forms for various requests and issues such as academic concessions, deferred exam requests, course add and drops, modified programme requests, etc. Determine if a written form is appropriate to your situation before sending an e-mail request.

Use blind copies (BCC) when sending an e-mail to a group and the recipients have not agreed to public use of their email address. It is generally considered inappropriate to send a message to an individual, and to blind copy others.

Avoid large attachments whenever possible. Make large files accessible on-line via a webpage or use a file sharing mechanism such as SharePoint. Consider the file format when sending an attachment; PDF should be used to distribute informational documents rather than sending Word files.

RESPONDING TO E-MAIL

Gauge when an e-mail needs a response and be sure to respond to those you intend. If you need time to respond to an e-mail, let the sender know.

Before you use "reply all" consider whether everyone who received the original message also needs to receive your response. Only send copies to people when they need to be informed and not just as routine. When an e-mail is sent to a group of people asking for information or wanting action, many assume someone else will reply. If you are the one who replies, copy the group so everyone knows the e-mail has been answered.

Read over every e-mail before you hit 'send'. Run spell-check. It doesn't matter if the message goes to a coworker you've known for years or your new supervisor; it's a reflection of you.

The majority of the writing in this document was gleaned from either the "Guidelines on the Use of Email, Web Pages and Discussion Forums" from the UVic Faculty of Engineering or from www.extension.iastate.edu/mt/civility/communication/email