

# Email Protocol



## And Related Miscellaneous Issues

Liberalily adapted from <http://www.emailreplies.com/> and <http://www.iwillfollow.com/email.htm> as well  
as stories from friends and colleagues.



# A Famous Oops

Shipley and Schwalbe\* hold up an email exchange between an executive and a secretary at a large American company in China. The executive nastily wrote:

*You locked me out of my office this evening because you assume I have my office key on my person. With immediate effect, you do not leave the office until you have checked with all the managers you support.*

The secretary wrote back:

*I locked the door because the office has been burgled in the past. Even though I'm your subordinate, please pay attention to politeness when you speak. This is the most basic human courtesy. You have your own keys. You forgot to bring them, but you still want to say it's someone else's fault.*

She then performed the two-click operation that sent copies of her and her boss's emails to the entire staff of the company. Before long the exchange appeared in the Chinese press and led to the executive's resignation.

\*Send: The Essential Guide to Email for Office and Home, by David Shipley and Will Schwalbe; quoted in Janet Malcolm's NYRB review, Sept 27, 07.



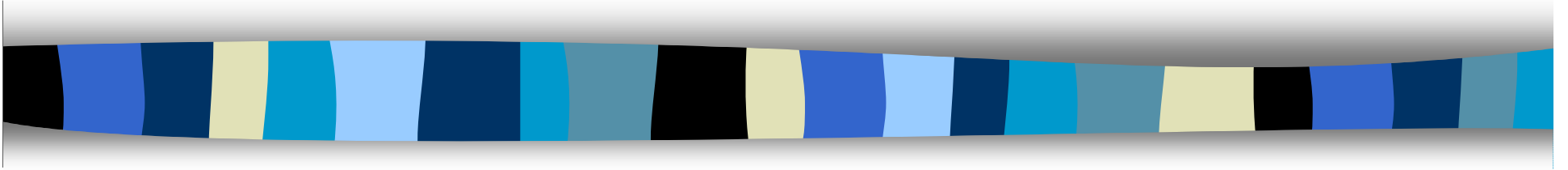
# An Even Better Oops

In this case\*, the secretary spilled ketchup on the boss's trousers, and he wrote an email asking for the £4 it cost to have the trousers cleaned (the company was a British law firm). Receiving no reply, he pursued the matter. Finally he—and hundreds of people at the firm—received this email:

*Subject: Re: Ketchup trousers With reference to the email below, I must apologize for not getting back to you straight away but due to my mother's sudden illness, death and funeral I have had more pressing issues than your £4. I apologize again for accidentally getting a few splashes of ketchup on your trousers. Obviously your financial need as a senior associate is greater than mine as a mere secretary. Having already spoken to and shown your email...to various partners, lawyers and trainees..., they kindly offered to do a collection to raise the £4. I however declined their kind offer but should you feel the urgent need for the £4, it will be on my desk this afternoon. Jenny.*

\*Send: The Essential Guide to Email for Office and Home, by David Shipley and Will Schwalbe; quoted in Janet Malcolm's NYRB review, Sept 27, 07.

# Pointers



In No Particular Order



## Basil's Big Rules #1-3

- For every one message, write one email.
- If you need one person to respond to five requests, write five emails.
- Email in-boxes are to-do lists.



## Basil's Big Rules #4-6

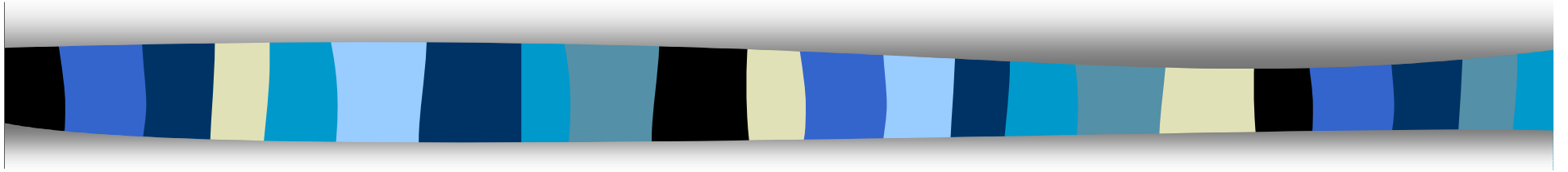
- Subject headers should provide main message
- First paragraph should convey context, extended main message, and response required.
- Write as if you are writing.



## Basil's Big Rules #7-10

- Text messaging is wonderful.
- Email is not text messaging.
- Write, using words, spelled correctly, in a sentence format that is punctuated, perfectly so.
- You are being judged all the time.

# And



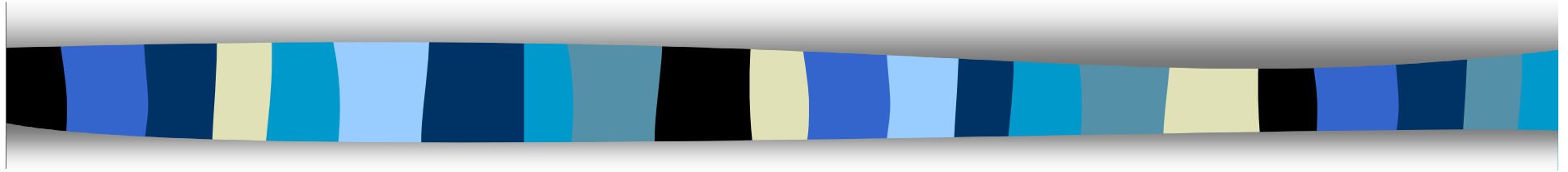
Don't forget ...



## Be polite, dammit!

- Say please.
- Provide reasonable deadlines.
- Say enough.
- Don't say too much.
- Be clear.
- Think about things from your recipient's point of view.
- Don't waste people's time.

# Matters of style



Style matters ...



## Use proper spelling, grammar, etc.

- Do I really need to tell you why?
- If your email program doesn't have a spell-check or grammar-check, compose important correspondence off-line in Word.
- E-mails with no full stops or commas are difficult to read and can sometimes even change the meaning of the text.
- Emails should be as well written as normal, professional prose.



## Be concise and to the point.

- Your and your email are probably not the most important things in your audience's life.
- Think about that first point.



## Use proper structure & layout

- Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph.
- When making points, number them.
- Short first paragraph should provide email's context.
- Last paragraph should specify response required.
- (If no response is required, WRITE that no response is required.)



# Think Long. Write short.

- Do the work for your reader.
- Keep sentences short (15 words or less).
- Keep paragraphs short (6-7 lines max).
- Keep entire email short: “one screen’ll do ya.”



## Abbreviations & emoticons

- In business emails, don't use abbreviations such as BTW (by the way) and LOL (laugh out loud).
- The recipient might not be aware of the meanings of the abbreviations
- The same goes for emoticons, such as the smiley :-).
- Save these features for people you are on close terms with.



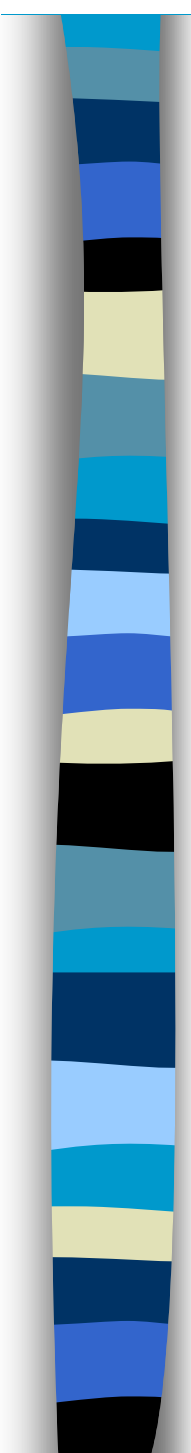
## No fancy formatting

- Sender might not be able to view formatting or special fonts
- When using colors, use a color that is easy to read in the background.
- There are lots of e-mail clients (and some servers) which cannot handle messages in HTML or richtext formats.



## Read your own damn email.

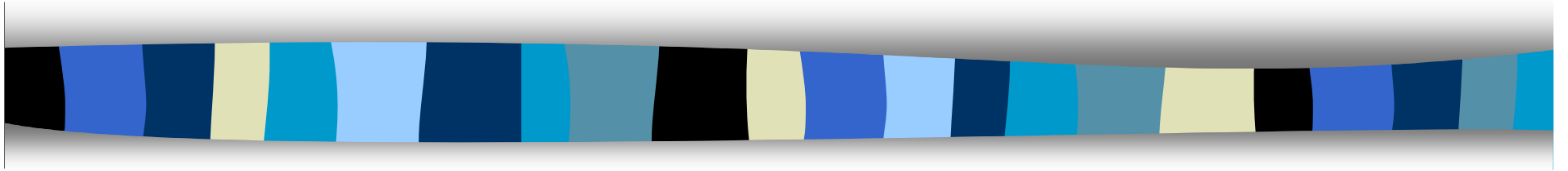
- A lot of people don't bother to read an email before they send it out.
- People whom misspell the name of Kwantullen, you lose your credibility. LOL.
- These people are *screwing up*.
- Proofread: facts, spelling.



When, if ever, is it appropriate to ask your correspondent be more concise and to the point?

- When the relationship would make it acceptable... and when you think your audience will be appreciative. Otherwise, you'd likely be doing it only to "boost" your self-esteem. -- David Ingre

# Matters of Organization



Organization matters



# The Subject Header

- People use subject headers to organize their time.
- Try to use a subject that is meaningful to the recipient as well as yourself.
- Be precise.
- Indicate main message.



# Templates for Common Responses

- Some questions you get over and over again.
- Save these texts as response templates and paste these into your message when you need them.
- You can save your templates in a Word document, or use pre-formatted emails.
- This is how I grade my student assignments, by the way.



## Preempt further questions.

- If you do not answer ALL the questions in the original email, you will receive further e-mails regarding the unanswered questions.
- Answer questions your colleague SHOULD have asked in the first place, too.



## Don't leave out the message thread.

- When you reply to an email, you must include the original mail in your reply.
- A 'threadless email' will not provide enough information to the recipient .



# Quoting

- It is silly to reply to an e-mail by including a complete copy of the original with the words "I agree", "Okay" or "Ditto" at the bottom.
- The correct method is to use quoting.
- This is best explained by an example:  

```
>and do you agree with the  
proposal to hire Ms. Ross to  
>handle our legal services?
```

**Yes. Please make the necessary arrangements.**



## Quoting, cont'd.

Quoting can occur again and again as in the example:

```
>>and do you agree with the proposal to  
hire Ms. Ross to  
>>handle our legal services?  
>  
>Yes. Please make the necessary arrangements.
```

**Arrangements made. Our first meeting is scheduled for tomorrow morning.**

-----

From this we see both two level quoting (>>) and one level quoting (>). The (>>) indicate that the sender is quoting your quote and the (>) is a quote of part of your message you sent in reply.



## When to Reply All ...

- Only use “Reply to All” if you really need your message to be seen by each person who received the original message.
- When your goal is to embarrass the living s\*\*\* out of somebody. [This should be the rarest of goals.]



When is it appropriate to correct  
someone's mistake in a "Reply all"?

- When your personal relationship with that person will not produce unnecessary hurt or be an insult; also, *not* simply for self-aggrandizement. --  
David Ingre



## When to CC

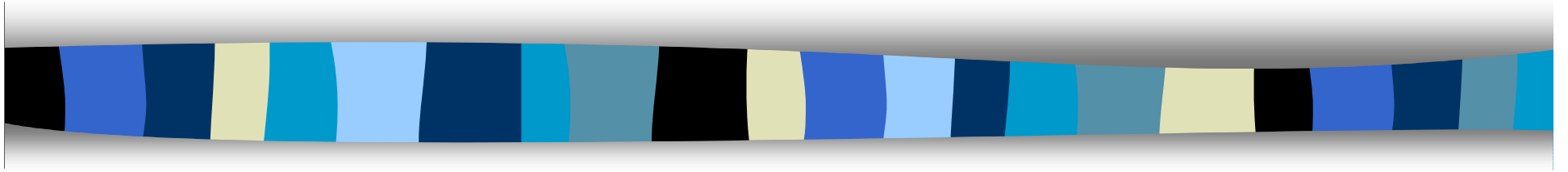
- Try not to use the cc: field unless the recipient in the cc: field knows why he or she is receiving a copy of the message.
- In general, do not include the person in the cc: field unless you have a particular reason for wanting this person to see your response.



# When to BCC

- Large email lists.
- When you are doing something sneaky ... [uh, think of something good to say here, Basil ...]

# Be respectful



## Be nice



## Time is of the essence

- Colleagues and clients send an e-mail because they wish to receive a quick response.
- If the email is complicated, just send an email back saying that you have received it and that you will get back to them.



What is the standard response time to email messages for a working group?

- I've been told my standards are pretty high: I think that one should check at least every 24 hrs, and respond.
- Exceptions: weekends... then, 48 hr turnaround. -- David Ingre



## Don't Attach Unnecessary Files

- By sending large attachments you can annoy colleagues and even bring down their e-mail system.
- Wherever possible, try to compress attachments and only send attachments when they are productive.
- You need to have a good virus scanner in place since your customers/clients, etc., will not be very happy if you send them documents full of viruses.



## Do not use the high priority option.

- We all know the story of the boy who cried wolf.
- An adept, specific subject header should do the trick.
- If the email requires an urgent reply, use “urgent” in the subject line.
- Never say “urgent,” though, unless a response really is required right away.



## Be reasonable.

- IF YOU WRITE IN CAPITALS IT SEEMS AS IF YOU ARE SHOUTING.
- This can be highly annoying and might trigger an unwanted response in the form of a “flame mail.”
- Therefore, try not to send any email text in capitals.



## Do not forward chain letters

- I get a surprising number of these hoaxes from otherwise intelligent former students.
- Happily for them, I cannot go back and lower their grades.
- Do not forward them.
- Just delete them right away.



# Spam, spam, spam, spam

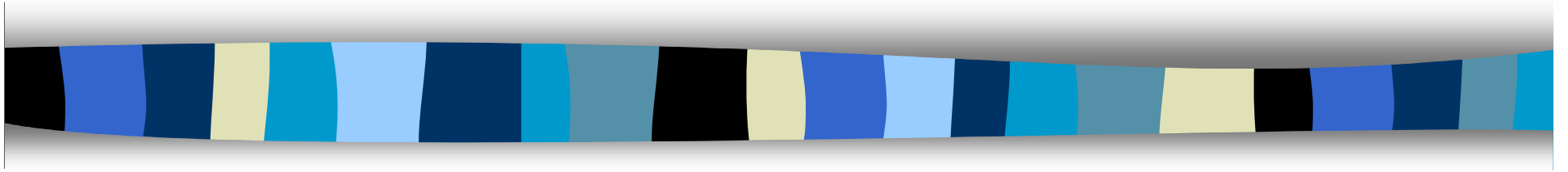
- By replying to spam or by “unsubscribing,” you are confirming that your email address is 'live'.
- Confirming will generate more spam.
- Hit the delete button or use email software to remove spam automatically.
- Don't worry: You won't lose anything important.



## Do not request “receipts”

- My otherwise intelligent sister makes this mistake and I think less of her for it. 😊
- This will annoy your recipients before they’ve even read your message.
- Ask the recipient to confirm receipt instead.

# Don't be foolish



And don't be stupid



“Uh, puleeeeeeeze don’t read that!”

- Biggest chances are that your message has already been delivered and read.
- It is better just to send an email to say that you screwed up.
- “Recalls” don’t work on numerous servers.
- The story of two Jessica’s.



## A Related PowerPoint Slide

- Don't email when you are drinking.
- Don't email when you are hung over.
- Don't email when you are high.
- Don't email when you're angry.
- Don't email when you are sleepy.
- Don't email when you are experiencing delusions of grandeur.
- Don't email, etc., etc., etc.
- I mean it: DON'T.
- But DO: Print out this slide and put it on your monitor.



## Never discuss secret info.

- If you don't want your email displayed on a bulletin board, don't send it.
- Never make any libelous, sexist or racially discriminating comments in emails, even if they are meant to be a joke.
- BTW, jokes often lose their humour in emails anyways.
- You're probably not funny anyway. 😊
- George W. is busy deciphering your emailed complaints about Statistics.



# Things not to send out

- Passwords
- Usernames
- Credit card information
- Bank information
- Any account information
- Horrible stories about your Saturday night
- Why? Email is not secure.



For some thorny questions ... I  
asked my colleague David Ingre.

If someone sends an email with  
questionable/disparaging information  
that affects others ...



When is it OK to send the information with those whom it affects?

- When and if you believe that it's ethical for you to do so...
- I don't think there is a "set ethical response".



## Do unto others ...

- Do not copy a message or attachment belonging to another user without permission of the originator.
- If you do not ask permission first, you might be infringing on copyright laws.
- It is also just unprofessional, bad form, rude, impolite, etc.



When, if ever, should the information be printed out?

- I can't think of a case to print it out... unless there were legal ramifications and you were building a paper file for your lawyer...



When should the person it was sent to first discuss it with the sender?

Same answer as above: I think that ethical judgments vary with context, and so forth.



## Panteli Tritchew reminds us about how to act in Rome

- “My gut response is that they are asking for email protocol, not etiquette.”
- “The matter is more complex in that you can't answer any of these questions fully without reference to:
  - *corporate culture*
  - *organizational communications*
  - *organizational politics.*”