6

The subject line

Most people pay very little attention to what they write in the subject line of an email. But, remember, the subject line will be the first connection point you have with the recipient. It is just as important as the content of the email itself.

The average office worker gets around 100 emails per day, and it is estimated that 79 percent of emails never get opened. Make sure yours are part of the 21 percent that do.

In general, you want to make the topic of your email crystal clear. For example:

M&S Job application (Job code: 7573)

Attract attention to your message by adding "FAO" (For the Attention Of), to your subject line so the recipient sees his or her own name.

The example becomes:

(FAO Mark Kinsley) M&S Job application (Job code: 7573)

Studies have shown that personalising a subject line gives your email a 17 percent better chance of being read. That statistic should motivate you to use the recipient's name in the subject line if you have it.

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Your email is more likely to be read if you are specific about what you want—so avoid vague subject lines such as "question", or "query". Don't try to tempt the recipient into opening your email with subject lines such as, "the greatest opportunity of your life". Firstly, these clickbait-type titles sound like spam. Secondly, when your email fails to live up to the grand promises you've made in the subject, the recipient will feel cheated.

Ultimately, you need to consider who you're writing to and how you can motivate them to open your email. If you are clear, specific, and personal in the subject line it will give your email the best chance of being read.

How to address recipients

If you are writing a more formal email, and you don't know the name of the person you are writing to, it's best to open your message with *"Dear Sir/Madam"*. It is, however, significantly more effective, and more polite to use the name of the person you're writing to, even if this means doing a little bit of research. Addressing the person by name makes the email more personal. It looks like you actually care about your recipient, rather than firing off an email addressed to an anonymous person.

Once you have the name you can write—Dear Mr Harris, or Dear Ms Harris, or Dear Dr Harris—it's important to be sure you're using the correct title for that person. Note that in American English, a period follows the title, e.g., "Mr. Harris", "Ms. Harris", "Dr. Harris". Only use "Mrs" if you know the woman is married—or have seen her referred to as Mrs elsewhere. If you use "Ms" and later notice that the woman refers to herself as "Mrs", adjust your subsequent emails accordingly.

EFL learners also struggle with when to move from the formal to the informal when addressing someone with whom they've been in correspondence for some time. For example, if you're regularly emailing back and forth, it can begin to feel ridiculous to call each other Mr or Mrs in each message.

In English, we don't officially have informal and formal addresses. In written correspondence, however, the movement towards informality plays out beneath the surface, with the communication gradually becoming more casual over time. For example, you might start with *"Dear Mrs (surname)"*, and a few emails later, she might begin to address you with *"Hi (first name)"*. My advice is to wait for the other person to initiate and then follow their lead if they decide to make things more informal. This is a reliable way to avoid causing offence.

Keeping your paragraphs short

If the email you've composed consists of big blocks of writing, consider ways to split the text into smaller paragraphs. Don't just divide your writing randomly. Instead, isolate the areas where the focus of you're writing has shifted. Remember, starting a new paragraph signifies the start of a new idea.

For a better idea of how to separate your emails into paragraphs, look at the example below:

"I recently discovered your website, and I'm interested in the language courses you offer. A little about me: I am from Italy and have been studying English for a very long time, but I still make a lot of mistakes, so apologies for my English in this email. I have some time off this summer, and I would like to take some classes. It would be great if you could send me some more information about the prices. Thank you for your time, and I hope we will meet soon."

If the same message were split into paragraphs, it might look something like this:

"I recently discovered your website, and I am interested in the language courses you offer.

I have some time off during the summer, and I would like to take some classes. It would be great if you could send me some more information about the prices.

A little about me: I am from Italy and have been studying English for a very long time. However, I still make a lot of mistakes, so apologies for my English in this email.

Thank you for your time, and I hope we will meet soon."

Notice how the second example is easier to skim and more inviting to read?

Numbering your points

If you are writing an email that contains a series of points, it's best to number them. Numbers make it easier for the recipient to see, at a glance, the elements that require a response. Numbering your points also allows the recipient to add their responses under the relevant numbers in your email. They no longer have to write *"with regards to this"*, and *"in answer to question four"*, etc. When the recipient adds their responses below the numbers, it is also easier for you to read and understand the reply.

Using fixed phrases

The beauty of learning to write for specific purposes is that seventy-five percent of what you write will be the same every time. So, once you've learned the fixed phrases you don't need to learn much more. Students who are quick to realise this never understand why