

Email That Works

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Email that is effective is often hard to come by. If you are using email more and more to communicate with volunteers or staff, here are some tips to help.

Reread

Typos, misdirected fingers, and left out words can create confusion for the reader. Take the time to reread what you wrote.

Emotions and Feelings

Neither of these are well-communicated in the flat dimension of an email. If discussion of a topic turns particularly passionate, it is best to wait a while before firing back what could be interpreted as a "flame". Flames are email messages that clearly attack someone or something. Focus on the topic, not the person writing the message.

Retain part of the original message

By deleting the previous message when responding, the reader may not remember all the specifics of the original email or not have even seen the original before if this was a forwarded message. Be sure to include a portion of the previous message or some reference information as a point of reference. You should edit the original message into a length and format more in keeping with your list's standard practice. Abbreviate the original message to provide the reader with context while avoiding an overly lengthy email.

Be clear in your subject line

An empty subject line means the reader could think they are getting spam. A subject line such as "A question" or something else as unspecific is also not helpful to the recipient. Make the line clear and short. Change the subject line if the topic changes from the original email.

Skip the cutesy formatting

Avoid color, italics, and other fancy features. Those background shots of your dog should be left out, as well. They all take time to load on the readers screen and many times are incompatible with another email program and the reader gets garbage. Keep it simple.

Keep your communication professional

Skip the crazy names or funny addresses. There are lots of free email services that you can set up an email account that is professional and strictly for your volunteer activities. This is business and it needs to be fun, but email is to save time, not use it. Also, some backgrounds can take up a lot of unnecessary disk space.

Do not send personal communications to the entire list

If you respond to someone in a more personal manner, do not send your email to the entire list. Send it only to the person to whom you are directing your personal comments or questions.

Text has been modified from the original version.