

Actuarial Standards Committee

Suggestions for More Effective Email Correspondence

(Initially agreed by e-mail dated 14 December 2013)

1. Before replying to all, consider, “Is it necessary that I reply-to-all? Would a reply just to the sender, or perhaps just to the sender and one or two particular others, suffice?” For example, a “Thanks” to the sender should not normally be a “reply-to-all”. Minimize email clutter for others, and hopefully they’ll do the same for you.
2. Before replying, consider, “Is a reply necessary at all?” And if it’s dealing with an upcoming meeting agenda item, consider, “Is this an issue or thought that I should raise now by email, or is it one better presented orally during the next call or meeting?” Note that at times, sending an email in advance of the next meeting or call can indeed be very useful; on other occasions, it may not be.
3. Is this the right time to prepare and send a reply? For example, the initiator of an email stream can perhaps best wait before replying to very early comments, until more come in. This can avoid long public dialogue between A and B before C, D, and E have weighed in. Similarly, if it’s dealing with a major document (for example, the near-final draft of an SOI), at times the sender of the document should prescribe an order for responses, so that multiple persons don’t provide different edited versions which can make the job of dealing with the suggestions more messy than necessary.
4. Consider commencing your emails with what you are expecting from the recipients. For example:

Dave, Godfrey and Alf – Please provide your suggestion on this.
Francis and Esko – Please comment.
Rest of the ASC – For information only
Deadline for response: 28th February
5. When replying to an email which has generated other emails by others in the group, reply to the last one sent, not the original email. In this way, we have one consolidated email stream on the subject rather than multiple streams. One way to do this is to open the emails on a given subject in reverse chronological order (in other words, open the most recent one first).
6. Occasionally, shortly after having sent an email in reply to a group email, a further thought may strike you that you wish you’d included in your email. In that case, instead of replying again to the original group email, do a reply-to-all to that email you just sent, include any attachment you had with your first reply, and instruct the other recipients that they should delete the earlier one you sent. In that way, both your first email response and your additional thought are in a single email stream.
7. Occasionally, an email stream may go a different direction, and in fact deal with a new or different subject. A trivial illustrative example is where “Dinner – Jan 28th” later turns out to be on Jan 30th instead. In such cases, change the email’s subject header.

8. When providing edits and comments on a document attached to an email, where possible (i.e., if working on a computer rather than a handheld device) insert them directly into the document itself (using track changes) rather than in a cover email. Then rename the document to indicate that it has been changed (for example, with your initial added, date, time or some other indicator). Comments and suggested edits made only in the email tend to get lost and/or forgotten as the stream gets longer (as actually recently occurred in the IAA's news release for the ISAP ED on IAS 19). Comments and suggested edits made directly in the document tend to get dealt with.
9. When writing emails try to be clear. Use simple English and common words. Don't assume your fellow ASC members will pick up implications – spell them out. Doing this cuts down on multiple e-mails trying to figure out what the sender means.
10. Express yourself clearly and concisely.
11. Read your text again before sending, for both content and tone (which can often be misinterpreted, or come across more harshly than intended).

As an aide-memoire ("11 ASC-commandments" for email exchange):

- a. Is a "reply-to-all" necessary?
- b. Is a reply necessary at all?
- c. Is now the right time to prepare and send a reply?
- d. Consider commencing your emails with what you are expecting from the recipients.
- e. Ideally, reply to the last email of an email chain.
- f. If, having sent an email, an afterthought occurs that is to be added, resend the first email with that additional thought and all attachments, and instruct all recipients to delete your earlier email.
- g. If the content of an email chain changes, change the "Re:" to reflect the new content.
- h. When editing or commenting on a document, always insert your edits in the document itself (using track changes) rather than in a cover email. Rename the document.
- i. Use simple English and common words.
- j. Express yourself clearly and concisely.
- k. Read your text again before sending.