

Transcript | The Art of Writing the Perfect Email

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Great. I can see that the attendance list is picking up thick and fast, so I will get going. Welcome to this event on the art of writing the perfect email. My name is Doug Hodgson. I work on the events team here at Apolitical.

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As ever, it would be fantastic to hear from all of you. So please do post in the chat where you're joining us from and what organization you work for it's always great to know who we've got around the world

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From the global community of public service joining us. So points for the first brave poster um today we're going to be focusing on the key components of writing an effective email helps adjust tone and structure to create concise, engaging messages and the common pitfalls seen in large scale communications like interdepartmental emails or perhaps mailing lists.

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I can see already that the chat is flooding with lots of people. So thank you very much, Lynn from the Department of Justice in Canada for saying hello first. Hi, Graham.

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Dining in from Toronto will as well from Ottawa. Lots of Canadians here. It's lovely to see you. Hi, Rachel. She's in Derbyshire and natural England in the UK.

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I'm seeing Ria from London. Welcome. Fantastic. Hi there, Pablo from Bolivia. Great to have you here. Hi, Sarah from Manchester.

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That is a fantastic very global emily is from scotland global community public service as ever it's fantastic to see you all I'm really looking forward to fielding some of your questions later.

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And tackling this important subject. So for those of you who might be joining us for the first time, welcome.

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Apolitical is a network and a learning platform for governments used by over a quarter of a million public servants and policymakers from more than 160 countries.

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Our mission is to make government smarter and deliver for people and the planet by doing that.

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We do that by putting the best knowledge and skills at the fingertips of public servants and policymakers all around the world, just like you. And I'd also like to extend a special welcome to those of you today who are in A-list schools writing effectively in government community.

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If you're not in that forum, then we're thrilled to extend an invitation to join today's speakers and over 6,000 of your peers across the global public service in this space. It's a place for you to ask questions, share advice, resources.

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And some hot tips on all and any aspect of writing in government. So please do join. My colleague has just posted a link in the chat.

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Something might have just popped up at the bottom of your screen that will take you to the community page. So hope to meet you all and engage with you all in that space.

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I'm just going to get through a couple of technical notes before we get into today's conversation. So this event is recorded for on-demand viewing on the API School website.

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Please don't record it yourself. If you come off mute, your Zoom username and if your camera, your Facebook background may be visible in the recording.

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Contact details for privacy concerns are in the AIM Political homepage footer. Closed captions are available and can be toggled off or on in your screen settings.

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We're going to crack into today's discussion with a couple of holds. So I'd like to get everybody in attendance a kind of steer from you guys today to start off with.

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So the first poll will just pop up in your screen. I can see it just has done.

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And this is a very simple numerical question. How many emails do you send a day on average?

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So some of you might be sending a lot of Teams messages perhaps and not so many emails. Some of you might be churning out 100 or more emails a day. I'd love to know how many that is.

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And... we'll give you a moment to respond to that poll.

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And we'll wait for everybody to have a go at it before I read the results.

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Fantastic. That is interesting. Okay. So most of you are spending between 10 and 25 emails a day.

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None of you that so far are sending 100 or more, which is perhaps unsurprising because that is that you'd be spending all day writing.

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Though lots of people may be doing mixed communications methods, some on teams selling some interdepartmental emails That is quite interesting. I'm going to move swiftly onto our other poll, number two that should pop up.

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On your screen, there we go. And I would just like to know, in your view, what is the most important quality in government writing? So this is not necessarily referring to emails specifically, although you know we'll capture email writing within this selection so you might think the clarity and confusion is the most important

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Plain English or plain plain language, avoiding jargon and active voice consistency, the ability to adapt your tone or language to different audiences If you have a different idea to some of the options that are on your screen, then just feel free to post them in the chat.

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I will give you another few seconds to all of the above, Cassandra. Thank you, Sandra. That's good I'm going to give you a few seconds.

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To finish answering there. There we go. Okay. Wow. A whopping 61% of you are saying clarity incision is the most important element of writing in government so uh speakers beware we're expecting a high level of clarity and precision from your presentation today.

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And then active voice, only two of you. That's very interesting to me. Let's see if you'll be interested to know if anybody's opinions change it throughout today's session.

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I am going to ask you one more poll. Before we move on to our presentations. And I would like you to answer in the chat I know that there's a little text box that is opening up there, but if you can answer in the chat, that's a little bit easier for me to read it if that's possible. I'd just like to know what is your email

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I'm sure all of you might have one. I'm just going to give that moment to unnecessary reply alls. Thank you, Brittany. That's very good Bad grammar, bad titles.

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Lack of relevance says graham Ali says PLDR, which is an acronym which means too long didn't read.

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That's interesting. We use that quite a lot in apolitical and people seem to like it. So I'm interested that some people don't like that acting no signatures says tori I trust you are well. I presume I'm not being that's not being directed at me. I am very well. Thank you very much. I'm presuming that that means that the kind of

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Email opening, long and wordy emails this is all uh very good this is kind of golden content. So thank you for sharing all of these Really interesting to get your feedback on those polls there. I am going to move us on to introduce our speakers for today. So we're fortunate to be joined by three brilliant guests.

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Sandra Hollingspad, Erica Pappas and Dr. Stuart Thompson Stuart is a political communications and public affairs consultant and founder of CWE Communications, through which he has been nominated for awards My body touches the Chartered Institute of Public Relations Sandra is the former journalist turned public servant. She works as an information assessment librarian for Global Affairs Canada and is an active leader in the Canadian government's plain language community of practice.

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Erica is corporate records business lead for communication and policy tools at the City of Edmonton, government of Alberta.

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Welcome all of you. If you'd like to find out a bit more information about our speakers, head to the resources tab at the bottom of your Zoom screen where you'll be able to read their full bios.

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The rest of the session is going to work like this. Each speaker has about seven minutes to deliver a lightning talk tackling what they think makes a perfect or perhaps not so perfect email. That's not a lot of time.

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Lightning talks tend to be this way, but the aim is that we scratch the surface and then leave lots of time at the end for you to pose your questions to our speakers and to get some kind of tailored insights. So before we get into that, I wanted to ask a really quick icebreaker

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To get us going. So Stuart, I'm going to come to you first with this. We've already posted this icebreaker in the writing effectively in government community for all of you attendees that would like to have a go at answering this. So check out the chat where you'll find a link to that thread. But Stuart, I would like to know.

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What is your unread number currently sitting at in your inbox? And there is no shame, we're all friends. I'm being nosy.

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Love to be here today and I'm looking forward to hearing Erica and Sandra speak as well. I'm sure I'm going to learn loads from their wise words. To be honest with you, I'm so anal. As soon as an email comes in.

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I clear it. Now, that brings its own challenges. So I'm not suggesting for a minute that that puts me in any special category because actually maybe I'm too distracted by emails. So that's not a good thing.

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That's good. I'm impressed. I think that um Oh, there's a big range in the chat. I think that you're about in the median of lots of people in the room today, Stuart. So that's a good place to be. Erica, how about you?

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I would say I have... I haven't looked this morning yet.

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But I usually have about 25 at the beginning of the day and I try to get down to about five by the end of the day. Most of those instead of answering them directly, I'm going to add them to my task list and then archive the email so I don't have to look at it.

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That is some good email hygiene. I would say. Sandra, how about you? How many unread emails are currently sitting in your inbox?

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74.

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Hey, we have a winner. We have a winner. Sandra, thank you for your honesty and

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Now, I'm a little bit different in that because I've never mastered all the intricacies of getting Outlook to do work for me.

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Anything that I need to reply to, I mark it as unread and leave it in my inbox.

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But I also have an extraordinary number of other folders into which I stuff stuff at every available opportunity because my inbox is pretty close to full And... Other than that, I also delete about 150 emails a day.

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That's pretty good going. I would say I'm in a similar bracket to you, Sandra. I like doing the kind of folder and markers on read technique.

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So thank you for your honesty there, speakers. We've got lots of responses in the chat.

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I sound like your inbox Got to stop breathing in that.

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Ranging from

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But if you're... talking to you, you and I both need to go drinking.

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We'll save that for after the event. I'm going to... I'm going to hand over to Stuart immediately. So we're going to go Stuart, then Erica, then Sandra. Stuart.

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Whenever you're ready, I know that you've got some slides. Try pulling them up and take it away.

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Yeah, hopefully that's come up okay, Doug, is it? Perfect. Lovely. Well, thanks very much. So it's great to be speaking to you today.

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I too am looking forward to Erica and Sandra's contributions. So what I wanted to talk about is sort of objectives just for the couple of minutes that I've got. Now, what I wanted to say at the outset is it is perfectly acceptable to have your own style and personality and for that to come across in email. So whatever I say and whatever others say.

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You know it's not trying to create some amorphous blob of similarity between all of us. That's very far from the case.

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But the reality is, I think that humor and nuance and inside jokes, all those sorts of things just don't come across in emails very well, especially in those longer form ones as well.

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But we all have a work persona and this needs to come across in all the communications that we undertake in any workplace.

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So whether that's emails, whether that's behaviors, whether that's the way that we chat to colleagues, all of that is part of our reputation in the workplace. So that's sort of, I suppose, my first objective is to think about emails

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In that setting. But whatever you're writing in an email needs to be considered not to be private.

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They are all ultimately public documents, whether by design or by accident or by nefarious means all these things can happen.

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So the one thing that we do need to think about is that tabloid test. So the newspaper test. How would this look if this email appeared on the front of a newspaper?

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Because they can be leaked, they can be hacked, etc. Freedom of information requests. Now, I know we've got countries from literally all over the world on these apolitical calls. So the circumstances will change and vary between countries. But here in the UK, we have freedom of information. We have subject access requests. So me as an individual can request any email that mentions me and that all has to be drawn from the system. And if that were the case.

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How would that email look? So again, back to that reputation piece. I'm reminded of a... an example again here in the UK of a journalist writing about high-speed rail line the HS2 line. And he was after some information about the A of a particular role that was being advertised.

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And of course, those on the chain forgot that this could all be public. So when it was released, it had everything in there about the role, but equally the comments saying, well, we don't really want to give him that information because we know what sort of story he's going to write.

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That's all public. So that has to be in your mind as well. So we're not talking about just your reputation.

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But also the reputation of your department, your government, even the politicians as well. So if we're not careful, we end up sort of straying into that political territory that we're all trying desperately You know, not to be involved in.

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So absolutely think about the unintended audiences as well as the intended audiences, if I can sort of stretch that bit too much.

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And also emails come in and out of government. So you might well be writing for commercial audiences, as well as those across departments and amongst colleagues. So it can be quite easy for a discussion to move along with non-government views

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Included in that long chain, which some of you talked about in the chat as well.

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And we can sometimes think about emails as being, you know, sort of, you know, a blank screen Starting from scratch But the reality is that you're always, well, always, but largely

responding to those whole discussions. So you might need to think about ways to reestablish control

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Within those emails to maybe go back to maybe that governmental position that's been shifted away from.

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And there's various ways you can do that. You can restate parameters. You can summarize. You can have clear action points. Those ways will help you to regain control. And I say, that can be especially needed if that discussion moves away from the government position, for instance.

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And whilst colleagues in government and a department may understand your role those outside of government often don't.

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So don't take anything for granted just because you're on email chain it may not or be obvious to everybody why you should be on that particular you know cc line or two line.

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And sometimes don't be afraid to sort of reintroduce or introduce yourselves And say what you do, because we've all seen those emails where somebody says, you know, I'm now copying in Dave or Doug or whatever. And it's not necessarily very obvious to anybody why Doug is now on this email. So Doug may need to say.

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Well, this is who I am and this is the role, et cetera. And we don't always take that beat to think about that level of clarity amongst the people, not just the wording.

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So, you know, audiences need to know what does that audience need to know? So objective in terms of the clear language, but also objective in terms of the people.

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Again, if those emails are going outside of government, yes, again, the chat mentioned the avoiding of technical jargon, but sometimes we as individuals can fall into those inside jokes or civil service talk or departmental jargon that again others from outside may not recognize, particularly from the commercial

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Side of things as well. So if we start using terms, you know, explain them. That's absolutely fine.

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And sometimes you can remove yourself from those discussions as well. Don't feel afraid to do that.

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It can feel a little awkward, but as long as you explain your removal, then that's fine.

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And I think also importantly, emails are a really good record of what's happened and when.

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So they're useful when they're keeping records of conversations, of calls of summarizing events. Now, I worked for a long time in my career in law firms, so I head up the communications consultancies within law firms and lawyers will always sort of, you know, encourage us all to keep to keep very good records particularly

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In the event of legal proceedings, obviously. But it can be a really powerful way of just reminding everybody how you got to a particular decision. So another objective would be you know the the record of what's going on.

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Get the basics right. And I go, again, Eric and Asanja will talk about, you know, subject lines and, you know, language, so I'm not going to, you know, I'm not going to talk about that But particularly because for me, the heart of emails is about reputation

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With colleagues, with colleagues you know internal stakeholders, external stakeholders they're a valuable tool But that means that that need to get that perfect email is incredibly important in terms of reputation. Now I've just to finish here, I put a few questions.

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That everybody can ask themselves as we're putting the emails but i think a really sort of short way of putting this together is really how do I, you know, if I received this email How would I react to it? Do I understand it?

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Do I know what to do with it? Do I know what my action points are? Does it move the issue forward?

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So for me, writing that email is always about putting myself in the shoes of the intended audience. So that's always my objective when trying to write that perfect email.

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Stuart, that's fantastic and expertly timed. Thank you. To everybody that's asking about slides, our speakers are very kindly that yes to sharing the slides, which we'll post them on the event page by the end of this week. So if you navigate to the event page.

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You'll be able to find copies of the slides are using, including those fantastic questions that you just left.

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Ross Stewart. So thank you for that great presentation. That was an amazing way to get started.

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I'm going to hand over to Erica. Erica, whilst you're getting your slides up, I just want to say to everyone, if you want to submit some questions, please try and do that in the Q&A tab at the bottom of your screen rather in the chat. It just makes it easier to

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To keep tabs on what's being asked. So thank you for that. And Erica i can see your

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Hello, everybody. I'm excited to be able to present on this because I think a lot of us have pet peeves about receiving emails and receiving emails people replying all and sending emails and sending emails Really what we want to do is make the best use of everybody's time. Emails are an opportunity.

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For both the people sending it and the people receiving it. The sender is looking to put their idea or their request into the recipient's mind as clearly as possible.

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So if you think about if you think about a diver, for example.

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If they're going into murky water, you could sort of see what's around you. You can kind of get the gist.

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But clear water would be much better. You're not seeing the water itself. And so you can focus on the fish or the coral reef or whatever you happen to be.

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Viewing. So what we want to do is make our emails as clearly clear as possible to avoid distractions So it's easy to understand as possible, including word choice.

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And white space is easy to action as possible and as free of distractions as possible
Distractions include just getting people to

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Just not draw notice to something they're like, oh, that's strange. That includes distractions.
Let's try to go straight for the goal.

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And remove distractions if possible. So greetings are important. They prime your audience to be
receptive to you. You want them to want to hear you.

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The greeting will communicate who the email is for. Please, please check your spellings.

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It misspelled names don't communicate a lot of respect for the recipient.

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Make them as easy to action, sorry, it sets the tone for the rest of the emails so we're talking
formality here.

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And is the evidence of what the recipient thinks or the sender thinks they're thinking Sorry. The
recipient relationship with the sender is, or at least what the sender thinks that should be so
When I was doing my master's, I had a friend who's like, oh, my dad's a professor.

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He would love to read this. I think he'd be very interested. I was like, okay, so I sent the... The
professor, my thesis and i said hi ian And the response was signed Dr. Smith. So I had to adjust
my tone going forward and match it. You can match your tone of your

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Of your greeting by looking at previous emails you've gotten from your recipient by talking to
other people who know the recipient, just generally the company culture internally if you're
writing to a coworker versus leadership, see if you can figure out what the norms are around
that.

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My personal preference for most things is, hey folks I like that. That's my personality. That's
friendly. It's also gender neutral.

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Some people may not care about gender neutral. Some people will and so I just find that that's a way for avoiding distraction or avoiding that bit of notice that takes away from your message. So you want to keep people focused on your message.

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So you need to state your intentions. You need to say what you want this email to provide.

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It's either a hook like You may be you may be you may be eligible for additional funding.

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Okay, I'll continue reading. Please review and approve this project charter.

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Again, they know exactly what the email is about and it gives them something to Create a structure to understand the rest of the email.

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You want them to be able to understand it on the first read through without them having to go back and reread.

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For the body? What does the recipient need to know?

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So to Stuart's point. Does everybody know each other in this email?

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Yeah. Sorry, the ADHD is strong with me today. What does the recipient need to do with this email?

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And what resources would be helpful. So you're trying to make this as easy to read, as concise as possible.

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Give only the amount of context this person needs to know.

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I used to have a boss. Who I had a five minute question for him, but you needed to book half an hour because he would tell you all of the things.

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So let's try to avoid that in our emails.

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So any helpful information you can include in the body of the email is great.

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Please link to any additional context. Or provide an attachment for additional context. So keep that email as clean as possible. Use plain language.

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Don't use jargon, avoid acronyms, just keep that as clear and as simple as possible.

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That will encourage your recipient to act on it Quick note on AI. Absolutely use it for inspiration for writing.

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But you are the subject matter expert. You are the one who's sending the email.

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So check to make sure that the tone is appropriate, that is saying the right thing if you're using AI. It's pretty obvious if you don't check that stuff.

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Don't put any private information into AI. This is just a tool for wording.

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And check your organization's policies and requirements around AI use. City of Edmonton works in the Google environment. We are allowed to use Gemini. We are not allowed to use any other chat AI.

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Function. So then you need to provide the next steps. You may have already done this at the beginning of your email.

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But recap here. Please talk to your employees about this.

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Is not sufficiently descriptive. For the person to be able to action it.

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So you want something like Please schedule individual meetings with your direct reports to discuss topic A, You need to tell the person what the next step is.

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As clearly as you can and as directly as you can. Sometimes it won't be that direct. You can provide recommendations. We recommend scheduling a meeting with your direct employee or bringing this up at your next team meeting.

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Whatever is appropriate for your work environment. If you need to provide options, do it, but make sure that they are clear and actionable.

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And the final one is sign off. Let them know who to contact for more information.

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If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

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Chat with your leader at your next meeting if you have any questions about this topic.

00:27:06.000 --> 00:27:17.000

Also, if you're going to follow up, say you're going to follow up because it gives a person a little bit of extra reason to action it. So I'll follow up with you on this next week or in two weeks.

00:27:17.000 --> 00:27:26.000

And then actually do it. So a good follow up would be like, so I'm just following up on this email. Have you had a chance to address that yet?

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They were supposed to address it last week. But, you know, we're encouraging them to be mindful of it without be mindful of saying, okay, come on now.

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Please just get back to me. That doesn't go over as well. So again, we're going with tone here.

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So that your email really isn't done when you click send.

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So you need to make sure that your recipient has received the information, not just the email If they have not understood what you said.

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You wasted your time. So we're trying to make this clear friendly and action.

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Erica, thank you so much. That was wonderful. And your lived experiences as an experienced public servant really shine through in some of the kind of level of detail that you've gone into some of the thinking there. So there are some fantastic points in which we can

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Taken to Q&A. Yeah, looking forward to picking your brains a bit more about some of those small details that make all the difference. So thank you for that.

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I am going to hand over to Sandra next. And Sandra, I'm just going to pull up your slides on your behalf.

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So let me know that you can see those. Right.

00:28:45.000 --> 00:28:50.000

Thank you very much.

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I'm going to be speaking. All right, where am I taking it?

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Feel free to take it away.

00:28:55.000 --> 00:29:14.000

I am going to, or I was asked to write about the power of this subject And when I was researching this, for some reason, what popped into my head was a... two word phrase from an old children's nursery rhyme

00:29:14.000 --> 00:29:25.000

Called Alibabi. Alibaba and it says open sesame. So basically what the purpose of the subject line is to get people to open your email.

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So could we please go to the next slide? This is basically what I'm going to talk about.

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And that's all you need to see of that slide. Why do we use emails?

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This is what we need them for. My colleagues have basically said this, so I'm not going to waste your time by reading this slide. So please, let's go on.

00:29:50.000 --> 00:29:57.000

Did you know about half of recipients open emails based on the subject line.

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And I suspect about 25% of them delete the emails. Based on the subject line. I know I do.

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About 70% will open emails with a personalized subject line or a call to action. And about the same number will report spam based on subject lines.

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So if you want people to actually open your email and do something with it, you have to get their attention.

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On we go. Best practices. Keep it clear and concise.

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You're looking at 50 characters. Remember, people now have the attention span of a goldfish.

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That goldfish has a longer attention span. And 50 characters is about five to seven words.

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Put the most important stuff First, don't make them wait till the end of the line.

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And if possible, with your subject line, summarize the email's content.

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Content. Be relevant and time sensitive, use action verbs. I've given you a couple of examples.

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Given deadline and be specific about your deadline. And if you can make it a day and a time that works better.

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Personalize when possible. Name an individual, a unit, or a project and use keywords that people will understand.

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For example, I am working on the minister's visit to Saudi Arabia.

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This is what it's about. Avoid what they call spam triggers, which is all caps.

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Excessive punctuation. And vague language. Have you noticed that the number of exclamation marks that appear behind things now have gone from 1 to 14.

00:31:46.000 --> 00:31:58.000

All right, let's go. Now, you have to tailor or you should tailor your subject line to your audience, know who's reading it.

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If you're dealing with managers What you need to focus on is making decisions and input that is provided from them If you're working with peers and colleagues.

00:32:08.000 --> 00:32:17.000

You focus on collaboration and shared goals. And for broadcast messages, you explain why this matters to everybody.

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And I've given you examples. Strategic plan feedback needed by 5 p.m. On April 5th.

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I initially put April 1st, but I figured that was a bit of a a little bit too easy.

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And your peers and colleagues use the best web services to get the best results.

00:32:38.000 --> 00:32:45.000

And broadcast message, new cyber security policy effective April 1st. That I figured deserved to be an April Fool's joke.

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Okay, let's go. Use tone and formatting effectively.

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This is your tone. Be respectful. Professional. And if you can manage it conversational.

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An example is please review, not review. Avoid the words free or or urgent. Use inclusive language. Let's work together.

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Let's get this done, all that kind of stuff. And ask engaging questions.

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Ready to improve departmental efficiency? Don't hire Elon Musk. I have some problems with a couple of these.

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I'm not too sure I need to ask people. Please. This is a fight I'm having and i've been having this Since I helped my father with his homework and a communications class.

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And I have a real problem with asking engaging questions.

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But it may work. Better in environments than the ones in which I work.

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I work for Global Affairs Canada, so I am dealing with diplomats all day.

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And foreign service officers. Also deal with formatting. Use numbers or lists to be specific.

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But also to help people keep track of where you are.

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Where am I in this email? Limit the use of excessive punctuation and forget all caps.

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I won't give you the history of all caps, but it's been a while.

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Avoid things like urgent read immediately, ASAP, all that kind of stuff.

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Use emojis and punctuation sparingly and carefully. As a personal practice, I only use emoji in my team's chat, which are transitory and almost always something that I don't have to worry about having appearing in the uh On the front page of the Globe and Mail.

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I do not put it in what I will call official government documentation and i include emails in that. Again, that's my personal practice.

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Here are some more examples of tailoring one's subject line. And in this case, I have given good and bad examples of what things should look like.

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I guess we can... I'll let you read it. You don't need me to do that for you.

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So if we could move on. Again, now this one I've decided to go into my mathematics class and show you the work.

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Again, same audiences. Here's a bad example. There's a good example. And then there's what was done.

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To turn that into something better. I wrote an awful lot of this presentation for you guys to review.

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On your own later. So again, I am not going to bother reading things out loud.

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But you will. The kinds of things that people Or that you can use or the kinds of techniques that you can use to improve your subject lines. So if we can move on to the next one.

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Now, subject lines calling for action. Or that call action.

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Again, here are some examples. This is what you get. This is what you want from management.

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Budget proposal, immediate review required. Now, I actually prefer the second one, which basically says gives a date.

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Peers and colleagues. The focus is on let's do let's get together and do stuff. I kind of like the last one on this list.

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Training opportunity, enhanced public service skills. And broadcast messages, important new cyber protocols effective this particular date.

00:36:50.000 --> 00:37:00.000

Departmental survey your your feedback matters and upcoming changes to the employee benefits program.

00:37:00.000 --> 00:37:10.000

Next, please. No, I'm calling this the memoir, which is if you want to sort of, you know.

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Take something like this and just... scotch tape it to your screen. These are the kinds of things that will help you produce good subject lines.

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Um you Basically, why do you want to do it? Because you want to do to open your emails and to do something with them other than delete them.

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Tailor your content and your formatting to your audience. One best practice I can talk to here is determine who needs to know this information and who doesn't need to know this information.

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So if you have an option of telling people that this is required, do so. If you don't, basically see, you know, it's optional.

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This is more useful for things like meeting requests. To help people plan what they need to do.

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Be relevant and time sensitive. Use action verbs. I can provide a list.

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And give a deadline. One of the reasons I am here is because I started life off as a journalist. Believe me, I live and die by deadlines.

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Personalize where possible. I've already gone over that, and avoid triggers.

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And I will also say that avoid language triggers. If I see one more email that begins. I am thrilled to, I am not going to be responsible for what happens to my laptop.

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Next, please.

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Oh, okay. That's fine. That's fine. That was one of the things I fixed. I duplicated it.

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Sandra, I might suggest that this next slide we wrap this up and go to Q&A after this if that

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These are subject lines, do's and don'ts. Keep it concise. Be clear and specific about the content.

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And Erica has gone over that very well. Use action.

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Oriented language, use plain language and design plain language language i gotta find another way of saying that. Personalize where possible and field test different subject lines. Don't.

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Use alt caps or excessive punctuation. Avoid the trigger words.

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Write vague or overly general subject lines use emojis in perfectional context.

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And make false promises or misleading claims. Not usually a problem in government, but sometimes one gets to wonder.

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And next.

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Okay. And this is my bugbear, which is plain language B, plain language.

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If you want to write a good subject line bone up on plain language and learn how to write what they call in journalism the lead. That is, you can explain the entire importance of your news of your news email in about

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30 in about five to seven words, try it. It is an intellectual exercise.

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But it works. And the last one

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This is my contact information. And just for fun, I decided to give you the alphabet soup that is after my name master's degree in library and information science and a bachelor in journalism.

00:40:27.000 --> 00:40:49.000

There's my email address. Last time I checked, there are exactly two hauling saids employed in the Canadian federal government I will guarantee she's a cousin. The interesting part is her first name is Samantha. So I'm the one with the shorter surname.

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Excellent.

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And the current Canadian motto, elbows up. And since I'm from the province of Saskatchewan, I feel perfectly appropriate in using it

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Thank you, Sandra. That was fantastic. I'm going to remind everybody that these slides, these excellent slides, including all of those fantastic examples.

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Are going to be on the event page By the end of this week. So please just refer back. You'll also be able to access a recording of this event if you've had to drop off or just joined halfway through. So you can refer back to it but um

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That was three excellently concise and tip-packed presentations there. So thank you very much.

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I am going to turn us over to Q&A shortly. I will give you all a moment to submit your questions. I can see there's some fantastic ones being submitted already, but I'll just give everybody a chance to react to Sandra's presentation as well and get them into the Q&A tab. Whilst you're doing that, I want to remind you all about our

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Writing effectively in government and community over thousand public servants in this forum discussing the kind of things which we've just been talking about so far.

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Email writing just being one important aspect of government communication. So this community is open we'd really love to see you join and share your views and experiences in there.

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Okay, I am looking at... great questions already so Sandra, this has got some upvotes. It's a question from Renee. You touched on it, Sandra, but I want to get do it in erica's perspective on it. And it is the question of emojis um

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So Renee is saying, what's your recommendations on the use of emojis to clarify the emotion intended in your email?

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Sometimes the emotion become misinterpreted when the message is text. So Sandra, your tip was to use it sparingly. Stuart, I wonder if you agree or you have a slightly different view.

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No, I agree. I mean, I find them deep irritating, frankly. And it's very easy to get the wrong one but I am also incredibly conscious that I'm older therefore as younger generations come through they will communicate in a different way and it will become

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More and more the norm. And I noticed that for some conversations, for team-based conversations nowadays, we don't do that on email so much. That has moved across not exclusively often to whatsapp and the use of emojis and you know reactions there is much more commonplace and

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And there it's fine. But no, I fear on emails again it's it I don't think they necessarily help convey the emotion or the tone any more correctly than actually language written language that does.

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Yeah, I would. I would say that as well.

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Thanks, Stuart. That's really helpful. Erica, yeah, go for it.

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Adjust your wording if you're not sure about how the tone will be received.

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Unlike Sandra, I don't mind using please at the beginning. It's the kind of please that your mother gives you when she tells you to do the dishes or something.

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It's like, please go do that. So, um.

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That one's never used.

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So, um. Yeah, I would prefer strongly to use language for that.

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If it is a more informal communication, let's say with a coworker.

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It's transitory, putting my corporate records hat on. So it's like about drafting something or it's information that doesn't need to be kept as an official record.

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If you both like emojis, go for it. But anything that's going to have to be officially kept I would use them very sparingly.

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I think that's some stellar advice. Nice to hear some consensus there so uh We use emojis quite a lot for our external communications at apolitical but yeah, internal, not so much. I think it's probably similar reasons.

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This is a question from Tammy and Sandra, you just spoke to us about kind of getting people to read your email by writing excellent subject lines tammy is asking about Once you've got the person that's open your email and give it a read

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What's the best opening? So everybody, I noticed in the chat had some pet peeves. I hope you're well. I hope this finds you well.

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That can get repetitive, I guess. Is that because it's just the safest option and best option to use? Would you use something different? What's your advice to Tammy on kind of greeting?

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Um... I honestly don't bother with it.

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I'm a firm believer in cut to the chase. This is why somebody wants what this is what I want you to do. This is when you want to do it by.

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Somewhere in the chat, someone noticed the subject lines using part of what is called the five W's.

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I have expanded it to eight Who, what, where, when, why, how, how much, and how long.

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As much information as you can put in your subject line using that formula works fairly well.

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But also, and this is also You know, something I'm struggling with is that honestly this is a work colleague I do not necessarily wish to wish take time, their time to kind of be collegial.

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Again, it's me. I just don't see the point. And because I'm trying to get through stuff and I want to help my colleagues get through stuff I keep it as lean as I can.

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Now, one thing I forgot to talk about, and I'm sorry to take this advantage here, but you may wish to with the people that you regularly write to, write emails to, you may wish to come up with a system that helps them identify

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The emails. And I learned this from a woman that I was dealing with who was the chief technic Chief Technology Officer at Global Affairs Canada. And when I started working with her, she said, okay.

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If you want me to do something, you begin my subject line with 911.

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If you want me to read something, eventually you begin it with 411.

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And if you want me to actually do something with it, it is 3-1-1.

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Jesus, I go in, I sort my emails. 911, I deal with immediately.

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411 goes to the bottom of the pile and I'll get it around to it eventually. Then I will handle the 311s.

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And if you work with computers, you know that they will sort numbers before letters.

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And if you think you have a full inbox, you should have seen hers.

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It was scary to look at. Um and Code it. Yeah. In addition, uh.

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Interesting. So coding Hmm.

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I've tried it a couple of times. I find that the Foreign Service officers that I deal with really don't understand it, but she had to get through a lot of stuff from a lot of people.

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And that worked for her. So if you can put it somehow consider if you read a lot of emails with people Check it out. See if it works for you.

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I know it works for me. But that may be because I have people who tell me they wanted to do it in the first place.

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That's a really interesting tip, Sandra. I haven't heard of that before.

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And I also... I also saw somebody talk about trigger words.

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And, um. I've actually got a list.

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One of the bad parts of being a librarian is I bring bibliographies to all of this.

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So I have quite a collection of things that I'm going to add to my presentation, but there is a list of what trigger words are. And it probably changes Depending on your context.

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I know.

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Um

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Yeah, trigger words is super interesting. I think, Sandra, the kind of trigger it's an interesting concept. I think it has a double-edged meaning often because triggered is an interesting word in the kind of modern vocabulary. And then you're talking about in the sense of emails. So it's like a really interesting concept

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So I'm looking forward to reading your list. And perhaps there's a discussion to be had in the writing community about words that people would add to that because with you know apolitical the global platform we have over 160 countries represented

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In our membership. Interesting to see how kind of trigger words transliterate across different languages. I've just seen a really interesting question from Tina here and this is to you, Stuart.

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Tina's asked, could you please expand on your point of do I need to reassert authority?

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Tina's working at the, she said she's working in an administrative role and she finds that her emails are getting a bit ignored sometimes And yeah, so any more tips that you can give Tina on the kind of the assertion of authority through email

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And how she might improve in that and get people certainly in kind of upper management or more senior levels to pay attention.

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Yeah, look, I mean, I think some of the tips that both Erica and Sandra talked about in terms of being incredibly clear about deadlines and requirements sometimes Again, you don't want too many words, but some explanation about that as well because frankly, if they don't even know you think the task is important for instance it may not be clear to them about

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About why that task is important so actually so you know the deadline, the requirement but the why might be handy there as well.

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And another way might be that you bring others in. So maybe offline, which we haven't really touched on, I know in a couple of in the chats about sort of, you know, taking the views of others on wording, getting them to read them, which I think are really good points that people have raised.

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In a similar way that, you know, if you want to reassert authority, you might get another member of the team or a line manager, as long as they're not the ones that you're trying to hold to account to come in and name check them on it. So the at and then you can name them as well. So things like that might help to bring that focus

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Back to the task that you need to be, you know, actioned.

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That's really helpful. We hope that that's, Tina that that's expanded a bit a bit on what you can do in your role.

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Erica, in your presentation, you touched upon this and um which is the role of artificial intelligence so so There's a question here that was pre-submitted actually asking for those of us who have access to artificial intelligence in the workplace, how can we leverage that to draft or refine emails

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And do you have any insights on crafting better AI prompts for this purpose?

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What I do is I will, if you're looking to clarify your language.

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What I do is i just Write the email.

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And then go, okay, this isn't very clear. And then I have the AI simplify or clarify or rephrase And see what I think of it. And then I might ask again, make it more casual, make it more formal.

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I prefer to start with my own content and then get suggestions for wording.

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I have also, though, occasionally been given a task where I'm like, they're like, hey, can you do a template for this?

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I have no idea what that process is. So I'll ask AI to give me a draft one.

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So that I can just make a structure in my head.

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So if you're not sure how to communicate something, getting some suggestions is helpful.

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As long as you go through and check that your meaning hasn't changed and that your tone is appropriate.

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And that you're, you know, the amount of context you're providing is appropriate.

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You can absolutely use AI. Just be aware that you need to you will need to edit what it provides you and adjust what it provides you to make sure it says what you mean it to say.

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Thanks, Erica. Go for it, Stuart.

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You're like... Just to add to that, which is entirely right. And I think some of the people in the chat sort of alluded to this anyway But obviously some of the AI systems particularly really important when you're in government you know but equally important in the commercial setting as well

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Are sort of closed systems now so you have co-pilot, whatever, but within your Microsoft system closed so it's all protected don't go outside. So if you're using ChatGPT effectively unless you do the opt out because you're paying for the higher you know the value one etc

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You've given them the data. You've given them the information and particularly in government, but across commercial settings as well that's the absolute thing you can't do And unfortunately, particularly early on, we all made that mistake. We go outside. We'll try this and we'll go outside the system. We'll take, you know, take it offline and then bring it back in. Just be really, really

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Sort of don't do it or be extremely careful about what you're putting into those systems. So sorry, Jester.

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No, it's a very prudent point to add, Stuart. And I know that um you know we run a lot of AI related events it depends on what you can and can't use, depending on which department, which country you're in, which role you're fulfilling. So no, it's very prudent. I am remarking at the time, I can't believe that nearly an hour has passed. So I'm afraid

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We're going to have to wrap up but if there were loads of questions, if we didn't get round to asking or answering your questions.

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Please post them in the writing in government community As I said, the 6,000 people in there, including our speakers for today. So you're going to get some like amazing proud fourth knowledge in response to some of your questions.

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So I encourage you to do that. I would like you to join me in giving Sandra, Stuart and Erica a big kind of virtual round of applause. I know we can't do it physically. I'm seeing lots of parts.

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And kind of clapping emojis rising on my screen Thank you very much for your insights. It's really interesting and very lots of impactful tips that we can take with us into our email writing as soon as this event has finished.

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I wanted to also share with everybody in attendance today that as a special thank you for joining and adding your two cents to this discussion that we're going to be giving you all access to one of our most popular resources.

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This is the 10-point plan to nail the perfect email strategy. So to claim your 10-point plan.

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Go to the writing effectively in government community and leave a comment on the post that is pinned to the top of the page. I posted it during this event.

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If you comment in that comment Brett, then we're going to email you a link within the next few days containing your 10-point plan.

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My colleague is posting a link to that in the chat.

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Now. The team is also going to pull up a very quick poll just to get a measure of how you felt about today's session, which always helps us go a long way in improving understanding how to improve our content so

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You should see that popping up now it's completely anonymous. On a scale of 1 to 10, please rank your agreement with statement that this event was a valuable use of your very precious time as public servant. We really appreciate you.

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Giving us that feedback and for taking the time to invest in your own learning.

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And whilst I give you a couple of seconds to answer that, a final plug.

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For an upcoming event in our program that might be of interest to you all.

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Today we've been covering the foundational skill of writing emails, but in a couple of weeks we're going to be honing in on another public service fundamental, if you will, which is the humble meeting.

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We talked about writing pet peeves today. I'm sure a lot of you have some meeting etiquette pet peeves.

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So if you find that your meetings are sidetracked, often fail to produce clear outcomes or maybe even build momentum behind your ideas.

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Then this event is going to be really good for you. I really encourage you to sign up. My colleague is going to be sharing a link in the chat the registration for that session as well.

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Really hope you can join us. That is all we have time for.

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Thank you so much. We hope you found today's session helpful. Thanks once again, Stuart Thompson, Erica Pappas and Sandra Hollingshead for their wonderful wisdom and keep an eye out for the email coming your way with today's recording and the resources, including those fantastic slides that were shared.

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We hope to see you at another April event very soon. Have a great day, everyone.