

E-mail Attachments and Etiquette

INTRODUCTION: Would you be in favor of adopting and enforcing a University policy (advice, recommendation or suggestion) on e-mail attachments, in particular, and e-mail etiquette in general? Here are two suggestions for your consideration. The first is specifically about the use or misuse of attachments; the second, about e-mail etiquette in general. (Note that this is merely a recommendation or guide; not a law. It does not ban attachments, replies to everyone, html e-mail, high priority or urgent e-mail, or deny that they may be used or needed or necessary.)

1. A Proposed Policy on E-mail Attachments: *Do not send an e-mail attachment unless it is needed or necessary.* (This suggests that "You may send attachments if they are needed or necessary.")

*You may check one of these: (A) ___ I am in favor. (B) ___ I am against.
(C) ___ I am indifferent. (D) ___ Other.*

2. A Proposed Policy on E-mail Etiquette: *Do not send attachments, fancy or urgent e-mail, or replies to everyone unless they are needed or necessary.*

*You may check one of these: (A) ___ I am in favor. (B) ___ I am against.
(C) ___ I am indifferent. (D) ___ Other.*

SUGGESTION: This is a plea to *keep e-mail small, simple, safe and effective* as well as *observe e-mail etiquette*. It suggests that, *whenever possible, people should put their messages in their e-mail instead of attach(ing) them to their e-mail*. It merely asks people to try (when possible and

sufficient) to *send plain text versions of e-mail messages instead of fancy ones* and urges senders of e-mail messages to *consider the recipient*.

EXPLANATION: If there is a fancy or graphics version, they can put it up on the website and put the web address or text version in their e-mail. They should not send a 4 megabyte or even 10 kilobyte attachment, for example, when a 1 kilobyte e-mail says the same thing in the exact same words. This suggestion does not seek to ban attachments, censor the content or restrict the length of the message. It is merely a recommendation about the format or size of the e-mail. It suggests that *"bigger is not necessarily better," when it comes to e-mail*. Further, it *warns people about overusing attachments, replies to everyone, html e-mail, and high priority or urgent e-mail*.

JUSTIFICATION: Here are some of the reasons for such a policy: Attachments are bulky and dangerous and ineffective; because they are time-consuming to download or read and may be infected by a virus. Hence, they are more likely to be deleted or ignored rather than read. Fancy or html e-mail can carry viruses and cannot be read by all e-mail clients. Unless everyone is interested in a reply, it tends to be treated as spam and ignored or deleted; and the more high priority or urgent messages one sends, the less likely recipients consider them high priority or urgent. Here are a few references or noteworthy quotations.

"Every e-mail I send or receive that has a file attachment carries built-in risks. Viruses and Trojan horses are the most obvious, but file size is another. I found this out after I accidentally tied up an editor's \$2-per-minute dial-up account -- for 40 minutes -- with a huge attachment."
(Steve Bass, *The E-Mail Rules*, PC World magazine,
<http://www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,41082,00.asp>)

"File attachments deserve special scrutiny on the sender's part. For starters, don't send them to people you don't know. Chances are, the whole message will just be deleted without being read, due to virus fears. On top of that, large file attachments can take forever to download."
(Laurianne McLaughlin, *Essentials of E-Mail Etiquette*, PC World.
<http://www.pcworld.com/resource/printable/article/0,aid,80624,00.asp>)

McAfee's Virus Detection and Prevention Tip: "Do not open any files attached to an email unless you know what it is, even if it appears to come from a dear friend or someone you know. Some viruses can replicate themselves and spread through email."
<http://us.mcafee.com/virusInfo/default.asp?id=tips>

"Symantec Security Response encourages all users and administrators to adhere to the following basic security best practices: Train employees not to open attachments unless they are expecting them." <http://securityresponse.symantec.com/>

"We all know the story of the boy who cried wolf. If you overuse the high priority option, it will lose its function when you really need it. Only use 'Reply to All' if you really need your message to be seen by each person who received the original message. Be aware that when you send an email in rich text or HTML format, the sender might only be able to receive plain text emails."
<http://www.emailreplies.com/>

"If you want your messages read, consider your recipient." (Steve Bass, The E-Mail Rules, PC World magazine, <http://www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,41082,00.asp>)

Thank you.

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