

Email Basics

ME 120: Lecture 2

Purpose

Establish guidelines for effective email suitable for engineering professionals.

Email for work

Email for Work

Email is so common that we can forget that the rules are different in a business environment.

- Everything is saved.
- You cannot control where your email goes after you send it.
- Your email establishes your professional reputation.
 - Style
 - Substance

Start with bad
examples

Bad email

To: Jill
From: Joe
Re:

the report is due tomorrow
we'll discuss it at the meeting

Bad email

To: Jill

From: Joe

Re:  No subject

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting

Use a subject line that allows the recipient to sort and later find your message.

Longer subject lines are better than terse, ambiguous subject lines.

Bad email

To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report

← Ambiguous

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting

Bad email

To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test ← Still ambiguous

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting

Bad email

To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting

Better. We still
don't know
which muffler.

Bad email

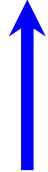
To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting



No capitalization, no punctuation.

Bad email

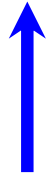
To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting



No capitalization, no punctuation.

Message:

I'm so lazy that holding the shift key and typing a period are too much effort.

Bad email

To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting



No capitalization, no punctuation.

Message:

I'm so lazy that holding the shift key and typing a period are too much effort.

Or, you are unimportant.

Bad email

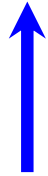
To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting



No capitalization, no punctuation.

Message:

I'm so lazy that holding the shift key and typing a period are too much effort.

Or, you are unimportant. Or both.

Bad email

To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting

Which report?

Bad email

To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting

Which report?

It's possible that Joe and Jill share responsibility for only one report. It's also quite likely that Jill is responsible for more than one report. Joe is assuming that Jill can sort this out.

Bad email

To: Jill
From: Joe
Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting

Which report?

It's possible that Joe and Jill share responsibility for only one report. It's also quite likely that Jill is responsible for more than one report. Joe is assuming that Jill can sort this out.

Joe is putting the responsibility for understanding the message onto the receiver. He is assuming that the context for this message is well understood.

Bad email

To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting

What does the due date mean?

Bad email

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From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

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What does the due date mean?

Is Joe expressing concern that he is not finished?

Is Joe reminding Jill of her responsibility?

Is Joe asking for help on a joint responsibility?

Is this a complaint about an unwanted assignment?

Once again, Joe is making huge assumptions that the context is mutually known and understood.

Bad email

To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

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This statement is too ambiguous.

Bad email

To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

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This statement is too ambiguous.

What is "it"? The report? The due date? Your responsibility? My responsibility?

Bad email

To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting

This statement is too ambiguous.

What is "it"? The report? The due date? Your responsibility? My responsibility?

When is the meeting?

How does the timing of the meeting relate to the due date for the report?

Bad email

To: Jill

From: Joe

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

the report is due tomorrow

we'll discuss it at the meeting

This statement is too ambiguous.

What is “it”? The report? The due date? Your responsibility? My responsibility?

When is the meeting?

How does the timing of the meeting relate to the due date for the report?

Is this message a threat?

Is Joe saying “Don't worry, I'll take care of it”?

Better email

To: Jill Smith

From: Joe Jones

Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler

The report on acoustic measurements for the muffler upgrade on the new LNG fork lift is due tomorrow. I'm nearly finished. I just need to correct a microphone calibration plot in the appendix. I'll be done by 3:00 PM this afternoon.

I'll be able to answer any questions you have at our 4:00 PM meeting today.

FYI, the current draft of the report is attached.

Joe Jones

Test Engineering

x-4364

Bad email

To: Professor Smith

From: Joe

Re: Hey!

im confused about problem 8

can u give me a hint

Better email

To: Professor Smith

From: Joe Jones

Re: ME 120, Problem Set 2, Problem 8

I've been working on problem 8 for about an hour, and I'm confused about whether we can treat the air as incompressible.

If I assume the air is incompressible, the work input to the compressor is 50 kW, which seems low. If I assume the air is compressible, I don't think I can use of the formulas in Chapter 3 unless I also assume the compression is adiabatic. Can I assume the compression as adiabatic?

I can come to your office hours tomorrow. If you get this email before then, and have time to give me a hint, I might be able to work the rest of the solution on my own.

Joe Jones, joe_jones@gmail.com

ME 120, Tuesday section

Even better email

To: Professor Smith

From: Joe Jones

Re: ME 120, Problem Set 2, Problem 8

I've been working on problem 8 for about an hour, and I'm confused about whether we can treat the air as incompressible.

If I assume the air is incompressible, the work input to the compressor is 50 kW, which seems low. If I assume the air is compressible, I don't think I can use of the formulas in Chapter 3 unless I also assume the compression is adiabatic. Can I assume the compression as adiabatic?

I can come to your office hours tomorrow. If you get this email before then, and have time to give me a hint, I might be able to work the rest of the solution on my own.

Thanks,

Joe Jones, joe_jones@gmail.com

ME 120, Tuesday section

Email Guidelines

Basic principles

- Be direct and brief: One main point per email.
- Provide context for decisions.
- Write in complete sentences with proper punctuation.
- Use short paragraphs.
- Avoid jokes or emotional content.

Email Guidelines

Make these assumptions

- The recipient is busy.
- The recipient does not have time to read long, rambling messages.
- The recipient is not focused only on solving your problems.
- The recipient prefers questions that have short, direct answers. Questions with yes/no answers are best.
- Your jokes are probably not very funny. Those jokes are even less funny via email.

Web references

Web sites with useful email advice

- <http://webfoot.com/advice/email.top.php>
- <http://www.businessemail etiquette.com/>
- <http://www.netmanners.com/email-etiquette/>
- <http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/EmailCommunication.htm>

General Advice

Would you feel comfortable seeing this message printed in the daily newspaper, or read aloud by a television news reporter?

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Would you feel comfortable seeing this message printed in the daily newspaper, or read aloud by a television news reporter?

- Emotions are normal. Acting out of emotion often leads to trouble.
- Separate feelings from strategy and tactics.
- Venting emotion may feel OK in the moment, but will it help me obtain my goal.

If in doubt, wait.

If your email has a lot of strong feelings attached to it, let it sit.

- Compose the email with an empty “To” field
- Take a walk
- Better yet, let it sit overnight.
- Remember to ask:

Will sending this email help
me achieve my goal?