

## How can I get my client prospect to read my emails? Part 2

*Posted by Robin Hensley on November 30, 2010*

Today, we're finishing up our conversation about email that we started last month.

I am often asked how to get prospects to read client emails. It's frustrating when there is no reply or the reply is not the favorable response the client is seeking. While I'm not going to tell you *what* to say, the following ten tips will help you lay out your message so that whatever you say will have a better chance of being read. Better hurry, though. IM (Instant Messaging) is rapidly replacing email. Getting your message down to just a few characters is an art in itself and a topic for another time. For right now, just master the nuances of text placement as outlined below.

### **1. Make your message fast and easy for the reader.**

1. Map out your message so that the reader intuitively knows where to look for specific information.
2. The subject line is the first place the reader looks. Make the subject short and compelling, capturing the information like a newspaper headline would.
3. Include a signature line, as the reader will intuitively look for contact information there.
4. Make the message itself stand out with bulleted points that move the reader's eye where you want it to go.

### **2. Write for skimming and scanning.**

- Readers skim e-mails, giving different levels of attention to different parts.
- They also scan, looking for specific information while ignoring the rest.
- Set your e-mails up to help your reader do both.

### **3. Use white space to speed up skimming and scanning.**

- To skim and scan, the eyes need to move around the text, focusing in some places, resting in others.
- A dense block of print discourages rapid eye movement.
- Contrast speeds things up.
- Alternating print with empty white space "gives the reader wings".

### **4. Use white space to add meaning.**

- White space is not empty. It's full of meaning.
- White space tells the reader that there's a change in idea, a shift in the argument, an example on the way, a contrast coming, or an objection being raised.
- Readers use white space to navigate information for meaning.

### **5. Make the first sentence count.**

- In business e-mail, the first sentence of the text is the most important.
- Readers decide to read an e-mail immediately or save it for later based on that first sentence.

**6. Begin with your conclusion, and then explain.**

- For replies, give your answer in the first sentence and explain your reasons below.
- To save time when making a request, tell the reader straight out what you want.
- For updates, summarize the situation in the first sentence and then detail it in the rest of the e-mail.
- If you have a question, ask it right away. If the reader has asked you to reply, remind him or her of that at the start.

**7. Keep it simple to keep things moving.**

- Use headers and sub-titles to enhance skimming.
- Use short sentences and common vocabulary as much as possible.
- Keep your message length to screen size to eliminate scrolling.
- Use simple, straightforward language to get your message across right away.
- Use simple present and past tense.
- Use simple salutations. A first name followed by a comma is less formal, a name followed by a colon is more formal and signals something important is about to be said.
- Cut the e-mail thread and start a new e-mail (and subject line) when the length becomes cumbersome.
- Use the subject line to gain the reader's attention.

**8. Build connection through your tone.**

- Avoid using CAPITALS. The reader interprets them as SHOUTING.
- Avoid using punctuation such as exclamation marks ("!") when your message is intended to be formal!

**9. Proof, then send.**

- Always use Spell Check.
- Read to get a fresh perspective and to pick up typos and errors.
- Change the typeface to see your message with fresh eyes, or enlarge the type size.
- Print a hard copy.
- Read your message aloud to listen for errors.

**10. Know when to call instead of e-mailing.**

- Use the telephone to build or enhance your connection with the reader.
- Call to communicate how you feel.
- Call if you need to break bad news before you send the e-mail.
- Call to reach resolution if e-mails have gone back and forth for a long period.

For more on e-mail dos and don'ts, sample texts for a variety of situations, and visual cues to give your messages more impact, pick up a copy [The Executive Guide To E-Mail Correspondence](#) by Dawn-Michelle Baude, Ph.D.

Until next time,

Robin