



Email Etiquette in the Faculty of Law

This document is to be seen as an enhancement of the existing Faculty Email Protocol.

Please note that it does not replace existing policies in the Faculty, Division or University for dealing with difficult behaviours, bullying or harassment.

Across all points, consider whether your email is accessible – e.g. full URLs in messages or text with colour highlights can be hard to read.

TIMING: Individuals have different times at which they are able to write and respond to emails. Colleagues will need to compose emails at times that suit their individual schedule. However, when we send emails we should reflect on and show sensitivity to the circumstances of the intended recipients; sending an 'urgent' email at the end of the day may cause undue stress. There can be no expectation of a response outside of 'core hours.'

Consider:

- a. Is your email necessary?
- b. Can your email be saved as a draft and sent during core hours? Or can you schedule send (click on the arrow beside the send button and 'schedule send' to set time) or use delayed send (click 'Options' then 'Delayed Delivery')?
- c. Would a phone call or chat/meeting on Teams be better?
- d. If you are sending an email outside of conventional work hours – especially deep into the night or at weekends – can it potentially make recipients feel unduly pressured and preoccupy them when they might reasonably expect not to be 'at work'?

LENGTH: Short and concise emails are more likely to be read but a long email may be unavoidable. An email is not a substitute for a memo - attachment of a word document may be more appropriate if the email is likely to be very long and contain information that needs to be recorded. Length and frequency (see below) of emails should be considered together. If an email exchange requires more than one long message on each side, it is often likely to be more efficient to arrange a conversation on Teams or in person to discuss the issues.

Consider:

- a. Can you keep the email short, perhaps as per the [five sentences personal policy](#)? Maybe a short Teams or phone call is possible instead of an email?
- b. If a long email is necessary, is it clear? Can you highlight key points for clarity and use bullet points at the top to summarise contents? Or, as above, would a Teams/phone call or meeting be better?
- c. Are you engaging in a lengthy email and/ or email exchange that could be experienced as a 'bombardment'?

FREQUENCY: Most people prefer to receive fewer emails. Overall email traffic could be reduced by better use of an Intranet or Teams. A Teams call will usually be a better use of time than a ‘back and forth’ on email (in particular, if the emails are lengthy), although this may sometimes be unavoidable.

Consider:

- a. Can a Teams call be used instead to avoid a back and forth of messages? As above could it be experienced as a ‘bombardment’?
- b. To bring a ‘back and forth’ to a close, can you use wording which does not appear dismissive such as ‘I am sorry, but I can’t carry on with this conversation’?
- c. Does your email make it clear if no reply is needed? Can you add this to the subject line?

TONE: Tone can be hard to convey via email - a recipient may read an email differently to the sender: a short email (which many prefer) can seem curt but may not be (e.g. a question in the subject line with a blank email). It may also be wise to delay sending an immediate response to an email that seems rude. As with letters, a greeting at the beginning, and signing off is seen as courteous, and writing in CAPS is seen as aggressive. Consider, in particular, the role and experience of your correspondent.

Consider:

- a. Would you be offended to receive your email?
- b. If the email may be misunderstood, can you arrange to speak with the person instead?
- c. If the topic is urgent, can you mark the email as such rather than use a brusque tone? Although be aware of timing.
- d. If addressing a difficult issue, have you considered whether a face-to-face conversation might be possible?
- e. Be alert to the power dynamics at play: there is an important rhetorical difference between emails sent to friends or peers and those sent when you are in a role of authority or line management. Treat professional services staff with consideration and respect for the parameters of their job.

TOPICS: In general, work email should be used for topics linked to work. Some prefer single topic emails as emails with multiple topics can get lost in the inbox. In all cases, the subject line should clearly identify the contents. Topic is linked to timing (see above) – for example, it would be insensitive to send negative student feedback in the middle of the night when it would be impossible for the recipient to seek or find support.

Consider:

- a. Is the subject line an accurate reflection of the contents?
- b. Is the timing correct to send an email concerning this topic?
- c. Have you indicated in the subject line if the email contains material that is sensitive? Do you need to password protect the email? Should you have a conversation instead?

- d. Remember subject access requests - would you be embarrassed if somebody saw the email? If so, don't send it!

RECIPIENTS: Email traffic is high for everybody and dealing with emails can be time consuming. It is important to send the message to the correct person. It helps recipients if the subject matter is clear and the sender articulates any required actions or next steps. As with a letter, information is being sent to you for a particular purpose. It has not been composed for wider distribution – think before forwarding. Emails from colleagues within the collegiate university will usually indicate in the body of the message if you are asked/invited to forward to other people not in the string. Also do not extract and use text from someone else's message without acknowledgment. Likewise, do not make changes to a message received from someone else and resend to others without making it clear where you have changed it.

Consider:

- a. Who is the email for? Are you sending the email to the correct person – do they deal with this topic?
- b. Have you considered the circumstances of the intended recipients (e.g. Highlighted text is challenging for some colleagues)?
- c. Do all of the people in 'cc' really need to receive it? Who is essential? Are others for info only?
- d. Can you avoid 'reply all'? If sending to a number of recipients, have you clarified what action needs to be taken and by whom? Have you made clear who needs to respond?
- e. Can a comms channel be used instead of a group email? Or a shared inbox?
- f. Is there sensitive material in the message? Be careful when forwarding long email chains to additional recipients. *Be especially mindful and cautious if forwarding attachments - OneDrive may be a more secure way to share.*
- g. Think carefully before forwarding emails to other parties, especially those with email addresses other than 'ox.ac.uk'.

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Published: June 2025