

Top 10 Email Goofs

Yes, email has been around for a long time now. But that doesn't stop people from still committing gaffes that would get them in big trouble with the email etiquette police. Want to steer clear of mistakes that damage your professional image? Here are some common email "oops" to avoid:

- **Writing in all caps.** In email land, this is seen as shouting. That goes double for the subject line — an all-caps word there not only is considered rude, but will probably result in your email being automatically deleted as spam.
- **Sounding like a law textbook.** It can be challenging to find the right tone for the person who's going to be reading your email. You don't want to be too informal in a professional situation, but going overboard with corporatespeak isn't helpful either. Find a balance between "Hey, dude" and "Attached please find my resume for the accountant position, for which I respectfully wish to be heretofore considered."
- **Using ridiculously long subject lines.** We all have much shorter attention spans than we used to. Being bombarded with emails all day long makes most of us reluctant to even read a long subject line, much less open it. Plus, many of us are looking at email on a mobile device with a small screen, so the shorter the subject line, the better. Four to seven words is best.
- **Not using the "Bcc" (blind carbon copy) when emailing a bunch of people.** The "Bcc" prevents the recipients from seeing the emails of the other recipients on the list, who might not be thrilled to broadcast their email address to strangers.
- **Clicking "return all" instead of "return sender"** when only the sender of the email really cares about your response. Especially if your response includes some sort of private or unflattering comment about one of those "alls" (I hope you wouldn't do that anyway, especially about your co-workers!).
- **Capitalizing the first letters of words for no apparent reason.** This is really more of a general literacy goof than strictly email, but since people seem to be doing this all over the place, I'm compelled to include it. Besides the first letter of the first word in a sentence, the first letter of a proper name (like "Nancy") or title ("Nancy Dowd, Chief Financial Officer") should be capitalized. Also capitalize the first letter of the month, days of the week, names of streets, cities, states and countries.



That's it. Arbitrarily capitalizing letters to emphasize a word is not okay. That's what "bold" is for.

- **Mangling apostrophes.** Same as above — apostrophe atrocities seem to be spreading like a virus. Here's a quick reminder: the apostrophe is used instead of the letter in a contraction. For example, the contraction for "you are" is "you're," with the apostrophe taking the place of the "a." "Your" is possessive, as in "your job search" — no apostrophe.
- **Sending an email with the greeting "To Whom it May Concern," "Dear Sir or Madam," or even worse, "Dear Sir."** These all sound overly formal, out-of-date, and too generic. And of course, the last one is also sexist. If you really can't find the name of the person you want to target, then "Greetings" or "Hello" are much better. "Dear Hiring Manager" is fine if you're emailing a cover letter and resume to someone whose name you haven't been able to find (LinkedIn and Google searches are good for finding hiring managers' names).
- **Including too many topics in your email in one loooooooooooooong paragraph.** Have you ever read an email and thought, Huh??! What is he trying to say?? Stick to one main topic for each email message, and break up text by putting subtopics into separate paragraphs. It's easier to read on a mobile device, and makes text easier to read and understand in general.
- **Using multiple fonts and/or colors.** Doing either makes an email hard to read. Stick to one font and dark print on a white background. A different font for your signature is okay, as long as it's legible.
- **Misspelling the recipient's name.** This really makes you look unprofessional, especially if you're sending a return email to someone whose name is right there in the signature of the email they just sent to you.

So there you have it. If you avoid these common goofs, your emails will look more professional to your readers.