Inquire: Knowing What Style to Use at Work

Overview

When you are at work, do you ever send emails? Are those formal? Do you write emails in the same way you talk to your coworkers? How do you know if they should be formal or not? This lesson will address these questions. First, you will learn about the difference between conversational and professional writing. Then, you will learn about constructing a professional email and texting etiquette at work. Finally, you will learn about some best practices for professional writing.

Big Question: How do you write a professional email?

Watch: Eleanor 's Email

Think about the first job you ever had. Was it a simple babysitting job? Maybe a fast food job? Regardless of what type of job it was, you had to communicate to coworkers and bosses within that workplace, although the nature of the job defines how formal the communication has to be.

For example, in a small retail job, it might be acceptable to text your manager when you will not be coming in that day. On the other hand, you might have to send a professional email when you are not able to make one of your classes. These situations use two types of writing: conversational and business. Conversational writing is less formal writing that is more fluid and does not strive to follow all of the conventional rules of grammar. Business writing is formal writing that strictly follows grammar rules and is used for official correspondence between people in a professional setting. It's important to know the difference between these types of writing, and when it is appropriate to use each type.

Probably the most common use of professional writing in today’s workplace is a professional email. Even college students must write professional emails to communicate with their instructors. Let’s watch how Eleanor writes an email to her English professor about a question she had in class.

First, Eleanor logs in to her student email to ensure her professor knows she is a student at the school. Remember to use a professional email address, usually some form of your first and last name. She types “ENGL 101: Assignment 4 Question” in the subject box to make this subject as specific as possible without being too long. Eleanor types “Dr. Adams,” then proceeds to explain her problem with assignment four. “While writing the paper for assignment four, I am having trouble understanding the requirements.”
Would it be possible for us to have a meeting during your office hours to discuss the requirements further? Please let me know at your earliest convenience. Thank you, Eleanor Raymond.”

In this lesson, you will also learn how to write a professional email like Eleanor has done. Are you familiar with how to use business or conversational writing? When might you find yourself needing to write a professional email?

Read: Writing in the Workplace

Overview
When reaching out and talking to people at work, it is important to know how to write in a professional tone. This lesson will cover the differences between conversational writing and business writing, how to write a professional email, proper texting etiquette at work, and some best practices for professional writing.

What is the Difference Between Conversational and Business Writing?
Conversational writing is less formal writing that is more fluid and does not strive to follow all of the conventional rules of grammar. Business writing is formal writing that strictly follows grammar rules and is used for official correspondence between people in a professional setting. If you need to ask a coworker a question, or just send a reminder to your group at work, then conversational writing is appropriate. If you work from home and use online communication to keep in touch with your colleagues, conversational writing is usually also okay. However, if you are writing any official report, log, or email, you should use business writing. When talking to your boss via written communication or when making business proposals, you should use business writing. There is an easy rule of thumb for knowing which writing style to use: if the conversation is important to the bottom line of the business, you should use business writing.

Constructing a Professional Email
When using business writing, it is important to know how to write a professional email. The first thing you should do is address your audience and say hello. Being formal and polite is important. Use the person’s title and offer a professional greeting, such as “Hello, Dr. Jackson” and not “Yo, Doc J.”

After you address your audience, you should succinctly explain the reason for your email and any needed context around your issue. Don’t drag on or include unnecessary information when writing emails. Ask any questions you have toward the end of your message so they don’t get lost if the message is a little longer. If the message does run long, offer a brief summary at the end. Finally, if you need them to respond to your email, let them know how they should respond and when they need to get that taken care of: “If you can help, please let me know by Friday afternoon.” Avoid using ambiguous terms like tomorrow in case they don’t read the email on the same day you send it. Be as specific as possible when able.

Texting Etiquette: Appropriate Practice at Work
As smart phones become more and more prevalent, so does texting in the workplace. This section will discuss some things to keep in mind when texting at work. First, make sure all involved are comfortable with using texts to communicate. Sometimes people want to separate their work and personal lives. If that’s the case, respect that separation and don’t text anyone who has said they would prefer other forms of communication.
Along those same lines, know that you cannot misuse text messaging without consequences. Treat it like email; it can be monitored and regulated. Some companies have rules about what sorts of things you can and can’t send over text message to other workers. Familiarize yourself with these rules so you don’t cross any lines when texting your colleagues.

Finally, maintain professionalism when texting others. Just because it is a time to be less formal doesn’t mean you should ignore notions of professionalism. Especially if you are using it to discuss work-related topics, you should maintain a professional attitude when texting your coworkers.

Professional Writing Best Practices

There are a few things you can do to make it easier to write professionally. First, because professional writing needs to be clear and concise, you need to know your purpose.

Second, know your audience. If you know who you are talking to, you know what information you need to include and what information you don’t need to include. For instance, if an email is going to the head of the sales department, you will not need to explain sales targets. If that same email is going to shareholders, it might be beneficial to include those sale targets and how you plan to achieve them.

Third, practice regularly. Professional writing can feel stiff and awkward if you aren’t used to writing that way. Practicing your writing so it feels more natural will improve your writing. It also helps to have someone proofread your writing. Getting a second set of eyes to make sure you include all needed information, do not provide any unnecessary information, and minimize mistakes will better prepare you for professional writing in the future.

Reflect Poll: Writing Styles

Which writing style is easier for you: conversational or professional?

- Conversational
- Professional

Expand: Netiquette 101

Overview

As companies gain a larger online presence, it is important to learn how you should conduct yourself online. This is especially true if you use the Internet to telecommute or if you represent your organization on any form of social media. This section will focus on netiquette: the proper way you should conduct yourself online.

Netiquette 101

There are a few rules to keep in mind to professionally conduct yourself online. First, realize that you aren’t talking to other computers but rather that you are talking to other people. There is a person on the other side of any conversation you engage in online, so don’t say anything to that person that you wouldn’t say in the real world. This person is a human being, so you shouldn’t be mean or rude just because you are talking to them online.
Second, act the way you would in person, which goes beyond just how you speak to others. It also includes how hard you work if you work from home, the kinds of behavior you engage in or justify, and the kinds of people you interact with.

Third, be forgiving of others’ mistakes. People might say something that is wrong or they might mistype. Maybe they say something that is supposed to be sarcastic but it doesn’t come across. Whatever it may be, if someone makes a mistake online, forgive them. It happens. If you are willing to let it go when someone else makes a mistake, it is easier to expect the same when you make a mistake.

Finally, make yourself look good. This doesn’t mean lie or pretend to be someone you aren’t. Instead it means that you should be polite, respectful, and helpful so that others see you in a positive light rather than using the limited anonymity of the Internet to be rude toward others.

Several of these rules have a similar theme: respect. As long as you keep that in mind when working with others online, you will be in a good position.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings
An article providing things to keep in mind when crafting professional emails
- Link to resource:

An article providing things to keep in mind when texting in a professional setting
- Link to resource:
  https://www.huffingtonpost.com/diane-gottsman/10-professional-texting-e_b_12154416.html

An article providing tips on how to maintain professionalism when using the Internet at work
- Link to resource:

Lesson Glossary

**conversational writing**: less formal writing that is more fluid but does not strive to follow all of the conventional grammar rules

**business writing**: formal writing that strictly follows grammar rules and is used for official correspondence between people in professional settings

**netiquette**: the proper way you should conduct yourself online

Check Your Knowledge

1. Texting is not trackable by your work.
   a. True
   b. False
2. When posting online, you should treat others as people.
   a. True
   b. False
3. Practicing can make professional writing easier.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:

Citations

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