Guides to Professional English

Email and Commercial Correspondence

A Guide to Professional English

Adrian Wallwork

Springer

Guides to Professional English

Series Editor:
Adrian Wallwork
Pisa, Italy

For further volumes:
http://www.springer.com/series/13345

Adrian Wallwork

Email and Commercial Correspondence

A Guide to Professional English

Springer

Adrian Wallwork
Pisa
Italy

ISBN 978-1-4939-0634-5 ISBN 978-1-4939-0635-2 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4939-0635-2
Springer New York Heidelberg Dordrecht London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014939610

© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2014
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed. Exempted from this legal reservation are brief excerpts in connection with reviews or scholarly analysis or material supplied specifically for the purpose of being entered and executed on a computer system, for exclusive use by the purchaser of the work. Duplication of this publication or parts thereof is permitted only under the provisions of the Copyright Law of the Publisher's location, in its current version, and permission for use must always be obtained from Springer. Permissions for use may be obtained through RightsLink at the Copyright Clearance Center. Violations are liable to prosecution under the respective Copyright Law.
The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.
While the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication, neither the authors nor the editors nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein.

Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

Introduction for the reader

Who is this book for?

If you write emails and letters as part of your work, then this book is for you - particularly if you are a non-native speaker of English. By applying the suggested guidelines, you will stand a much greater chance of getting the desired reply to your emails in the shortest time possible.

I hope that other trainers like myself in Business English will also find the book a source of useful ideas to pass on to students.

This book is NOT for academics. Instead, read chapters 1–6 of *English for Academic Correspondence and Socializing* (Springer Science), from which some of the subsections in this book are taken or adapted.

Is this a book of the rules of email or just a guide?

It is only a guide.

It is based on 20 years of my own personal emailing experiences plus courses that I have held over the last 10 years at IT companies and research centers. They are ideas that my clients have found useful and which have significantly improved their relationships with the recipients of their emails.

I suggest you try out the various strategies outlined in this book: if they work for you, great. If they don't, then try another strategy. There is no one way that is guaranteed to be 100% effective.

What will I learn from this book?

Some of the key guidelines that you will learn from this book are:

- Write meaningful subject lines - otherwise recipients may not even open your mail.
- Always put the most important point in the first line - otherwise the reader may not read it.
- Never translate typical phrases literally - learn equivalent phrases.

- Be concise and only mention what is truly relevant. Write the minimum amount possible - you will also make fewer mistakes!
- Be a little too formal than too informal - you don't want to offend anyone.
- If you have two long important things to say, say them in separate emails.
- Give clear instructions and reasonable deadlines.
- Put in bold the most important thing you want recipients to read - then at least if they read the bold part and nothing else, you will still obtain what you wanted.
- If you need people to cooperate with you, you have to think of the benefits for them of cooperating with you.
- Empathize with your recipient's busy workload.
- Always be polite - and remember if there is a minimal chance that your reader will misinterpret or be offended then you can be sure he / she will. Never adopt an angry or super-authoritative tone. Saying 'please' is not enough.

How is the book organized?

Chapters 1–4 tell you how to organize an effective email from the subject line, initial salutation, body of the text, and final salutation.

Chapters 5–7 suggest ways for making requests and chasing people who have failed to do what you requested, and Chapter 8 deals with commenting on other people's work.

Chapters 9–12 focus on stylistic elements of writing emails: punctuation, formality as well as using a soft indirect style.

Chapter 12 deals with attachments.

Chapter 13 outlines the main differences between an email and a business letter.

Chapter 14 suggests ways to organize your emails and letters, avoid ambiguity, and make fewer mistakes from an English language point of view.

Chapter 15 is for fun only and lists typical abbreviations, acronyms and smileys.

The final two chapters list useful phrases for all types of emails (Chapter 16) and commercial letters and emails (Chapter 17).

How should I use the table of contents?

The table of contents lists each subsection contained within a chapter. You can use the titles of these subsections not only to find what you want but also as a summary for each chapter.

Other books in this series

There are currently five other books in this *Guides to Professional English* series.

CVs, Resumes, and LinkedIn
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0646-8/

User Guides Manuals, and Technical Writing
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0640-6/

Meetings, Negotiations, and Socializing
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0631-4/

Presentations, Demos, and Training Sessions
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0643-7/

Telephone and Helpdesk Skills
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0637-6/

All the above books are intended for people working in industry rather than academia. The only exception is *CVs, Resumes, Cover Letters and LinkedIn*, which is aimed at both people in industry and academia.

There is also a parallel series of books covering similar skills for those in academia:

English for Presentations at International Conferences
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4419-6590-5/

English for Writing Research Papers
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4419-7921-6/

English for Academic Correspondence and Socializing
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4419-9400-4/

English for Research: Usage, Style, and Grammar
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4614-1592-3/

INTRODUCTION FOR THE TEACHER / TRAINER

Teaching Business English

I had two main targets when writing this book:

- non-native speakers (business, sales technical)
- Business English teachers and trainers

My teaching career initially started in general English but I soon moved into Business English, which I found was much more focused and where I could quickly see real results. The strategies I teach are almost totally language-independent, and many of my ‘students’ follow my guidelines when writing and presenting in their own language. I am sure you will have found the same in your lessons too.

Typically, my lessons cover how to:

1. write emails
2. make presentations and demos
3. participate in meetings
4. make phone calls
5. socialize

This book is a personal collection of ideas picked up since the advent of email. It is not intended as a course book, there are plenty of these already. It is more like a reference manual.

I also teach academics how to present their work. In fact, some of the chapters in this book are based on chapters from *English for Academic Correspondence and Socializing* (Springer).

How to teach email writing

I suggest you adopt the following strategy.

First, get your students to send you collections of around 10 emails that they typically write (and receive). Before they send them to you they should obviously delete any confidential information regarding their company. Make sure they also include subject lines.

Read through the collections of emails and convert them all into one Microsoft Word (or equivalent) document. Having the email examples in Word will enable you to revise them using Track Changes during class (i.e. with your laptop connected to a bigger screen so that students can see clearly).

In your first lesson on email, have a general discussion on:

- how they choose their email address and what effect they think this has on recipients (Chapter 1)
- how much time your students spend on writing and dealing with emails
- whether they write emails from scratch or use Google Translate
- how much effort they make to ensure their emails are well constructed and in perfect English; and compare this level of effort with the effort they make when writing in their own language
- how formal / informal (Chapter 11) their email correspondence is and how it differs from a business letter (Chapter 13)
- what they think are the qualities of a good email
- what useful phrases (Chapters 16 and 17) they know, and whether they have made their own personal collections of such phrases

In the next lesson, focus on subject lines (read Chapter 2 in this book while preparing for your lesson). Collect 10-20 subject lines, then in the lesson get students to decide which ones are effective and why. They can then improve the ones that they think are less effective.

Then move on to salutations (Chapters 3 and 4), using the same strategy as with subject lines.

Now you will need to turn to the main body of the email. Most emails consist of either making requests (Chapter 5) or replying to them (Chapter 6).

When your students have mastered the basics of email writing (Chapters 1–6, 10–13), with more advanced students you can then deal with difficult emails: chasing people (Chapter 7) and criticizing (Chapters 8 and 9).

To discuss how to organize an email, use Chapter 14, which also covers avoiding ambiguity and English language mistakes.

You can have some fun by showing them how English can be used in weird and wonderful ways - see Chapter 15 (on text messaging style and smileys).

When you are preparing each lesson, make sure you find examples from your students' own emails, i.e. the ones that you collected in the first stage of preparing your email course. You can also create a variety of exercises using their emails, for example on grammar, useful phrases, and level of formality.

Finally, get involved with the company / companies where you teach. You will find your work much more satisfying!

Contents

1 EMAIL ADDRESSES 1
  - 1.1 Choose a suitable email address 1
  - 1.2 Check how your name will appear in your recipient's inbox... 2
  - 1.3 Avoid a spam-friendly email address 2

2 SUBJECT LINES 3
  - 2.1 Compose the subject line from the recipient's perspective 3
  - 2.2 Combine your subject line with the preview pane 3
  - 2.3 Include name of a mutual third party in the subject line (and in cc) in a mail to a new contact 4
  - 2.4 Make it clear if your mail only requires very limited effort on the part of the recipient 4
  - 2.5 Be specific, never vague 4
  - 2.6 Consider using a two-part subject line 5
  - 2.7 Ensure that your subject line is not spam friendly 6

3 INITIAL SALUTATIONS 7
  - 3.1 Avoid gender titles (e.g. Mr, Mrs) in first email to new contact 7
  - 3.2 Spell the recipient's name correctly 8
  - 3.3 Use 'Dear + first name + second name' only in the first contact 9
  - 3.4 Be careful of punctuation 9
  - 3.5 Choose a specific job title when addressing an email to someone whose name you do not know 10

4 INTRODUCTIONS AND FINAL SALUTATIONS 11
  - 4.1 Explain where you got your contact's details from 11
  - 4.2 Introduce yourself to a new contact 12
  - 4.3 Give details about who you are and what you are requesting 13
  - 4.4 Introducing someone to a third party 14
  - 4.5 Reminding a contact who you are 14

4.6 Begin with a greeting + recipient's name 15
4.7 Indicate which of the multiple recipients actually needs to read the mail.. 16
4.8 If in doubt how to end your email, use Best regards 16
4.9 Don't use a sequence of standard phrases in your final salutation 17
4.10 Ensure your signature contains everything that your recipient may need to know 18
4.11 Avoid PSs and anything under your signature 18

5 **MAKING REQUESTS**.. 19
5.1 Decide whether it might be better just to make one request rather than several 19
5.2 Lay out your request clearly and give recipients all the information they need to carry out the request 19
5.3 Avoid blocks of text and don't force your reader to make sense of everything 20
5.4 Make all your requests 100 % clear....................................... 21
5.5 For multiple requests, include a mini summary at the end of the email... 23
5.6 Give deadlines 25
5.7 Motivate the recipient to reply by empathizing with their situation or by paying them a compliment 26

6 **REPLYING TO REQUESTS** 27
6.1 Apologizing for late reply 27
6.2 Consider inserting your answers within the body of the sender's email 28
6.3 Insert friendly comments within the body of the sender's text... 30
6.4 Saying 'thank you' 31

7 **CHASING AND BEING CHASED** 33
7.1 Be diplomatic when sending reminders 33
7.2 In your reminder, include your original email......................... 33
7.3 Explain the reason for your urgent need for a reply 34
7.4 Tell your recipient what the new deadline is.......................... 34
7.5 Motivate your recipient to reply 35
7.6 End the reminder with a further apology 35
7.7 Chasing a supplier 36
7.8 Replying to a reminder 37

8 **REVIEWING DOCUMENTS** 39
8.1 Give explicit instructions about how you want the recipient to review your work... 39

8.2 The advantages of using a 'soft' approach 41
8.3 Carefully construct and organize your comments on your colleague's work 43
8.4 Learn how to make positive comments 44
8.5 Be constructive in your criticism 45
8.6 Avoid being too direct when asking for clarification and making suggestions 48
8.7 Conclude by again saying something positive 49
8.8 Re-read everything before you hit the 'send' button 49
8.9 Responding to criticism 49

9 ENSURING BETTER COMMUNICATION BY USING A SOFT APPROACH 51
9.1 Think about how your email might be interpreted by the recipient 51
9.2 Use non-aggressive language 53
9.3 Avoid irritating the recipient with unnecessary remarks 54
9.4 Choose the most appropriate level of directness 55
9.5 Be friendly but not invasive 56
9.6 Add a friendly phrase at the end of an email 57
9.7 Avoid labeling your recipient as 'incompetent' 57

10 RECOGNIZING LEVEL OF FORMALITY 59
10.1 Formal: long and complex sentences 59
10.2 Formal: modal verbs 60
10.3 Formal: nouns 61
10.4 Formal: multi-syllable words 61
10.5 Omission of subject and other parts of speech 62
10.6 Abbreviations and acronyms 62
10.7 Smileys 62
10.8 Avoid excessively formal forms of English 63
10.9 Don't mix levels of formality 64
10.10 Avoid very colloquial English 65

11 PUNCTUATION AND CAPITALIZATION 67
11.1 No punctuation necessary after salutations 67
11.2 Hyphens 69
11.3 Exclamation marks and smileys 69
11.4 All caps 70

12 SENDING ATTACHMENTS 71
12.1 Consider not sending an attachment to someone with whom you have had no previous contact 71
12.2 Always tell your recipient when you have attached a document 71

12.3 Detail any changes with respect to a previous document 72
12.4 Instruct the recipient on what feedback you expect on the attachment 72
12.5 For non-work attachments, explain why the attachment will be of interest to the recipient 73

13 BUSINESS LETTERS 75
13.1 Note the differences between an email and a business letter 75
13.2 Templates 75
13.3 General rules on layout of letters 76
13.4 Addresses 77
13.5 References 77
13.6 Dates 78
13.7 Subject lines 79
13.8 Initial salutation and final salutation 79
13.9 Body of the letter 80

14 PLANNING AND STRUCTURING AN EMAIL OR LETTER, AVOIDING MISTAKES IN YOUR ENGLISH 83
14.1 Plan your email or letter and be sensitive to the recipient’s point of view 83
14.2 Organize the information in the most logical order and only include what is necessary 84
14.3 Bear in mind that long emails / letters will be scrolled 86
14.4 Use short sentences and choose the best grammatical subject 87
14.5 Choose the shortest phrase 90
14.6 Don’t experiment with your English, instead copy / adapt the English of the sender 91
14.7 When using pronouns ensure that it is 100 % clearto the recipient what noun the pronoun refers to 93
14.8 Avoid ambiguity 94
14.9 Ensure that recipients in different time zones will interpret dates and times correctly 94
14.10 Always check your spelling ‘manually’: don’t rely on automatic spell checkers 95

15 ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND SMILEYS 97
15.1 Numbers 97
15.2 Acronyms 99
15.3 How sounds of letters are used 104
15.4 Use of symbols 105
15.5 Contractions 106
15.6 Short forms 107

15.7 Abbreviations 108
15.8 Alternative spellings 109
15.9 Smileys 112

16 USEFUL PHRASES: GENERIC 117
16.1 Initial salutation 118
16.2 Introducing yourself to people who don't know you 119
16.3 Making an inquiry (first contact) 120
16.4 Responding to an inquiry 121
16.5 Making reference to previous correspondence 122
16.6 Making requests to people who already know you 123
16.7 Making announcements and giving instructions 124
16.8 Replies to requests from people who you know 125
16.9 Replying on behalf of someone else 126
16.10 Replying to someone who has just replied to you 127
16.11 Chasing 128
16.12 Responding to a chase 128
16.13 Reporting on progress and updating 129
16.14 Contact details 130
16.15 Invitations 131
16.16 Making arrangements 131
16.17 FIxing the time 132
16.18 Giving directions on how to reach your office 133
16.19 Favors / giving help 134
16.20 Thanking 134
16.21 Opinions 135
16.22 Asking for and giving clarifications 136
16.23 Apologizing 137
16.24 Sending documents for approval 139
16.25 Sending and receiving attachments, faxes, emails 140
16.26 Fax transmission and scans 141
16.27 Phone calls 141
16.28 Booking hotel rooms 142
16.29 Circular emails 142
16.30 Chit chat with colleague you know well 143
16.31 Sending regards and wishes 143
16.32 Final salutation 144

17 USEFUL PHRASES: COMMERCIAL 147
17.1 Making inquiries 147
17.2 Replying to inquiries 148
17.3 Making and canceling orders 150
17.4 Accepting an order, giving details 151
17.5 Contracts 152
17.6 Chasing orders 153

17.7 Replying to chase of order 153
17.8 Payment details 154
17.9 Chasing payment 155
17.10 Replying to a request for payment 156
17.11 Reporting problems with goods received 157
17.12 Replying to customer complaints 159

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 161

Index 163

1 EMAIL ADDRESSES

1.1 Choose a suitable email address

If you email someone for the first time (i.e. a new contact), he / she will open your email on the basis of:

1. your email address
2. how your name appears in their inbox
3. your subject line (see Chapter 2)

Your email address reflects your level of professionalism. Avoid any of the following types of address:

lordofdarkness@yahoo.com (name of favorite rock band, movie etc)

andrew1999@hotmail.com (first name + number / date of birth)

verwhite@gmail.com (merge of first name and second name, i.e. Veronica White)

Instead, clearly differentiate your first name from your last name. Here are my personal and work addresses:

adrian.wallwork@gmail.com

adrian.wallwork@e4ac.com

They look professional and no one is going to get a negative impression from them. Also they make it easy for recipients to find your address within their email system. On the other hand, if I wrote my address as follows (i.e. not given name + family name), it might be much more difficult for my recipient to locate me:

adrianwallwork@gmail.com

awallwork@gmail.com

wallworka@gmail.com

A. Wallwork, *Email and Commercial Correspondence,*
Guides to Professional English, DOI 10.1007/978-1-4939-0635-2_1,
© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2014