

## Guidelines for E-Mail Communication

One of the most important practical lawyering skills necessary to acquire is a sense of professionalism. This is needed in every aspect of legal skills as a student and as a lawyer. Writing, the most important lawyering skill takes place in a variety of settings, from communications with professors, to scholarly papers written while in school, to formal papers filed in court, internal documents in a law office, and finally to e-mail communications written in all circumstances. In every setting and writing medium, the goal is to communicate effectively with colleagues, supervisors, adversaries, potential employers, court personnel, support staff, and clients.

1. Think twice before you send an e-mail. If sending an e-mail for information, consider first whether you can get the information you seek elsewhere, do so. If you can ask a question in class, or of your employer, or of a librarian, do so.
2. Consider using only a professional email address where available, your university account for all correspondence while you are a student, and separating your personal and professional correspondence. Many law firms and other organizations employ stringent email policies and spam filters that may prohibit or delay delivery of emails from personal email accounts.
3. If you use a personal e-mail account, think about the professional nature of the address you choose. Just as attending a meeting with a prospective employer or client in shorts and flip-flops would be improper, using an address like bunkie@fun.com would not be an ideal way to communicate with faculty or prospective employers. **Similarly, be aware that prospective employers often check sites such as Facebook and MySpace for more information about applicants, and you should consider the information and impression you present about yourself on these sites accordingly.**
4. Give the e-mail a subject line that is informative of the issue presented in the body of the e-mail.
5. Include your full name and other contact information in every e-mail.
6. Treat e-mails to professors as you would legal memoranda or formal letters; treat e-mails to supervisors, employers and others with whom you are in contact professionally as you would formal letters. Despite the ease and accessibility that e-mail provides, e-mail communication in these situations should never be viewed as informal. Begin every e-mail with “Dear Professor,” or “Hello Professor,” or “Dear Mr./Ms.,” and end every e-mail with a proper parting sentiment, e.g., “Sincerely.” Never begin an e-mail with “Hi” or “Hey” etc., and never begin an e-mail without any salutation. Always check the “To:” and “Cc:” lines before sending e-mails, particularly if you use the automatic fill-in feature from your address book. Avoid typing in all capitals or all lower case letters, or using slang terms or shorthand references or usage. Use formal, professional language with appropriate grammar and punctuation.
7. E-mail correspondence is prone to miscommunication. Remember that tone of voice can be easily distorted by the nature of e-mail. Jokes can be taken seriously, sincere comments can be misconstrued as light-hearted, and mild irritation can read as anger. Misunderstandings cannot be

easily corrected. Review, proofread and check the spelling of all e-mail communications before they are sent. Try to compose your thoughts and refrain from writing e-mails while upset or angry.

8. Ben Franklin advised: “Do not do that which you would not have known.” Do not ever send any e-mail that you would not want to see published on the front page of a newspaper. Think twice before you click the “Send” button.

9. Do not e-mail your professor in any personal way about your classmates, or a workplace supervisor about other colleagues. If a conflict between you and a fellow student or worker should arise specifically related to the course or school, or with a fellow worker specifically related to an issue in the workplace, discuss this in person with your intended audience.

10. Do not ever include faculty or professional e-mail addresses in a mass-mailing list.

11. In academic and professional situations, use e-mail as a way of determining when a conversation is necessary and may take place before asking questions that may require long answers or involve follow-up questions.

12. Whenever possible, factor in a reasonable amount of time for those to whom you are writing to respond. Response time may vary depending on the person, your question and the particular circumstances at any given time. Do not use e-mail, if at all possible, as a means for communicating in a hurried, harried or emergency manner. In this way, if you do have an urgent reason for communicating, it will be viewed in its appropriate light and responded to as such.