

Writing an email

Overview

The purpose of an email is often to inform and persuade the reader. Emails are a quicker way to communicate than sending a letter by post and so are often used for ongoing situations or discussions. Emails can give the reader immediate feedback, opinions or information about a certain topic. Emails can also be used to persuade the reader that the writer's view is correct and that some sort of action or decision is required. However, emails can also provide a balanced argument which suggests possible alternatives, but lets the reader make up their own mind about the topic. The ways you use language and vocabulary when writing an email will depend on the audience and the purpose you are writing for.

Tips for writing an email

Language – think about:

- **the audience that the email is for** – often emails are sent to one person, but they can also be sent to multiple readers at the same time. An email sent to a group of people is likely to be semi-formal and would usually not include slang.
- **the context and your relationship to the reader** – the tone of most emails should be semi-formal, but some emails can be a little more relaxed in tone; for example, if you are mailing someone of your own age who you know well. Emails can also be more formal; for example, if you are emailing your boss about a situation at work.
- **how long your reader has to read your email** – busy people often receive a lot of emails each day, so making sure that your formal email sounds clear, professional and polite is important to make sure your message gets through.
- **the impression you create for your reader** – unless your email is to your friends and is just for social purposes avoid using emojis or informal abbreviations such as ASAP.

Organisation:

- **Plan the main points you will deal with in your email before you start writing it** – an email should deal with just one overall topic, so stay focused and avoid adding unnecessary detail. The structure of a formal or semi-formal email is usually in three parts. For example:
 1. **a subject line** – just two or three words so that your reader can tell at a glance what the topic is, then a brief introduction to explain why you are writing. For example, if you are emailing a stranger, introduce yourself very briefly and then get straight to the point. If it is someone you know, or a response to an email you have received, you may need to remind your reader of the situation so far.
 2. **the body of the response** – include relevant points about the topic, developed and supported appropriately – you should divide your explanation into fairly short paragraphs, each dealing with a key aspect of the topic.
 3. **a closing section** – explain briefly what is next. If you want your reader to do something, make that clear here; for example, please let me know by Thursday if ...' or to show that you are open to further discussion, end your email on a friendly note; for example, thank you for your help with this – let's keep in touch.
- **Make your email easy to read and follow** – for example, you can use headings or short lists where it's appropriate. You can also choose to emphasise the most important information with **bold** - but do not overdo it. Appropriate connecting words and phrases can often do a better job – for example, 'However, it is crucial to remember ...'
- **Use a suitable greeting and sign off appropriately** – this will depend on who you are writing to and why, so for example 'Dear Mr Green' and perhaps 'Best wishes', or 'Dear Sir/Madam' and 'Yours faithfully'. If you are writing to a group informally and don't want to use all their names 'Greetings' might be a useful opening.

Example of an email

Comments

Subject: 'Room-for-a-break campaign' 1

Hello Team, 2

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the recent discussions about whether or not our company should join the 'Room-for-a-break' campaign. I have researched the campaign, taken all of your opinions into consideration and will explain why I have decided we should join with some slight changes. 3

Some say that taking a nap at work is counter-productive, while others say that it will increase effectiveness at work. The problem is if you have the ability of bouncing back after a relaxing nap or not. Other companies which have nap rooms have found that some people take napping too far, but I am confident that will not be a problem for us. Mid-afternoon napping will be encouraged only when it is necessary. 4

Innovation rooms on the other hand I believe will increase everyone's creativity. In our innovation room there will be couches, music, coffee and dim lights. It will be a room for staff to relax in and to think in. You will be able to stay there and socialise or just think how we could improve our company. I hope you will use it wisely so that it can become something permanent after the campaign. 5

Sporting equipment will also be made available in the office. This is better than going to a separate gym because it saves time and you will not miss out on important discussions with your co-workers. It means you can exercise and carry on working so you will not get behind with important deadlines but will still get a break. 6

At the end of the campaign we will look at how productive everyone has been to decide if we should carry on with nap rooms, innovation rooms and sporting activities in the office or not. I am impressed with the extra work you have all put in to make this happen so I am trusting you with this campaign. There is a short

1 The learner uses a subject line that identifies the topic of the email.

2 The email is to be sent to all staff working at the company, so a greeting that includes everyone is appropriate.

3 In this paragraph, the learner reminds readers of the situation and introduces the decision that will be explained.

4 Each paragraph deals with just one feature of the campaign.

5 Each paragraph includes relevant support and details to explain what has been decided about each part of the campaign.

6 The focus of each paragraph is clear in its first line.

Comments

survey to fill in before we start – please complete this before Friday. 7

Let's make room for a break and see how it goes. 8

[Name]

7 The closing section explains what will happen next and what employees are expected to do.

8 The sign off makes it clear that a final decision is still to be made.