

**E-mail has become one of the most common methods of business and personal communication.** It's fast, efficient, convenient—and it can be dangerous. Consider these tips for getting the maximum benefit while avoiding the pitfalls of e-mail, whether you're at work or home.

**Before you hit send, be sure your message is complete and is going to the right person.** Sending a blank or incomplete message can be embarrassing or worse. For e-mails you originate, make the address the last thing you do—that way, the message can't be sent until you're ready. For replies, take care not to hit the “send” button prematurely. And always check to make sure the address is accurate. We may laugh at stories of people who sent messages to the wrong people, but the reality is, such errors can damage your reputation, cost you business and money, and ruin relationships. If you're sending attachments, try to get in the habit of attaching the document first so it isn't forgotten.

**Casual is okay, sloppy is not.** It's perfectly acceptable to begin an e-mail with “Bill,” instead of “Dear Mr. Smith:”. E-mails don't require the structure of traditional formal written correspondence, but use correct grammar and make sure everything is spelled properly. And proofread, proofread, proofread. It's far too easy to accidentally leave a word out and change the entire meaning of your message. (Spell check doesn't always know what you are trying to say either!) Be concise and to the point. Don't type in all capital letters (that's considered shouting); capitalize where appropriate.

**Remember that e-mail is not 100 percent reliable.** Spam filters and system failures can cause messages to end up somewhere in cyberspace. If it's important, request a receipt confirmation by either using the tool in your e-mail software or specifically asking the receiver to acknowledge the message.

**Be cautious with abbreviations and acronyms.** E-mail has spawned a language of its own, but don't use abbreviations and acronyms that your reader might not understand—or worse, might misunderstand. It's always better to spell things out and be clear.

**Use humor sparingly or not at all.** E-mail is a one-dimensional communication without the benefit of tone or facial expression. Even including a smiley face or other humor indicator may not have the effect you want. It's much safer to just avoid using humor completely.

**E-mail praise but not reprimands.** E-mail is a great tool for quick and timely electronic pats on the back, but should never be used for any sort of negative appraisal. Thoughts and emotions can be misinterpreted, and creating even more problems in the process. Include a subject line appropriate for your message. Focus on one issue per e-mail and make it clear in your subject line so the recipient can find your message quickly and will know what it's about.

**Don't let e-mail replace human interaction.** E-mail may be efficient, but we still need real face-to-face conversation in many situations. Make e-mail work for you, not against you. When it comes to GWRRA, we also need to keep in mind that not all of our members have access to e-mail (and some prefer to check it sparingly outside of work). Make sure your “phone tree” can still keep these members informed.