



Essential Question: How do you communicate effectively when you write email messages?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students learn how to communicate effectively by email, taking into account the purpose and audience of their message, and the tone they want to convey.

Students learn about the importance of clear communication when writing emails, as facial and vocal cues are absent online. Students then learn about good ways to communicate by email, and use these strategies to edit an email message. Finally, students practice writing unclear emails for different audiences to demonstrate the importance of effective communication.

objectives

Students will:

- Communicate effectively by email, taking into account the purpose and audience of their email, and the message they want to convey
- Modify emails that are unclear
- Demonstrate that they understand the difference between effective and ineffective email communication

Materials and Preparation

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Materials

- **Say It Right Student Handout**
- Chalkboard or white board

Preparation

- Copy the **Say It Right Student Handout**, one for every student

Parent Resources

- Send parents the **Effective Email Communication Parent Tip Sheet**

Key Vocabulary

- **Effective:** Done well
- **Emoticons:** Symbols you can type that show how you feel
- **Edit:** To correct and revise
- **Context:** Background information that provides greater explanation
- **Formal:** More serious
- **Informal:** More relaxed



teaching plans

Introduce

APPROACH one of your students and say in a raised voice: “WHY DIDN’T YOU TURN IN YOUR HOMEWORK? HOW DISRESPECTFUL.” Immediately afterward, ask that person how he or she felt when you asked the question. (Responses might include: surprised, scared, guilty, or angry.)

ASK *Why was what I did an example of ineffective communication?*

Sample responses:

- *The teacher assumed that the student was disrespecting the teacher by not turning in the homework. But maybe the student was sick, or the teacher misplaced the homework. It would have been more effective if the teacher had asked the student less aggressive questions first.*
- *The teacher began by raising her voice, which probably led the student to tune out the teacher’s voice.*
- *The teacher’s comment made the student feel fearful or guilty, even if he or she did complete the homework or had a good reason why it was not done.*

INVITE students to share examples of effective ways to communicate with others when they are face to face.

Sample responses:

- *Take turns talking*
- *Don’t shout*
- *Recognize the feelings of others*
- *Choose your words carefully*
- *Clear up misunderstandings by asking follow-up questions*

EXPLAIN that some ways of communicating are more effective than others, and that the students will explore more about effective ways of communicating today.

Teach 1: Tips for Good Emails

WRITE a sentence on the board, such as, “I got my test back.” Ask students to pair up, and have one person from each pair repeat the sentence twice, with differing emphases to express two different meanings. The other partner should respond accordingly.

INVITE pairs to describe the two ways the first partner said the phrase, and also how the other partner responded. Help them consider how much additional information is conveyed through facial and vocal expression. Then have them reflect on how easy it is to misunderstand messages when those cues are missing.

ASK *If you wrote the phrase “I got my test back” to a friend over email, how would you let them know more about what you really mean?*

Sample responses:

- *I would write more information to let them know if I was happy about my score or not*
- *If my score was good, I would include a smiley face to let them know that I was happy*
- *If I got a bad score, I would include a subject line in the email that read “bummer”*



EXPLAIN that it is important to say what you mean and provide context when you are writing to others, especially if what you are saying could have many meanings. Let students know that there are some good tips for writing clear and effective emails. Introduce the following tips:

1. Think about your audience. You might write with different words and a different tone depending on who you are writing to. Emails to people you have never met might be more formal; emails to friends will probably be more informal.
2. Include a subject line that helps the person opening the email know what to expect.
3. Get right to the point, and try to keep the message to one screen for formal emails. People who get tons of messages every day will thank you.
4. Write only what you would say to a person's face. Anything you say over email you should be able to say to someone's face.
5. Only use uppercase letters one time if you want to emphasize an idea or a word. Typing whole sentences in uppercase letters is like shouting.
6. Provide context so that the intent of your message is clear.
7. Use emoticons, such as a smiley face, or an exclamation point on occasion to help people understand your meaning when they cannot see your face or hear your voice. But a word of caution: Emoticons may not be appropriate when writing more formal emails.
8. Check your spelling, grammar, punctuation, and formatting before sending an email, especially a formal one.
9. Type your name at the end of the email.

Teach 2: What's Wrong with This?

DISTRIBUTE the **Say It Right Student Handout**.

HAVE students edit the email message and explain their changes.

Possible edits:

- Use a more formal tone. For example, "So, Mr. President," is very informal; the information about the writer's little brother seems rude; change bossy-sounding sentences to more polite ones.
- Change the subject line so it is more specific to the message's intent.
- Change uppercase sentences to lowercase, unless you want to emphasize one or two of the words.
- Capitalize "all" at the beginning of the seventh sentence.
- Fix spelling of "cough" and "license."
- Capitalize "president" in the last sentence.



Wrap Up and Assess

You can use the tips on the **Say It Right Student Handout** to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives.

ASK

- *What are some tips for writing effective emails?*
- *What are some tips for writing ineffective emails?*

REMIND students that clear writing is especially important on the Internet because others cannot see your facial expressions.



Extension Activity

Have students review the “Good Email Tips” on the student handout. They should then type up a sample email that is purposefully ineffective. They can exchange these ineffective emails with classmates and then rewrite them so they are more effective.



Homework

Students bring home the “Good Email Tips” to share with their parents. They can then go over an email that the parent has written and assess how effective it was. If the parent does not have an email account, the students can find another trusted adult who does.

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students® 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

2. Communication and Collaboration

- b. communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats

5. Digital Citizenship

- a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
- b. exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity
- d. exhibit leadership for digital citizenship



Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

Directions

Read the email message below, read the “Good Email Tips,” and then edit the email with the tips in mind.

Edit This Email**To:** president@whitehouse.gov**Subject:** hey!**Message:**

Dear Mr. President,

My little brother doesn't even know who you are. I am writing to you because I am worried about AIR POLLUTION. SOMETIMES THE AIR IS SO DIRTY IT MAKES ME KOFF. CAN'T YOU DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT? HERE IS MY PLAN. I think people should only drive their cars on odd or even days. all they have to do is check the calendar.

If they have an odd driver's liecents, they can drive on odd days. If it is an even day, go in a carpool! So, Mr. president, ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE EVERYONE DO WHAT I SAY?

Your friend,
Angry about Air Pollution

**Good Email Tips**

1. Think about your audience. You might write with different words and a different tone depending on who you are writing to. Emails to people you have never met might be more formal; emails to friends will probably be more informal.
2. Include a subject line that helps the person opening the email know what to expect.
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