

RUTHLESSLY UNSUBSCRIBE

Over time, we subscribe to too many mailing lists. From newsletters to journals to marketing. Don't constantly scroll past or delete subscription emails ad infinitum, instead: stop hoarding, and unsubscribe ruthlessly. The subscriptions you retain can't be 'just-in-case' but must be 'hell yeahs'.

ETIQUETTE AND CLARITY IS KEY

Respect matters, especially in tone-deaf textual form. Collegial salutations, full sentences, and even basic punctuation are often missing from email. Remember that a workplace email is not the same genre as a text message to your friend. Etiquette and clarity is important and appreciated by others, and will ultimately affect the success of the message you are trying to convey.

"DO" EMAIL, DON'T "CHECK" IT

The act of repeatedly "checking" your email is both mindless and unnecessary when you can't actually act on the email. Instead, block dedicated time in your schedule, to sit and "do" your email. Focus on each email and force yourself to 'only touch it once' (see below).

PAUSE, DON'T SEND

The best email choice is frequently to send no email. While useful, email is often not the only or best way to communicate, decide, or share information. Before you send your next email, pause to think: is there a better option than email? A phone call, text, or even nothing? If we all wish to receive fewer emails, no responses can be a positive thing.

And, while gratitude is important, do not feel obliged to reply, or especially reply-all a "thank you". Blessed in academia are those who choose to send less email.

MAKE SUBJECT LINES AND THE SUBJECT CLEAR

Take a tip from the military: structure your subject lines as short, systematic, and clear. For example, use 'ACTION'; 'INFO'; 'DECISION' along with 4 or 5 words to summarize. Write this subject line with the swamped recipient in mind.

Emails shouldn't be mini-whodunit novels—with the main point only at the end or hidden in the middle. Instead, state your intended action, information, or decision right at the email's start. Add detail or context after. Moving the purpose of the email from its end to its start, makes it much simpler for recipients to comprehend quickly and accurately.

EVERY EMAIL IS NOT EQUAL

We all tend to respond to non-urgent email too quickly. This paradoxically only intensifies norms and expectations for quicker general response times. We often feel internal pressure to respond quickly to more emails, but what is truly needed versus expected? Liberate workplace expectations—agree to realistic appropriate response times for normal versus urgent emails collectively. Set new, longer norms for non-urgent emails that work better for everyone.

TEMPLATES & FILTERS ARE YOUR FRIEND

For outgoing email, use email templates if you send the same types of emails often. This is easy, but seldom done. Modify as needed to personalize them.

And, for incoming email, use email filters to automatically sort the email into folders on arrival. If you get many emails, consider a propriety email management system. Through artificial intelligence these systems learn your sorting preferences better over time. Dedicated folders can be set up for emails you are just copied on or from more distant contacts. Set certain emails to show in your inbox on set days of the week or be sent back to you on a date or time you choose to "do" your email.

INBOX: FILE AND PURGE

Avoid the never-ending inbox. Eyeing a jumble of 3547 emails in your inbox would give even a Zen-master palpitations. Creating a basic file structure allows incoming email to be easier to find later. To start, move all your emails in your inbox to an archive folder and start fresh. Just go for it! Emptying your inbox is a great foundation to improving your email practices. Few things in academic life will yield more positive emotions so easily

ONLY TOUCH EACH EMAIL ONCE

When you "check" email, you touch the same email repeatedly. Instead, adopt the touch-it-once approach to "do" your email: immediately file, delete, or respond to each. You also don't need to do your email in the order it was received. With limited time take a quick scan and do your priority emails first.

NEVER UNNECESSARILY "REPLY ALL"

It's great for you that you're not available for lunch Thursday, or next week for the faculty meeting. But the other 40 people copied on the email don't want or need to know. Don't listlessly click 'reply all' to email, but reply only to the person or people who must know. Remember: every time you choose not to "reply all", you save each person copied a few seconds of effort. Is there a greater gift to your colleagues than more time and energy?

 @effectiveacad #happyacademic

While we can't opt out of email in our work, we can always choose to improve our email practices. Whether you care more about getting better at email or getting better at what the work email stops you doing, we all need REDEMPTION to break the email curse.