

Email and Commercial Correspondence

***Adrian
Wallwork***

*A Guide to
Professional
English*



Springer

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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

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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!

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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