# Avoid These
# Email Mistakes

**MISTAKE NO. 1: EMAILING SOMETHING THAT'S BETTER EXPRESSED IN PERSON**

Before you start dashing off your missive, stop for a few seconds. Are you writing something emotional or complicated? Is this is a topic that is likely to get heated? Then an email message probably isn't the best way to communicate it, says writer William Schwalbe, coauthor of *Send: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better*. Since tone and inflection don't translate well through email, you could be setting yourself up for failure.

**MISTAKE NO. 2: USING A VAGUE OR USELESS SUBJECT LINE**

Don't give people a reason to delete or ignore your message. Use your subject line to capture attention and be clear about the email topic, Schawlbe says. Tell the user up front what your purpose is, and if you were referred by someone, name-drop in the subject line. And if the substance of the messages changes during some back-and-forth, change the subject line to reflect that, he says.

**MISTAKE NO. 3: COPYING TOO MANY PEOPLE AND HITTING REPLY ALL**

Schwalbe also says it's a good idea to establish some ground rules about who should respond to messages. Typically, a good rule of thumb is if you're in the "To" line, feel free to answer. If you're in the "CC" line, your response is not needed. And while you're at it, establish some ground rules for copying coworkers, since not everyone needs to be copied on every email. It just clogs up inboxes. That goes for replies, too—don't use the Reply All button unless it's truly necessary, and feel free to write, "No reply necessary," if you're sending a message that doesn't require one.

**MISTAKE NO. 4: NOT USING A SALUTATION**

If you're the type to just dive into your message without the niceties of a "Hi Jim" or a "Good morning Mary," you could be setting the wrong tone, especially if you're communicating with someone based outside the U.S., Canavor says. You can drop it after the first exchange, but it sets a more congenial tone, she says.

**MISTAKE NO. 5: NOT DOUBLE CHECKING GRAMMAR AND SPELLING**

Yes, it really matters. A 2015 survey of HubSpot Sidekick readers found that 40% of people find bad grammar to be their number-one cold email pet peeve. Canavor says that sending an email message riddled with grammar and punctuation errors is disrespectful, and that people might take you less seriously if you don't present yourself well in writing.

**MISTAKE NO. 6: BURYING THE LEAD IN A SUPER-LONG MESSAGE**

An email isn't the place to write your manifesto. Keep it to a paragraph or two, and don't "bury the lead"—keep the most important information up front, Schawlbe says. If you have to make it longer, keep it to three or four points and use numbered lists or bullets for each point to make them easier to follow and address, Schawlbe says. If you can't cut it down, perhaps email isn't the best vehicle for what you need to communicate.

**MISTAKE NO. 7: NOT GIVING A SPECIFIC ACTION ITEM**

One of the last items before your sign-off should be the action item or request, Schawlbe says. If you're assigning responsibilities, do so. If you're asking for someone to take action, be clear about it. Vagaries may render your email message useless.

**MISTAKE NO. 8: NOT HAVING A CUSTOMIZED SIGNATURE LINE**

Canavor suggests having four or five email signatures crafted so you can just choose the one that's right for the situation. Be sure you have comprehensive contact information, including phone numbers, email addresses, Twitter handles, and the like.

If you need to establish credibility with someone, use the version that has a few credentials, awards, or honors. If you're sending a message to a personal friend, you can be more informal. There aren't hard and fast rules, but know that if you have eight or 10 lines of copy, it's likely not going to get read.

**MISTAKE NO. 9: ENGAGING IN AN ENDLESS BACK AND FORTH**

Once an exchange has gone beyond three or four messages and it's still not going anywhere or if it starts to get heated, pick up the phone or walk down the hall, Schawlbe says. It can take an average of seven email messages to set up one meeting. If you're caught in such an exchange, there's a simple fix, he says.

"Just say, 'Wow, this is getting complex. I'll give you a call in 10 minutes'," he says.