

TLP Five-Minute Read Over Coffee – What I think is important in email writing

I spend a lot of time thinking about how to write powerful emails in English. These principles summarise what I think is important.

1- Think carefully how to start

- Dear Mr Higson (Formal, first Contact, used in many European companies)
- Dear Toby (Formal, more familiar, used a lot in UK, USA, Canada)
- Hi Toby (Semi-formal, good colleague, really good customer, 'American style')

2- Email Sandwich

What is it!

- For example: 'I hope your week is going well' to start the email, or 'If you have any questions do let me know'.
- When should you use it! It depends on lots of things - most importantly the context of the email. Is it customer facing? How well do you know your customer?
- I think you should use it a lot - both to keep it professional but also to communication warmth.
- There is one danger here. Which is losing your authentic voice in a very mechanical email style. You need to avoid being an email robot and use the same opening and closing expressions all the time. Don't always say 'I hope this email finds you well' your audience well.

3- How direct should you be?

- There is no easy answer. For example, being direct in the UK would mean something different in Germany or Slovenia! Being too direct I label as 'email machismo'. If you write very short, direct emails it is easy to come across as directive and rude.
- Consider softening your requests with a modal verb like 'would, could or can' or simply by saying please. 'Please could you send me the November sales report', feels very different from 'Send me the November sales report'.

4- Being warm, authentic and clear.

I had great feedback on how what you want or need (in written or spoken communication) can get lost in politeness. The expression this person used was the language of hesitancy. If you are too polite you might give the impression of being hesitant.

Consider the difference between the two examples.

Would it be possible for you to send me the November sales report when you have a moment? (Too hesitant?)

I would like you to send me the November sales report.

💡 I think the style I want to express most powerfully is a simple and generous email style that works for colleagues, customers and other contacts.

💡 The language is professional, warm but it is not blah blah or too formal. As a native speaker I am generous to my audience in that I try to avoid jargon (idioms that might not be understood), abbreviations, phrasal verbs that might not keep it clear.

Hi Peter,

I hope you are good. I would like to organise a meeting to review the November Sales Report. Would you be free to meet next week? Let me know if you have any questions on what needs to be included in the report.

Best wishes

Toby

5 - Play with your ending.

Best regards (formal, first contact)

Kind regards (formal but you have a good rapport)

Best wishes (end of the year, festive)

Best (really good colleague - people might think you are too lazy to use 'Best regards')