

# 16 Tips for More Effective Emails

These simple strategies can boost effectiveness.

BY STEPHANIE KLOOS DONOGHUE

Email remains one of the most-used communication tools in the world. According to Statista, the number of emails sent and received *per day* worldwide reached 293.6 million in 2019, with the number expected to grow to 376.4 million by 2025.

Despite the prevalence of patient portals and in-office staff communication platforms, doctors and staff often use individual emails to communicate with colleagues, patients, vendors, lawyers, accountants, and others. Even within password-protected portals and email platforms, word choice and tone are critical to effectiveness. Here are some email and wording strategies that your entire office can use.

**1. Develop an appropriate email “signature” for external correspondence.** The end of each email should include your name with credentials and all contact information: address, phone, email address, website, and even logo. This not only looks professional but makes it easy for recipients to contact you.

Use the same signature style for everyone in the practice so that all correspondence reflects your practice branding.

**Even within password-protected portals and email platforms, word choice and tone are critical to effectiveness.**

**2. Double-check email addresses.** This is critical for an initial email to someone who is not yet in your electronic address book. Just one wrong character means your desired message won’t be received.

**3. Beware of cc.** It might seem easier to carbon copy (cc) several people

with a single email, but this can remove the personal connection. Consider separate emails with individual salutations—even if the message is the same. Better yet, add at least one comment that personalizes every email. (For example: “Thanks for recommending that I try XYZ Orthotics.”)

Note that SPAM filters may block your email if there are too many recipients.

**4. When a cc is necessary due to time or message, opt for bcc instead.** Send the email to yourself and blind carbon copy (bcc) recipients to protect their email identities.

**5. Carefully word the subject line.** You want your messages to stand out in recipients’ inboxes. However, don’t misrepresent the content just to get attention—such as writing URGENT when there isn’t critical timing involved.

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**6. Address email recipients as you would in person.** If you've addressed the recipient by Mrs. or Dr. for years, it would be out of place to suddenly switch to a "Dear Marge" salutation in an email.

**7. Monitor tone.** Punctuation and capitalization should set the desired email tone. For example, overuse of exclamation points, bold face, or oversized fonts may appear to shout off the computer monitor. Words in all capital letters should be used sparingly and for emphasis only, as they can be more difficult to read.

**8. Consider the legal ramifications and privacy of your emails.** Consult an attorney with questions about email contents, if necessary, and on the types of correspondence that would be better sent by other, more secure, methods. For example, use the patient portal for confidential patient correspondence.

**9. Select a proper font size.** Very

small or lightly colored type is difficult to read. Twelve-point black type is almost universally legible.

**10. Use short paragraphs and bullet points.** Break up email copy

visually into small pieces to make the message easier to read and remember.

**11. Avoid texting abbreviations.** While "c u l8r" may be appropriate for a casual text message, it is out of place in professional correspondence.

**12. Check spelling and grammar.** No matter how rushed you are or how short the message, be sure your email is error-free. Re-read every email—consider doing this aloud—

before you hit send. Autocorrect could convert your well-intentioned message into a confusing mess.

*Tip:* Keep the recipient field (To:) blank until the email is ready (completely proofed and vetted). This can

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**Be sure to assess if email is the right approach for your message. In some cases, it might be better to connect to the person by phone.**

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avoid sending an unfinished email prematurely.

**13. Select attachments carefully.** Consider size and format before sending pictures or document attachments (Word files, pdfs, etc.). For example, a referring colleague's email may block files over a certain size or may block attachments altogether.

**14. Ask recipients to confirm receipt.** This is important especially if you're waiting to hear back from the recipient.

**15. Respond as quickly as possible.** When you get a response from an email, acknowledge it—even if it comes at a busy time. "Thanks for your quick response," you might write. "I will circle back with an answer as soon as possible."

**16. Finally, don't overdo it.** According to Statista, individuals receive three times as many emails as they send. Those bombarded by emails from a single source are likely to hit delete before even looking at the content. Be sure to assess if email is the right approach for your message. In some cases, it might be better to connect to the person by phone. **PM**

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## Anatomy of a "Thank You"

A simple "thank you" can be written in several different formats. Here are some of the most common ways it's used and how each might be interpreted.

- **Thx or TU** = Shorthand; texting abbreviation; quick and unprofessional. If this type of shorthand is typically used internally (among staff), it may be appropriate for that purpose only.

- **Thanks** = Informal. May be appropriate for those you email frequently. It conveys a relaxed feeling of gratitude.

- **Thank you** = Most formal. Its neutral tone makes it the safest bet for all professional correspondence, both internal and external.

- **THANKS or THANK YOU or thank YOU** = Medium/strong show of gratitude. For patients, doctors, or others who have gone out of their way for you (for example, referred a large number of patients), this may be appropriate. Use sparingly to maximize the effect.

- **THANKS! or THANK YOU!** = Extreme appreciation. Reserve this to recognize extraordinary actions. Multiple exclamation points can be used for additional emphasis. **PM**