SZ

Universität Stuttgart
Sprachenzentrum

English Revisited:
Tips, Tidbits & Tutorials

In This Issue: Emailing

Glossary

to attest to: to show evidence of

ubiquitous: found everywhere

pitfall: a hidden difficulty or danger

permissible: allowed

to wind down: to come to an end

to shed light on: to help explain something

Editorial

Average number of emails an office worker receives each day: 121. Number of email users worldwide: 4.3 billion. Percentage of emails that are opened on mobile devices: 55%. Percentage of Americans that check their email in the bathroom: 42%.

Email has become a part of everyday life, and as the aforementioned statistics from www.expandedramblings.com can attest to, they are read everywhere. However, despite their ubiquitous nature, there are a number of pitfalls awaiting the unsuspecting, especially when communicating with someone from a foreign culture.

Are emoticons permissible in business emails? Is it "Mrs." or "Ms.?" Do you capitalize the first letter after the salutation? As we wind down from the summer semester, this issue will help shed some light on these questions and more.

Dr. Joseph Michaels

University Glossary
The latest version of our university glossary is available on our website.

Upcoming Issues:
- say and speak, listen and hear, make and do
- individualism and collectivism
- humorous false friends

@ **Comments**

Do you have any ideas for future issues or would like to give us feedback? Please contact us.

@ **Subscription**

Currently on Offer

If you are interested in any of the following, please **contact us**.

- **More English seminars coming up**: The Sprachenzentrum is happy to announce that more academic English seminars for Ph.D. students and university employees will be offered, starting in September. Please enroll through our website: http://www.sz.uni-stuttgart.de/englisch/seminars-akad-ma/index.html

- **Intensive courses during the semester break**: The English Department will be offering SQ: Effective Communication in the Workplace (C1), SQ: Mechanical Engineering (C1), and Preparing for the TOEFL (B2) during the semester break. More information available on C@MPUS.

- **Seeking your assistance:** We are looking for someone who can help us with updating our newsletter to the new UniDesign. We use Microsoft Publisher to format the newsletter. We would be very grateful and can offer a free coaching or proofread any work in English you may have. Please contact us here for further information.

Grammar

The Importance of Correct Email

There are a lot of communication methods available today in our working environment, but when it comes to doing business, email is still the most important means of sending messages. Once you have ruled out more immediate interpersonal communication like a face-to-face discussion or a telephone call and <u>opted for</u> email, you should bear in mind that this piece of correspondence acts as an ambassador not only for your own competence but also for the whole company. By setting high standards you will no doubt <u>enhance</u> the corporate image of your organisation, which is so vital in today's competitive business world. How you present your email could be the key to either failure or success.

As a general rule you should focus on only one subject per email message. Keep your correspondence short and to the point. "Time is money". Because of the sheer volume of email we receive every day, make sure that your subject line is precise. After all, your message shouldn't end up as junk mail. In your subject line capitalise only the first word unless there is also a name:

Your advertisement in The[1] Guardian of 2 April 2018

Looking at capitalisation, remember that the first word of the body of your email **always** has a capital letter. Titles that refer to a specific person and come before their name are capitalised.

Dear Professor Brown
In the course of our conversation on Monday you mentioned…

Only the first word of your complimentary close should be capitalised:

Kind regards

Never use capital letters for <u>emphasis</u> as this can come across like SHOUTING! Instead use *italics* or **bold** type.

Fully blocked style[2] with open punctuation has been common for all workplace documents since the 1970s as it not only looks very businesslike but also saves time. Open punctuation means leaving out all non-essential full stops and commas after each line of address in your signature footer[3], after the salutation and after the complimentary close (*see above*). However, should you decide to use a comma after your salutation, you have to be consistent and put a comma after your closing line, too. Note that in British English there is no full stop after "Mr" or "Ms"[4].

Dear Ms White,

Best wishes,

A great rule to follow is "pepper your page with periods": use lots of periods, i.e. full stops, and few commas to make your sentences short. A flowery and long-winded style belongs to the past. Emoticons, or font-based visual representations of human faces, should of course be kept out of your formal work correspondence. You don't want to look incompetent.

The right choice of tense is vital in email in order to avoid any misunderstandings. Use the present continuous form for a temporary activity and the present simple form for actions that happen regularly. Contractions are fine in less formal messages.
Our company**'s working on** improving relations with our key customers.
Every year in June we **recruit** candidates for positions in IT and HR.

Use the present perfect continuous form for longer or repeated actions in progress from the past up to the present. Use the simple form to express a present result or to give a quantity.
Our e-bikes **have been selling** well on the British market for several years.
We**'ve sold** over 500 e-bikes so far this year.

Last but not least, an important piece of advice to German native speakers: avoid nominalisations! Instead of:
We ensured the **motivation** of our employees with the **introduction** of Lunch and Learn sessions.
Use verbs:
We **motivated** our employees by **introducing** Lunch and Learn sessions.

Write correct emails right from the start of any business relationship. Never <u>underestimate</u> the importance of first impressions. For more practice with what you have read, click below for a short exercise.

Sylvia Grade

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[1] The definite article is part of the newspaper's name.
[2] All lines begin at the left-hand margin.
[3] Below your own name you add your company's full name, address and telephone number.
[4] This is the most modern way of addressing a woman as you avoid referring to her marital status.

@
Exercises

> **Glossary**
>
> *to opt for:*
> to choose
>
> *to enhance:*
> to improve the quality of something
>
> *emphasis:*
> special importance
>
> *to underestimate:*
> to wrongly believe something is not that important

Intercultural Communication

A Few Personal Lessons on Cultural Differences in Emailing at the Workplace

Since becoming one of the main forms of communication in the workplace, email has transformed from an electronic letter into a kind of short messaging system. Navigating this transformation can be challenging to even the most proficient email writer, which is especially the case when one is writing to someone from a different culture. In the United States, for example, emails are often short and to the point and replies are expected to come quickly[1]. Furthermore, after initial contact has been established, it is not uncommon to leave out the greeting, ending, and sometimes even the name if writing back and forth to each other in a short span of time. In Germany, on the other hand, emails tend to be more formal and a quick response is less expected. Here, one tends to keep the greeting, ending, and name no matter how many emails are exchanged between the same individuals.

In comparing these differences, it is easy to see how any deviation from culturally accepted emailing norms could rub someone the wrong way. Recently, a friend of mine shared a story about a problem from work. The friend, who works at a German company that has several foreign employees, described how an American employee fired off an email to the entire department, including the boss, without a greeting, demanding information about a technical issue. The boss was so taken aback that he replied and commented on the email style rather than addressing the question asked.

One well-known but nevertheless tricky difference between German and Anglo-Saxon cultures is how they address members of their respective groups. Even in formal situations, English speakers tend to use first names while German speakers tend to go by last names. A general rule of thumb is if you use the first name when speaking to someone in person, use it in email as well. Moreover, you might find that once you have written an email to someone in an Anglo-Saxon culture, even to someone who you have not met before, they may respond to you with your first name. For example, I recently sent a request to an American online customer support center for assistance with a problem I was having with their website. I addressed the email to the "service team." As this was a complicated issue, I heard from a number of employees, who all addressed me by using my first name although we have never met and most likely never will.

Not only the use of names but also the tone of the email in Anglo-Saxon culture can be more casual, especially with people with whom one has repeated contact. Thus, many Anglo Saxons may begin emails with such phrases as "I hope you are doing well," or "How are you?" Very informal expressions like "What's up?" should be avoided unless you know the recipient well. This phrase also tends to be used by younger people. Care should also be taken not to ask how an individual is in every email since that will come across as odd. If an Anglo Saxon wants to inquire about casual details, for instance by asking about the recipient's weekend plans, their family, etc., it is also recommended that such pleasantries be left for the end of the email. The message should get straight to the point since many readers scan through for content and may miss the main point if it is embedded in other less important information.

If you are unsure about these cultural nuances, it is always advantageous to follow the lead of the person with whom you are writing.

For a list of formal and informal greetings and closings, please see the following previous article from our newsletter.

To see if you can recognize various levels of formality in an email in English, click below for a short exercise.

Gretchen Chojnacki-Herbers

Source

[1] Barton, E. (2013, November 7). Master the art of global email etiquette. *BBC Capital.* Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20131106-lost-in-translation

Glossary

to navigate: to deal with a difficult situation effectively

proficient: skilled and experienced

norm: something typical or standard

to rub someone the wrong way: to annoy someone

to fire off an email: write a hasty, not well thought-out email

to be taken aback: to be surprised or shocked

to address: to speak to someone

recipient: someone who receives a correspondence

pleasantry: an informal remark in polite conversation

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Exercises

Vocabulary

The Language of Formal Emails

Every single day many of us are <u>inundated</u> with emails, a lot of which are largely redundant. <u>Separating the wheat from the chaff</u> can be an <u>arduous</u> task and also one which we have limited time to devote to.

For this reason, many emails will be filtered out and even deleted just after reading the subject line. The subject line should, therefore, be as <u>succinct</u> and as relevant as possible. In addition, including keywords will make it easier to retrieve the email at a later date.

Is the email intended to inform, to request, to confirm or even to warn? This should then be <u>elucidated</u> in the subject line. The subject line 'Meeting postponed' would be imprecise. An example of a more appropriate subject line could be: 'Project ABC meeting postponed to 30 May'.

Salutation

There are different conventions for salutations in American and British English. The opening and closing statements reflect both the degree of formality and the familiarity of the respondents with one another.

In British English, for instance, formal emails which begin with the salutation 'Dear Sir/Madam should always finish with the expression 'Yours faithfully', whereas those which begin, 'Dear Mr/Mrs Smith' should end with the expression 'Yours sincerely'. In American English, 'Sincerely' is a more widely used closing expression.

One of the most commonly made mistakes by German companies is to translate the German 'Frau' as 'Mrs' and to then to address all adult women as 'Mrs', regardless of their marital status. This term is actually reserved for married women. The correct word to use when the marital status is unknown is the more neutral 'Ms'. The German title 'Professor Dr' is also superfluous in an English salutation. 'Dear Professor Smith' is the correct salutation for someone who holds a professorship and 'Dear Dr Smith' for someone who has a doctorate but no professorship.

Opening Statement

Here again, the language should reflect the email's intent in a clear manner and should always begin with a capital letter. If the request is the first communication, it is polite to include a sentence of introduction.

My name is Fred Flintstone and I am the Project Manager for project ABC.
I received your name from my manager, Joe Bloggs, who suggested I contact you.

In response to an enquiry:

Thank you for your enquiry/email of 1 April 2018. (Note that in formal emails in the United States, the date would be written as follows: April 1, 2018.) Thank you for your interest in our programme.

General Language Tips

The use of modal verbs (could, would, etc.) is felt by native speakers to be more polite. 'I would appreciate it if you could provide the data by 2 April ' sounds much more <u>courteous</u> than the direct instruction 'Send me your data by 2 April please'. One common error is to use 'can', for instance 'Can you send me more information?' This really sounds as if the writer is questioning the recipient's ability to send information rather than a request. 'Would' or 'could' should be used instead.

As a general rule of thumb, requests should always be coined in such a way that the recipient feels that they have the option to accept or reject the request.

Closing Remarks

It is good practice to close the email with a short phrase.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation.
If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to let me know/contact me.
I look forward to hearing from you.

For more useful phrases and a short exercise, please click on the link below.

Cheryl Stenzel

Glossary

to be inundated with: to be overrun with, bombarded with

to separate the wheat from the chaff: to separate the valuable from the worthless

succint: briefly and clearly expressed

arduous: difficult

to elucidate: to make clear, explain

salutation: a form of address, e.g. Dear Mr.

courteous: polite

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Exercises