

Faculty of Population Health Sciences email principles

The Faculty aims to support a healthy work life-balance for all staff. Workloads, travel relating to work and flexible working patterns can blur the boundaries between work and life outside. The volume of email traffic, expectations that email should be answered immediately and accessibility of communications on portable devices further blur those boundaries.

Open recognition of the issue and adoption of a framework of norms are likely to support staff well-being and healthier working patterns.

Some Institutes and UCL departments have begun to tackle the issue by adopting principles similar to those below. To support a consistent approach to email across all Institutes within FPHS we intend to adopt the guidelines and Email Charter below.

1. Is email necessary?

- Where possible, pick up the phone, Skype or walk and speak to the person you want to communicate with. If you need to have a difficult conversation with someone don't try to do that via email. Do be mindful of Freedom of Information and General Data Protection Regulation as emails do form a written record and are disclosable in legal proceedings.

2. Choose the right tone

- Consider carefully the presentation and tone of your emails. Choose your words carefully and consider the effect a poorly phrased email could have on the recipient.
- In the absence of audio and visual cues, terseness, humour or irony can easily be misinterpreted.
- Emails can come across as impersonal and cold. Opening and closing the message with a salutation helps. Use 'Dear ...' and 'Best wishes ...' or similar – unless two people have agreement for leaving out the intros and sign offs.

3. Flexibility

- There can be no expectation that staff or students check their emails outside of work hours, although we recognise that staff or students may choose to do so, particularly if this helps them to work more flexibly.
- Emails can be sent out of working hours as part of flexible working, but the recipient cannot be expected to reply outside of working hours. A note underneath your email signature can help to reinforce the message.

Some examples:

“Please note that to give me more work flexibility I sometimes manage emails out of normal working hours but I do not expect staff to respond to my emails out of normal working hours.”

“Please note, my emails sent outside of working hours do not require reading or a response out of hours.” or similar.

- Consider the use of the delay mechanism in the Outlook when sending emails in the evenings or at weekends. Please note that for this function to work, the Outlook application needs to be open. (Quick how-to guides: [Microsoft support](#), [Lynda video](#)). Or keep the email in your 'draft emails' until the next working day, and then send it.

4. Log off

- Disconnect from your work email when you leave work if this is your wish.

Email Charter

1. Respect Recipients' Time

As the message sender, the onus is on you to minimise the time your email will take to process even if it means taking more time at your end before sending to make your email easy to read.

2. Short or Slow is not Rude

Given the email load we are all facing, it's OK not to give detailed responses to all questions. If you receive a brief reply, don't take it personally and know that others won't. Wordy responses take longer to read, and recipients may miss key details if they just scan it.

Similarly, it's OK if replies aren't sent immediately. Don't feel you need to give an instant response and don't expect to receive one. Skype or the telephone are your tools if something is urgent or needs a reply within a few hours.

3. Be Clear – Info, Action, Time-Sens, Low Priority

Start with a subject line that clearly labels the topic and identify whether the email is for [Info] or [Action] and indicate its priority. It is best to keep emails short but if the email has to be longer than five sentences, make sure the first provides the basic reason for writing.

4. Quash Open-Ended Questions

It is asking a lot to send someone an email with several long paragraphs of text followed by a non-specific question such as: "Thoughts?". Email generosity requires simplifying and asking easy-to-answer questions. Try and avoid subject header 'Quick Question' as people may feel under pressure to answer quickly and it may not be a quick response.

5. Slash Surplus cc's-

Consider who needs to be copied into the email as for every recipient you add, you are dramatically multiplying total response time. When there are multiple recipients, don't default to 'Reply All'. You may need to cc a couple of people on the original thread or you may only need to reply to the sender.

6. Tighten the Thread

Some emails depend on context for their meaning which means it's usually OK to include the thread being responded to but try not to extend a thread to more than 3 emails. Before sending, cut what's not relevant or make a phone call instead. The subject header should refer to the email content and not cover other topics as an aside.

7. Attack Attachments

Don't use graphics files as logos or signatures that appear as attachments as time is wasted trying to see if there's something to open. Don't send text as an attachment if it could have been included in the body of the email.

8. Give these Gifts: EOM and NNTR

If your email message can be expressed in half a dozen words, put it in the subject line, followed by EOM (End of Message). This saves the recipient having to open the message. Ending a note with "No need to respond" or NNTR can also be helpful.

9. Cut Countless Responses

You don't need to reply to every email, especially those that are themselves clear responses. An email saying "Thanks for your note. I'm in." does not need you to reply "Great." That costs someone 30 seconds.

10. Disconnect!

If we all agreed to spend less time doing email, we'd all get less email! Consider scheduling half-days at work where you can't go online - or a commitment to email-free weekends - or an 'auto-response' that references this charter.

This charter was adapted from emailcharter.org.

Related UCL guidance:

- [UCL ISD Email Etiquette guidance](#)
- [FPHS email signature template](#)
- [UCL GDPR guidance for out of office messages and information rights requests](#)