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Focus on Email – The Big Ten Rules

Here are ten tips for writing more effective emails:

1. Purpose: Ask before writing: Why am I writing this? What do I want the reader to do?

2. Audience: Identify the reader ahead of time. Consider these questions:

Who exactly is my reader? Decision maker? Influencer? Implementer?
What does the reader know about the subject?
Will the reaction be receptive? Indifferent? Resistant?
What's in it for the reader? Why should the reader read this or agree with it?
How will the reader use this document?
Should anyone else receive this?
What cultural issues could affect the communication? Ethics? Corporate/
Language? Social?
If this email were read by the entire staff, what would they think?

3. Bottom line: What do I want my reader to remember? What's my pitch? Do I have more than a single topic?

Keep your emails down to one topic.

4. Strategy: Should I put it in writing? Do I need to distribute this? Could I make this a phone call? A fax? A meeting?

5. Develop headlines from your questions. Put them in bold.

Use headlines – bold type – so that the reader can follow key sections of your email more easily.

6. Organize your message with a specific sequence in mind.

If, for example, you fear the recipient may have a negative reaction, make a bad-news sandwich.

Buffer it first with a kind remark. Break it to 'em in the middle paragraph. End the email with an appreciation.

- 7. Leave the reader's address out until after you draft the email. Save it as a draft, proofread it, and then send it.**

- 8. Create the all-important subject line.** Choose the best verb and let that begin your subject line.

- 9. Edit for the following:**

Content: Does my message cover too much?

Sequence: Bottom line up front?

Design: Did you use headlines/ white space/action items?

Structure: Are paragraphs 6 lines maximum. Sentences limited to 12-18 words?

Style and tone: Free of jargon? Inappropriate tone.

Proof: Did you proofread?

- 10. Use the MADE formula for writing most of your emails.**

Begin with the message up front. Second paragraph is your action statement. Bullet point your details. Finish with an attachment, if necessary. "E" stands for evidence or attachments.

More on this formula and all the other tips in future newsletters.