A guide on email signatures and etiquette

Emails are a common form of communication within and outside the School and University. It is important that we present ourselves in an accessible and inclusive manner, in addition to observing normal standards of politeness and respect.

This guide lays out recommended additions to your email signature to support a positive culture in the School, best practice for accessibility, and standards of email etiquette that everybody should follow.

Email Signatures

THE BASICS

We encourage all staff to have an email signature which includes the following basic information: your name, job title, School/department, office address, email address and telephone number. You can also include the University logo and links to your website and social media accounts.

TEMPLATES

Here are two templates for email signatures that you could use:

Title and name (gender pronouns)
Job title
Other roles
School of Life Sciences
Room number and building address
University of Sussex
Phone number and internal extension
Links to website and social media
PROMOTING A POSITIVE WORKING CULTURE

Pronouns

It is good practice to include your gender pronouns in your email signature. This helps minimise misgendering, normalises use of pronouns, and helps make our workplace more inclusive to the benefit of all.

You can either include your pronouns in brackets after your name: (she/her, he/his, they/them etc.) or you can include a line on your signature which says ‘my pronouns are...’

Read more about the benefits of including your pronouns on your email signature in this article on Medium.com.

Working hours

It is common to include your working hours on your email signature, especially for part-time staff, to let colleagues know when they might expect a reply.

We all receive a lot of emails and some people feel pressure to reply as soon as they receive them, even outside of their own working hours. To help alleviate some of that pressure and promote a healthy working environment, include a disclaimer about expectations on replying, especially if you send a lot of emails outside of normal working hours. We recommend:

‘If you receive this message outside of working hours, please do not feel any pressure to respond to me until during your own working hours. Feel free to send me messages at any time and I will respond as soon as possible (dependent on workload) and usually within my normal working hours (Monday – Friday, 9am -5pm).’

HOW TO ADD A SIGNATURE IN OUTLOOK

1. Click new email
2. Click the signature icon in the toolbar
3. Click signatures...

Here you can create new signatures – you may like to have more than one version for different recipients, for example a separate version for emails to students.

Accessible Emails

There are a number of practices you should use for making your email more accessible, especially for people who are blind or low vision. For example:

- Avoid using text in images as the sole method of conveying important information. If you are including an image in your email, use alt text to briefly describe the image. This helps people who can’t see the screen to understand what’s important in the image.
- People who use screen readers sometimes scan a list of links. Links should convey clear and accurate information about the destination. For example, instead of linking to the text by saying ‘click here’, include the full title of the destination page.
• Ensure that colour is not the only means of conveying information because people who are blind, have low vision, or are colour-blind might miss out on the meaning.
• Use a font size of 11pt or larger and ensure there is sufficient spacing and paragraphs in your email. People who have dyslexia describe seeing text merge or distort and this will help reduce the reading load.
• To make it easier for screen readers to read your email, use a logical heading order and organise the information in your email into small chunks.

For more information about making your emails accessible to people with disabilities, visit the Microsoft website here.

Email etiquette

• Address your messages to a named person if at all possible, and sign them with your name.
• Write carefully and politely, using ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ where appropriate.
• Don’t send a message in a hurry when you’re angry. Take time to calm down and check what you are writing.
• Using all uppercase letters means SHOUTING. *Asterisks* around a word, or using bold font, can be an easy way to add emphasis, if needed.
• Sending e-mails outside of work hours is reasonable (9-5pm), but don’t expect a response outside of working hours.
• Give recipients time to reply – if you haven’t received a reply in over 48 hours and you need one, send a polite reminder.
• Think twice about clicking ‘reply all’ – does everybody in the original e-mail chain need to see your reply?