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CONTENTS

EFFECTIVE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION THROUGH EMAIL: THE DO'S AND DON'TS

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Abstract

Communicating by the use of email is a common thing that takes place for all various purposes, formally and informally. Nonetheless, it becomes challenging for L2 writers to communicate using the written method since it involves a higher level of language proficiency and cognitive level. The complex elements in the language transfer when writing is never seen as just a small issue as it does require its user to be more skillful and advanced. Related to the need of communicating using email, not many are aware of the features and etiquette that could lead them to have a more effective composition when communicating in an email. Undeniably, one of the top requirements in a workplace is for its team to be able to express messages clearly as a part of entrepreneurial skills development. Given this, the study aims at discussing the existing tips for composing effective emails that are adjusted with the modern era, as well as proposing recommendations of the most updated things that should be added or avoided in an effective email. This is a small-scale library study, which is expected to be explored more to be a field study in the future. The recommendations are presented to guide all readers in general, and university-level authorities in particular, to be alert and to keep improving the necessity of writing emails effectively to compete in the global workplace.

Keywords: *email writing; written communication; communication skills; entrepreneurial skills*

Introduction

Good communication skills are valuable things that every person should master to avoid any misunderstanding, either spoken or written. As the main purpose of communicating is to ensure that the message could be understood by the partner, then both the sender and receiver need to play their roles optimally to avoid any communication breakdown. This is the basic foundation, that communicating effectively means not only putting your thoughts in order and presenting them in an accessible way but also expressing them in a way that would capture the attention of the receiver (Beattie & Ellis, 2014).

However, communication, either spoken or written, always has its own challenges and barriers. It involves so many aspects for a message to deliver, and language becomes one of the most challenging factors for many people. Language, for instance, plays an essential role in communication, as it is seen as a system of symbols and rules that enable us to communicate (Harley, 2005). Even more, the context and purpose might be different, even so, the people involved. Eventually, this brings about various factors that could be barriers to taking over the process.

The covid-19 pandemic somehow brings about a more global impact, particularly in Indonesia, in which people are faced to use written communication more often through electronic media, including email. Email is commonly used nowadays as it could facilitate communication by its high speed, asynchronousness, and computer processability (Palme 1995a), and provide opportunities to increase productivity, worker satisfaction, and organizational viability (Rice & Bair 1984; Safayeni, Lee & MacGregor 1988, as cited in Bälter, 1998). In other words, an email is a tool for communicating in various contexts which requires a higher level of skills from both its sender and receiver.

To communicate effectively means not only putting your thoughts in order and presenting them in an accessible way, but also expressing them in a way that would capture the attention of the receiver (Beattie and Ellis, 2014).

Despite the fact that it is needed, many people do not acquire a strong knowledge of composing effective emails. This situation

should be a concern from the earliest stage of university students before they jump into real work life. Nevertheless, the urge for entrepreneurship grooming becomes the demand for the latest generation to, later on, be able to communicate at a professional level using emails.

Unfortunately, there are many barriers that occur when Indonesian has to communicate by email, such as getting embarrassed about their English language proficiency, and their informal writing style which often causes a lack of positive intention to some extent. "Poorly written, unclear, misleading or ineffective emails cause not only a loss of time and productivity, but they also harm one's reputation as it leaves a poor impression on the receiver" (Prasatya, 2017). Even more, Whitfield also stated that a style lacking in salutations and closings, where a few typos are overlooked, gives the second-language author more confidence in its use (https://www.expat.or.id/business/e-mail.html).

Considering this phenomenon, more efficient guidelines about the things that should be added and avoided in composing effective emails are necessary. Undeniably, not much-updated research could provide the disclosure of what things really need to expose to improve the second language writers in Indonesia nowadays.

Thus, this library focuses on presenting some adjusted rules in the Indonesian context so they could be more advanced in communicating using emails in a formal context. It is demanded that Indonesian speakers should also be able to communicate fluently using electronic mail or other tools in order to compete globally. In the end, this study aims at:

1) discussing the existing tips for composing effective emails that are adjusted with the modern era, and

2) proposing recommendations of the most updated things that should be added or avoided in an effective email.

Emailing as a Part of Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is defined as "the method of creating, exchanging and perceiving the information, which aids encode, decode and transmit the messages by means of telecommunication network" (December, 1996) and also includes "any human interaction, which are symbolic text-based, directed or facilitated over digitally-

based technologies". It involves, Internet; email, instant messaging, cellular phone text, multiuser interaction etc. In this definition, certain message interchange is computerized at certain point in the medium of exchange when people are involved in the process.

Electronic email is a part of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). CMC itself is defined as "the method of creating, exchanging and perceiving the information, which aids encode, decode, and transmit the messages by means of telecommunication network" (December, 1996). This includes a wide range of communication areas, including "any human interaction which are symbolic text-based, directed or facilitated over digitally-based technologies."

There were many theories that consider CMC presents more negative impacts on communication, yet it is no longer relevant in today's era. People use computers literally for almost everything, for work in particular. Computers appear to be a medium for people to communicate in the digital era easily. In addition, Abdullah (2003, as cited in Waldvogel, 2007) also implied that email is "a rich repository of relation communication that allows writers the flexibility to personalize their messages." In other words, communicating using emails does not reduce any crucial elements of rich communication, even if face-to-face interaction does not take place. Indeed, it all could be adjusted with other elements in the writing process.

There are two well-known models in the CMC: Cues filtered out and hyperpersonal. The cues filtered out model tends to develop its concept from the aspect of bandwidth and social presence. Some researchers even figured out its negative relationship. The bandwidth of a communication medium is mentioned to affect the degree of social presence (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). The hyperpersonal model, on the contrary, focuses on "facilitating more desirable levels of interaction than face-to-face communication precisely because of its lower bandwidth" (Duthler, 2006).

Email is considered to be more effective in facilitating hyperpersonal communication as its "asynchronous nature allows users to take time to compose and edit their messages" and these messages can be "carefully edited, formal, and linguistically complex" (Herring, 2002). The writer, thus, could adjust several aspects of their

message to make it more personal, polite, and well-accepted by the reader.

Notwithstanding this might be an arguable theory in the past, Walther somehow stated that "the reduced cues in email allow for greater cognitive concentration on attaining multiple goals in interpersonal interactions, including optimizing self-presentation and concern for the communication partner's needs and wants, at one's own pace" (1996). In conclusion, all those aspects of interactions could occur.

This leads to the conclusion that asynchronous interaction indeed has a bigger capacity to be more socially desirable and effective to use in communication. However, it should be noted that the linguistic resources when composing email hold a huge role to support this hyperpersonal communication. This would lead to the other elements discussed: challenges in writing emails in the second language context.

Writing Emails in L2 Context

It is a fact that writing in a second language context requires complex skills and abilities. Hyland (2019) defines second language writing as "a term applied to writing done in a language other than the writer's native language(s)." It requires higher effort than L1 writing, as it also involves not only just what people do, but also the things they might produce. Hence, "accuracy and clarity are the main criteria of good writing, while the actual communicative content, the meaning, is dealt with later" (2019).

Grabe and Kaplan (1996) even proposed that L2 writing abilities include three major elements. The first is the language use context, in which some of the relevant points are involved: participants, setting, task, topic, textual input, and output. In other words, writers should be able to adjust their language use based on the purpose of their communication. Those factors are still an icing tip of an ice burg.

The next element mentioned by Grabe and Kaplan is the writer's internal goal-setting. It should be determined in the very first place, what the writer composes the text for from the internal point of view. Nevertheless, the message would not be clear to convey verbal processing becomes the next element to include. This relies on both long-term and working memory, which at the same time includes various elements of language competence as well as knowledge of the world. The last element is a final component for internal processing output. In this last stage, the output could be checked, to compare it against the original goal from an earlier stage.

Those become the evidence that presents how complex L2 writing is. Even more, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) also stated that an L2 writer should provide a way to integrate the three major concerns of writing: a writer's cognitive processing, the linguistic and textual resources that instantiate the writing task, and the contextual factors which strongly shape the nature of writing. On the other hand, there is this crucial factor that affects all those processes: the writer's L1 skills.

Hyland (2019) also states that L2 writers should have an adequate understanding of the *processes* of text creation, the *purposes* of writing, and an *awareness* of particular audiences and how to express these text choices. In this study, the context of Hyland's theory is adjusted to the email writing requirements in English. This supports the claim that indeed, it takes those crucial elements to produce a text that involves the community to read and understand the message conveyed.

Email style varies from formal, following conventional grammar and spelling rules, to informal and spontaneous where brevity may be paramount (Millar 2009, as cited in Lewin-Jones and Mason, 2014). For more professional purposes, the language expressions tend to be formal to semi-formal rather than an informal one. The research result from Lewin-Jones and Mason's study also indicated that one of the clearest themes to emerge is the balance between formality and informality in the language of emails, and how professionalism fits into what could be seen as a sliding scale of formality (2014).

Given this situation, composing an email in English could not be considered a simple thing any longer. All aspects are related, and Indonesian students or writers must know the updated guidance to compose an effective email so that their written communication could be well-established.

Email Features

There are several features that every user could explore in an email. The first part is the header. It is structured into various fields, including the subject line, sender, receiver, and

other information about the email. At the top of the email, the first field that appears is the "to" field. Based on its position, it implies its priority, and yet people send the wrong emails to the wrong person all the time (Prasatya, 2017).

Among those common features, there are two crucial buttons that could be found under the sender and receiver information: CC (Carbon Copy), and BCC (Blind Carbon Copy). Based on Konuk's study, the majority of students rarely used BCC and CC in accordance with their functions (2021). This might be caused by the lack of understanding of the functions of those buttons.

The email address that is listed as CC in an email is mentioned and involved in knowing the certain issues discussed in the email. On the other hand, the one in the BCC list is in the loop to keep it secret. In short, they might be someone in charge that needs to know the issue and its progress without any necessity to respond.

Bälter (1998) stated that basically, all mail systems have functionality for replying to messages by issuing a reply command for a certain incoming message. This command normally automatically fills in the addressee field (with the sender address of the incoming message) and the subject field of the message (with the same subject as the incoming message). This would make it easier for the email writer to communicate under the same email thread without confusion, indeed.

There might be tons of details that could be explored in an email, depending on the email platform used to facilitate the communication. For today's generation, it does not require effort to use them, yet they might need to be introduced to be more familiar with some features. As the basic features are mentioned already, the core of this paper will now present the most influential part in the next discussion.

Discussion
Email Writing: The Do's and Don'ts
Composing an effective email at any purpose level could lead to successful written communication. Therefore, recognizing the elements that could minimize barriers to communication breakdown should be prioritized in this digital era. The first point to discuss here is the existing tips for composing effective emails that are adjusted with the modern era.

The first step is to understand the elements of a good email. It should be taken into consideration that writing effective emails takes practice, awareness, and feedback (Rahman, 2016). Therefore, introducing the basic steps would be crucial for Indonesian writers to excel in written business communication, either formally or informally. The more practice they have, the more expert they will be in the future.

There are several elements to construct a clear email with a logical structure (Chapman, n/d). The details are presented in the following discussion.

Subject Line
A subject line would determine the first impression of the sender to the receiver in the written communication context. This is a summary of your message, thus should be as clear and specific as possible. The clear and easy-to-catch newspaper headlines would be easier to remember the readers, as per se with a clear subject line. It could not be too long or too short, or too complicated, but catchy enough to attract the reader's attention easily.

Salutation/ Greetings
Before stating the purpose of writing an email, salutation must be the next point that should be included in the email. It reflects how we respect the receiver, both formally and informally. Thus, greetings should not be left out of an email. Kankaanranta (2005) mentioned that by using salutations, the writer "constructs a relationship with the recipient, and the usage thus contributes to the maintenance of good social relations" (p. 359).

This is in line with what Crystal (2001) has observed, that between people who know each other, "Greetingless messages are usually promptly sent responses, where the responder sees the message as the second part of a two-part interaction (an adjacency pair), for which an introductory greeting is inappropriate."

Therefore, considering the relationship between the sender and the receiver would be essential to determine the appropriate greetings to use. There are a number of options that could be used in email greetings as presented in table 1 which is adapted from Rajnerowicz (2022).

Table 1. The most common greetings

Greetings	Example	Function
[Name],	Alana,	The most direct

Hi [Name],	Hi David,	Informal
Hello [Name],	Hello Maria,	Semi-informal
Dear [Name],	Dear Frieda,	Formal & natural
Dear [title + last name],	Dear Mr. Patterson,	Formal & polite
Dear [first name + [last name],	Dear Dexter Smith,	If the gender or which last name is unknown
Good [morning/ afternoon/ evening]	Good morning,	Useful for multiple recipients
Dear + [Job title]	Dear Communication Manager,	If only the position is known

Opening Sentence

One of the requirements of an effective email is to have a clear, concise, and polite message. Indeed, it matters to reveal this impression from the opening line of the email. This part plays as big as the subject line's role: to attract the readers' attention. Thus, the opening line should be as clear and concise as possible, to show how the sender respects the reader's time, no matter what the main purpose of the email was.

Rajnerowicz (2022) also proposes the four basic types of email opening that work effectively to use. The first point is to offer value. The value, however, should focus on the reader's benefit or solution that they might be seeking. The second one is asking questions. It is crucial to learn that these two kinds of opening lines would suit a business product or service best, as the focus is on the readers' needs and situation.

The next part is the one that boosts the ego. This technique indeed represents how a sender could perform greater cognitive concentration on attaining multiple goals in interpersonal interactions, including optimizing self-presentation and concern for the communication partner's needs and wants which was proposed by Walther (1996). Examples of boosting ego statements are congratulating the receiver's achievements or any business accomplishments.

The last one is an opening that starts a conversation. This last technique is usually used when there was an interaction that took place before, such as following up on a meeting, an email, or continuing a certain discussion. This tends to be a more flexible expression when opening the line.

The opening line should not be too personal or too bragging. It should be kept professional but warm, yet polite to start the discussion. There are various opening sentence references that could be used, and it is suggested to use the most relevant lines with today's circumstances to make it appropriate to use.

Email Body

As using an appropriate opening line is just the beginning, it takes more consideration to compose an effective body email so that the main purpose of the email could be well-delivered. This is the most essential part of written business communication; therefore, it should be as brief and clear as possible. The body could be composed either in direct or indirect ways.

The direct structure begins with the main point, which expresses the real purpose of the email. Once it is stated, the next thing to include is the relevant context of why the main points are stated. Thus, readers could easily understand why the communication takes place. Once this is settled, a closing statement is needed. The closing could be in a form of a call-to-action sentence, a brief summary of the body, or simply thanking the reader. This direct method suits communication in which the audience already knows the topic or is likely to approve the message sent (Martina, 2022).

The indirect method, on the contrary, is used when the new topic is conveyed for the first time. Thus, it should start with a relevant context to guide the reader to understand the main better easily. It needs to be carefully considered which best method to implement to avoid any negative impressions. Adjusting it with the main purpose of the email is the key. The negative message should not be conveyed directly, as it might influence the reader emotionally or professionally. Hence, a negative message should always be delivered using an indirect method. Stating positive reinforcement would not harm anybody, after all.

All in all, writers could not just compose too long or too short unclear sentences when emailing. The style of writing holds a significant role in written communication, which might affect the professional image of the sender.

Avoiding ambiguity would be a good step in writing a clear body email. In the end, all the expressions used from the subject line until the main body should be consistent, particularly the tone of the message conveyed. This would establish a professional and reliable image of the sender.

Closing

Another component of an effective email is the closing part. "Signing off or adding a closing to a message is also a way of doing deference or signaling respect" (Waldvogel, 2007). Additionally, Bunz and Campbell (2002) found that messages containing both verbal (e.g., please, thanks) and structural (greetings and closings) indicators elicited the politest responses. Thus, having a proper closing in an email would be necessary to maintain in written communication, emailing in particular. The closing statement used should also be consistent with the level of formality in the greeting and body. The most effective closing remarks which are proven to trigger a more positive response from the audience are presented in table 2. The expressions were gained through research conducted by Greenley (2017) with various online communities involved as the participants of the study.

Table 2. The most effective email closing

Email Closing	Response Rate
Thanks in advance	65.7%
Thanks	63.0%
Thank you	57.9%
Cheers	54.4%
Kind regards	53.9%
Regards	53.5%
Best regards	52.9%
Best	51.2%

Surprisingly, the research found out that emails closed with a variation of showing gratitude indeed earns more responses than just the popular closings. This does not always mean that all emails should be closed with the highest ranks only, for sure. Eventually, the context and the degree of formality of the email itself should be prioritized. In the past, almost all emails use formal closing remarks only. In reality, the expressions keep updated as the generation that dominates the market also changes from time to time. Hence, adjusting the expressions is

required to enter a global standard of email communication.

There are also several rules proposed by Pascual (2022) to pick the most appropriate email closing. First, including a job title and contact information is crucial. However, it needs to be kept in mind not to show off too much. Keep the information as simple as possible. Second, use a small company logo if needed. The company logo is just a trademark of the company, focusing on the main purpose of the email. Third, avoid using any quotes or adding irrelevant pictures or emoticons. This would decrease the professional degree of the sender. The last one is to ensure including a sign-off signal to indicate that your email ends already. In the end, the closing remarks are relatively personal, and every writer might have his/her own style. This would not be an issue, as long as all aspects, tone, and formality levels are consistent.

Suggestions to Write a Concise Email

As the previous discussion has presented the existing guidance along with the recommendations of the expressions that could be applied using the updated research result, this part presents some additional suggestions that L2 email writers could implement to write a more effective email. The suggestions were developed based on professional experiment which is proven to be effective.

If in a formal academic writing context all information should be written clearly in a formal language expression, the more statements used also means the clearer the claims will be. In contrast with this, email writing indeed needs to keep everything simple. Avoiding wordy sentences is a must, as the email should be concise to read. Likewise, the emphasis on using more action words in active sentence constructions are more efficient to use rather than using noun phrase or passive voice too much.

To keep it short, the email should always start with the reason WHY the email is written which later at the end leads to the call to action from the receiver. Once it is stated, adding supporting information is necessary to make the main purpose clearer. The last part is adjusting the formalities and niceties in the writing style. This could be the most challenging aspect for Indonesian writers, as the niceties often are overwhelming in their nature, which might lead

to ambiguity and unclear statements. However, this all could be learned by practicing, editing, and adjusting the linguistic complexity level just as stated by (Herring, 2002). Eventually, all skills could be improved when they are exposed and implemented more often.

Conclusion

As the urgency of communicating using email is inevitable in today's era, then all the relevant information on writing an effective email is required for all L2 writers. Indonesian writers indeed face so many challenges when communicating in written expressions as this involves complex skills and elements even writing it in an L1 context. Nevertheless, composing emails in an L2 context would be more problematic to implement. Therefore, this paper provides some research findings and updated articles about essential information in email communication.

It is a fact that there are various tips that readers could easily find on the internet about composing a good email. Nonetheless, selecting the most relevant and updated ones would be much more effective to level up the written communication skills, starting from the University level students so it would be easier for them to compete globally at the workplace in the future. It is highly recommended that the practice should just start as early as possible for a better outcome.

This study focuses on the useful recommendations that should be applied and avoided to write a good email. It is expected that more in-depth research about students' and teachers' perspectives on the use of emails to communicate professionally could be dug out. Even though email writing seems so simple, it requires so many aspects in order to convey just a simple message. Thus, grooming entrepreneurial skills in written business communication is intriguing and worth to be explored in the further research study.

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