

Guidance for E-Mail Etiquette at Barnert Temple
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Document Purpose

E-mail provides us with an incredibly efficient communication channel. It is fast, inexpensive, easy, and used by nearly everyone! Yet the rapid adoption of e-mail also presents us with challenges related to e-mail overload and miscommunication.

One of the underlying issues relates to having reasonable expectations of others when using the e-mail channel. Some of us use e-mail continuously during the day, and are comfortable engaging in "group dialog" using this communication channel. Others do not have constant e-mail access, and seek to catch up with their e-mails once or twice daily. The first group may be frustrated with the delayed responsiveness of the second. The second group may become frustrated with the burden of too many back-and-forth e-mails that are no longer current, cluttering their Inbox. The solution for all, in a general sense, involves:

- 1) Understand what e-mail is, and what e-mail is not.
- 2) Be sensitive to different people's work and life environments.

More specifically, it helps to be familiar with the following "rules of the road" which have been compiled from various sources.

General Guidelines

- **Concentrate on one subject per message, whenever possible.** This is especially important when each subject may lead to a different e-mail stream, and may need to involve different recipients. (Exceptions to this include itemizing multiple issues in preparation for a meeting, or providing a committee update on several projects.)
- **Keep your messages short and focused.** Recipients either don't fully read or ignore long messages, leading to incomplete responses that require further e-mails to clarify.
- **Don't argue or send e-mails when angry.** Wait before writing your e-mail, or even better, pick up the phone.
- **Answer all questions, and try to pre-empt further questions.** If you do not answer all the questions in the original e-mail, you will receive further e-mails regarding the unanswered questions, which will not only waste your time, but the other person's time as well. Keep in mind that some issues are too complex to resolve via e-mail. Sometimes it really is better to use the phone instead!
- **Remember to include attachments the first time** so that an additional e-mail does not need to be sent. One way to remember this is not to fill in the recipient's name until the attachment has been included.
- **Use sentence case.** All capital letters looks as if you're shouting and using all lowercase letters is hard to read.

- **Proofread the e-mail** before you send it to check for errors, clarity, attachments, and potential misunderstandings.

When composing an e-mail

- **Addresses in the "To" field are the people you are directly addressing.** The addresses in the copy field, "Cc" are for the people you are indirectly addressing and just want to keep informed. Copy only those who need to be copied and make sure they know why they are receiving a copy.
- **Limit the use of "Cc" to those who need to receive the information.** Be as selective with these as with your "To" addressees. If a "Cc" recipient only needs to be copied on the final outcome of an e-mail exchange, don't "Cc" them on all the back-and-forth e-mails leading up to it.
- **Use the "Subject" field to convey a meaningful brief description of the topic.** Always specify a subject, but do not say something vague like "A few things."
- **Give the recipient a deadline for a response, and, as the sender, be patient.** E-mail is not the same as instant messaging or text messaging. Not everybody checks e-mails and is able to respond within the hour.

When responding to an e-mail

- **Avoid "Reply To All" unless it is absolutely necessary and appropriate.** Ask yourself the question, "Does *every* recipient truly need to see this?" Only use "Reply To All" if there is a particular reason for wanting all recipients to see your response.
- **If you are Cc'd, then you do not need to take action on the e-mail.** You are copied to keep you informed.
- **Reply quickly - within 48 hours, if possible.** Send a short e-mail if you need more time to respond.
- **Include the message thread, and summarize it.** When you reply to an e-mail, you must include the original e-mails in your reply. However, keep in mind that an e-mail thread becomes less useful the longer it is. Don't assume that the recipient will always be able to figure out a complex issue by reading pages and pages of e-mail responses. It is your responsibility as the respondent to briefly summarize the e-mails to date to help the recipient quickly understand and respond.