Applies to: All Operations & Facilities Management Department Employees

Guidelines:

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Out of Office Notification

Prior to an absence from the office of one (1) or more working days, the Supervisor should be notified in writing of requested dates of leave. An email should be sent to your group informing them of the dates of absence and who will be serving as a backup during the absence.

An out of office message should be set up using the Out of Office Assistant located under Tools in Outlook and set to both inside and outside of organization. The notification must include dates and times of absence as well as contact information (phone number and email address) of an assigned delegate and/or an office support contact.

Employees must also ensure voice mail has been set up with an out of office message, stating dates of absence and contact information of assigned delegate and/or office support contact.

Appointments

If a meeting request is received and conflicts with another scheduled meeting or you are not able to attend for other reasons, please notify the meeting organizer by including a response for any and all meeting declines or tentative acceptances. You will need to utilize the "Edit the Response before Sending" feature when including a message.

Email Signatures

The official and approved Washington University School of Medicine email signature should include name, job title, department, University name, phone number and email address. This information should be in plain text format. For more information, please visit https://publicaffairs.med.wustl.edu/items/email-signatures/.

E-mail Guidance

Most e-mails are considered public records. Because access to these e-mails could be required at some time in the future, proper use of e-mail is very important. Please take a moment to familiarize yourself with the information below.

E-mail is a permanent record, so please consider the liability of information that is communicated before hitting send.   Note that the sender's deletion of an e-mail has no bearing on whether recipients delete the message or forward it   elsewhere.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I determine what to save?

Before asking "what should I save?", ask "what should I send?" Discretion should be used when deciding whether or not to communicate electronically and what to include in that communication. Once the communication has been sent, the   same guidelines for retaining hardcopy files apply to e-mail and other electronic correspondence.

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When corresponding electronically, you should consider the following:
- E-mails intended for general distribution should be considered official documents and proofread for accuracy and grammatical correctness.
- E-mail threads should typically not exceed three replies and should not be used in place of a face-to-face project meeting or voice-to-voice communication to address critical project issues.
- Confidential e-mails should include a confidentiality statement warning about general distribution in the signature block of the e-mail. Example of signature block:
  > Confidentiality Notice: This e-mail and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended for the sole use of the individual(s) to whom they are addressed. If you have received this e-mail in error, please delete the original message from your system, destroy any copies, and notify me at one of the above contact numbers. Thank you.
- Proper e-mail etiquette should always be considered (see below).
- E-mail subject lines should be descriptive, specific, and relevant to the subject contained in the message.
- Personal comments should be avoided.

How do I save my project-related e-mail?

E-mails that are important to keep as documentation of the project should immediately be saved to the project folder located in your personal mailbox in Outlook.

Simple transactional communications do not need to be included as part of the project record. Ask "what significance does this message have to me and to the project?" In many cases, this will include those that document key project information, direction, or decisions. Messages that do not contain significant project value may be saved to a personal e-mail folder for reference and deleted at project close.

What is proper e-mail etiquette?

Electronic mail, or e-mail, allows you to send a letter almost instantaneously. However, just because it's fast does not mean it's the best way to communicate. As with any letter, the e-mail reader cannot see facial expressions or hear subtle vocal intonations. It is important to avoid relying on e-mail as your primary means of communication with others. As high-tech as we have become, there is no replacement for face-to-face personal interaction (or, if distance prohibits it, voice-to-voice over the telephone).

Etiquette Guidelines

Perception is a Reader's Reality

- Body language, facial expressions, and tonal inflexions are lost with e-mail. Emotions you may think were apparent might not be so to the reader. The reader may interpret emotions you had no intention of conveying.
- Avoid chastising or criticizing someone over e-mail (especially if others are copied). This is especially important if it's someone you supervise. Without being there to see how they react, it's difficult to ascertain if the criticism is taken correctly, etc. Over the phone, you at least have the advantage of taking cues from tone of voice and dialogue.
- Remember your manners – "please" and "thank you" is still appropriate.
- TYPING IN ALL CAPS DENOTES YELLING OR SCREAMING IN E-MAIL!
- Deal with employee performance issues in person, whenever possible.
- Delegate major assignments and projects in person, whenever possible (if this cannot be done in person, use the phone). E-mail can be used to document the tasks and deadlines that were agreed upon.
- Use humor and irony sparingly in e-mail – it's easy to misinterpret.

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Think Before You Act

- You can't get a message back once you hit send (and don't count on the recall function because it doesn't work in every situation).
- If you need to respond to a heated message, write it and wait. Allow some time to cool down. You will likely find yourself making changes to your response before sending. Any feeling of gratification from "flaming" is not worth the damage it can do to your relationship with the other person, your reputation, or your career. Don't send anything that could come back to haunt you! When in doubt, forward the message to your supervisor or a trusted peer to review before sending.
- Re-read a message before responding to be sure you really understand it.
- Proofread your message before sending. Just because e-mail is instant, it shouldn't be sloppy. Watch grammar and spelling (use spell check).

Focus, Focus, Focus

- If it's worth the recipient reading, it's worth writing well. On the other hand, no one ever won a Pulitzer Prize for writing "The Great American E-mail Message," so don't agonize.
- Get to the point quickly, in the first paragraph. Supporting details can follow.
- Include a subject line and make it descriptive. Make sure it reflects the topic of the e-mail. (Project should always be first followed by the topic)
- Avoid multiple topics in single message. It's better to send separate messages (they can be filed separately).
- Keep to your topic. Short and concise is best, but avoid sending responses that might seem curt.

Watch Your Kilobytes!

- Try to send links or shortcuts to files whenever possible. If files must be e-mailed, consider the file size. When sending large files, use WinZip to compress them or convert them to a PDF document if they are not being edited in the original program. Remember that some individuals may not be able to receive your message if the file size is too large. Worse yet, if you're attaching a large file, it could crash their e-mail.
- Avoid e-mail stationary. The message takes longer to open, and it takes up more file space.

Responsiveness

- Try to respond to e-mail messages within 24 hours. Don't delay responses unnecessarily. It is better to send your response and "keep the deck clear."
- Acknowledge messages from others, especially if they are assigning you work.

Be True to Your Tools

- Use "read receipts" sparingly. Don't put them on every single message just because you like to know when your message is opened.
- Keep TOs and CCs to a minimum. Be extra cautious in the use of "reply all" (use only when necessary).
- Don't mark Importance as High (!) for a message, unless it is. This will help you avoid appearing like the "boy who cried wolf."
- If you have more than two rounds of exchange with someone over e-mail, break the cycle. Pick up the phone or go talk to the person.
- If you're going to be out of the office for one day or longer, set an out of office message in your e-mail by going to Tools | Out of Office Assistant in Outlook. Make sure to include the name and other contact information for someone who can handle concerns in your absence.

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General Reminders

- Don't assume you have a right to privacy regarding your e-mail.
- Don't assume sent means read. Even a read receipt only means the message was opened but not necessarily read. It's a mistake to assume your message will be read immediately. Give others time to respond.