

The Use and Abuse of Email – Some Thoughts
from Susan Davies at FMC Clerks' Meeting – April 20, 2008

1. On "To:" line put those in direct line of responsibility or decision. Only put on "cc:" line those with clear need to know but from whom no action is necessary. Do not use "bcc:" line generally for organizational business since it is important for everyone to know who is getting the email.
2. Subject lines are very important for clarity of communication, encouraging recipient to open and read, organization and filing, and saving everyone time. So compose thoughtfully.
3. Learn to use "reply" and "reply all" thoughtfully. Eg. – If setting up a meeting, person responsible initiates email, responders should "reply", not "reply all". Initiator can synthesize, send out next email incorporating information, etc.
4. If the topic is one of correction, chastising, unhappiness w/ recipient, don't communicate by email! Best is face-to-face, second would be telephone call.
5. Don't assume confidentiality of email unless you have an explicit agreement with the recipients. Even then, accidental "sends", rights of employers to review all emails on company computers, and general lack of security of email works against confidentiality.
6. Point 5. above is especially true if the sender is expressing outrage or disagreement with recipient. Do not be surprised, and maybe you should expect, the recipient to forward that email selectively to whomever he/she chooses.
7. Email is generally not a good way to make decisions, even in a non-Quaker context. It is linear, people come in at different points, read a series in different order, don't necessarily read all of them. Email isn't great for discussions generally because tone and body language are so important to communication.
8. Quaker "sense of the meeting" is not possible by email.
9. Write clearly what is expected of whom and decision or action needed.
10. Avoid lengthy dense paragraphs containing embedded vital information. Instead use bullets and lots of white space.
11. Beware of forwarded email. Remember the sender has option of invisibly deleting and altering parts of the forwarded email.
12. Avoid temptation of offloading responsibility by sending email – "passing the buck". If you don't hear back within a day or reasonable time, telephone!
13. Shorten a series of emails by recognizing when a series is over. "Great", "Done". and similar one-word responses are generally not necessary.
14. Read Send by David Shipley and Will Schwalbe – it's really helpful.