

Cleveland State University

EEC 414/503

Writing in Electrical and Computer Engineering

Lecture 7

Letters, Memos, and Emails

Dan Simon

Letters, Memos, and Emails

1. Guidelines for Correspondence
2. Letters: most formal
3. Memos: less formal
4. Emails: least formal

1. Guidelines for Correspondence

1) Know your purpose

“As you requested last week, I am sending results of our flux capacitor testing ...”

“This email explains CSU’s new policy of requiring publications from graduating seniors ...”

2) Know your readers

“This email includes the results of electromagnetic Geissler sheilding testing using Ca47 isotope separation ...”

“This email includes the results of flux capacitor testing. Flux capacitors can be used to reverse time and ...”

“Hey Emmett – check out these flux capacitor test results. This thing works better than we expected ...”

1. Guidelines for Correspondence

- 3) Use correct formatting
Specific details will be given later in these slides
Basically, make your correspondence visually appealing
- 4) Follow the ABCs of good correspondence:
Abstract, Body, Conclusion
We remember what we read *last*
- 5) Use the three Cs for persuasion:
Capture, Convince, Contact

1. Guidelines for Correspondence

6) Focus on the reader, not on yourself

“I believe that my new control algorithm will ...”



“You will find that our new control algorithm will ...”



“These new guidelines are necessary because our software in the personnel office ...”



“These new guidelines will help us provide you with better service ...”



7) Use attachments for details

Email attachments

Letter attachments

report appendices

1. Guidelines for Correspondence

8) Be diplomatic

“Failure to submit required reports by Friday will result in the suspension of all grant activity ...”



“Please submit required reports by Friday to avoid unnecessary suspension of grant activity ...”



“I refuse to comply with your request because of your previous unreasonable demands ...”



“Unfortunately, I will not be able to fully comply with your request because of previous time commitments ...”



“Your funding request has been declined.”



“Your request has been declined. However, the next proposal window is ...”



1. Guidelines for Correspondence

9) Edit carefully

Proofread – even emails!

10) Respond quickly, and give others enough time to respond

Letters, Memos, and Emails

1. Guidelines for Correspondence
2. Letters: most formal
3. Memos: less formal
4. Emails: least formal

2. Letters

- Hard copy, or attached to email
 - If attached to email, use PDF if possible

Sample Letter Format

April 26, 1999

Dan Simon
775 Rothrock Circle
Copley, OH 44321

Date, sender name,
return address

Dr. L. Kenneth Keys, Dean
Fenn College of Engineering
1960 East 24th Street
Cleveland, OH 44115-2425

Recipient name and
address

Subject: Automotive Research — Subject line

Dear Dr. Keys: — Salutation (followed by colon)

The body of the letter goes here. There is no need to indent paragraphs if there is a blank line between paragraphs. There is no need to indent paragraphs if there is a blank line between paragraphs. Make sure to avoid typographical errors.

Typically there is a closing paragraph that asks for further action, or sums up the content of the letter. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Body of letter (intro.,
main text, conclusion)

Sincerely,

Dan Simon

Dan Simon

Closing and signature (may include
job title, email address, etc.)

Enclosure: Automotive Research Proposal — Enclosure information

cc: Dr. Fuqin Xiong, Chair, Department of Electrical Engineering
Dr. Rick Steiner, Vice President of Research

Information about other recipients

Letters, Memos, and Emails

1. Guidelines for Correspondence
2. Letters: most formal
3. **Memos: less formal**
4. Emails: least formal

Sample Memo Format

To: Fuqin Xiong, Chair, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering

cc: Dr. Frank N. Stein, Director of Medical Research
Barack Obama, President, USA

From: Dan Simon, Associate Professor *Dan Simon*

Date: January 8, 2008

Subject: Outside Employment

Summary

This memo is to request permission to consult with Slacker, Inc. (www.slacker.com) in Austin, Texas. The work involves the development of antenna tracking and control systems. I will spend no more than 8 hours per week on this work. This will not negatively impact my university obligations. In fact, I expect it to help me remain current with the industrial state-of-the-art. This consulting is in compliance with Article 26 of the CSU/AAUP agreement.

Past Consulting

You may recall that I requested permission last September to consult with Bettcher Industries. However, their VP of engineering resigned soon after, and so I have not done any work with them.

Conclusion

If you agree to give me permission to consult with Slacker, please sign and date below, and return a copy of this memo to me for my records. Thank you for your consideration.

For inter-office
communication

Similar to letters

Less formal

Use headings to
organize material

Letters, Memos, and Emails

1. Guidelines for Correspondence
2. Letters: most formal
3. Memos: less formal
4. **Emails: least formal**

4. Emails

- Emails comprise the vast majority of business communication – that's why it's **so important** to understand email netiquette
- Email is **not private**

4. Email is not private

Executive email allowed as evidence in class-action suit over diet-drug combination Phen-Fen:

“Do I have to [spend] my waning years writing checks to fat people worried about a silly lung problem?”

Chevron email used in \$2.2 million lawsuit:

“25 reasons why beer is better than women.”

4. Email is not private

Email from FEMA employee two days after Hurricane Katrina: “... the situation is past critical ... no food or water ... dying patients ... deplorable conditions ...”

Response from FEMA Chief Michael Brown: “Thanks for the update. Anything specific I need to do or tweak?”

(Brown resigned 12 days later)

4. Emails: Common Problems

- Errors – spelling, punctuation, grammar
- Irony, jokes, spam
- Clicking “send” in the heat of the moment
- Forgetting the subject line (extra important)
- Responding to everyone instead of just the sender – “reply” vs. “reply all”
- Formatting errors (all caps, no line breaks, assuming reader has HTML, ...)

4. Emails: Common Problems

- Impersonal: “To Whom it May Concern”
- Unnecessary attachments when replying
- Not including the previous email history
- Subject is too vague
- Using URGENT or IMPORTANT in the subject
- Accidentally hit the “Send” button too soon
- Email is too long

To: Dan Simon

Subject: Urgent! need help!!!

how r u?

i need help designing kalman filter using flux capacitor components, pls answer soon, no one else will help me!!!!



To: Dan Simon

Subject: Kalman filter request

Hello Dr. Simon. How are you? I have recently begun studying Kalman filters and their implementation using flux capacitors. I would appreciate any information that you have in this area. Thanks in advance for your help.

Regards, Joe B. Student



To: Dan Simon

Subject: Ethiopian relief

Hi Dr. Simon – I am in your technical writing class – If this email gets forwarded to 1 million people, then Microsoft has promised to donate \$1 million dollars for Ethiopian relief! See below!

Forwarded message:

Hello! Please forward this email to 10 of your friends ...



To: Dan Simon, Zhiqiang Gao, Fuqin Xiong, Lili Dong, ...
<every other person in your address book> ...

Subject: Engineering joke

This is SO funny! LOL! How many engineers does it take to change a lightbulb? [Click here](#) for the answer! 😊



To: Joe Student

Subject: IEEE Officer Vote

Joe, this email is a reminder to let you know that your IEEE Officer vote is due by the end of tomorrow. Since you're a Democrat, I know that it's important to you to vote early and often! 😊

Dan



To: Joe Student

Subject: IEEE Officer Vote

Joe, this email is a reminder to let you know that your IEEE Officer vote is due by the end of tomorrow. I hope to hear from you soon. Thanks.

Dan



To: Dan Simon

Subject: Admission letter

How could you reject my grad school application, you stinking bum, you lousy excuse for a professor! That's fine – CSU is a pathetic school anyway. You'll be sorry when I'm a millionaire and make my donations to some other university! SCREW YOU!!!!

P.S. Could you please write me a recommendation letter?



To: Dan Simon

Subject: Admission letter

Dr. Simon – I am surprised that my grad school application was rejected. My past academic performance is good, and I am passionate about continuing my education. Could you please let me know the reasons for the rejection? Thank you for your time.
Sincerely, Joe B. Student



To: ECE Faculty
From: Dan Simon
Subject: Meeting about email

Colleagues, I am trying to set up a meeting to discuss the proper use of email. Please let me know which of the following meeting times are most convenient for you:

Monday 5:00 AM

Wednesday 11:00 PM

To:c.alexander@ieee.org,p.chu@csuohio.edu,L.Dong34@csuohio.edu,y.fu@csuohio.edu,z.gao@csuohio.edu,m.hizlan@csuohio.edu,n.sridhar1@csuohio.edu,a.stankovic@csuohio.edu,f.villaseca@csuohio.edu,f.xiong@csuohio.edu,s.yau@csuohio.edu,c.yu91@csuohio.edu,wenbingz@acm.org,y.zhu61@csuohio.edu

Dan, both times are fine for me.



To: ECE Faculty
From: Dan Simon
Subject: EMAIL MEETING

COLLEAGUES, I AM TRYING TO
SET UP A MEETING TO
DISCUSS THE PROPER USE OF
EMAIL. PLEASE LET ME KNOW
WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING
MEETING TIMES ARE MOST
CONVENIENT FOR YOU:
MONDAY 5:00 AM OR
WEDNESDAY 11:00 PM



To: ECE Faculty
From: Dan Simon
Subject: Meeting about email

Colleagues, I am trying to set up a meeting to discuss the proper use of email. Please let me know which of the following meeting times are most convenient for you: Monday 5:00 AM or Wednesday 11:00 PM. The rules of email etiquette are not "rules" in the sense that I will come after you if you don't follow them. They are guidelines that help avoid mistakes (like offending someone when you don't mean to) and misunderstandings (like being offended when you're not meant to). These core rules of email etiquette help us communicate better via email. It is amazing to find that in this day and age, some companies have still not realized how important their email communications are. Many companies send email replies late or not at all, or send replies that do not actually answer the questions you asked. If your company is able to deal professionally with email, this will provide your company with that all important competitive edge. Moreover by educating employees as to what can and cannot be said in an email, you can protect your company from awkward liability issues. This website discusses the main etiquette rules and provides advice on how employers can ensure that they are implemented.



To: Dan Simon

Subject: internship

To whom it may concern: I am seeking a summer internship. Attached please find my resume.



To: Dan Simon

Subject: internship

Dr. Simon, I am seeking a summer internship in the area of robotics. Attached please find my resume. Thanks for your time, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely, Joe B. Student



To: Joe B. Student

Subject: paper reviews

Hi Joe – I've attached 12 papers to this email that I would like you to review and summarize for me. Try to get this done by the end of the week. Thanks.

Dan Simon

Attachments: Paper1.pdf,
Paper2.pdf, ...

To: Dan Simon

Subject: Re: paper reviews

Dr. Simon, I will get my reviews to you in the next day or so.

Sincerely, Joe B. Student
Attachments: Paper1.pdf,
Paper2.pdf, ...



To: Joe B. Student

Subject: research results

Joe, I have some questions about your research results.

1. Are the results averages or from a single run?
2. Have you considered the effects of special relativity on your calculations?
3. How does your work relate to flux capacitor design?

To: Dan Simon

Subject: Re: research results

Dr. Simon,

The answers to your questions are yes, no, and I don't know.

Joe B. Student



Acknowledgments

- Technical Communication, by Mike Markel (Chapter 14)
- Technical Communication, by William Pfeiffer and Kaye Adkins (Chapter 5)
- Pocket Book of Technical Writing, by Leo Finkelstein (Chapter 18)
- A Guide to Writing as an Engineer, by David Beer and David McMurrey (Chapter 4)
- Technical Communication in the Twenty-First Century, by Sidney Dobrin et al. (Chapter 12)
- www.emailreplies.com
- email.about.com