ME 370: The Mechanical Engineering Profession

Lecture 02: Email for Professional Communication

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Purpose

Establish guidelines for email usage by engineering professionals.

Email for Work

Email is so common that we can forget that the rules are different in a business environment.

- Everything is saved.
- You cannot control where your email goes after you send it.
- Your email establishes your professional reputation.
 - ▶ Style
 - ▶ Substance

-	

Start with bad	
examples	
•	
Bad email	
lo: Jill	
From: Joe Re:	
the report is due tomorrow we'll discuss it at the meeting	
we ii discuss it at the meeting	
To: Jill	
From: Joe	
Re: No subject	
the report is due tomorrow	
we'll discuss it at the meeting	
Use a subject line that allows the	
recipient to sort and later find your message. Longer subject lines are better	
than terse, ambiguous subject lines.	

To:	Jill	Bad email	
From: Re:	=	— Ambiguous	
	Interim report	— Ambiguous	
	port is due tomorrow		
we'll d	iscuss it at the meeting		
		Bad email	
To:	Jill	Dad email	
From:		0.11	
Re:	Interim report on lab t	est ←Still ambiguous	
	port is due tomorrow		
we'll d	iscuss it at the meeting		
		D = J = = 11	
To:	Jill	Bad email	
From:	=		
Re:	Interim report on lab t	est for new muffler	
the re	port is due tomorrow		
we'll d	iscuss it at the meeting	Better. We still	
		don't know	
		which muffler.	

To: Jill	
From: Joe Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler	
the report is due tomorrow we'll discuss it at the meeting	
†	
	·
No capitalization, no punctuation.	
To: Jill	
From: Joe	
Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler	
the report is due tomorrow	
we'll discuss it at the meeting	
1	
NI	
No capitalization, no punctuation.	
Message: I'm so lazy that holding the shift key and	
typing a period are too much effort.	
,. c .	
Bad email	
io: Jili	
From: Joe Re: Interim report on lab test for new muffler	
the report is due tomorrow we'll discuss it at the meeting	
†	
No capitalization, no punctuation.	
Message:	
I'm so lazy that holding the shift key and	
typing a period are too much effort.	
You are unimportant.	

To: From:	Jill Joe	-	
Re:	Interim report on lab test for new	muffler -	
=	port is due tomorrow	-	
we'll d	iscuss it at the meeting	_	
No cap	pitalization, no punctuation.	_	
Messag		-	
	so lazy that holding the shift key and	d _	
	ng a period are too much effort. are unimportant.	-	
	ooth.	-	
	Bad email		
To:	Jill	<u>-</u>	
From: Re:	Joe Interim report on lab test for new	muffler -	
	p <mark>ort</mark> is due tomorrow		
	iscuss it at the meeting	-	
	/hich report?	-	
•	Then report.	-	
		=	
		=	
		-	
То:	Bad email		
From:	Joe	-	
Re:	Interim report on lab test for new	muffler -	
	port is due tomorrow	=	
we'll'd	iscuss it at the meeting	_	
V	/hich report?	-	
	It's possible that Joe and Jill share resport for only one report. It's also quite likely		
	is responsible for more than one report		
	assuming that Jill can sort this out.	-	

To:	Jill Bad email	
From: Re:	Joe Interim report on lab test for new muffler	
the re	port is due tomorrow	
we'lld	iscuss it at the meeting	
V	/hich report?	
	It's possible that Joe and Jill share responsibility for only one report. It's also quite likely that Jill is responsible for more than one report. Joe is assuming that Jill can sort this out.	
	Joe is putting the responsibility for understanding the message onto the receiver. He is assuming that the context for this message is well understood.	
To: From:	Jill	
Re:	Joe Interim report on lab test for new muffler	
	oort is due tomorrow iscuss it at the meeting	
	pes the due date mean?	
To: From:	Jill Joe	
Re:	Interim report on lab test for new muffler	
the re	port is <mark>due tomorrow</mark>	
we'll d	iscuss it at the meeting	
What do	pes the due date mean?	
ls Joe	e expressing concern that he is not finished? e reminding Jill of her responsibility?	
	e asking for help on a joint responsibility? s a complaint about an unwanted assignment?	

To: From: Re:	Jill Joe Interim report on lab test for new muffler	
-	port is <mark>due tomorrow</mark> iscuss it at the <mark>r</mark> meeting	
	pes the due date mean?	
	expressing concern that he is not finished?	
ls Joe i Is Joe a	reminding Jill of her responsibility? Isking for help on a joint responsibility? Isk complaint about an unwanted assignment?	
	assuming that the context is mutually understood, may (or may not) be a bad assumption.	
To:	Jill Bad email	
From: Re:	Joe Interim report on lab test for new muffler	
	port is due tomorrow iscuss it at the meeting	
	ement is ambiguous.	
To:	Jill Bad email	
From:	Joe	
Re:	Interim report on lab test for new muffler	
	oort is due tomorrow iscuss it at the meeting	
This stat	ement is ambiguous.	
	is "it"? The report? The due date? Your	
respo	nsibility? My responsibility?	

To:	Jill	
From:	Joe	
Re:	Interim report on lab test for new muffler	
the re	port is due tomorrow	
	iscuss it at the meeting	
This star	tement is ambiguous.	
	t is "it"? The report? The due date? Your	
	onsibility? My responsibility?	
Whe	n is the meeting?	
	does the timing of the meeting relate to the	
due c	late for the report?	
То:	lill Bad email	
From:	•	
Re:	Interim report on lab test for new muffler	
the re-		
	port is due tomorrow <mark>iscuss it at the meeting</mark>	
	tement is ambiguous.	
	t is "it"? The report? The due date? Your onsibility? My responsibility?	<u>-</u>
Whe	n is the meeting?	
	does the timing of the meeting relate to the late for the report?	
	•	
	s message a threat? Joe saying "Don't worry, I'll take care of it"?	
	, , ,	
То:	Jill Smith	
From:		
Re:	Interim report on lab test for new muffler	
	ort on acoustic measurements for the muffler upgrade on	
	LNG fork lift is due tomorrow. I'm nearly finished. I just correct a microphone calibration plot in the appendix. I'll	
	by 3:00 PM this afternoon.	
l'll be ab	le to answer any questions you have at our 4:00 PM	
meeting		
FYI, the	current draft of the report is attached.	
Joe Jone	S	
Test Eng		

Rad email

To:	Professor Smith	
From: Re:	Joe Hey!	
	•	
	fused about problem 8 give me a hint	
- Cu u a	5. · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	
_	Better email	
To: From:	Professor Smith Joe Jones	
Re:	ME 370, Problem Set 2, Problem 8	
	working on problem 8 for about an hour, and I'm confused	
	ether we can treat the air as incompressible.	
is 50 kW justify usi	e the air is incompressible, the work input to the compressor which seems low. If I assume the air is compressible, I can't ng any of the formulas in Chapter 3 unless I also assume the sion is adiabatic. Is it safe to treat the compression as adiabatic?	
I can con	ne to your office hours tomorrow. If you get this email before have time to give me a hint, I might be able to work the rest of	
	on on my own.	
	s@gmail.com	
ME 3/0,	uesday section	
То:	Professor Smith Even better email	
From:	Joe Jones	
Re:	ME 370, Problem Set 2, Problem 8	
about wh	working on problem 8 for about an hour, and I'm confused ether we can treat the air as incompressible.	
is 50 kW justify usi	e the air is incompressible, the work input to the compressor which seems low. If I assume the air is compressible, I can't ng any of the formulas in Chapter 3 unless I also assume the sion is adiabatic. Is it safe to treat the compression as adiabatic?	
then, and	ne to your office hours tomorrow. If you get this email before have time to give me a hint, I might be able to work the rest of ion on my own.	
Thanks,	, c	
Joe Jones		
	s@gmail.com uesday section	

	Some real (bad) examples	
To: From: Re:	Gerald Recktenwald Professor X Re: Do you have a need for DI water?	
Science I	Research & Teaching Center, Room 405	
Iisted als Th (SRTC-0 Here we Spring-20 contribu of very a	request the AAAA xxxx Spring-2012 course is cross- o with the MME department e course will be offered at the AAAA Blah Lab 00) or in research lab settings are the AAAA guys again organizing the AAAA- xxx 012. Last year Prof Y was one of the lecturers, ting to the success of the course. We also had a couple ctive students from your department who signed for the attach the organization of the course (subjected to last	
To: From: Re:	Gerald Recktenwald Student X Hi i would like to enroll for a class please	
me to ge company Medical, years no	w my name is xxxx yyyy i spoke with Molly and she told at into contact with you and send a email i work for a called ABC we deal with sheet metal fabrication. Dental, and military i have been with the business for 4 w my owner asked me if i could take a Solidworks class to business for my work so what i am asking is if you can	

me to get into contact with you and send a email i work for a company called ABC we deal with sheet metal fabrication. Medical, Dental, and military i have been with the business for 4 years now my owner asked me if i could take a Solidworks class to help the business for my work so what i am asking is if you can give me department permission to take ME-450 class. Molly had mentioned during this course solid works is trained but its an advance class if i got into contact with you maybe you could put me in so i could learn for my work or if you know something that might be better for me that would be good to if you could get back to me when you have a chance that would be great thanks again.

Email Guidelines

Basic principles

- Be direct and brief: One main point per email.
- Provide context for decisions.
- Write in complete sentences with proper spelling and punctuation.
- Don't use texting abbreviations.
- Do use short paragraphs.
- Avoid jokes or emotional content.

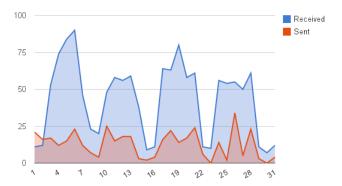
Email Guidelines

Make these assumptions

- The recipient is busy, and does not have time to read long, rambling messages.
- The recipient prefers questions that have short, direct answers. Questions with yes/no answers are best.
- The recipient's job is not to solve your problems.
- Your jokes are probably not very funny in person. Your jokes are even less funny via email.

Email traffic for GWR in March 2014

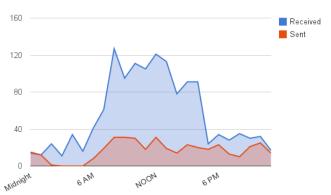
Daily pattern during the month



-		
•		
•		
-		

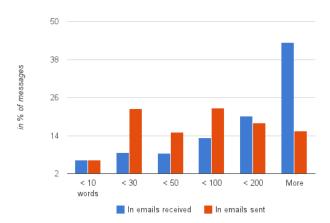
Email traffic for GWR in March 2014

Pattern during 24 hour period



Email traffic for GWR in March 2014

Word count



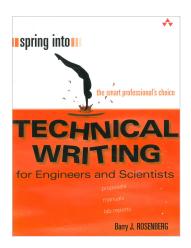
Web references

Web sites with useful email advice

- http://webfoot.com/advice/email.top.php
- http://www.businessemailetiquette.com/
- http://www.netmanners.com/email-etiquette/
- http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/ EmailCommunication.htm

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Email Guidelines



Barry Rosenberg, Spring into Technical Writing for Engineers and Scientists, 2005, Pearson Education

Rosenberg's Advice

Use the same discipline in writing email as you do when writing formal documents.

- Use complete sentences.
- Capitalize proper nouns and first words of sentences.
- Punctuate properly.
- Use correct grammar.

Informal is not always bad

To: Jill Jones From: Joe Smith

Re: Lunch at 11:45 today.

I'm heading to the sandwich cart in 30 minutes. Do you want to come along?

- Joe -

Rosenberg's Advice	
Re-read all messages before sending them. • Check for obvious typos and gaffes. • Avoid a quick, emotional reply.	
Ask yourself:	
Will the recipients understand this message?	
Rosenberg's Advice	
Would you feel comfortable saying the text in this e-mail message in a face-to-face meeting with the recipient?	
Rosenberg's Advice	
After the first miscommunication, stop sending email. Call or make a face-to-face visit.	
errain. Can or make a face to face visit.	

What is your goal?	
Can this email hurt your professional reputation? Is your email consistent with your goal?	
is your ciriain consistent with your goal.	
What is your goal?	
vviiat is your goal.	
Can this email hurt the reputation of your company?	
Is your email consistent with your goal?	
is your email consistent with your goal:	
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\ A / I	
What is your goal?	
Will this email be offensive or hurtful to the recipient? Is your email consistent with your goal?	

What is your goal?	
Is this email demeaning or offensive to the recipient or to other people who are not the intended recipient?	
Is your email consistent with your goal? How would this email sound if it was read aloud at a staff meeting? Note: the legal standard for sexual harassment is not your intent. The legal standard is whether the conduct is	
offensive to people who witness it. Of course, there is much more to it.	
General Advice	
Would you feel comfortable seeing this message printed in the daily newspaper, or read aloud by a television news reporter?	
General Advice	
Would you feel comfortable seeing this message printed in the daily newspaper, or read aloud by a television news reporter?	
 Emotions are normal. Acting from an emotionally agitated state often leads to trouble. 	
Separate your feelings from your strategy and tactics.Venting emotion may feel OK in the moment, but it is	
unlikely to help you obtain my goal. If you need to vent, do it in private (alone) or with a trusted friend.	

If in doubt, wait.

If you have a lot of strong feelings about the subject of the email, or the person you are sending it to, let it sit.

- Compose the email with an empty "To" field
- Take a walk
- Better yet, let it sit overnight.
- Remember to ask:

Will sending this email help me achieve my goal?