

Email guidelines

Is email the correct tool?

Email is a great way to contact people when you can't speak to them directly or need to send them a document. However, face-to-face or a quick telephone call may be more effective, particularly if the topic is sensitive, confidential or very urgent. Speaking to someone in person also means that any misunderstandings can be cleared up on the spot.

Writing an email

Action:

Consider what action you would like the recipient to take when they receive the message and make this clear.

Subject line:

Treat this as the label on the tin. Include (briefly) as much information as possible about what the recipient is required to do, including for example, dates, deadlines, times and locations.

Suffix:

Useful tool for the subject line to indicate what is required of the recipient. Suffix can then be used as a tag to sort emails into folders. Examples include [Info], [action] [urgent] [project code]

Email length:

Avoid lengthy emails as the message or action can become lost or confused. If you are communicating complex information then consider using an attachment or link to a document. Avoid replying with email history unless it is necessary.

Attachments and sensitive information:

If you are receiving or sending people's personal details or sensitive information this should only be done via a University approved Dropbox account for business. Your staff contact will contact IT services for an account to be set up on your behalf. If you are sending sensitive information you will need to encrypt the document using 7zip or adobe. When a document is encrypted it means that only someone with a password for that document can open it. Your staff contact will be able to show you how to encrypt documents.

If you are sent documents via email you should save the document onto your computer and delete the email, so it is not stored in your mailbox. You will also need to regularly empty your deleted mailbox.

Recipients:

Always double check who you are sending the email to, and make sure that they are the right person to be sending that information to. Any email containing personal or sensitive information should not be sent to a private email address, such as a Hotmail or Gmail account.

- The “To” field should only be used for recipients who you are asking to take action.
- The “cc” field is for recipients who need to see the information. Think carefully about who you need to communicate with and limit the ‘ccs’ to this group only. The “bcc” field should be used if you do not wish to share email addresses with other recipients. If you are emailing large groups the bcc field should be used.

Reply all: “Reply all” creates large numbers of emails which are often irrelevant. Before using the “reply all” consider if all the recipients need to know or take some action. Consider whether everyone should have access to all of the information contained in the message.

Responses

When responding to an email, double check that you have addressed all the points/questions that were raised – this reduces the need for further emails seeking clarification.

Final check: It is advisable to re-read your emails before sending to check that the message is clear, that attachments have been inserted and spelling has been checked.

Response time expectations

The use of mobiles and tablets has led to people expecting a very fast response to emails - even at evenings and weekends. Some staff do check emails outside of working hours, but you can't rely on this. It's always best to give people as much time to respond as possible. Please note that many of our staff involved in teaching and medical research have multiple roles at the university, so they may take a little longer to reply to emails. If a response is required the same day then email is probably not the most effective way of getting in contact.