

Sample Email Improvement Memo

To: <YOUR AUDIENCE>
From: <INSERT YOUR NAME>
Subject: New Rules For Email Efficiency

Efficient and Simple emails. They may sound like mythical creatures but they do exist. I'd describe the studies that have been done on lost time and efficiency issues from ineffective emails and large message volume in an organization - but then I'd be inefficient myself. We all know that our electronic communications take up too much of our day.

I've decided to make my inbox more efficient and recover valuable time for better use in our business. To help us all achieve this goal, I'm asking that we begin to follow the seven simple rules listed below (in no particular order).

Rule 1 **To CC or not CC**

When composing or responding to an email, only the people who need to act or who originally asked for the information should be included in the To: category. Managers and people who might be interested in the topic but who do not need to act should be in the cc: category. "To: = Do; cc = See See"

As an example, if you are responding to my request for information, put my name in the To: category. If you are acting on a request from me to send information to someone else, don't copy me at all - I'll assume you did it (See Rule 3).

If you feel I should be copied on an email but I do not need to act or respond, put me in the cc: category. Be prepared that I will only read these cc: messages when I have free time and that might be a matter of days.

Rule 2 **Reply Slowly**

Well, not slowly, but with thoughtfulness. Don't just hit "Reply All" because it's the quickest way to make sure you don't miss anyone. Reply to the sender alone or to those in the To: category. Even if someone else started the chain and listed dozens of recipients, take a minute to delete anyone who doesn't need to watch a back and forth exchange between two people. That's called tennis.

Rule 3 **Message Received**

A common email time waster is the back and forth of simple one liners. While we don't want to lose our humanity and the politeness of communications, please say "Thanks" only when necessary and only to the person you need to say it to (not a cc: to 15

people). When receiving an email request from me, a reply saying you will “get on it” is not needed. A note of reply when it’s done is more effective. Saying “Done” and not “Doing” or “Will Do” is the best rule for replies.

Rule 4

Define URGENT...

We all might define “urgent” differently but in an email for me, ‘urgent” should pertain to a need for action by me in the next few hours. If it is truly urgent, put the word URGENT in capital letters in the Subject (Rule 5) and flag the email as High Priority. Otherwise, don’t overuse the flag or the word.

Rule 5

Cryptic Subjects are for Sherlock Holmes

The subject line in an email is often poorly used. Take the time to add more detail to the subject. “Contract renewal” is too cryptic to be of any use and requires reading the message body to decide if action is needed. “Renewing the Johnson contract next week” is better.

Rule 6

Tell Me What to Do...

If an email is directed to more than one person then the writer needs to take more accountability to define the needs for the readers. Instead of expecting others to read all the text and then figure out what they need to do, you should outline briefly at the start of the message what is needed from the addressees and then continue with the body of the email.

A combination of good subject lines (Rule 5), identification of urgency (Rule 4) and a brief description of what is needed can shorten email reading time dramatically. For example, a subject such as “Project Cost Summary for London - No Action required” would allow a recipient to read it later without using precious workday time to review it.

Rule 7

One, Two, I Call You

When a subject requires back-and-forth answers over a short time period, telephoning and clearing up questions with a single call is often the best idea. If you exchange two messages in a short time and are about to send a third, pick up the phone and make a call. Save both parties some reading and typing time.

I plan to follow these rules with you and encourage everyone to ask (and receive) the same from their co-workers and staff.

Thanks