

How to start and finish an email? – Part 2

It matters how you start and finish an email. Part 1 looked at how to start an email. This article explores your options in finishing a professional email.

The Covid-19 period represents a new context for email communication. It is important we balance communicating simply and effectively with ensuring our messages convey the empathy, reassurance and sensitivity that can be very meaningful in this crisis period. In this series of articles, we focus simply on ensuring you use the correct start and end to your email writing. Please note that there is no universal truth in relation to how to write emails! The conventions below are my suggestions based on my experience of professional practice.

You have a range of options depending on the level of formality and cultural context. An effective email writer needs to tune in to both the formality of the situation and also have a feeling for the cultural context which can encompass the nationality, company style, personal style and age of the recipient.

How to finish an email: Formal

When communicating to customers, suppliers or senior management.

Best regards - This is a classic and very formal way of ending an email. I use this convention widely in my formal business email writing. It is an effective way of ending a client-facing communication, for example, in particular at the start of the relationship.

Kind regards - This is also an effective ending to a formal business email. It can be a useful and subtle way of communicating more warmth in your business relationship with a client, supplier or senior manager.

Best wishes - Unlike the above, the use of 'Best wishes' I would admit to being more of a personal style. 'Best wishes' still conveys formality but it also communicates more feeling. I believe this is a good way of signing off an email in Covid-19 times. It can also have a seasonal connotation. I have a little 'rule of thumb' whereby I use 'Best wishes' in my client-facing communications in the period building up to Christmas.

Warmest regards, Kindest regards - These conventions need to be used with care. If overused they can give the impression of being a little OTT (over the top) or 'gushing' (overly-emotional) in your email writing. However, they are good conventions to use when communicating condolences or celebrating good news with formal business contacts. For example, if your client is getting married, having a baby or conversely has experienced a death in the family these expressions feel appropriate. They allow you to retain your professionalism but at the same communicate empathy.

Note of caution - mixing email and letter writing

conventions. 'Yours sincerely' and 'Yours faithfully' are letter writing conventions that are best used in a letter (electronic or otherwise) and not a business email. A good example of when to use these conventions would be in sending an electronic cover letter in support of your CV for a new job posting. You use 'Yours sincerely' when you know the person you are writing a letter to; 'Dear Mr Higson/Yours sincerely'. When you don't know the person you are writing a letter to, the convention is 'Dear Sir/Madam/Yours faithfully'. I don't typically use these conventions in my email writing. The only exception would be if I was emailing a complaint to a service provider and I wanted to express a very serious tone in my writing I would consider using 'Yours sincerely'.

How to finish an email: Semi-formal

When communicating to good colleagues or clients/suppliers you have a very warm relationship with.

Regards - 'Regards' is a good sign off to use across your organisation when communicating to colleagues. It works well if you are communicating to a colleague in your company that you don't know so well. It communicates professionalism but is less formal than 'Best regards' or 'Kind regards'. It feels a little cold to use with a really good colleague.

Best - I use 'Best' as my preferred email sign off when emailing to my team. It conveys a warmer impression than 'Regards' but still highlights a professional boundary. It is not an overly common way of finishing an email so don't worry if it does not feel comfortable in your company context.

A little note of caution: As with starting an email, the way you finish really does depend on the culture in which you work. In some companies the established practice might be to use 'Best regards' across both internal and external communications. In which case there is no need to be an email revolutionary! However, as general guidance, the boundaries between the formal and semi-formal expressions listed above do hold true. I would really not recommend using 'Regards' in a first contact email to a customer, for example.

Other more informal conventions: There are many other ways of finishing an email that you will experience in your day to day exchanges. 'See you later' and 'Cheers' - a UK favourite, are sometimes used and very relaxed in tone. If you have a great relationship with a colleague these might be fine but know they give a relaxed impression.

A pet hate! The closing expression I like least is 'BR' as an abbreviation for 'Best regards'. Using this expression does neither one thing or the other. It conveys a busy/hurried state that undermines a professional tone and it is simply too short to communicate any warmth. Best avoided!

We hope this has been useful!