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WRITING *e*-Mails

*T*he use of e-mail or electronic mail is steadily increasing. E-mails is cheaper and faster than a letter, less interfering than a phone call and easier to send than a fax. While using e-mail, differences in location and time zone do not remain an obstacle. For example if you send an e-mail from India to a firm in America, they will get it immediately.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- understand how to adjust your style for e-mails; and

- write an e-mail.

28.1 WHAT MAKES E- MAIL DIFFERENT

Electronic communication is fundamentally different from paper based communication because of its speed and broadcasting ability.

On paper, it is essential to make everything clear because your audience may not have a chance to ask for clarification. With e-mail, the receiver can ask questions immediately. E-mail thus tends to be loosely structured, like conversation. This has its advantages-you save time and effort. Why should you spend hours on correct spellings, perfect grammar and appropriate words when the message is only to tell your colleague that you are ready to go to lunch. Of course, you must know when you can be careless and when you have to be meticulous.

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Another difference between e-mail and older media is that what the sender sees when composing a message might not look like what the reader sees. With e-mail, the software and hard ware that you use for composing, sending, storing, down-loading, and reading may be completely different from what your correspondent uses. The visual quality of your message may be quite different by the time it gets to someone else's screen. Since these differences exist, it is necessary for you to tailor your message to this new medium.

28.2 HOW TO WRITE AN E-MAIL

In this section you will learn some of the major features of communicating through e-mail.

Ways Of Establishing Context

With e-mail, you cannot assume anything about a sender's location, time, state of mind, and profession, interest or future value to you. This means that you need to be very careful about giving your receiver some context. Further more, your receiver may get a few hundred messages all at once. This section will give specific ways for establishing context so that your message becomes meaningful and receives attention.

(a) Useful Subject Lines

A subject line that relates clearly to the body of the e-mails will help people mentally shift to the proper context before they read your message. The subject line should be brief, and needs to be a complete sentence. It should give a clue to the contents of the message. For example:

> **SUBJECT: BOOK ORDER – TEACHER TRAINING**
>
> Dear Mr. Mishra,
>
> Please send one copy of the following CUP titles by 26th March latest.

Here the subject line summarizes the most important details of the message.

If your message is in response to another piece of e-mail, preface the subject line with Re: or RE: (for Regarding).

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> Subject: RE: Book order-Teacher Training

When you know the person gets a lot of mail and you want him/her to act on your message without delay:

> Subject: URGENT: Book Order- Teacher Training

If you are offering non-urgent information that requires no response from the other person, prefacing the subject line with FY I: (For your information) is not a bad idea, as in

> Subject: FYI: Passes for The Wild Duck
>
> 21 passes for the 18th 3 p.m. show are at the Reception Desk, First come, First served!

Do not use 'information' for your subject line. Instead ask clearly for the specific piece of information you need.

(b) Quoting references

If you are referring to previous e-mail, you should explicitly quote that document to provide context. Instead of sending e-mail that says:

> "Are passes for 18th, 3 p.m. show gone?"

You can make your e-mail specific by beginning with the subject line. In the subject line if you are referring to the show on the 18th you can say',

> "Re: Show on 18th

and . Your e-mail can read:

> "Are passes for 18th, 3 p.m. show gone?"

Referring to previous document becomes necessary because you may have sent the message on Friday and might not remember it on Monday morning when you see the response. But you must also avoid giving too much context. Look at the two examples given below and decide which is better and why?

A:
> >I've talked to Rakesh about
> > price quoted by BPL. He thinks
> >its too high. Neha promised
> > to contact HL and LG> Any news?
> > What do I do now?

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B:
> Rakesh has Bp: quotation. Compare
> it with those of HL and LG available
> with Neha.
> Respond with the line of action.

The second (B) is better because it is shorter and is action oriented. It tells the receiver precisely what he should do-

(i) compare prices form different sources

(ii) decide and convey subsequent action.

You must remember that the greater than sing (>) appears only when you are forwarding a mail or replying to a mail without going through the process of composing a reply afresh. This sign (>) appears only at the recipient's end.

(c) Page Layout

Words on a computer screen look different from the words on paper and usually people find it difficult to read things on a screen than on paper. For instance, you may have put some of your information in boxes but your recipient's computer may not receive it in that form. This means that good e-mail page layout is different from good paper document page layout.

(d) Shorter Paragraphs

Frequently e-mail messages will be read in a document window with scroll bars. It is difficult to read a very long paragraph because half of it will be outside the screen. Therefore, it will be difficult to remember the information.

(e) Line Length

Most softwares that read mail do not automatically wrap i.e. adjust what words go on what line. This means that if there is a mismatch between your software's and your correspondent's in how they wrap lines, your correspondent may end up with a message that does not look good; especially in formal business communications.

If a line is longer than 76 characters (Anything typed including a space is a character), it is split after the 75th character and the line ends with an equal sign. Some e-mail reading software can automatically reconstruct your message but others may completely change the alignment. You should try to keep your lines under seventy characters long. Why seventy and not, say seventy six? Because you should leave a little room for the indentation or quote marks your correspondents may want if they need to quote pieces of your message in their replies.

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(f) Clear and precise prose

Keep everything short. Keep your lines short, keep your paragraphs short and keep the message short. If your correspondents want more information, they can ask for it. Also note that some of your correspondents may have limits on how much disc space their e-mail can use.

If you are sending a report to many people then you may need to put more details into the e-mail so that you aren't flooded with questions from everyone on the recipients list. You should ask yourself carefully, if all the people really need to be on the list.

The fewer the people there are on the recipient list, the shorter the message should be. Keep everything on one "page". In most cases this means twenty five lines of text.

People usually use short forms when sending e-mails. Here are a few of them.

E-mails acronyms and abbreviations			
BBL	- be back later	IMO	- in my opinion
BFN	- bye for now	IOW	- in other words
BRB	- be right back	LOL	- laughing out loud
BTW	- by the way	NBD	- no big deal
FYI	- for your information	RPFL	- rolling on floor laughing
<g>	- grin	TIA	- thanks in advance
<G>	- big grin	TIC	- tongue in cheek
HSIK	- how should I know?	TTFN	- ta ta for now
IAE	- in any event	TTYL	- talk to you later
		WYSIWYG-	what you see is what you get.

(g) Greetings and Signature

Every new medium develops its own rules for opening and closing. Because e-mail is so new, there aren't firm customs on how to open and close.

Most often start with 'Dear-(First name) and close with 'Regards' or 'Thanks' and your signature. In the USA, they often begin with 'Hi' Many people do not give either a salutation or a signature because the addressing information is a part

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of an e-mail message. The e-mail message itself says who it is to and from.

All the same, it is good to have greetings and signatures. Many e-mail programmes allow you to set up a default signature to be included at the end of every message. Many people use these signatures as an easy way to give their name and alternate ways of reaching them.

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for example:

Antony John Kunnan,

Assoc. Prof, TESOL Program,

King Hall C 2098, CSULA,

5151 State University Drive,

Los Angeles, CA 900;32-8143, USA.

+1 (323) 343 4344 voice

+1(323) 343 5336 Fax

http:// www. calstatela.edu/dept/tesil/kunnan.htm

Of course, you have to decide whether all this information is necessary with a particular message. Such a heavy signature may be inappropriate for a one-line casual e-mail.

(h) Identification

It is important to identity yourself especially when you are e-mailing a stranger. Your e-mail must answer the questions that will come to the receiver's mind.

They are:

- How did she/he find out about me?

- What does she/he want from me?

- Who is he/she?

- Why should I pay any attention to him/her?

It is best to put all identification information at the top instead of the bottom because:

- Your identity is an important clue to the context of the message.

- If there is a problem with the transmission of the mail, the end is much likely to get lost than the beginning

- If you don't establish quickly who you are, your correspondent may delete your message before he gets to the bottom.

WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

In this unit you have learnt how e-mail is different from older media, To write a good e-mail:

- Provide your audience with adequate context:
  - Use meaningful subject lines.
  - Quote the e-mail to which you are responding
- In doings you use page layout:
  - Short paragraphs
  - Lines under 75 characters long
  - Messages under 25 lines long
  - Plain prose.
- In the body of the e-mail pay attention to:
  - Greetings and signature.
  - Identifying yourself at the beginning

OVERALL QUESTIONS

I. Say whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F) Correct the false statements.

(i) E-mail is no different from older forms of communication.

_____

(ii) With e-mail, the receiver can ask for and get clarifications.

_____

(iii) We must always spend time and effort in correcting the language and style of our e-mail.

_____

(iv) The e-mail always looks well composed and well formatted when it is received.

_____

(v) Since many messages come all at once we must use ways to make our message stand out and be read

_____

(vi) Reference to previous letter/mail is carried below the subject line.

_____

(vii) Mark all mail "URGENT", its the surest way of having your message read.

_____

2. write e-mail message for each of the following situations.

   (a) You receive the following message on 21/04/2001

   Dear Harish,

   Last night the new central cooling system installed by Aqua Cool exploded. Our complete spring stock has been destroyed. Damage-minimum Rs. 4 lakhs.

   Advise line of action.

   Manish.

   (b) Write to Raj Travels, asking them to cancel your air tickets to **Bangalore and** hotel accomodation they had booked for you. You will inform about changed date in near future.

CHECK YOUR ANSWERS

Overall Questions

1. (i) F. It is different because of its speed and broad casting ability.

   (ii) T.

   (iii) F. This depends on the situation-who the e-mail is for and for what purpose.

(iv) F. How well formatted an e-mail is depends upon the recipient's' hardware and software.

(v) F.

(vi) F. Reference precedes the subject line.

(vii) F. Urgent should be used only when immediate action is required.

2. Your e-mail can be along the following lines:

   (a) Contact Aqua cool and ascertain cause of explosion-any casualties/contact insurance- use stand by system for time being.

   (b) Cancel reservations will inform about new dates, regret inconvenience caused