Guideline

Subject: **Email Guidelines** (for RCPA Management Team)
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Email Guidelines

Electronic communication, because of its speed and broadcasting ability, is fundamentally different from paper-based communication both in effectiveness and business protocols. Because the turnaround time can be so fast, email tends to be treated as more conversational than traditional paper-based media. Traditionally, in a paper document, the author takes care to make everything completely clear and unambiguous because the audience may not have a chance to ask for clarification. With email documents, we behave as if they recipient can ask questions immediately. Email also tends, like conversational speech, to be more casual than traditional communications on paper.

However, a correspondent does not have normal status cues such as dress, diction, or dialect, so may make assumptions based on the sender's name, address, and - above all - facility with language. Email users need to be aware of when to be casual and when to be meticulous.

Email also does not convey emotions nearly as well as face-to-face or even telephone conversations. It lacks vocal inflection, gestures, and a shared environment. The audience may have difficulty telling if the sender is serious or kidding, happy or sad, frustrated or euphoric. Sarcasm is particularly dangerous to use in email.

In a conversation, there is some minimum of shared context. Both correspondents might be in the same physical location, and even on the phone they have, at minimum, commonality of time. When an author generates a document for paper, usually there is some context embedded in the medium. With email, a recipient can not assume anything about a sender's location, time, frame of mind, profession, interests, or future value to them. This means, among other things, that authors need to be very careful about giving receivers some context.

Effective Email

Subject Lines

A subject line that pertains clearly to the email body helps recipients shift to the proper context before they read the message. Try to use a subject that is meaningful to the recipient as well as yourself. When comments are sought, start with FYC (For your comment) to signal that action is needed. If you are offering information that requires no response from the other person, prefacing the subject line with FYI (For Your Information) is useful.

Avoid using URGENT or IMPORTANT and high priority flags unless it is a really, really urgent or important message.

Quoting Documents / Message Threads

If you are referring to previous email (rather than responding to a thread), you should explicitly quote that document to provide context.

Try to retain the message thread. When you reply to an email, you should include the original mail in your reply, in other words click 'Reply', instead of 'New Mail'. Some people say that you must remove the previous message since this has already been sent and is therefore

unnecessary. This means that a 'threadless email' will not provide enough information and you will have to spend a frustratingly long time to find out the context of the email in order to deal with it. Leaving the thread might take a fraction longer in download time, but it will save the recipient much more time and frustration in looking for the related emails in their inbox.

Language

If there are lots of misspellings, subjects do not agree with verbs and words are used incorrectly, it can give the impression that the sender (and their organisation) is careless at best or disrespectful at worst. E-mails with no full stops or commas are difficult to read and can change the meaning of the text. Keep your language gender neutral.

Use the active voice of a verb wherever possible. For instance, 'We will process your application today', sounds better than 'Your application will be processed today'. The first sounds more personal, whereas the latter, especially when used frequently, sounds unnecessarily formal.

Avoid abbreviations such as BTW (by the way) and emoticons such as smiley :-). The recipient might not be familiar with abbreviations and in business emails these are generally inappropriate.

Do not write in CAPITALS. IF YOU WRITE IN CAPITALS IT SEEMS AS IF YOU ARE SHOUTING. This can be annoying and might trigger an unwanted response.
Read the email before you send it to correct errors. Reading your email through the eyes of a recipient will also help you send a more effective message and avoid misunderstandings and inappropriate comments.

Identification

When an individual receives email from strangers, they care about what connection they have with the sender. It is useful to open with basic information including: how the sender learned of the recipient and what the sender wants. If an unknown sender does not establish quickly who they are, the correspondent may delete their message before they get to the bottom of the copy.

Outlook Functions

To avoid confusion and inundating people with unnecessary emails, avoid the cc: field unless the cc: recipient knows why they are receiving a copy of the message.   Do not overuse Reply to All – only if you really need your message to be seen by each person who received the original message.

Use of the Bcc: field. There are two drawbacks to placing all the email addresses in the To: field: (1) the recipient knows that you have sent the same message to a large number of recipients, and (2) you are publicising someone else's email address without their permission. One way to get round this is to place all addresses in the Bcc: field.

Do not request delivery and read receipts. This will annoy recipients before they have even read your message and often does not work anyway. If you want to know whether an email was received it is better to ask the recipient to let you know if it was received.

Do not ask to recall a message. Usually the message has already been delivered and a recall request draws more attention to a problem. It is better just to send an email to say that you have made a mistake. This will look much more honest than trying to recall a message.
Use templates for frequently used responses. Some questions you get over and over again, such as directions to the RCPA. Save these texts as response templates and paste these into your message when you need them. You can save your templates in a Word document, or use

pre-formatted emails.

Formatting
Email is meant to be a quick medium and requires a different kind of writing from letters, and reading from a screen is more difficult than reading from paper, so structure and layout is very important. Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph. When making points, number them or mark each point as separate. Keep sentences to a maximum of 15-20 words.
Remember that when you use formatting in your emails, it may appear differently for the recipient. Only use colours that are easy to read on the background.

Email Etiquette

- Answer all questions, and pre-empt further questions.

- Answer swiftly. People generally use e-mail because they wish to receive a quick response.

- Each e-mail should be replied to within 24 hours. If the email is complicated, just send an email back saying that you have received it and that you will get back to them (and when that will happen).

- Do not attach unnecessary files. Wherever possible try to compress attachments and only send attachments when they are productive.
- Do not copy a message or attachment without permission. If you do not ask permission first, you might be infringing on copyright laws.

- Do not use email to discuss confidential information. Sending an email is like sending a postcard. If you do not want your email displayed on a bulletin board, do not send it.

- Never make any libellous, sexist or racially discriminating comments in emails, even if they are meant to be a joke, as these are in violation of RCPA policy.

- Do not forward virus hoaxes and chain letters. If you receive an email message warning you of a new unstoppable virus that will immediately delete everything from your computer, this is most probably a hoax. By forwarding hoaxes you use valuable bandwidth and sometimes virus hoaxes contain viruses themselves, by attaching a so-called file that will stop the dangerous virus. The same goes for chain letters that promise incredible riches or ask your help for a charitable cause. Even if the content seems to be bona fide, the senders are usually not. Since it is impossible to find out whether a chain letter is real or not, the best place for it is the recycle bin.

- Do not reply to spam. By replying to spam or by unsubscribing, you are confirming that your email address is 'live'. Confirming this will only generate even more spam. Therefore, just hit the delete button or use email software to remove spam automatically.