MERRIMACK COLLEGE

Email Guidelines
A Guide from Merrimack College Web Services

Effective emails can serve a variety of purposes, including as a way to:
• Mass-distribute new information
• Send attachments
• Serve as a to-do list
• Archive projects and conversations

Clear, informative emails should be sent to recipients who are relevant to your conversation. Do not overburden others with unnecessary messages.

College-wide Email Distribution:
The college-wide email distribution system is a necessary tool that ensures the community or specific groups (i.e. faculty, staff, students) receive important information from the institution relevant to their position within the college. It is for these reasons that the college-wide email distribution system is reserved for the following:
- Messages that directly relate to carrying out the business of the college.
- Messages that relate to changes in college policy, operations or those that communicate critical time-sensitive issues or emergencies.
- Messages that inform the community or a select group of people (e.g. faculty, staff, students, members of a specific school or department, etc.) of an announcement or event related to their specific role within the college.

*Announcements that do not meet these criteria should seek other resources for information sharing such as the campus calendar, Student Affairs Newsletters, the Provost Briefing, or the Alumni Newsletter.

Crafting Email Messages

Recipients
Take time to make sure everyone in your To: field needs this email. Remember that they will likely be included in any replies as well.

Double-check the names of your recipients, especially if your email program auto-fills names for you.

Pro Tip: If you need to let someone (like your supervisor) know you responded to a matter, but don't need them on the rest of the email chain, put them in a bcc: so they see your outgoing message but are not included in any replies.

Subject lines should be Descriptive and Specific
Your subject line should be clear, relevant and reflect the content of your email. The subject line should tell the recipient if they need to take action and serve as an index for when they are looking for this information in the future.

Some smart phones have limited displays, so limit your subject lines to 40 characters. If you must go over, put the most important information in the first 40 characters.

Examples:
✗   *Subject: Budget*
✗   *Subject: I know you're busy, but I really need your budget requests by Friday*
✓   *Subject: Submit budget requests by Friday*

✗   *Subject: Faculty Meetings*
✓   *Subject: Final Faculty Meeting schedule for 2019-20*

✗   *Subject: Hey*
✓   *Subject: We met at MLA, following up to swap syllabi*

Composing the Message
Begin your message with your request for action (whether a response to the email or some other task). Not everyone will read to the end of an email, so make sure they see the most important information first.

Examples:
✗   *I've been thinking a lot about some of the stuff we talked about on Monday …*
✓   *Here's the task list we decided on Monday. We should discuss …*

Messages do not need to be long. Short emails may feel brusque, but people are more likely to read and respond to messages that get to the point.

Always proofread your message before sending.

Keep Paragraphs Focused
In general, a paragraph should cover a single topic and be roughly 100–200 words in length. If your paragraph is longer than that, look for ways to cut content, or break the paragraph into two (or more) separate topics.

Keep these tips in mind when writing paragraphs:

• Address only one topic in each paragraph.
• Use bold and italic formatting (sparingly) for emphasis.
• Use bulleted lists instead of paragraphs to ease reading.

Be Conversational
Use a casual, upbeat tone. Don't go overboard, however, and undermine the College's professionalism and credibility with silly jokes.

• Use us/we/our when referring to Merrimack College.
• Use active voice instead of passive voice.

Examples:
✗   *Improving communication will be the College's priority.*
✓   *We're working to improve communications at Merrimack.*

Best Style Practices
Double space between paragraphs. Extra white space makes text easier to read, especially on phones and smaller devices.

Do not use all-caps, fancy fonts or colors in your email text.

Examples:
✗   *HERE'S YOUR* `TASK LIST`
✓   *Here's your task list*

If you are covering many topics, consider using headings between sections. If you have two questions, one that requires a simple yes or no answer and a second that requires more thought, consider sending two separate emails so that the second issue does not keep the recipient from responding to the first.

Avoid "Click Here"
Links labeled "click here" are outdated and not helpful to people using screen readers. A better approach is to embed the link directly into content by highlighting the words that best describe the new page where the link will take the reader. Keep the length of linked phrases to five words or less.

Example:
✓   All business administration majors must satisfy the College's [general education requirements](#).

Images
If you use images in your email, avoid clip art, the *Comic Sans* of the art world.

Do not use large images (over 600 pixels wide) which can be slow to load, especially on smart phones.

Replying
Long messages do not necessarily require long responses.

Acknowledgement of receipt is appreciated, and yet, not every email requires a reply. In life, etiquette prompts us to say, "thanks" in some situations, and to say nothing when a conversation has run its course. Use your email the same way.

Pro Tip: "Thanks" rarely requires a reply all.

You can remove (or add) recipients on an email chain as needed.

If your email chain meanders off-topic, change the subject line to focus the conversation and/or make the content clearer.

Reducing Your Email Inbox
To receive fewer emails, send fewer emails.

Set your mail program to retrieve mail less frequently, perhaps every hour instead of every 5 minutes. Research has found that workers take as much as 20 minutes to get back to tasks after being interrupted.

Consider archiving your emails so that your inbox does not seem overstuffed.

Occasionally cull email newsletters and commercial solicitations from your inbox. Don't just delete individual messages—consider how much information you get from each source and change the frequency of their emails or unsubscribe altogether as appropriate.

When in Doubt—Don't Hit Send
Remember, email is a permanent record, and not private. Don't write anything on email that you wouldn't say in public. If something you write might hurt someone's feelings, or offend a group of people, don't send it. Don't send messages written in anger or other charged emotional states. Your messages live on and can be forwarded to anyone else. Also, remember that anything sent from or to yourname@merrimack.edu is ultimately the property of Merrimack College.