Charter for e-mailing @ howest

Writing decent e-mails is important in every professional context. Below, you will find 25 tips for suitable e-mail conversations.

E-mail styling tips

1. Use your Howest account for all formal communication.
2. Choose a clear subject line, such as: “*English class moved to 15/02*” instead of “*class moved*”. The clearer you choose your subject, the faster the reader can read and classify your message.
3. Use an appropriate salutation such as: *Dear Mr., Mrs., Miss or Ms. (when you do not know the woman’s marital status),* followed by the name of the person for people you know. For people you do not know, use: *Dear Sir or Madam*. Never use *Dear* alone, without a name following it.
4. Close your e-mail correctly with *Best regards or Sincerely,* followed by a comma.
5. Always add an electronic signature with relevant information: first name and name (in that order), study program and/or function, class, etc…. If relevant, you can add a telephone number or a website. You do not need to add your e-mail address.
6. Every e-mail should have correct writing style and usage. You should pay special attention to uppercases, punctuation and grammar. Use spellcheck if necessary.
7. An e-mail should not be too busy looking. Avoid dark colored backgrounds and distasteful fonts.

Content and structure of an e-mail

1. An e-mail should contain one clear main message, which you need to explain in your introduction. Briefly explain the issue and make clear what you want to know or what action needs to be taken.
2. In the following paragraph(s), you must further explain your message. Keep your paragraphs short so the reader can quickly scan their content. Be concise, delete excess words and try not to exceed the screensize.
3. In the last paragraph, you clearly need to mention the (re)action you expect from the reader. Formulate questions in a friendly and polite manner. If you expect the reader(s) to take action in any way, make sure to thank them in advance for their help and effort.
4. If you need to discuss two different topics, consider sending two separate e-mails. This helps the receiver to process your e-mails better (forward, reply, archive).
5. Delete previous, not relevant (parts of) messages.

Language in an e-mail

1. Match the language and vocabulary of your e-mail to your audience. Use an adequate style. Avoid emoticons, sms-language and slang in formal communication.
2. Be friendly and polite. Use a sober and tempered language. If your message or reply gets emotional, do not send it. Let it rest overnight and rephrase it the next morning. Don’t ever get angry in an e-mail.
3. Avoid screaming UPPERCASES and !!!!!!!!!!!. It will result in irritation or other undesired reactions from your reader(s). If you must emphasize, use bold, italic or color to do so.
4. Use your tone and style consistently. For example, you should not combine “Dear Sir” with “Cheers”.

Attachments to an e-mail

1. Don’t forget the attachment. It is best to add the attachment first and write the message afterwards. Refer to the attachment in your e-mail. Make sure to use a format the user can open and read and give the attachment a clear name.
2. Shared servers or Cloud services are helpful tools when you want to exchange (big) files. Include a link to the file location or send large files in compressed formats.

Avoid epic e-mail fails

1. Imagine the information in your email from the receivers’ perspective and decide who really needs to receive it. Choose carefully who you put in Cc and do not expect (re)action from those in Cc.
2. When sending an e-mail to a large number of people, put all the e-mails addresses in the Bcc field, as this prevents the massive spreading of e-mail addresses and reply-alls.
3. Input the address of the addressees just before pushing the send button. By doing so, you avoid sending incomplete and / or unedited messages.
4. Use the “read receipt” or “high priority” functions only when necessary.
5. Always try to answer an e-mail within an expected or reasonable time. If you are unable to reply on time, inform the sender of this. If you are unable to answer your mails for a prolonged period, use a polite but clear auto reply message.
6. Check your message. Use the spelling checker and re-read your message before you push the send button. If you hesitate on the spelling of a word, you look it up in a(n) online dictionary.
7. Avoid asking for information via e-mail if you can find it elsewhere (on LEHO), otherwise you risk receiving the standard reply of: “Check LEHO”. When a lecturer thinks your request is relevant for other students, your e-mail and the related answer might be published on ad valvas.

Language Policy Howest

September 2012

Brugge, Kortrijk