

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA E-MAIL BEST PRACTICES

The University of North Florida considers e-mail an important means of communication and recognizes the importance of proper e-mail content and prompt replies in conveying a professional image and delivering our commitment to individualized attention and student focus, customer service.

All employees should read and understand the University's policies regarding e-mail, passwords, computer and network use and other procedures located on the Information Technology Services web page at <http://www.unf.edu/dept/its/>.

Pursuant to Florida law, e-mail regarding University business is public record and subject to request and or disclosure to anyone in the public. Accordingly, please be mindful of what you write in an e-mail and observe the best practices discussed below to not only protect your reputation, but that of the University.

While e-mail style is a personal preference (formal or informal), department heads and supervisors, in consultation with departmental colleagues, shall determine e-mail standards (e.g. expected turnaround, turning on Out of Office Assistant, e-mail signature and other protocol) affecting the efficient operation of the unit and the University's commitment to student focus and customer service. If you are a new or current employee, become familiar with these e-mail best practices and speak with your department head or supervisor about department e-mail protocol. Additional resources are provided at the end of this document.

Writing e-mails:

- Write well-structured e-mails.
 - Use the inverted pyramid form of writing. Your most important statements should appear in the first paragraph. Follow up with supporting details.
 - Keep paragraphs short for easy reading. Put forth your recommendations or state the measures you plan to take in resolving a problem.
 - Use sub-topic headings within your e-mail message, especially if the message is lengthy. Refer to the subtopics in your first paragraph. This will provide a helpful guide for your reader.
 - Ask for an action. For example, let your recipient know what you need in order to complete a task.
- Always fill in the subject line with a subject that describes the content of the e-mail.
 - Think of your subject line as the headline of an important news article. The subject line should be meaningful and relate to the message content.
 - Subject lines should not change when replying and forwarding messages.
- Use plain text unless formatting is required.
- Outlook has a spelling and grammar checker for outgoing messages and should be utilized to minimize avoid misspellings, poor grammar and/or improper punctuation when sending messages.
 - This will help properly convey the message and give a good impression of you, your department and the University.
 - Read your e-mail before sending to make sure you are appropriately conveying your intended message. Outlook spell checker is no substitute for good proofreading.
- Use proper upper and lower sentence casing.
- Personalize the message by including the recipient's name.
 - While there is no standard salutation and closing, including these items personalizes your e-mail. Examples of salutations include: "The name of the person", "Hi (the name of the person)", "Hello (the name of the person), and "Dear" (the name of the person). Examples of closings include: "Best Regards", "Regards", "Sincerely".
- Use the To: field for people who are to act on your message, and the Cc: (carbon copy) field for people who are sent the message for their information only.
- Use active instead of passive voice.
 - Try to use the active voice of a verb wherever possible. For instance, "We will process your application today" sounds better than "Your application will be processed today". The first

sounds more personal, whereas the latter, especially when used frequently, sounds unnecessarily formal.

Replying and Sending e-mails:

- Include the original message thread when replying.
- Answer all questions and attempt to pre-empt further questions when possible.
- Only use Reply to All if you really need your message to be seen by each person who received the original message. Be especially careful of using Reply to All when receiving an e-mail sent to a large group of people such as Campus Update.
- Answer promptly.
 - If you are researching a complicated e-mail, send an e-mail back saying that you have received it and that you will get back to the sender. This will put the sender's mind at ease and they will usually be patient. Some departments have standards for turnaround e-mail time. Check with your department head or supervisor.
- Place your reply at the top of the message.
- Acknowledge the source when you quote information. Just as you would in an academic essay or published work, properly acknowledge references when you quote information in e-mail.
- When forwarding e-mails, state what action you expect the recipient to take. Indicate "fyi" (for your information) if the e-mail is for informational purposes.

General Practices

- Utilize Outlook's signature option in the format section for your outgoing messages.
 - Signature lines may include your name, job title, department name, direct extension, fax number and e-mail address. Avoid large fonts, graphics, HTML or e-business cards in your signature line as this creates a larger e-mail. Outlook has the ability to create multiple signatures allowing you to create a more detailed external signature with UNF's complete address, area code, etc. and a less detailed internal signature with your name and extension.
- Use "Out of Office Assistant" when you will be unavailable for a day or more to check e-mail.
 - For security reasons, restrict your message to letting senders know you are out of the office and when you will be returning. Include the name and phone number of another person within your office to contact for assistance.
 - Some departments request this feature be turned on if an employee cannot check e-mail for a specific number of hours. Check with your department head or supervisor to determine proper protocol.
 - When you return, disable the Out of Office Assistant immediately so that senders no longer receive your away message.
- Limit the use of read and delivery receipts.
 - Turning this feature on globally for every e-mail does not guarantee knowing whether the recipient has read the e-mail as he or she has the option of answering yes or no to the read prompt. If you want to know whether an important e-mail was received and read, ask the recipient within the e-mail to reply to you when received and read.
- Limit the use of recalling messages.
 - Most chances are that your message has already been delivered and read. It is better just to send an e-mail with an explanation and the corrected information.
- Limit labeling messages with high priority.
 - If you overuse the high priority option, it will lose its function when you really need it.
- Restrict yourself to one subject per message.
 - This helps recipients to use the Subject: field to manage the messages they receive.
- Use layout to help you communicate.
 - Use blank lines between paragraphs, one main idea per paragraph, and lists of points where appropriate.
- Use bullets or numbering for clarity.
 - You can make it easy to respond to your message by clearly identifying your questions or requests with bullets or numbers.
- Use University established methods of e-communication to correspond with constituents.

- UNF has many methods of communicating with internal and external constituents (e.g. the Web, myWings portal, Web Calendar, distribution lists, Campus Update and Student Update.) Speak with your department head or supervisor to determine the proper method of communicating your message or contact Marketing and Publications for guidelines on use of Campus and Student Updates, the Web calendar and publications.

Attachments

- Avoid opening attachments that you are not expecting or received from unknown senders.
 - Attachments may contain computer viruses. When in doubt, call the sender and verify they have sent the attachment.
- Limit sending large attachments.
 - Whenever possible, save an attachment to a shared drive and include the path to the file. If sending large attachments externally, compress the attachment before sending. The current attachment size limit is 10MB.
- Save necessary attachments to a drive and delete the original e-mail.
 - Attachments take up space in your mailbox. To quickly generate more space, you can save e-mail attachments to a network or local drive and then remove the e-mail from your Inbox.

Security Guidelines

- Never reveal your login ID and password to others.
 - The security of your password should be treated like the PIN of a debit card.
- Be selective when you give out your e-mail address.
- If you need to complete a web form that requires an e-mail address, create a free web e-mail account (e.g. Hotmail or Yahoo) and provide that e-mail address in the web form instead of your official UNF e-mail address.
- After using Webaccess or Ntrigue from a location outside the University (e.g. Internet café, business center or other public location), always logout and close your browser at the end of your session.
- Set your password to a memorable but not easily guessable word and mix letters and numbers. The length of the password is more important than the complexity. Strive for short sentences or pass phrases that exceed 15 characters.
- Do not reply to spam.
 - By replying to spam or by unsubscribing, you are confirming that your e-mail address is 'live'. Confirming this will only generate even more spam. It is better to just delete such messages. UNF hosts an antispam solution designed to reduce the amount of spam that makes it to your inbox. If you believe that you have received a piece of spam that you shouldn't, refer to the following ITS web page for more information or to report it:
<http://www.unf.edu/dept/its/email/ironport.html>.
- Do not forward virus hoaxes and chain letters.
 - If you receive an e-mail message warning you of a new unstoppable virus that will immediately delete everything from your computer, this is most probably a hoax. By forwarding hoaxes you use valuable bandwidth. Sometimes virus hoaxes contain viruses themselves, by attaching a so-called file that will stop the dangerous virus. Refer to <http://www.snopes.com/computer/computer.asp>. The same goes for chain letters that promise incredible riches or ask your help for a charitable cause. If you have questions about the validity of an e-mail, contact your C-tech or the ITS Support Center.
- Shut down your computer each day.
 - ITS recommends shutting down all computers daily. This ensures the application of necessary patches upon daily reboot and prevents the computer from being attacked or abused when it is unattended.
- Never give out personal or financial information through e-mail; someone may be “phishing” for information.
 - Phishing is a high-tech scam that uses spam or pop-up messages to deceive you into disclosing your credit card numbers, bank account information, Social Security number, passwords, or other sensitive information. If you get an e-mail or pop-up message that asks for personal or financial

information, do not reply or click on the link in the message. Legitimate companies don't ask for this information via e-mail. If you are concerned about your account, contact the organization in the e-mail using a telephone number you know to be genuine, or open a new Internet browser session and type in the company's correct Web address. In any case, don't cut and paste the link in the message. For more information on phishing, visit the Anti Phishing Group web page at <http://www.antiphishing.org/>.

Privacy and Copyright Guidelines

- E-mail is not confidential.
 - E-mail messages made or received by UNF employees in connection with official business are public records and subject to disclosure.
 - Anyone, including newspaper and other media, can access the University's public records; therefore, what you e-mail today could be tomorrow's headline or lead story.
 - If you wouldn't want others to read it; don't send it. Use an alternative communication vehicle such as face-to-face or phone conversation.
 - Do not send social security numbers, birth dates, grades, medical information, student records, or other confidential information via e-mail.
 - Sending an e-mail related to UNF business is a matter of public record. If the message cannot be displayed publicly in its current state, consider rephrasing the e-mail or using other means of communication.
- Use caution when forwarding e-mail or attachments.
 - If you receive an original work from a student or a non-University representative, be mindful of who you forward the document to because of both FERPA issues and copyright concerns.
 - What you receive from a student may be an "educational record" and may not be shared with others unless they have a "legitimate educational interest" as defined by FERPA, in reviewing the document. Accordingly, you should avoid forwarding an e-mail from a student unless you are certain the person the message is forwarded to has the required educational interest in reviewing the document. Similarly, if you receive an attachment from a non-University representative that may be proprietary in nature, be mindful that you only forward it to those that have a legitimate business reason for reviewing the document.
 - FERPA, The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), is a federal law which affords students certain rights with respect to their educational records. The intent of this Act is to protect the privacy of students and their records. For additional information on FERPA, visit the Registrar Web Page and select FERPA from the General Information list or search for FERPA on the UNF main page.

Managing Your Mailbox

- Delete e-mails from your Inbox you no longer need.
 - Your Outlook mailbox has a space limit; therefore, regularly delete e-mails from your Inbox that are not intended to perpetuate knowledge about University business. As such, you only need to retain messages that have a continuing impact on the University. Such messages should be retained and either printed and stored in a hard file or stored electronically elsewhere in your PC.
- Delete e-mails from your Sent Items folder.
 - Every time you send an e-mail message, a copy of the message is stored in your Sent Items folder. As with your Inbox, delete e-mails from your Sent Items folder which are not needed to perpetuate University business as sent items similarly use your available mailbox space limit.
- Archive old mail by moving it to a local drive.
 - If you need to retain e-mail for University business purposes, you can archive old e-mail by moving it to a local drive which will then not affect your Outlook mailbox space limit. You can stay under this limit by moving old messages from your mailbox to a local drive on your computer by using the archive feature. To setup your Outlook to archive old mail visit <http://www.unf.edu/dept/its/e-mail/olarchive.html>. You also have the option of copying e-mail that you believe needs to be retained to a CD or ZIP drive.
- Empty your Deleted Items folder.

- Empty your Deleted Items folder. When you delete messages, they are moved to the Deleted Items folder but are still included in your total mailbox allocation. Empty this folder regularly or set your mailbox to automatically remove deleted items.

Resources:

<http://www.netmanners.com/>

<http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>

<http://unf.skillport.com/spunf/login/login.cfm>

Because Netiquette Matters by Judith Kalos

Netiquette by Virginia Shea

SkillSoft online course - E-mail & Internet Use

1.5 hour course