Email Etiquette: A Quick Guide to Writing a Professional Email
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E-mail has generally been used as an informal means of communication. However, as it becomes increasingly popular in the job application process, students need to take time to think through the content of their e-mail and address the message that they might be sending to employers. An e-mail to an employer should never just say “see attached.” The receiver may not even open the attachment.

Although employers don’t always read an entire cover letter the first time, they do expect the writer to take time to include the necessary information in an appropriate way. The following rules should be used for e-mail when writing or responding to potential employers, co-workers, colleagues, business members, and college staff or personnel. You will be taken seriously, and will often be given more credibility.

Common mistakes are:
• Using emoticons ( :o),
• Being too informal,
• Misspellings and poor grammar,
• No capitalization, and spelling words the way they sound.

Because e-mail has become a mainstream form of communication, students may not easily switch from casual and conversational e-mail to professional e-mail. I cautioned a student about practicing the use of professional writing after reading an e-mail he sent - it was full of emoticons and phonetic spellings. He used “ur” for “you’re or your,” he used “i” for “I”, and also used many other common e-mail exchanges. We discussed how his habit could greatly affect his ability to get a job, and worked extensively on what he might write in an e-mail to an employer.

Rules of the Road

Professional e-mail is very different from casual e-mail or instant messenger. Remember: it’s easier to be ruled out than ruled in for a position. Here are some rules to consider when writing an e-mail in which you are job prospecting or applying for a job:

• Always introduce yourself the same way you would in a cover letter.
  Dear Mr./Ms. So and So,
  I am writing in regard to your posting on....for XYZ position in financial services.
• Treat your e-mail as if you were writing a professional cover or thank-you letter on paper, but be brief.
• In the subject line, make it obvious why you are writing: “Application for XYZ position.”
• Make sure you change the contact name and content according to the person/company to whom you are sending the message.
• If you are responding to an e-mail, include the original message in the reply, so the receiver can put your e-mail into the correct context. Also, respond within two business days.
• Always spell words correctly! Don't just use spell check. It won't catch words that are spelled correctly, but are misused within the context of the sentence.
• Never use all capital letters. Employers may think that you are screaming. It is also difficult to read.
• Think about the message your e-mail address sends. Keep your address simple, and avoid unprofessional sounding names like “studdmuffin” or “partygirl.”
• Read your message carefully before you click the send button. Tone of an e-mail can be misinterpreted.
• Have someone else proofread your message before you send it. It may be easier to find errors if you print and review your e-mail.
• Name your document “your name, resume.” Employers receive hundreds of resumes via e-mail. If you follow-up by asking recruiters if they received your e-mail, they won’t have to look through 300 attachments called “resume.”
• If you are attaching your resume, ask the receiver if they would prefer that you send it in a different format, ie: Word Perfect, rich text format, or as a PDF.
• Do not assume that if an employer is informal that you should be.
• Don't just rely on e-mail. E-mail can be lost. Follow-ups can often be done via the telephone or regular mail