

# Effective Email Techniques

## From the Basics

Most of us learn to use our computers and telephones by "just doing it" or by watching colleagues. Few of us take the time to attend formal, structured training sessions. Because of this, we sometimes learn how to do things in round-about ways and miss some of the basic, useful tools available to us. These "Back to Basics" tips are designed to fill in some of the gaps we have noticed, based on questions to the HelpDesk.

## "Netiquette"

Email is the primary communication tool at NLU. It is very effective - but it is also very different than face to face or telephone communications. There are some simple concepts to help all of us use email more effectively.

### 1. Style - It's Not the Same as a Phone Call

- **Be brief.** You can usually fit everything you need to say on one screen.
- **Use a blank line between paragraphs.** It is easier on the eye.
- **Recognize the limits.** E-mail carries none of the tone of voice, facial expression, physical gestures or other communications available in personal conversation (which, by the way, are >75% of the content communicated at a face to face meeting; using e-mail is throwing away 3/4ths of your communications "tools").
- **Stay away from sarcasm,** and use "emoticons" such as a smiley :) or a <grin> to let someone know when you are joking. The net saying is "be precise in what you send, and forgiving of what you receive."
- **Use mixed upper and lower case.** In the e-mail world, USING ALL UPPER CASE IS THE SAME AS YELLING.
- **Add emphasis where needed.** Some e-mail programs (especially web-based ones) do not display italicized or underlined words. If you want to emphasize something, you can use \*asterisks\*. If you are really excited, you can SHOUT.

### 2. Content - Common Sense Counts

- **Always use a short, informative subject line.** People are more likely to read your message if they know what it is about. (It is considered rude to leave the subject line blank. Some people delete mail with missing or non-descriptive titles without reading it.)
- **Change the subject line when the topic changes.** You receive an email about class schedules for January. You reply. They reply. You reply - and soon the topic drifts away from class schedules and onto something very different – like budget needs. If the topic changes, change the subject line.
- **Start your message with the name** of the person you are addressing, just as in a handwritten note or letter.
- **Use the right tool.** If your message is lengthy or complex, then do not try to compose it in e-mail. Instead, use a word processor so that you can better format the document. Then attach it to a brief e-mail.

### 3. Sending E-Mail

- **Send mail to relevant people.** Don't broadcast mail to people unlikely to be interested or not directly involved in an issue.
- **Stop and think before you send** - the ease of sending, replying and forwarding tends to generate more mail than is needed. Many of us have more email in our inboxes than we care to read. Ask yourself: will this email really contribute something important? Example: you email a person requesting some information. She emails it to you. You reply with a "Thank you". She replies with "No problem - glad to help out." You reply with "OK, I'll keep you on my list of really nice people." She replies, "That's great." And so on... Know when not to send a reply or a comment.
- **Reply to the right people, not the whole list.** When you are part of a mailing list or listserv- STOP and THINK before you reply to a message: do you need to respond to the entire list or are your comments aimed at a single member of the list (often the sender of the initial message).
- **Avoid flame wars!** If you find yourself disagreeing with someone, do not start a volley of back and forth e-mails, with copies distributed to every known person on the distribution list! Get off your chair and walk down the hall to work out your differences of opinion face to face! Or at least, pick up the telephone and speak to the person. There is nothing better than personal interaction to resolve difficult issues. E-mail just does not work well for these situations.