

E-Mail and Other Electronic Communications Practices, Policies and Etiquette

Communicating via E-mail gives you great power to reach many people, to inform them, to obtain information, and to irritate and anger friends and strangers alike. Some simple, common sense practices will help you use e-mail as a productive tool in your personal and professional life and help you maintain positive relationships with friends and coworkers. Here are some generally accepted “do’s and don’ts” for e-mail. For ease of reference, this document is available at <http://owl.ben.edu/it/technology/eti/index.asp>.

Before You Begin: A Reminder About Benedictine’s Acceptable Use Policy For Information Technology.

- Benedictine University voluntarily provides computing equipment and services for the ***academic, research, administrative, and communications*** needs of its students, faculty and staff.
- Access to all Benedictine University owned and/or operated computing facilities is a ***privilege and not a right***. Individuals who refuse to follow the Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) will not be granted user accounts. Violations of the AUP by individuals with accounts may result in penalties included but not limited to closure of all accounts and revocation of all computing privileges
- ...the information stored on the University ***equipment is the property of the University***... the University will not access the personal files of any authorized user without that individual’s consent, ***with certain exceptions***.

See the Information Technology web page for the complete text of Acceptable Use of Benedictine University Technology Resources. This document pertains to all students, faculty and staff.

1. Match Your Message To The Right Communications Mechanism. (Email Isn’t Right For Everything.)¹

- If you have information to disseminate, think about effective tools that work but do not waste resources or intrude on individuals not likely to be interested in your news.
- If you decide that you do not want to pay attention to email from any particular person you may use email filtering to divert such mail to a separate folder (for review at your leisure) or directly to your deleted items folder. You may filter based on both the sender and on to whom the message was sent (in other words, you can accept messages addressed directly to you while filtering out messages from the same person sent to you via a distribution list).
- Communications channels available to you: Public and private email lists, web pages, and electronic bulletin boards.
- What’s the right tool for the job:

¹ If you need assistance in learning how to use any of these features, please call the Helpdesk at 630-829-6684. Note that not all of these features can be used from the web based Outlook.

- ✓ Public Email List – You have a message that is of importance to all or many of the members included in the public email list. The message is important and is relevant to the Benedictine-related responsibilities of the mail list members.
- ✓ Private Email List – You have a list of colleagues that share interests not likely to be deemed of interest to other members of the Benedictine community. These people may have asked you to keep them informed of certain events. They may be members of a committee.
Recognize that any user may request that s/he be deleted from any private email list (other than lists created and used for supervisory/management activities). A department head may create a private list of all members of the department. A department member cannot remove him/herself from such a list.)
- ✓ Electronic Bulletin Boards – These are perfect for regularly scheduled routine information. Do you need to tell people what your office hours are? Do you need to provide a weekly report or update on events or activities? Do you need to post official records (minutes, agendas) of committee activities? Posting this information to an electronic bulletin board is as easy as creating and sending an email message. There are no special skills required.
- ✓ Web Pages – Do you need to post information that will be available to constituencies who do not have Benedictine Email accounts? Does the information have a reasonably long life expectancy? Is the information something people might expect on a web page (office hours, business procedures, minutes, position papers, etc.)? Remember that Benedictine has only an INTERNET web page. Anything on the web is available to the world.

2. *SPAM = Electronic Junk Mail – Don’t Send It*

- The web is filled with “spam” (electronic junk mail). Do not contribute to this annoying and wasteful problem.
- Remember that one person’s “interesting tidbit” may be someone else’s junk.
- Choose your audience carefully – do not send mail to public or private distribution lists unless a significant percentage of that list has a reasonable chance of being informed by your e-mail.
- Do not flood the airwaves with incessant reminders about coming events – if you want to publicize an event by mass e-mail, send one message well in advance and then another a day or two before the event.
- Remember that chain letters, political advertising, solicitations for non-university sponsored organizations or causes, proselytizing and any commercial venture not approved by the University VP of Administration are not acceptable uses of the BU e-mail system.

3. *Junk E-mail – What To Do If You Receive It*

- If you receive unsolicited, unwanted e-mail from a member of the Benedictine community, REPLY to that individual, stating simply that you do not want to receive mail of this type from this individual. SAVE the original mail and your REPLY as evidence. (See Abuse)
- If the unwanted e-mail is from a known vendor that you have done business with or from a legitimate group, then REPLYing to them with a “take me off your list” should get results. But...
- If you receive unsolicited/unwanted spam-type e-mail from someone unknown to you outside the Benedictine community – **DELETE IT. DO NOT REPLY TO IT.** Replying only provides proof that the “spammer” has found a live, currently used e-mail account. Your account address may then be sold to dozens or hundreds of other spammers and junk mail merchants.
- Do not participate in CHAT groups, NEWSGROUPS, online “Surveys”, etc. – unless you want to be flooded with junk e-mail.
- There is very little that you can do to shut off a flood of junk e-mail once it has started. Just learn to use the DELETE feature.

- If you choose to subscribe to a listserv (an automated mailing list that distributes e-mail among a group of users interested in specific topics), be sure that you print out and save the instructions on how to **Unsubscribe** should you find that the list does not meet your needs.
- If you find your Benedictine University e-mail flooded with junk, then your best defense will be a quick finger on the DELETE icon. If the junk mail is flooding a personal e-mail account with an outside provider (Hotmail, AOL, Worldnet, etc.) then you may just want to change your e-mail address. Outside providers allow you to do this easily. You'll just have to inform all of your contacts about the new address.

4. Security and Privacy Start With You

- Protect your password! Once someone has your password, they can read your e-mail and they can **send** e-mail in your name.
- **LOGOFF!** If you do not logoff (and close the browser when using webmail), you can be the victim of a "drive-by e-mailer". Anyone using that computer can send offensive messages that appear to come from you.
- Remember that e-mail is never private; it is more like a postcard than a letter. Any recipient can forward what you send to "the world". And...BU reserves the right to read anyone's e-mail (see Acceptable Use Policy for details.)
- Deleting an e-mail does not mean that it is "gone". E-mail lives forever in the reels of backup tapes made nightly. If you don't want it saved, copied, forwarded or shared...then don't e-mail it; pick up the phone and call.

5. 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.
- E-mail carries none of the tone of voice, facial expression, or other cues that tell us when someone understands what we mean. 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.
- Many e-mail programs 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.
- Watch your spelling and grammar; people will form opinions about you by how well (or poorly) you handle the language. Remember that you represent both yourself and Benedictine University.

6. Content - Common Sense Counts

- Start your message with the name of the person you are addressing, just as in a handwritten note or letter.
- 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.
- If you are replying to a message someone else has sent to you, it is often good to include short, relevant parts of his or her original message in your reply. This helps everyone remember what he or she is talking about. A greater than sign (>) signifies that you are repeating someone else's words:
>when will you be sending that article to us?
We'll get it to you next week; is Friday OK?
- End your message with your full name and your e-mail address. (Some e-mail systems allow you to automatically include your "signature" at the end of each message. It is a useful tool.)

7. *Sending E-Mail*

- 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- and mail with missing or non-descriptive titles may be deleted without being read.)
- Send mail to relevant people. Don't broadcast mail to people unlikely to be interested or involved in an issue.
- 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 this situation.

8. *Abusive E-mail - Dealing With It*

- Your first defense (if the sender is known to you or is sending from a BU e-mail account) is to REPLY to an offensive message, stating that you are offended by the content of a message and that you do not wish to receive similar messages. SAVE and PRINT a copy of the original text and your reply as evidence should you need it.
- If the sender is not known to you and is not sending from a BU mail account, then do NOT reply. Just delete the message. If you get repeated e-mail then you may be able to complain to the e-mailers account provider (this has a modest percentage of success.)
- If a student believes that his or her rights have been violated by another's use of technology in a form of harassment, whether verbal, pictorial, or any other means, the individual should report the abuse to the Dean of Students for appropriate action. Save and print out any offensive messages you receive as evidence. See "Acceptable Use Policies" for more details.
- If a faculty or staff member believes that his or her rights have been violated by another's use of technology in a form of harassment, whether verbal, pictorial, or any other means, the individual should report the abuse to the Human Resources Office for appropriate action. Save and print out any offensive messages you receive as evidence. See "Acceptable Use Policies" for more details.