

The Art of the Email

What is an *email*? *Email* is short for *Electronic Mail*, so one email is really just an electronic letter. And, just like letters, there are formal ways of writing emails, as well as informal ones. Formal uses of emails include letters of recommendation, letters of application, letters of complaint, letters to the editor, letters of inquiry, letters of introduction, letters of thanks, etc. Informal uses of email include letters to friends and relatives, stupid forwards, etc.

Subject: This is obviously your title for an email. Business letters mailed on paper usually do not have these, but emails always do, as part of the format. The subject should be the “title” of your email, where you summarize / describe the contents, much like the title of an essay, review, article, etc. They do not have to be boring, and I would shy away from using the word “email” in the subject line of your email (since this seems redundant). You can tell a lot from subject lines, and whether they are intended for a formal or informal audience. Below are some real subject examples taken straight from my Gmail inbox:

- Hey
- Yo
- Dude . . .
- Information Request
- Yo homegirl
- What’s up Quale!
- Pics
- Letters of Rec. Request
- Hey son!
- How’s Norway?
- Stanford Admission Decision
- Article
- Sup?
- (no subject)
- Hi
- More Snow?

To, Cc, Bcc:

To: addresses where email is being sent to

Cc: Carbon Copy

Bcc: Blind Carbon Copy (recipient cannot see other people on address list)

Salutation: The *salutation* or *greeting* usually begins with the word “Dear” and is followed by the name of the person who will receive the letter. A comma is placed after the name. If you do not know the specific person to whom you are writing, you should try to make it as specific as you can: “Dear Editor,” “Dear Congressman,” or “To whom it may concern.”

Some Formal Concluding Phrases:

- Sincerely,
- Regards,
- Thanks,
- Thank you,
- Respectfully,

Signature: The signature is your name and, for formal emails, other useful information, including title / position, and possibly location and other contact information.

Here is my current school signature:

Brian Quale
English and Theory of Knowledge Teacher
International School of Stavanger
Stavanger, Norway
<http://www.mrquale.com>

Your formal signature should include:

(Your Name)
Student
International School of Stavanger
(Email--if different from one you are sending email from / Website Address—if appropriate)

Email Example #1—Reintroduction and Inquiry

Subject: Classroom Ideas
To: Mmerrill@sacstate.edu

Dear Dr. Merrill,

I wonder if you still remember me, since I myself frequently have trouble remembering some of my own students from previous years. But this is Brian Quale (tall, lanky, Neil Young aficionado) contacting you and seeing if there is any way I could coordinate something with your English Methods classes at The Sacramento State University. I recall us working on some student essays that were sent by a teacher, and I wonder--if you are teaching next semester, and if you think it might be worthwhile--if something like this could be possible. I have been working a lot on how I teach writing, and I think I have developed some cool and useful activities and strategies, and I would love to share these as well.

I teach at Mira Loma High School, where I have three IB classes (Juniors and Sophomores), as well as two "regular" Junior classes. If any of this sounds useful and like it might work, I would love to coordinate something with you.

Sincerely,

Brian Quale
English Teacher
Mira Loma High School
<http://mrquale.com>

Email Example #2—Email of Complaint

Subject: Leaking Air Conditioner
To: fherta@sanjuan.edu
Cc: rnicholas@sanjuan.edu

Dear Felipe,

I am following up on my leaking air conditioner in room A-26 which is becoming a nuisance and danger in my classroom. As the day heats up and my air conditioner runs more frequently, a large puddle of water forms on the floor of my classroom under a row of chairs. I do what I can with towels and Roy frequently mops the mess, but he is usually only available after school. I am worried about students in my 5th and 6th period classes, who frequently have to walk through the puddle to get to their seats; it is only a matter of time before a student slips. The constant stagnant water is also beginning to cause tile damage and mildew.

I hope something can be done soon,

Brian Quale
English Teacher
Mira Loma High School
<http://mrquale.com>
(916) 971-5360 ext. 6617

Email Example #3 –Letter of Inquiry

Subject: High School English Position Vacancy
To: drduevel@norway.com

Dear Dr. Duevel,

I am interested in your vacancy for a high school English teaching position at ISS, and I am hoping that I can schedule an interview with your school representative during the Seattle Conference. I feel that my IB training and experience would make me a strong candidate for the position. I have attached my updated CV, and if interested I would encourage you to also peruse my website, <http://mrquale.com>, which I have created as a resource for my students.

Please email me back if you have any additional questions, or if you would like additional information.

Thank you for your time,

Brian Quale
English Teacher
Mira Loma High School
Sacramento, California
<http://mrquale.com>

Attachment: *Brian P. Quale (CV _ Resume).pdf*

The Effective Emailer By Guy Kawasaki

1. **Craft your subject line.** Your subject line is a window into your soul, so make it a good one. First, it has to get your message past the spam filters, so take out anything about sex and money-saving special offers. Then, it must communicate that your message is highly personalized. For example, “Love your blog,” “Love your book,” always work on me. While you're at it, craft your “From:” line too because when people see the “From” is from a company, they usually assume the message is spam
2. **Limit your recipients.** As a rule of thumb, the more people you send an email to, the less likely any single person will respond to it, much less perform any action that you requested. If you are going to ask a large group of people to do something, then at least use blind carbon copies; not only will the few recipients think they are important, you won't burden the whole list with everyone's email address. Nor will you reveal everyone's email address inadvertently.
3. **Don't write in ALL CAPS.** Everyone probably knows this by now, but just in case. Text in all caps is interpreted as YELLING in email. Even if you're not yelling, it's more difficult to read text that's in all caps, so do your recipients a favor and use standard capitalization practices.
4. **Quote back.** Even if emails are flying back and forth within hours, be sure to quote back the text that you're answering. Assume that the person you're corresponding with has fifty email conversations going at once. If you answer with a simple, “Yes, I agree,” most of the time you will force the recipient to dig through his deleted mail folder to figure out what you're agreeing to. However, don't “fisk” either (courtesy of Brad Hutchings). Fisking is when you quote back the entire message and respond line by line, often in an argumentative way.
5. **Use plain text.** I hate HTML email. I tried it for a while, but it's not worth the trouble of sending or receiving it. All those pretty colors and fancy type faces and styles make me want to puke. Cut to the chase: say what you have to say in as brief and plain manner as possible. If you can't say it in plain text, you don't have anything worth saying.
6. **Ask permission.** If you must ask unanswerable questions or attach a file, then first seek permission. The initial email should be something like, “May I tell you my background to explain why I'm contacting you?” Or, “May I send you my PowerPoint presentation to explain what our company is doing?”
7. **Add a good signature.** That is, one that includes your name, title, organization, email address, web site, and phone. This is especially true if you're asking people to do something--why make it hard for them to verify your credibility or to pick up the phone and call you? Also, I often copy and paste people's signatures to put them into the notes field of an appointment. The email client that I use, Entourage, won't let you easily copy the sender's info from the header, so I have to create a forward, copy everything, and then delete the forward.

Some Other Pointers by Me

- Read your email aloud to yourself and make sure you spell-check before sending an email off (there are no “takebacks”).
- Be sure that your To, Cc, and Bcc's all contain the correct addresses.
- Use *Reply All* with absolute caution.
- Keep your ideas efficient, economical and effective (just like all the writing we do in English class)
- Avoid *emoticons* with formal emails—they can be very easily misinterpreted.

Formal Email Practice (for Homework)

To practice formal emailing, each student will email me (and “cc” a friend) a brief (about 4-5 sentences) letter, using the formal email guidelines that we have reviewed today. The topic of your formal letter to me will be about something to do with formal email techniques and etiquette (what you learned, further ideas you have, questions you still have, problems / limitations with email, a thank you for the wonderful lesson I created, etc).

Your Email to your Writing Buddy Must Include the Following Ideas:

- Explain Google Docs. Briefly (most have used the service before, but just in case). Also keep in mind what Google Docs automatically writes about your email (see below). Include the idea of collaboration, and how no one needs to re-invite anyone, and that your saved changes will be reflected when each other uses the service.
- Tell them which topic you chose to write about, and what you think your argument is. If you highlight your thesis statement (which I recommend doing), point this out to them.
- Also add a little bit about what you found to be problematic areas in the past with your formal writing, and what type of feedback is most helpful for you. You may also want to mention your writing goals that you are pursuing.
- Include me (**bquale@isstavanger.no**) as one of the collaborators (using commas to separate the addresses), although only use a salutation specifically for your Writing Buddy. In other words, pretend you are “Cc-ing” me, since Google Docs does not offer a “Cc” option.
- Be sure to thank them ahead of time for helping with your writing.

Google Docs Email Format

I've shared a document with you called "Catcher Rough Draft":
<http://docs.google.com/Doc#546875654654654>

It's not an attachment -- it's stored online at Google Docs. To open this document, just click the link above.

Your message will go below here