

Business emails tips and useful phrases

Cross off any tips below which are usually bad ideas in English emails.

Email opening greetings tips and useful phrases

1. You should usually write “Dear Mr/ Ms + full name” if you know the person’s name but you’ve had no contact before.
2. An informal, friendly email should have no greeting or just a name.
3. An informal, friendly email should start with “Hi”, maybe with their name.
4. Use “Dear” plus a description of someone’s position if you don’t know their name (“Dear CEO”, “Dear teacher” etc).
5. Use “Dear Sir or Madam” or “Dear Sir/ Madam” when you don’t know someone’s name.
6. Use “Dear Sir or Madam” for very formal emails, even if you know someone’s name.
7. Use “Dear Madam” when you know you’re emailing a woman but don’t know her name.
8. You can start emails to groups of people with “To: All...”, “Dear all”, “Hi everyone” or “Hi guys”, depending on the level of formality.
9. You can use “To” instead of “Dear” with people’s names (“To John” etc)
10. You can use a comma after both the opening greeting and closing greeting.
11. You can use no comma after both the opening greeting and closing greeting.

Email opening lines tips and useful phrases

12. You should usually open an email with your own name (“This is Alex”, “My name is Alex Case and I...”, etc).
13. If possible, it’s best to start an email with mention of your previous contact (“Thank you for your letter last week”, “Thanks for meeting me yesterday”, “Thanks for speaking to me on Skype at such short notice on Friday”, “Long time no see!”, “It was so nice to see you again on Tuesday”, etc).
14. With people you know, it’s often nice to start with a friendly, social opening line such as a small talk question (“How’s it going?”, “Hope you are well”, etc).
15. The best friendly “How...?” question is “How are you?”
16. It’s best to be as casual and/ or specific as possible in any social opening line (“How was your trip to Canada?”, “How’s it going?”, “How was the big presentation?”, etc)
17. Especially if there hasn’t been recent previous contact, it is common to start emails with the topic (“I’m writing to you about/ in connection with/ with regards to/ regarding/ because/ to/ in order to...”)
18. Opening lines are usually just one or two sentences, then you should start the body of the email with a new paragraph.

The body of emails tips and useful phrases

19. You should avoid one-sentence paragraphs in the body of the email.
20. A new paragraph means a new topic.
21. It is modern style to leave a blank line between paragraphs.
22. In traditional-style emails and letters, you put an indent at the beginning of new paragraphs (= a few spaces before you start the first word of the new paragraph).
23. It is best to put both an indent and a blank line between paragraphs.
24. Start each sentence of the paragraph on a new line (like a poem or song lyrics).
25. It’s common to refer to information elsewhere in the email (“Please see... below”, “Please find... attached”, etc).
26. Use “Please+ verb”, “Would you...?” or “I’d like you to...” for requests/ asking for help.

27. Use “Can...?”, “Could... (possibly)...?”, “I would be grateful if you could...”, etc for requests/ asking for help.
28. It’s more polite to use vague hurrying up phrases like “ASAP or “as soon as you can” than to write specific deadlines like “by (close of business on) Friday because...”
29. You can highlight important information with brackets (), triangular brackets (<>), exclamation marks (!), multiple exclamation marks (!!!), or CAPITAL LETTERS.
30. You should highlight important information with expressions like “Please note that...” and “NB...”

Formality in emails tips and useful phrases

31. Abbreviations like “asap”, “at the mo”, “CU on Monday”, “info”, “btw”, “Thx”, “BR”, “BW” and “ATB”, are so common in business that they can be used in any kind of email nowadays, including formal requests and 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, including formal ones.

Ending business emails tips and useful phrases

Email closing lines tips and useful phrases

33. Use “Thank you for your cooperation” to end most business emails.
34. Use “Thank you for your cooperation” for requests such as asking them to send you a document.
35. Only use “Thank you for cooperation” for commands/ instructions, usually only group emails on what everyone has to do.
36. Use “Thanks” to thank people (again) for their help.
37. It’s good to mention the next contact between you in your final line (“I’m looking forward to hearing from you”, “Looking forward to seeing you soon”, “See you then”, etc)
38. Finish with “I expect your quick reply” and “I’m waiting for your reply” when you need a quick answer.
39. Use a phrase starting with “If...” if there might be a reply but you don’t necessarily need one (“If you need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me”, “If you have any more questions, please contact me”, “If you need any more info, just let me know”, etc)

Email closing greetings tips and useful phrases

40. Use “Thanks and regards” to finish most of your business emails.
41. End more informal business emails with friendlier closing greetings like “All the best” and “Best wishes”
42. It’s alright to use only your automatic email signature to end an email without writing a different closing greeting and your name first.

Putting your name at the end of emails tips and useful phrases

43. In most business emails, we sign off with just our family name (“Tanaka” etc)
44. In formal emails, it’s useful to give your title (Mr, Ms, etc) in brackets after your name.

Check as a class or with the answer key below. If the tips are bad, make sure you know what you should do instead.

Suggested answers

with the bad tips underlined

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

First of all without looking above, brainstorm suitable phrases into the gaps below.

Starting emails

Email opening greetings

Email opening lines

Phrases for the body of emails (requests, giving deadlines, highlighting important information, abbreviations, etc)

Ending emails

Email closing lines

Email closing greetings

Your name at the end of emails

Check above, making sure you haven't written the bad things, brainstorm more, then compare your extra phrases as a class or with the big list from page 368.

Emailing line by line brainstorming

Work in groups of two or three. Look at the email below that your teacher tells you to (perhaps a different one from other groups), but cover all but the description of the email at the top, using a book or a piece of paper to hide the rest of the page (or changing the rest of the text to white if it's on a computer). Brainstorm possible opening greetings for that kind of email, and choose the best. Move your paper down so that you can see the hint, and brainstorm again if you had the wrong idea of what is coming next. Check the opening greeting in the next box and compare it to what you brainstormed. Brainstorm what you think is coming next, only looking at the hint and then the phrase(s) after you brainstorm. Continue line by line down the whole email, only revealing after you have guessed what is coming next each time. Then do the same for another email.

Ask about any phrases which you don't understand, phrases which you are not sure how to use, different phrases which you brainstormed, etc.

Choose a kind of email and take turns brainstorming its content line by line, making sure that your line follows the previous line that your partner said in terms of formality, logic, situation, etc. Start with suggestions from here, then do the same with your ideas, e.g. English emails that you really have to send.

Emails in these brainstorming texts

- Job application cover letter (no previous contact between you)
- A hotel replying to a complaint from someone who was a guest
- Request to a colleague who you know well
- Changing a meeting with a foreign colleague

Variations on those emails

- Job application cover letter (after previous contact between you)
- A hotel replying to a complaint from someone who tried to book on their website
- Request to a colleague who you don't know well
- Fixing a meeting with a foreign customer

Other kinds of emails

- Asking for advice/ feedback/ recommendations – Giving advice/ feedback
- Asking for contact details/ Asking to put in contact with someone
- Asking for information/ Enquiries – Answering questions/ Giving information
- Asking for payment/ Demanding payment
- Asking for permission – Giving permission – Refusing permission
- Bookings/ Making reservations
- Checking/ Confirming/ Clarifying
- Discussing documents (attachments etc)/ Sending documents/ Sending links
- Giving bad news – Giving good news
- Giving directions (on how to get somewhere, e.g. reaching your office)
- Negotiating
- Ordering products
- Progress checks/ Chasing something up
- Requesting – Making offers (offering help etc) – Responding to requests