



# Mobile Message Mayhem

10 Guidelines for writing email messages for mobile devices

Written by: Verne Ordman ([verne@businesswriting.biz](mailto:verne@businesswriting.biz))

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Picture this...

- \* Your email message is being read on a screen the size of a playing card.
- \* You only have 25 visible characters for your headline.
- \* Your reader is on the move – often rushed, preoccupied, agitated, distracted, and possibly frantic.
- \* Your reader has the reputation of having the attention span of a fly.
- \* There is no room for miscommunication, no time for the inevitable ‘to-ing’ and ‘fro-ing’ of clarification emails.
- \* Your reputation – and a lot of money – is on the line!

Even if you’re unaware of it, there is an increasing chance that the email you have just finished writing will be read on a mobile device (iPhone, BlackBerry or the like). According to the ‘Face of the Web’ Annual Study, mobile devices could soon rival the PC as the world’s dominant internet platform.

Avoid email hell and cut your recipient’s reading time by 50% by following 10 guidelines that will have you writing like a pro.

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## 1. BE BRIEF – BUT NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF CLARITY

Leaving out specific details to keep the message brief and abbreviating sentences because the reader ‘will know what you mean’ increases the chance of miscommunication leading to costly mistakes and frustration.

If you find you are ‘to-ing’ and ‘fro-ing’ with questions and answers, this is a sure sign that your original message was incomplete and unclear.

## 2. WRITE SINGLE PURPOSE MESSAGES

It is a good idea to ‘divide and conquer’ by ensuring each message has one clear purpose. Remember, your reader will only be scanning your message, so avoid loading the message with many ideas.

### **3. USE EMAIL TO 'SELL' ATTACHMENTS**

Anything longer than three short paragraphs should be sent as an attachment or a link. With statistics showing an ever increasing use of mobile devices to retrieve email, gone are the days when it's acceptable to send a report, quotation or proposal via email. The email should be used as a tool to convince the reader to read further.

In your email, include only the purpose of the message, why the attachment is important for the reader (what's in it for him/her) and a clear call to action (if there is one – and there usually is with email messages).

### **4. MAKE THE SUBJECT LINE WORK FOR YOU**

Write a short and meaningful subject heading that reflects the message's purpose. Keep the subject heading to approximately 25 characters.

#### **Examples**

For comment: Marketing Plan  
Due today: Agenda items  
Action item: Proposal decision  
Update: Training policy

Be especially careful when using 'update'. The word implies there is no action required, so if you do need some form of action, select a different word, eg 'Request' or 'Action item'.

### **5. AVOID WRITING EMAIL AS IF IT IS AN SMS**

Business email messages should not be written as you would write an SMS.

Don't remove the niceties (words like 'please', and greetings and complimentary closes) and don't use abbreviated sentences in your quest to keep your message brief. People don't like it when they receive what they feel is a cryptic message or when they believe you're being disrespectful or rude.

### **6. WRITE IN PLAIN ENGLISH**

Streamline long, awkward sentences and remove repetition and unnecessary wordiness. This is where you can make the biggest impact on the length of the message.

### **7. ENSURE A 1:1 WHITE SPACE RATIO**

There are two main ways to ensure a good white space ratio.

\* Keep paragraphs short (~ 4 lines) \* Use a full line space between paragraphs

Removing line spacing and using long paragraphs does not make the message shorter – it only makes it difficult to read and scan.

### **8. THINK HORIZONTALLY**

For stand alone lists (see item 7 for an example), use horizontal formatting rather than the usual vertical alignment. This saves space and reduces the amount of scrolling needed.

**9. USE TEXT ONLY**

Avoid using formatting in email to ensure the way the message appears on your reader’s screen is the same as how you sent it. Anything that needs formatting should be sent as an attachment.

Place logos and images below the text and let the reader know they are included and where to find them.

**10. EDIT AND PROOFREAD – PREFERABLY MORE THAN ONCE!**

Ensure your message is professional by checking it carefully for spelling, typing, punctuation, case, grammar and sentence construction errors. If you don’t have time to proofread the message, no matter how short it is, don’t write it in the first place – make a phone call instead.

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If you have never seen how an email looks on a mobile device, please try and find someone who will let you have a look. It’s important to see how the email looks on the small screen, among everything else and in the clutter.

So, from now on, write all your email messages as though you’re writing for a mobile reader and save all your readers time.

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**DETAILS ...**

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Verne Ordman is the owner of BusinessWriting.biz (a division of Verne Ordman & Associates Pty Ltd) and can be contacted on 02 9130 6856 or at [verne@businesswriting.biz](mailto:verne@businesswriting.biz).