




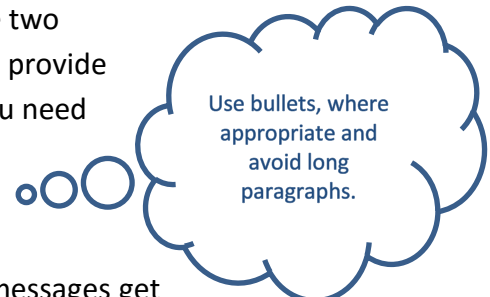
Email Tips: Mastering & Mistressing the Art of Virtual Communications

Email is the life and breath of virtual teams and checking and responding to emails in a timely way should be a high priority. In virtual teams we need to “over-communicate” in order to keep things moving forward. Here are some tips to help hone your email skills and to build a great culture of communication in your team or organization.

- **Read your emails.** This may sound redundant, but stay current with the items that land in your inbox.
- **Write emails thoughtfully.** This means you need to read the email that came to you in its entirety and make sure you address all issues in your response. Also remember that firing off a rapid succession of emails to a colleague when an idea pops into your head is not only disturbing to them, but it makes it hard to track any important or useful points you are trying to make. And don't forget to review your email before you send it to make sure there are no glaring factual errors or typos.
- **Respond quickly when necessary.** Also acknowledge and close the loop. If an email comes in that covers timely requests or urgent requests, send a quick acknowledgment email and let the recipient know you are working on it. Otherwise, they may be left wondering whether you even received the email in the first place. If you get a request from a team member or staff member, and you might not be able to deal with for a few days, pop a quick note to say “Hello, thanks I received this and will get back to you by Wednesday.” And then be sure not to lose this promise.
- **Email subject lines should always be specific and match the content of the message.** If you have an email thread that starts out as being about honorarium but changes to a request for time off, change the subject line. If you are going to add something to the existing subject line, for example “Monica’s response,” put it at the end so that the thread remains intact. If something is important or time sensitive, communicate this with the following, in all caps, at the beginning of the subject line: TIME SENSITIVE. IMPORTANT. PLEASE READ. RESPONSE



NEEDED. etc.... Use these sparingly and only as needed so that they remain as special requests and not the norm.

- **Context, context, context!** When writing emails to teams or anyone, don't forget to include the context for what you're saying. Pretend that team members won't remember what you are talking about. For example, don't just say "The meeting is cancelled." Say, "We had a team meeting planned for tomorrow at 2pm, and we need to cancel it due to xyz."
- **Be specific about what you are expecting** from the person you are writing, i.e. what is your "ask"? In addition to context, we need to be very clear with people about what we are asking for. For example: "Peter, I am sending you this draft agenda for our meeting tomorrow, no need to respond, I just want you to know what I am hoping that we will be able to discuss." Or: "Peter, I am sending you this agenda so that you'll be able to prepare for our meeting and I'd like for you to let me know what else needs to be added."
- **The fluffy stuff!** Warm hellos, how are you, hope you are well, and sign offs are important. In virtual communication this is the way we have "water cooler chat" and build relationships. Getting to the point is important, but so is making sure that we embed some human-ness into our emails. And maybe even a fun image!
- **Re-read your email for tone.** Is my intended tone coming across? Is there a way to smooth it out and make it clearer? Another great tip is to be intentionally positive – being overly friendly is better than coming across as flat or sarcastic. And on the other end, try to give the benefit of the doubt when reading other people's emails, if you feel that the tone is not great, re-read it and try to see if there may be another way it could have been meant. And, remember that negative, snarky, or pointed emails will always backfire (read this great piece about how to be the Ellen of email!). If you are feeling emotional about your response, take a few hours to integrate your emotions- better yet to sleep on it! If the email content is potentially explosive, volatile and the like, it is recommended that you reach out to a co-worker to read your email before sending.
- **If you've been asked two questions,** be sure you provide two answers. If you need more time for one of the questions, provide the answer to one and let them know how much time you need for answer two.
- **Format your email.** This is often overlooked which is very unfortunate because formatting makes your email easier to read and understand... and easy to read email messages get

replied to more quickly. So, use paragraphs and bullets extensively. Try not to write long paragraphs, especially in emails to teams.

- **Use cc and bcc in appropriate ways and be careful of reply-all.** If someone is cc'ed, it means that you want them to know about it, but don't require a response, and you also want the others in the email thread to see that you're keeping someone in the loop and you want the other recipients to know that you've looped them in. BCC is used when you want to keep someone in the loop, but either you don't want the primary recipient to know you've done this or it's not necessary for them to know. Use BCC sparingly. If it is extremely confidential and you want to make sure that the other PAN staff understands your reasoning, send them a separate note, i.e. "You'll see that I bcc'ed you on a note to the funder, I wanted you to be in the loop but want you to note this so that you do not reply."
- **Boost efficiency by using EOM and NNTR.** EOM stands for "end of message." People who exchange a great deal of e-mail sometimes write a very short message in the subject line of an e-mail note and conclude it with: (EOM). This saves the recipient having to actually open the message and [increases efficiency!](#) You can also end a note (that's in the regular body of an email) with NNTR – "No need to respond" – when you are just sending it for their information and don't require or expect a response.
- **Copy people only when necessary.** We have all received emails that we are copied on only to leave us with the feeling of "why did I get this?" We have also seen emails sent in anger or defiance that CC in appropriate people when an issue could and should be dealt without engaging any others. So only CC the recipients that need to be involved in the conversation. Always resist CC'ing others because you wanted to make a person look bad, but this can harm your credibility more than the other person's.
- **Remember attachments and make them orderly.** For team, staff, or group meetings, be sure to include all attachments needed for the meeting in the same email as the agenda. For example, if you are going to be reviewing a proposed terms of reference during the call, even if the team has been emailed it previously, include it with the agenda and other meeting documents for ease of access. People can't focus on the call or prepare if they are searching through their inbox for a separate email. If there are more than one or two attachments, it's good to include a numbered or bulleted list of these.
- **Turn off email alerts** (that little box that pops up every time you get a message!). Unless your job is to respond to emails all day, there is no reason for you to have your alerts turned on. Focus on what you are doing and schedule your email response windows into your day. This will ensure you can give your full attention to the task at hand, and it also means that you won't be distracted while in meetings or on a phone call.



● **Learn to prioritize your emails.** Not every email is urgent. If you had to step out to a meeting in 10 minutes and you only have time to respond to two emails, which two would you choose? Respond to the others in your scheduled email times. We are so used to instant gratification whether it's through social media communications or fast food that we often forget that not everything needs to be done ten minutes ago.

● **The telephone is a wonderful tool.** Sometimes, in the world of email, we forget that talking over the phone can sometimes be more effective and efficient than sending several emails! Talking to people is also a great way to build relationships. Finally, if you are confused by the tone or message in an email or if the lines of communication feel like they are getting tangled – set up a time to chat or pick up the phone. Never underestimate the power of real-time dialogue. Also, if you feel the need to write a lengthy email to go over all issues and cover all bases, then chances are you would do better with a face-to-face meeting or phone call.



● **Leave your phone in your pocket.** If you are at an event, meeting, or some other work related, leave technology out of it and be fully present with others in the room. As communications shift increasingly to the digital side, and workplaces become more remote, cherish the time you have with people face-to-face. Your email messages will still be there at the end of the event and you can respond without being rude to those in your company.



● **A picture is worth a thousand words!** Add some fun to your emails! Sometimes what words can't do, a picture can! A few favorites from our archive:

