

E-mail Etiquette

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E-mail, used properly, can be a very useful tool in sending quick messages to a friend, group, or a coworker. However, reviewing and responding to e-mail can take a lot of time. Further, it is not the best form of communication because you can't hear the sender's tone of voice or see their face. If the recipient does not like the content of the message, they sometimes assume that offense was intended.

The Lochmere e-list is a forum for exchanging information and expressing thoughts and ideas on topics of interest to the barony. That being said, there are a few things to keep in mind when sending individual e-mails or posting to the list that can help us avoid misunderstandings or lack of clarity. The following tips for e-mail etiquette were adapted from an article written by Laura Stack¹ entitled: "12 Tips for Better E-mail Etiquette."²

1. **Don't use e-mail as an excuse to avoid personal contact.** Sensitive topics are best discussed face to face if possible. If it is not possible, a telephone conversation is the next best thing. If you have a problem with someone, *speak* to them directly. It is not only the courteous thing to do, it's also consistent with Appendix A of Corpora.³ If you have confidence enough in the point you are trying to make, you should have confidence enough to discuss your point with the intended recipient.
2. **Use the subject line to indicate content and purpose.** Avoid subject lines that say things like "Important Information." A better example would be "Volunteers Needed for Midwinter's Revel." If someone is asking for a response from the group, use the subject line that is specified in their e-mail. This will help ensure that your response is not missed.
3. **Remember that your tone can't be heard in e-mail** and not everyone's e-mail service will allow "emoticons." Emoticons, while helpful, are not a guarantee that someone will consider your e-mail to be light-hearted.

¹ Ms. Laura Stack is the President of Pro, Inc., an international consulting firm that specializes in productivity improvement in high stress-organizations. She holds an MBA in Organizational Management.

² Laura Stack, "12 Tips for better e-mail etiquette." Cited: 4 January 2013. Online: <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/outlook-help/12-tips-for-better-e-mail-etiquette-HA001205410.aspx>

³ "Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc., Organizational Handbook," (Milpitas, CA: 2009) 31. Cited: 4 January 2013. Online: <http://sca.org/docs/pdf/govdocs.pdf>

4. **Don't assume a message is intended to be offensive.** If you have any concerns, pick up the phone and talk to the sender. (See tip number 1).
5. **Use courtesy copy (cc) and blind courtesy copy (bcc) appropriately:** Don't use bcc to keep others from seeing who you copied; it shows confidence when you directly cc anyone receiving a copy. Do use bcc when you are sending a message to a large distribution list, so recipients won't have to see a huge list of names. Be cautious with your use of cc; overuse simply clutters inboxes. Copy only people who are directly involved.
6. **If you are forwarding an e-mail sent only to you, ask permission of the author before you send it to another party.**
7. **Remember that e-mail isn't private.** It can always be retrieved.
8. **Keep messages brief and to the point.** Use bullet points whenever necessary. Try to keep your message short enough so that it appears on the screen without having to scroll down.
9. **Be sparing with group e-mail.** Don't send a message to the group that doesn't apply to everyone. That being said, if you don't have contact information for someone in the group, an "In Search Of (ISO)" message is perfectly acceptable. Use "*reply all*" sparingly.
10. **Use sentence case.** Using all capital letters looks as if you're shouting.
11. **Remember the Golden Rule....Do unto others....**the address of your intended recipient should be the last thing that gets typed into your e-mail. Before you hit the send button, review what you have written. What would you think if you received a message like you are about to send?
12. **Pay attention to spelling and grammar.** It matters; it contributes to the quality and impact of your message.
13. **"Sign" your e-mails.** Don't assume that everyone can identify you by your e-mail address.
14. **Don't assume that someone is ignoring you when you don't get an immediate response.** Your message may have been sent to a junk e-mail folder or simply not gone through the server. If you have not heard back from an individual send a second e-mail or better yet, give them a call.
15. **Acknowledge an e-mail sent to you.** If your response requires some research or is lengthy and you're short on time, simply acknowledge the e-mail and give an estimated time that you expect to get back to the person who asked a question.