

# How To Get Your Email Messages Read

By Angela Booth

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Angela Booth  
angela@zip.com.au

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Please send me a copy, if possible. Many thanks.

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Summary: Want to get your email messages read? Think before writing, and follow a few simple rules.

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How To Get Your Email Messages Read

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Who's reading the email messages you send out? Not as many people as you think. For example, research by Internet marketing firms suggests that only ten per cent of email ezines are opened and read.

Email's turning into a spam-filled jungle to which the only sensible response is a flame-thrower or a machete.

Here's what I do, and I expect that I'm typical. I get around 200 email messages a day. I delete 150 unread. I move 30 to a "follow

up" folder, and read 20. By "read", I mean I open the message and scan it quickly.

Will your message be read? Think about how your message will appear in someone's overcrowded Inbox, and structure it carefully to differentiate it from all the spam and other trivia.

= The From field

When you're scanning your list of messages, your glance moves first to the From field. Is it from a friend or foe? Will you read or delete? If it's an address which sounds genuine, the message has passed the first test.

Therefore, your email address is important. Use your own name, or that of your business.

Your email name shouldn't be cute, or weird. When someone's cutting through swathes of spam, after the tenth invitation to view utterly vile images, your cute email address will inspire rage, not a smile.

Remember that you're conducting business, and strive for professionalism.

Because I'm a writer, much of my email is from other writers. Many beginning writers select strange email addresses. Such as:

ialwayswantedtobeawriter@freemail.com. Or  
writergrl27@atanotherfreeemailservice.com.

Even if you're forced to use a Web-based, free service because you don't have a computer at the moment, or because you're travelling, read the Help file to see how to set the From field to your own name, rather than to your User Name for the service. Many people have their email filters set to automatically delete mail from free services.

= The Subject line

The primary rule: be clear.

Many people you're communicating with won't have any idea who you are, so your Subject line should make your reason for communicating with them plain.

If your message's Subject line is blank, or if it has a weird subject line, it will be deleted, unread.

Drop cute, friendly, or mysterious subject lines. Spammers use cute, friendly and mysterious subject lines.

I automatically delete: "Hi!" (sounds like someone sending me a virus); "Hey come see" (not while you live and breathe); "Re: your account payment" (the address has to be from someone I do business with); "Auto-response confirmed" (you're an idiot); "thanks for your subscription" (I didn't subscribe, and I hope you die a slow, miserable death).

If you're sending an article proposal, for example, say so right on the Subject line, with:

"Article Proposal: 10 ways to fold your socks"

Can't think of a Subject line? Take a moment. Ask yourself why you're sending the message.

Think of your subject line as a headline. If you're having a sale at your business, come out and say so: "Sale: Ten per cent off everything at Sally's Garden Center this month".

An honest, up-front subject line ensures your message will be read, if the addressee is interested. For example, if I'm a customer of Sally's Garden Center, I'll be interested that she's having a sale, and will save the message.

= The Message

TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT! Please. Don't obfuscate or waffle. If I don't know what you want after giving the message a quick read, I'm not going to read it twice. It's easier to hit the delete button.

Make your message short. Try to keep it at one screen, which means less than 200 words. Use plenty of white space, don't send me the entire 200 words without a paragraph break.

HTML or text?

Your choice. However, I admit I'm biased against HTML. Not only because it's becoming the format of choice for spammers, but also because people who use HTML emphasize the medium, not the message.

A year or two ago Flash-animated Web sites were all the rage. They had the same problem. Nothing much to say, and they said it with pretty pictures and glowing colors. Look, I read magazines. I watch TV. I don't need pretty pictures. I just want to know why you're sending me a message.

= Don't send message attachments

With all the viruses around, this one should be obvious, but it's not.

If you want to send someone an attachment, send them an email message first, to let them know what the attachment is, and ask them whether they want to receive it. (If you want to send someone a two megabyte file, the answer will be NO. Whatever it is, send it by postal mail.)

Like most people, I don't open an attachment unless I know who the attachment is from, and what the attachment is.

I expect to receive attachments from my clients. My students also innocently send attachments until I tell them that I prefer their exercises pasted into a text email, not sent as five DOC attachments.

If I don't know you, and you send me an attachment, I'll delete your message, including the attachment.

= Include ALL your contact details

Spammers never include verifiable names, phone and fax numbers, and postal addresses.

So you MUST include them if you want someone to take your email message seriously. This is the easiest way to differentiate yourself from spammers.

If someone trusts me enough to send me their phone and fax numbers, and their postal address, I know they're sending a serious message, and I'll read the message carefully.

Getting your email messages read is easy. Just treat the people you contact the same way you want to be treated. If you do that, your messages will be read.

\*\*\*Resource box: if using, please include\*\*\*

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