

Do Your Business Emails Pass the Mom Test?

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If you are writing emails you wouldn't want your mother to see, chances are that you wouldn't want a judge to see them either – or have them entered into an official court record. Emails can be used in business litigation as powerful evidence of wrongdoing or malicious intent. Here are some best practices for business email communications:

Choose the right communications method. Sometimes email is not the best choice for communicating your message. Consider making a phone call if you need to have a proper discussion, especially if emotion is likely to be involved.

Make the subject line count. The subject line should be a 3-5-word summary of what your email message is about. Don't fish around in your inbox for an old email to the person you are sending a new message to and hit "reply", using an old subject for your new message.

Be concise. Make your request or detail your message in the first sentence or two, and follow with a more detailed explanation if possible.

Be professional. Make sure your message is grammatically correct and clearly states your request or position. Leave any emotion or feelings out.

Don't use emoticons. Emoticons – smiling or frowning faces – and Internet jargon look juvenile in business communications. As mom used to say: "Use your words."

Think before sending "Reply to All". Does everyone in the email chain need to know your business with the sender? Consider carefully before you hit "Reply to All".

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