

# Managing E-Mail

*"I have no life, just e-mail."*

*Michale Jantze, The Norm (Daily Comic Strip)*

Checking email, reading email and answering email can take up hours of time if you let it. Not only is it time consuming, but email can be distracting or even unnecessary. As is often the case, without thinking—we develop strong habits. Is your email frustrating you? If so, then it's time for some basic email management. Here are a few simple ideas to help you begin to control your inbox.

## 1) Get to know your email program

Although all email programs basically do the same thing, there is still a lot of variety between them. As things are quieter during the summer months, spend an hour looking into your email program to familiarize yourself with the individual features that it offers. Are you using shortcuts that are available in your program to add your name and contact information to email messages, delete messages once you're finished with them, or move and file important messages?

## 2) Filtering and using folders to organize email

You can set filters to sort messages either before or after you've read them. For example, maybe you're a member of several different listserves related to early intervention topics. You can set up rules

to direct these messages as they arrive and send them to a designated "Listserve" folder so they do not sit in your Inbox or distract you from more urgent communications. This folder can be reviewed when you have time or interest. Be cautious as you setup these folders! Limit the number of folders you set up to receive mail that is yet to be reviewed.

Once you have read an email message—make a decision to save or discard it. Review your program's "Help" feature to learn how to efficiently move messages into folders within your mail program or onto your hard drive.

## 3) Don't check your email on demand.

It's likely that you don't need to see every piece of email as soon as it arrives. If you're using an email program that announces the arrival of new email (makes a sound or a screen a pops-up to announce that you have new mail), turn off the announcement features. Instead, set aside a particular time each day to review and answer your email. Schedule the 10 minutes, half-hour, hour or whatever time it takes you to answer the volume of email you get, and stick to that schedule as regularly as possible. Some sources recommend only accessing email twice during your work day.



## Idea of the Month

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Child & Family Studies Research Programs  
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Philadelphia, PA 19107  
<http://jeffline.jefferson.edu/tlc>  
215.503.4019

#### **4) Don't answer your email at your most productive time of day.**

It's also suggested that for the majority of people, email time should be reserved for the portion of the work day when the individual is less alert or less creative (saving peak energy periods for the new or challenging project that needs to be completed). So what if you are most productive in the morning? Set a defined limit (10 minutes) so that when you arrive at work you can check email for any urgent messages and then leave the rest until later. Reading and answering email outside of your "best" working time will help you make the most of your morning, when you are most alert.

#### **5) When you write email, pay attention to the subject line**

Try to communicate about what's in an email message. Ask yourself, "what will help the reader know what the communication is about right away?" For example, if you need the reader to "*please take action*" or "*respond with direction*" - use these words in the subject line to provide an orientation and alert the reader to your request or to what he or she needs to do. When something isn't of a timely nature, your subject line can communicate that to the receiver by using phrases such as "*at your convenience*" or "*when you have time later this week.*" Be careful about using "*follow-up*" as a subject, especially when you can replace it with an accurate description that will help the receiver orient to your communication.

Here are a couple of other "subject line pointers":

- ◇ As the subject of email communication changes, edit the subject line to reflect the current content.
- ◇ Many email sages recommend never sending message with a blank subject line.

#### **6) Review what you've sent out.**

Set a reasonable time limit to what you will hold in your sent box. At the end of each month, review the messages that are there. Discard those that are no longer needed, drag and drop important messages into the appropriate folder so you can save their contents. Don't save the earlier email messages when the final communication you are saving includes the trail of comments and replies.

One last note—in reviewing this topic, several sources remind us that email is not the best strategy for all types of communication—but that's another topic!

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