

Business Emails Tips and Useful Phrases

Cross off any tips below which are usually bad ideas.

Starting business emails

Opening greeting

1. *You should usually write "Dear Mr/ Ms + full name" if you know the person's name.*
2. *An informal, friendly email should have no greeting or just a name.*
3. *Use "Dear" plus a description of their position if you don't know their name ("Dear CEO", "Dear teacher" etc).*
4. *Use "Dear" plus a description of who it is for when emailing a group of people, e.g. when sending an internal memo.*
5. *You can use "To + name" as a more informal version of "Dear + name".*
6. *You can use a comma after both the opening and closing greeting, or modern style is to use no commas. Don't mix the two styles up.*

Opening line

7. *If there has been some kind of recent previous contact, it's a good idea to mention it in the first line of your email."*
8. *If there hasn't been any recent previous contact, you can mention that.*
9. *If there hasn't been any recent previous contact, you should normally start by saying your reason for writing.*
10. *If you write to someone for the first time, it's good to tell them how you know about them.*
11. *You can start most business emails with "How are you?" to sound friendly.*
12. *Start most business emails by giving your name.*

The main body of business emails

Paragraphing/ Organisation

13. *Opening and closing lines can be single sentences and are rarely more than two sentences, but you should avoid one-sentence paragraphs in the body of the email.*
14. *Except for opening and closing lines, paragraphing in emails is the same as paragraphing in essays and reports.*
15. *A new paragraph means a new topic.*
16. *Either leave a blank line between paragraphs or put an indent at the beginning of the new paragraph (= a space about this long - " "), but not both.*
17. *Start each sentence on a new line.*

Purpose/ Function/ Action needed

18. *Use "Please+ verb", "Would you...?", "I'd like you to...", "I'm afraid I have to ask you to..." and "I need you to..." for requests, and end with "Thank you for your cooperation".*
19. *It's better to give a specific time or date that action is needed by plus a reason why than to say something like "as soon as possible".*
20. *Give very specific reasons with lots of explanation for saying no to anything (e.g. rejecting a request or suggested arrangement).*
21. *Give very specific reasons with lots of explanation with apologies.*

Punctuation

22. You can highlight important information with brackets (), exclamation marks (!), multiple exclamation marks (!!!), or CAPITAL LETTERS.
23. The dots after “Mr.”, “Ms.”, “Mrs.” and “Dr.” aren’t needed in British English.

Ending business emails

Closing line

24. Use “Thank you for your cooperation” to end most business emails.
25. Finish with “I expect your quick reply” and “I’m waiting for your reply” when you need a quick answer.
26. It’s good to mention the next (email, telephone or face to face) contact between you in your final line.
27. Use a phrase starting with “If...” such as “If you have any questions...” if there might be a reply but you don’t necessarily need one.

Closing greeting and name

28. Use “Best regards” to finish all your business emails.
29. In formal emails, it’s useful to give your title (Mr, Ms, etc) in brackets after your name.
30. It’s alright to just use your automatic email signature, even in friendly emails.

Formality

31. Common business abbreviations like “asap”, “Thurs”, “Jan”, “btw”, “at the mo”, “BR”, “FYI”, “CU on Monday”, “I’m CCing...”, “Thx”, “TBA”, “TBC”, “Re”, “info” and “&” are also suitable for formal business emails like job applications and formal complaints.
32. Latin abbreviations like “e.g.”, “i.e.”, “NB”, “a.m.”, “p.m.”, “PS” and “etc.” can be used in all kinds of emails.

Are there any cultural differences above (i.e. things which would be different in emails written in your own language)?

Brainstorm suitable phrases to do the good things or ways of doing something better than the bad things that are in italics above.

Check with the answer key.

Find formal and informal phrases in the answer key.

What other differences and general differences are there between formal and informal emails?

Suggested answers

Starting business emails

Opening greeting

1. You should usually write “Dear Mr/ Ms + full name” if you know the person’s name. – It’s generally better to use “Dear Mr/ Ms + family name” or “Dear + first name”, but “Dear + full name” is possible if you can’t guess the gender or which part is the family name.
2. An informal, friendly email should have no greeting or just a name. – Not true. That would be a very short and business-like email, for example the third email on one topic in one day. A friendly one would usually start with “Hi + first name”, “Hi” and “Hello again”.
3. Use “Dear” plus a description of their position if you don’t know their name (“Dear CEO”, “Dear teacher” etc). – This is wrong. Dear is almost always used with actual names. If you don’t know the name, use “Dear Sir or Madam” or “Dear Sir/ Madam”.
4. Use “Dear” plus a description of who it is for when emailing a group of people, e.g. when sending an internal memo. – This is wrong. Dear is only used with names and in the expression “Dear all”. You can also use “Hi everyone”, or “To:” with a description of who it is going to (“To: All sales staff” etc)
5. You can use “To + name” as a more informal version of “Dear + name”. – “To + name” is never used in emails, only cards such as Xmas cards and birthday cards. “Hi + name” can be used instead of “Dear + name”.
6. You can use a comma after both the opening and closing greeting, or modern style is to use no commas. Don’t mix the two styles up. – True

Opening line

7. If there has been some kind of recent previous contact, it’s a good idea to mention it in the first line of your email. – True: “Thank you for your email about.../ enquiry about.../ order of.../ for meeting me.../ for your phone call.../ for the information about.../ inviting me...”, “In reply to your email,...”, “As requested, here is...”
8. If there hasn’t been any recent previous contact, you can mention that. – True: “Long time no see”, “It seems ages since...”, “Sorry it has taken me so long to write back”, “Sorry for my late reply”.
9. If there hasn’t been any recent previous contact, you should normally start by saying your reason for writing. – True: “I am writing to you about/ concerning/ with regards to/ in connection with/ regarding.../ to.../ because...”, “I am writing to enquire about/ inform you of/ confirm/ ask/ check/ reserve/ book/ suggest/ arrange...”, “Just a quick note to say...”, “Just a few comments about...”
10. If you write to someone for the first time, it’s good to tell them how you know about them. – True: “I saw your advertisement in...” “I was given your contact details by...” “... said that I should write to you about...”
11. You can start most business emails with “How are you?” to sound friendly. – This is not suitable either for people who don’t know well (“I hope you are well” or something more business-like is more suitable) or people you know well such as colleagues and long-term clients (“How’s it going?”, “How are things?”, “How’s life?”, or even better more specific ones like “Hope you had a good weekend”, “I heard there were floods round there. Hope you are okay”, “How was your holiday in Hawaii?”)

12. Start most business emails by giving your name. – Not a good idea, as it's obvious from elsewhere in the email and it's better to mention why you are contacting them first.

The main body of business emails

Paragraphing/ Organisation

13. Opening and closing lines can be single sentences and are rarely more than two sentences, but you should avoid one-sentence paragraphs in the body of the email. – True.
14. Except for opening and closing lines, paragraphing in emails is the same as paragraphing in essays and reports. – True.
15. A new paragraph means a new topic. – True.
16. Either leave a blank line between paragraphs or put an indent at the beginning of the new paragraph (= a space about this long - " "), but not both. – True.
17. Start each sentence on a new line. – Don't do this. It's not a poem or a song, and it makes the paragraphing confusing. It could also be mistaken for a list (with perhaps formatting like bullet points or numbers lost due to technical reasons).

Purpose/ Function/ Action needed

18. Use "Please+ verb", "Would you...?", "I'd like you to...", "I'm afraid I have to ask you to..." and "I need you to..." for requests, and end with "Thank you for your cooperation". – These are only used for commands/ orders/ instructions and are only usually used in internal memos. Requests are "Can you/ Could you/ Could you possibly/ Would you mind/ Would it be possible for you to/ We would really appreciate it if you could/ We would be grateful if you could...?", ending with "Thank you (in advance)", "Cheers", "Any assistance you can provide would be gratefully accepted." or "I would really appreciate any help you can give." or you can often just use "I look forward to hearing from you (soon)"
19. It's better to give a specific time or date that action is needed by plus a reason why than to say something like "as soon as possible". – True: "Can you get back to me by Friday because..."
20. Give very specific reasons with lots of explanation for saying no to anything (e.g. rejecting a request or suggested arrangement). – True in British and American culture, e.g. "I'm afraid I have to... at exactly that time because... but..."
21. Give very specific reasons with lots of explanation with apologies. – True in British and American culture, e.g. "This was because of/ due to...", "The reason for this was..."

Punctuation

22. You can highlight important information with brackets (), exclamation marks (!), multiple exclamation marks (!!!), or CAPITAL LETTERS. – In English brackets means unimportant information and capital letters are like shouting and therefore rude. Exclamation marks and multiple exclamation marks are useful for adding humour, but not to emphasise your points. For important information write "N.B.", "Please note that...", "I would like to draw your attention to..." and/ or use **bold**, a **different colour** or underlining.
23. The dots after "Mr.", "Ms.", "Mrs." and "Dr." aren't needed in British English. – True.

Ending business emails

Closing line

24. Use *“Thank you for your cooperation”* to end most business emails. – This only ends an email giving rules and instructions such as an internal memo from the HR department about pay claims and is therefore rare. *“Thank you (in advance)”* and *“Cheers”* are similar but for requests, there are the more elaborate versions *“Any assistance you can provide would be gratefully accepted.”* and *“I would really appreciate any help you can give.”*, or you can often just use the old standard *“I look forward to hearing from you (soon)”*
25. Finish with *“I expect your quick reply”* and *“I’m waiting for your reply”* when you need a quick answer. – This is very rude and is only used with angry complaints, maybe after having received inadequate responses so far. It’s generally best to put such instructions into the body of the email, e.g. *“Could you possibly... by Friday as...?”*
26. It’s good to mention the next (email, telephone or face to face) contact between you in your final line. – *“I look forward to/ (I’m) looking forward to hearing from you (soon).”*, *“Please let me know if that’s okay.”*, *“(I’ll) speak to you when I get back.”*, *“I look forward to seeing you again (soon).”*, *“(I) hope to see you again soon.”*, *“See you then.”*, *“I’ll mail you again as soon as I know”*, *“I’ll check and get back to you”*
27. Use a phrase starting with *“If...”* such as *“If you have any questions...”* if there might be a reply but you don’t necessarily need one. – True: *“If you need any further information/ If you have any more questions/ If you need any more info, please let me know/ do not hesitate to contact me/ drop me a line”*.

Closing greeting and name

28. Use *“Best regards”* to finish all your business emails. – It’s better to use variety, thinking carefully about friendliness and formality, e.g. *“Best wishes”*, *“All the best”* and *“Best”* for informal emails and *“Your sincerely”*, *“Sincerely yours”* and maybe *“Yours faithfully”* for very formal emails, plus other similar options like *“Kind regards”* to add variety to informal emails.
29. In formal emails, it’s useful to give your title (Mr, Ms, etc) in brackets after your name. – True, in case they don’t know what your gender is from your name.
30. It’s alright to just use your automatic email signature, even in friendly emails. – It’s better to just cut it down to your first name or write just your first name first, because otherwise that person might think they have to continue using *“Mr/ Ms + family name when writing to you”*.

Formality

31. Common business abbreviations like *“asap”*, *“Thurs”*, *“Jan”*, *“btw”*, *“at the mo”*, *“BR”*, *“FYI”*, *“CU on Monday”*, *“I’m CCing...”*, *“Thx”*, *“TBA”*, *“TBC”*, *“Re”*, *“info”* and *“&”* are also suitable for formal business emails like job applications and formal complaints. – It’s generally better to use the full forms: *“as soon as possible”*, *“Thursday”*, *“January”*, *“by the way”*, *“at the moment”*, *“Best regards”*, *“For your information”*, *“See you on Monday/ I look forward to seeing you on Monday”*, *“I have copied... in.”*, *“Thanks/ Thank you/ I am grateful for.../ I appreciate...”*, *“to be arranged”*, *“to be confirmed”*, *“regarding/ with regards to/ concerning”*, *“information”*, and *“and”*.
32. Latin abbreviations like *“e.g.”*, *“i.e.”*, *“NB”*, *“a.m.”*, *“p.m.”*, *“PS”* and *“etc.”* can be used in

all kinds of emails. – True