

How to write emails

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I. Formal versus informal style

When writing an email, you should consider whether **the addressee** is

- a person whom you know but with whom you are not on first-name terms or a person you do not know personally,

or

- a person you work with, your friend/family member, i.e. someone whom you know very well and with whom you are on first-name terms.

Your relationship with the addressee is decisive for the **appropriate choice of style**: formal or informal.

Below are examples of the two styles. Read them carefully and then comment on the differences in the choice of words, phrases and sentence structures.

Examples of professional emails:

Dear Mr Smith,

I would like to inform you that the Department of, University of West Bohemia, is doing an interesting project concerning We are able to cover all the theoretical aspects, but are looking for someone with a business background. I would appreciate it if we could meet and discuss your potential participation in the project either at our University or at your company. As I am quite flexible, I can probably accommodate to the time and place you propose. It would be a great pleasure to meet you in person.

The attachment contains details of the project.

I look forward to your answer.

Best regards,

Jan Novak, Ph.D.

Head of the Department of

University of West Bohemia

Dear Dr Novak,

Thank you for your email of April 20 informing me about the project. I would be pleased to join your team and hope that I will be able to provide the expertise you need. Would a meeting at 9.30 on May 5 at your Department suit you?

I have read the attachment very carefully and find the project quite interesting. I do, however, need a more detailed explanation of some of the points.

I look forward to your confirmation of the date and place.

Kind regards,

John Smith
Business Director
Škoda Transportation Pilsen

Examples of informal emails:

Hi John,

How are you doing? Haven't seen you for ages.

Just dropping you a line to say that we have a great project on under way. We need somebody who knows the ropes in business matters. Want to join us? Can we make a date to talk it over? Come up with a day and place – I'm quite flexible.

Take a look at the attachment for details. Please get back to me asap.

Best,
Jan

Hi Jan,

I'm fine thanks. How's it going?

Got your email yesterday. Thanks for the info. Sounds great. Hope my business know-how will be of help to you. What about a get-together this Friday? Is 7.30 p.m. at the Slovan OK with you? Let's plan on talking at least an hour, as you'll have to fill me in on some of the details.

Can't wait to see you again after such a long time.

Regards,
John

II. Professional emails

Email template

1. Subject line
2. Greetings/Salutations
3. Structure and parts of the body
4. Attachments
5. Closing remarks
6. Closings
7. Sender's name and position

1. Subject line

Be specific about the **subject** of the email. For example, the word "Information" without any specification is not enough. Some people use the term Re: before the subject. As this means "regarding", which is the same as "subject", it is not necessary.

2. Greetings/Salutations

should be followed by a **comma**.

Personal greetings (when you know the name of the addressee):

Dear Mr/Ms/Dr White,

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. White,

Impersonal greetings (when you do not know the name of the addressee):

Sir/Madam/To Whom It May Concern,

Notes:

- **Americans** usually put a **full stop/period after titles**; the British do not.
- **Americans** sometimes use a **colon (:)** after a very formal greeting.
- **Do not use the first name alone** in formal email greetings unless you know the recipient by first name.
- **Do not use the first name with the last name.**
Wrong: Dear John Smith, Right: Dear Mr Smith,
- If you do not know if the person is a woman or man, you can say: **(Dear) Sir or Madam.**
Another possibility is to write it with a slash: **Dear Sir/Madam.**
- **To Whom It May Concern** is very impersonal; usually used only when the message is addressed to a company or department generally (e.g. giving information, asking for information). This should not be used if you know the name of a specific person to whom you can address the email.
- As a **general rule, use a comma** after the greeting in a professional email. However, be aware that some people do not put a comma there.
- The term **Ms** is used for both married and unmarried women in today's business/professional world. If you are addressing a woman who you know to be married and quite conservative, you can use Mrs. If you do not know anything about them, use Ms. It is common in the Czech Republic to address any older woman as "paní " (Mrs), but this is not suitable in English if the woman is not married.

- **Important:** Unlike in Czech letters/emails, in English **the first word of the sentence after the greeting is capitalized**, like any other sentence. Begin the first sentence below the greeting, leaving an extra space or not.

Example:

Dear Dr. Akim,

Thank you very much

3. Structure and parts of the body

3.1. Paragraph structure

Division of the email into three paragraphs is common. This corresponds with the parts described below, and makes reading it easier.

These days, many people do not bother about paragraph structure, but if you want your email to look professional and serious, you should choose one of the two conventional English paragraph structures:

- **block paragraphs:** no indentation; one extra space between paragraphs,
- **indented paragraphs:** short indentation at the beginning of each paragraph; no space between paragraphs.

Block paragraphs are the most commonly used for business letters and emails.

Note:

It is true that these days many emails are written without indentations or any space between paragraphs. However, this does not look so good.

Advice:

Use spaces between block paragraphs in all important emails.

3.2. Parts of the body

The following is one useful way of describing the parts of a typical professional email. This would generally be used also for other rather formal emails.

3.2.1. Thanking the recipient

Thank the recipient (the person to whom the email is addressed) if this is appropriate. It is usually appropriate if there has been a previous email and/or something was requested.

Example:

Thank you for responding to my email.

3.2.2. Stating the purpose of the email

State the purpose of the email. If there is no "thanks", begin the email with this part.

Here you tell the purpose of your email or give your response to an email you have received.

If there has been previous communication or information previously given/received, you should refer to this.

Examples:

I am writing to enquire about /inform you of /confirm our /clarify (what was said).

3.2.3. Mentioning any further action or follow-up

Mention any further action, follow-up or next step if there is something that must be done.

Examples:

Please let me know as soon as possible if you will be able to attend.

Please reply as soon as possible.

Note:

Do not use imperatives without “please.”

4. Attachments

The reference to the attachment can be anywhere appropriate in the body of the email or used as a closing remark.

Example:

Attached you will find.... (e.g. the conference schedule)

5. Closing remarks (sometimes used as the closing)

This is usually one sentence which relates to the email interaction or the professional interaction involved.

Many times, this is another “thank you” referring to what has already been done or what is to be done.

Example:

Thank you for your cooperation (in this matter).

(if you have asked them to do something for you)

6. Closings

Formal closings are usually followed by a comma; it looks more “professional”.

<i>Best regards</i>	
<i>Kind regards</i>	
<i>With regards</i>	
<i>Regards</i>	(also right for more formal emails)
<i>Best wishes</i>	(not so common)
<i>Thanks/Thank you/Many thanks</i>	(used as a closing)
<i>Cordially</i>	(very formal; not so common)
<i>Sincerely</i>	(more American, but the British also use it)
<i>Sincerely yours</i>	(more American; very formal)
<i>Most sincerely</i>	(more American; very formal)
<i>Yours truly</i>	(American; not common for emails)
<i>Respectfully</i>	(not so common)

The most formal British closings – *Yours sincerely* & *Yours faithfully* – are almost never used for emails. They are mainly used for formal hard-copy letters.

7. Sender's name and position

One's position and/or employer is placed under the name. Other contact information can be placed there as well (tel. number, fax number, website, etc.); the email address need not be given again, but often is. (Of course, a templated email form can include all this automatically for every email.)

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Notes:

- While it is conventional to list all one's titles both before and after one's name in some European countries, it is not done in British or American communication contexts. **Both the British and Americans use only their highest degree.** In formal letters, the British use all their post-nominal degrees/titles only when their academic and professional distinctions are directly relevant to the content of the letter.
- The British do **not usually use a comma** between the name and the post-nominal degree/title.

Example:

John Smith PhD

- If you correspond with British or American contacts, or send information to these countries, **use only**, for example, **one title before the name, or the highest degree after the name** unless you are acting in a capacity in which the expertise represented by your degrees is relevant.
- **Keep the Czech form** of your title or degree (e.g. Ing., Mgr., RNDr., Doc., Ph.D.) as this is the title/degree you were awarded. Do not use a British or American equivalent. However, all titles must be capitalized in English, otherwise it looks like a mistake.

III. Informal emails

The template is similar to that of **professional emails**. There are, however, some differences.

1. Style

Typical features:

use of **contracted forms**,

leaving out the subject: "*Hope to see you soon*",

colloquial and idiomatic phrases.

2. Structure of the body

Very often all the information is presented in one or two paragraphs.

3. Greetings/Salutations

In greetings, **first names** are used, either followed by a comma/dash or not.

Hi John
Hello John
Dear John,
John –

A relatively informal way to **address a group of people** is:

Hi all (Hi All) or Hi everyone.

This would not be used for a rather formal email, e.g. announcing a conference. It could be used when addressing colleagues “in-house” or, perhaps, committee members who know each other well.

These days, if the email is not very formal and you do not know the name of the person, you can simply say:

Hello/Greetings

4. For Attachments see **Useful phrases: Informal emails.**

5. For Closing remarks see **Useful phrases: Informal emails.**

6. Closings

Some of these closings (except the last four on the right) are used even for somewhat formal, but friendly emails. If you are not sure, use the formal closings given previously. Of course, you can personalize closings for people you know well. Some people do not bother with a comma, but other people say there should always be a comma.

<i>Thanks/Many thanks!</i>	
<i>Best</i>	
<i>All the best</i>	
<i>Regards</i>	
<i>Cheers</i>	
<i>Have a good day/afternoon/weekend</i>	
<i>Have a nice day/afternoon/weekend</i>	
<i>Take care</i>	(very friendly)
<i>Bye</i>	(very informal)
<i>See you soon</i>	(very informal)
<i>See ya</i>	(super-informal)

Note:

Do not say “*Have a nice time*” as a closing. This phrase is used at the end of face-to-face meetings/conversations/phone calls, but only if you know the person is going to go to some event (e.g. concert, party) or engage in an activity (e.g. holiday, special visit, conference) that they should enjoy, and this has been mentioned or discussed during the conversation.

“*Have a nice time*” really means: “*Have a nice time at the party.*” It would not be used at the end of an email by itself, but could be used in longer closings like the following.

Examples:

*Have a nice time at the conference.
Have a great time at the party this weekend!*

IV. Review of differences between British and American usage

British usage	American usage
<i>Mr, Ms, Mrs</i>	<i>Mr., Ms., Mrs.</i>
<i>Dr Smith</i>	<i>Dr. Smith</i>
<i>Professor Newman</i>	<i>Prof. Newman</i>
<i>John White PhD</i>	<i>John White, Ph.D.</i>
<i>Dear Mr Graver,</i>	<i>Dear Mr. Graver:/,</i>
<i>Dear Sir,</i>	<i>Dear Sir:</i>

V. A few useful hints

- **Do not fill in the addressee until the email has been written and checked.** This prevents accidental sending of an email before it has been perfected.
- **Do not use emoticons (e.g. smiley faces)** in emails except with friends or colleagues you know well.
- If you want to use a **dash (–)** in your text, but your email system does not make a proper dash (which should be two shorter hyphens merged together automatically), use a hyphen but be sure to leave a space both before and after the hyphen.

Example:

Please respond immediately - it is very important.

- Be careful about **the use of “until.”** Many emails and other professional communications involve deadlines. Translating from Czech, many Czechs use **“until”** instead of **“by”** when referring to deadlines.

Wrong: *We must finish the report **until** Friday.*

Right: *We must finish the report **by** Friday.*

Also possible:

*We must finish the report **before** Friday.*

Although both “by” and “before” really mean the same thing, using “by” generally includes Friday, whereas using “before” does not include Friday.

The only time you can use “until” in such a context is the following:

We have until Friday to finish the report.

They do not expect the report until Friday.

So: *Please submit your application **by** Friday, May 23.*

*Please make sure your application is in our office **by** Friday, May 23.*

VI. Useful phrases

Below you will find lists of phrases that you might find helpful when writing an email.

Professional emails

Thanking the recipient

Thank you for responding to my email.

Thank you for your prompt reply.

Thank you for contacting us.

Thank you for providing the requested information/answering my questions about

Thank you for your assistance.

Thank you for raising your concern about

Thank you for your interest in our project.

Stating the purpose of the email

I am writing to enquire about /inform you of /confirm our /clarify (what was said).

I would like to enquire about

I am writing to ask if

I am writing in reference to (the question of/the matter of/the issue of/the schedule of)

I'm writing to let you know about

I would like to inform you about

I would like to ask you if

Mentioning any further action or follow-up

Please let me know as soon as possible if you will be able to attend.

Please send me the report by the 1st of October/by 1st October/by October 1.

Please inform all your colleagues about the symposium.

Please reply as soon as possible.

Please get back to me as soon as possible. (slightly more informal)

Attachments

Attached you will find (e.g. the conference schedule)

I am attaching the conference schedule.

I'm sending the conference schedule as an attachment.

Please find the conference schedule in the attachment.

You will find the conference schedule attached.

I've attached the conference schedule for you to look at.

Closing remarks

Thank you for your cooperation (in this matter).

(if you have asked them to do something for you or with you)

Thank you for your patience (in this matter).

(if there was some difficulty or delay involved in the matter)

Thank you for your consideration.

(if you have asked them to consider you for something, give you a benefit or opportunity, or choose you for something)

Thank you for your (kind) cooperation.

(can mean thanks in advance for the cooperation you are requesting them to give)

you)

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

(you will appreciate further assistance/action)

Thank you for your understanding (in this matter).

(if your request may be an inconvenience or have any negative impact)

Thanks in advance for your help/your attention to this matter.

Thank you for your time and effort on my behalf/in this matter.

You can thank the person again for what you already thanked them for at the beginning of the email, but usually using different wording. Very often this is thanks for past actions/cooperation.

Thank you again for everything you've done for us.

You can add **another closing remark after the "thanks"**.

Common ones are:

If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to let me know.

If you have any further questions, don't hesitate to contact/call/email me (again).

If you need any more information, please let me know.

If you have any (other) questions, please feel free to contact me (any time).

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

I am looking forward to seeing you soon.

I look forward to your response/reply.

I'll be very glad to forward more information if you feel it would be helpful.

Please reply as soon as possible.

Notes:

- If you are **speaking for your department**, you can use **"we"/"us"** instead of **"I"/"me"**.

Example:

Do not hesitate to contact us if you require/need (any) further information/assistance.

- It is now considered **OK** to use **contractions** in all but the most formal emails.

- **"asap"** is sometimes used even in more formal emails these days, but we **recommend not using it**.

Informal emails

Thanking the recipient

Thanks (a lot) for getting back to me so soon.

Thanks for getting back to me.

Thanks for taking care of the matter we talked about last month.

Many thanks for the prompt reply to my email.

Thanks again for all your help.

Thanks again for getting onto this so quickly.

Thanks so much for helping me out with this.

Thanks for being so helpful/so understanding

Thanks a lot for looking into this matter for me.

Stating the purpose of the email

*The reason I'm writing is to ask youto let you knowto find out (if)
I just want to let you know about the upcoming meeting/conference/etc.
(Just) a quick note to remind you abouttell you aboutsee if you can*

Mentioning any further action or follow-up

*Don't forget to give me a call as soon as you get the info.
Please get back to me asap.
Please let the other guys know about the meeting.
Let me know asap what's up with the conference plans.*

Attachments

*Please have a look at the attachment.
Take a look at the attachment for details.
There are more details in the attachment./More details in the attachment.
More info in the attachment.
Check out the attachment for more details.*

Closing remarks

*I hope to hear from you soon.
Hoping/Hope to hear from you soon. (even more informal)
Looking forward to hearing from you soon.
If you need any more information/info (about this), just drop me a line/just let me know.
If I can give you any more information, please get back to me.
Please let me/us know if you need any more info.
Let me/us know when you'll be able to
I'll get back to you asap.*

Other **common informal closing remarks** which can be used as the closing or with another closing:

*Hope you have a successful conference!
Hope you have a good time in Bratislava.
Enjoy your holiday!
Say "hello" to your husband/wife for me.*