

# Grammar Nuggets



## **Email is Correspondence Too!**

*By Kathy Sieckman, PP, PLS-SC, ACP*

Email is not just a method of communicating with others over the computer. It is a reflection of you and your firm when you are using your company equipment to send emails to others—whether regarding work subjects or not. Email is just the same as sending a letter or any other type of communication. You need to make sure your message is clear and error-free.

Keep these things in mind:

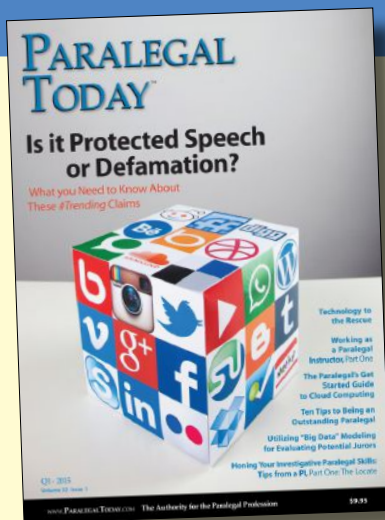
- Never, EVER use text-speak in business emails. Take the time to spell words out. People who do not text much or who insist on grammatically correct texts will have trouble reading the email when it contains those kinds of abbreviations. Take the time to turn “R U ready for me to snd the ltr?” to “Are you ready for me to send the letter?”
- Email was once considered a very informal way of communicating. Things are very different now. Think about how many times a day you use email to communicate with attorneys in your own office, clients, opposing counsel, and other professionals. Email has really become a primary business correspondence and, thus, is formal communication. Treat it that way.
- When you are using email to forward some kind of document, you need to make sure both the email and the attachment are proofread and are an accurate reflection of you and your firm and the quality of your work. I personally love that our Outlook Office Professional Plus 2013 is picking up when it looks like you intended to attach something but have not attached it before you hit send. But even if you do not have that version of Outlook, before hitting send, check your email for accuracy—that it is going to the correct person (do not trust your email program’s autofill) and that your attachment is correct AND attached.
- Speaking of autofill, be very careful when entering the name of a recipient where autofill starts to fill in someone from your contacts. It is very possible it could pull someone from your contacts with a similar start to their name, but is not the person you intended to receive the email. I have seen it happen, and I have received emails myself that were not intended for me, but because there are two Kathys in our firm, I have received her email. It is not too bad when it is just internal, but when you intend to send an email to a client and autofill puts in the name of opposing counsel, that is a huge problem. Slow down and check to make sure the recipients are the correct intended recipients.
- When you are sending an email—particularly one going outside the firm—do not trust the “send” spellcheck. You know which one I mean. You press send, it tells you words it thinks are spelled wrong, fixes them the way you tell it to, and sends it off into cyberspace. Were words that were spelled correctly still the wrong word? It is entirely possible. If you type “The client doe snot have any comment to your revisions,” it is all spelled correctly, but is it what you really meant? Take the time to read your emails and actually proof the email before you press send.

- When you are using your firm's email mail system and the email address reflects the firm/company name, you are the company. To the reader of the email, you are representing your firm.
- When you are using your firm's equipment or software to send email, the email belongs to the firm. They have the right to set up templates or give direction for how they want emails to look and what they want them to contain. Find out if your firm has those standards set out somewhere.
- Each email outside the firm should have a signature block just like every letter would. And just like every business correspondence, if you are not a lawyer, make sure your signature block contains your title. Otherwise, the reader may automatically assume you are a lawyer and are giving them legal advice.
- Be careful when responding to email and choosing "reply all." Does everyone listed on the email really need the information? In today's law firms, people can easily get over 200 emails a day, so any they do not have to have will put one less email in their box. However, do not assume people do not need to be included. If the subject has changed or someone has indicated they can be dropped from the email chain, that is one thing, but be careful about making the assumption that people do not want to be included. When in doubt, include everyone in the original group.
- Make sure the subject line of your email is accurate. Even if you are responding to an email chain, if the subject has changed, change the subject line. It not only makes it easier for the reader to sort information they really need to deal with at any particular time, but it makes it easier to search later.
- You never know who will read your email. Forwarding emails is far too easy to rely on the idea that only the addressee will ever read your email. Will it end up as a trial exhibit? Will your addressee forward it to someone you may not even know? Will it end up in your personnel file? Will the addressee post your email on the Internet for anyone to see? In the end, always be professional, always be accurate, and always be nice. The last thing you should think before you hit send is, "Do I want my mom to read this?"

Who knew email was so complicated? It really is not complicated; it is just good common sense. And it is good business sense to make sure your email represents you and your firm in the best way possible.

*Kathy Sieckman, PP, PLS-SC, ACP, has been a member of NALS for over 25 years and is currently serving as a member of the NALS Editorial Board. She was a finalist for the 2015 NALS Award of Excellence, and served as Co-Chair of the 2015 Las Vegas Conference Task Force. Kathy has a blog on proofreading tips at <http://proofthatblog.com>. If you have specific grammar issues you would like covered in future issues, please send them to Kathy at [proofthatblog@gmail.com](mailto:proofthatblog@gmail.com).*

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