

Email Basics Workshop



Electronic mail, or **email**, is the most frequently used service on the Internet. Being able to use email effectively and efficiently is a core skill required in today's world.

WLAC remote email server: <http://wmail.wlac.edu/exchange/logon.asp>
If you do not already have your user name and password, request them from Info Tech, building B-6.

Advantages of Using Email

There are many advantages to using email. Some of the most important are:

- You can send messages at any time.
- You can read messages at any time.
- You can send a message to multiple people at the same time (economies of scale).
- You can forward information without having to retype it.
- You can save time. Emails are sent / received in seconds or minutes.
- You can email documents and recipients can then edit and return revised versions.
- You can send messages around the world as easily as to someone next door.

How Private Is Email?

There is no guarantee of email privacy. A message can be intercepted and read as it makes its way over the Internet to its final destination. Also, some companies consider email to be the same as paper mail and reserve the right to archive and review your electronic correspondence. When you delete a message from your computer, a copy of the message may still remain on the mail server. My advice is to treat email as you would a postcard.

Internet Email Addresses

Like a postal address, an email address specifies the destination of an electronic message.

- An Internet email address looks like this: **user-name@domain-name.suffix**
- The **user name** is a unique name that identifies the recipient.
- The **domain name** is the address. Many people can share the same domain name.
- The **suffix** indicates what type of organization the address is associated with.
- All email addresses use the **axon sign** or "**at**" **symbol** to separate user from domain.

For example, here is how to interpret the parts of the email address: **sternjc@wlac.edu**

sternjc -- The **user name** of the email account holder is a unique, assigned name that can be a real name, initials, a nickname, or a descriptive word such as "information." At WLAC it is almost always the person's last name followed by his/her first and middle initial.

@ -- The **axon sign** is required in ALL Internet email addresses. It allows the email software to distinguish between the user name and the domain name.

wlac -- The **domain name** identifies the company or organization of the account holder.

.edu -- The **suffix** indicates what type of company or organization the domain is associated with.

How Email Works

Email is sent and received through electronic "post offices" known as **mail servers**. To read your email, it must first be retrieved from the mail server.

When you send email, you must enter the address of the recipient, compose your message, and click 'Send' yourself. The delivery of your email is handled by the software you have installed on your computer or through a Web-based service like Yahoo or Hotmail.

If the message isn't delivered properly because of an incorrect address or some other error, you typically receive an email message explaining why.

How Reliable Is Email?

Email reaches the recipient most of the time, but **delivery is not guaranteed**. If the message doesn't reach its destination the first time, the mail server tries sending it again and again.

If the message is not delivered successfully, you usually receive a message explaining the problem, along with the full text of the original message. You can also try to correct the problem yourself and resend it. Far and away the most common user error is typing the email address incorrectly.

Deciphering Error Messages

If your email message does not go through, you will receive an **error message**. These are the most common error messages you will come across:

User unknown -- The message arrived at the mail server, but the server couldn't find the recipient. Check the user name part of the email address for errors and try sending the message again. Also, double check the domain name to ensure that you are sending it to the right organization.

Host unknown -- Your mail server could not figure out the server's computer address based on the domain name. Check the domain name in the email address for errors and try again.

Message hasn't been delivered, but will try again -- Your mail server failed to deliver the message, but will continue to try to resend it. This error message indicates a temporary communications problem that may clear up by itself. For example, this message is generated when the recipient's mail server is not functioning or is disconnected from the Internet. In this case, there is nothing you can do and you should not resend your message.

Anatomy of an Email Message

The software you use to send, receive, and manage electronic messages is called an **email client**. To send email, you enter information similar to the heading of a typical interoffice memo. These are the data fields you will see in most email clients:

To -- Contains the email addresses of the **recipients**. This is a mandatory entry.

CC -- Short for **Carbon Copy**. Contains the email addresses for people other than the primary recipients. This is optional.

BCC -- Short for **Blind Carbon Copy**. Contains the email addresses of other recipients who receive copies, but their names and addresses are hidden from the other recipients. This is optional.

Subject -- Contains the main topic of the message. Recipients see this in their summary of incoming emails. Keep the subject line brief, but do not leave it blank.

Attachment -- Contains the names of files that you may be sending along with the email message itself, such as a word-processing document or a spreadsheet.

Body -- Contains the message itself, which can be of any length. In addition to plain text, you can also embed graphic elements, Web addresses, etc. into the body of an email.

Sending Email Messages

Most email programs have many features in common. Once you know one program, you can easily use others.

Launching your email program depends on which software you use. In some cases, you click on the **email icon** (often an envelope), or the Mail button on the browser toolbar, or choose the 'Send To' option from one of the menus. To write a message, click on the 'Compose Mail', 'New Message', or similar button.

In the new message window, type the email addresses of the recipients in the 'To' field, or use the **address book** (a component of your email program where you can store frequently used email addresses) to select one or more email addresses.

In the **CC field**, enter the address of anyone you want to receive a copy of the message. Type the email address or choose it from your address book. Enter the appropriate information into the **BCC field**, if you want to send a blind copy and your program has this feature.

Type the **subject** of the message now or wait until after you have composed your message.

Then **type your message**. You can edit it as you would modify a word-processing document. You can also copy text from another document and paste it into the message box.

Finally, click on the **Send** button and you are done.

Reading Email Messages

When you launch your email program, it usually shows you the messages you have received. From here you can read, reply to, forward, and otherwise manage your email.

Messages are organized into folders or boxes. Received mail is typically kept in the **Inbox**; outgoing mail is stored in an **Outbox**; sent mail is filed in a **Sent box**, and discarded mail may be kept temporarily in a **Deleted box**.

To read an email, you typically double-click on the envelope icon or the Subject line of the message. This opens a new window containing the **header** and **body** of the message.

To review mail in other folders or boxes, click or (double-click) on the folder. Then click the message that interests you.

Replying to Email Messages

The window with the email you are reading typically has a **Reply** or **Re** button. Click on this button to open a new window for the reply message. The 'To' and 'Subject' lines are automatically filled in with the email address of the sender and the subject of the message.

You might also have a **Reply to All** button that also opens a new window. In this case, all the addresses in the 'CC' list are included in the 'To' and 'CC' lines.

In some programs, the original message appears automatically. Other programs have a **Quote** or **Include Original Message** button. By clicking on this button, the text of the original email appears in the body of the reply, usually marked in a different font or color, or with a special character such as the greater than sign (>) at the beginning of each line. You can choose to place your reply before or after the original text. I suggest writing your new message on top of the old replied to message to avoid confusion.

To respond to a series of ideas or questions, you can intersperse your reply with the original text. Typically, your replies appear in a different color or font. It is also a good idea to trim unnecessary information away from the original message for the sake of clarity.

Sending Files as Attachments

In addition to sending text messages, most email programs allow you to attach word-processing documents, spreadsheets, graphics, audio, video, and other electronic files to your message. To attach a file:

- Click on the **Attachment** or **Include File** icon, often represented by a **paper clip**. This feature is often located on the toolbar or on a pull-down menu.
- Locate the file on your computer's hard drive or other storage device from the window that typically opens requesting the name of the file.
- Select the file you want from the file attachment window. An icon representing the file may appear in the body of your message, or the name of the file appears in the Attachment line of the header in your message window.

Opening Attachments

To view an attached file, you can often click on the file icon to open it. This typically brings up a dialog box allowing you to decide how you want to process the file. You can also save the file to your hard drive, and then use the appropriate software application to open it.

If you open an attachment that appears as random characters and symbols, most likely it has not been decoded correctly. Alternatively, you may be viewing it with the wrong software application.

Caution: It is possible for your computer to contract a **virus** when you open an attached file from an email message. If you do not know or trust the person who sent the email, delete the attachment or the entire email to avoid infection.

Embedding a Web Link in a Message

Some email programs allow you to put a **link** to a Web page in the message, making it easy for the recipient to access Web resources.

Most email programs that come with Web browsers support **hyperlinks** imbedded in the message text. If hyperlinks are supported, the recipient can simply click on the link and a Web browser opens to the referenced page.

To create a hyperlink within an email message, either type the **URL** (the complete address of a Web page, such as <http://www.wlac.edu>) or copy and paste the URL from the location box of your Web browser. You may need to do a carriage return (hit the 'Enter' key) for the link to activate. The URL may appear like regular text on your outgoing message, but the recipient usually sees the hyperlink in a special font, color, or underlined.

Managing Your Messages

Most email programs let you create **folders** so you can file your messages. You may also be able to arrange your received mail in categories, such as by project or client.

You can usually drag a message from the Inbox or Sent box to another folder. Sometimes pop-up menus allow you to file messages.

When you delete a message, it is typically moved to your **Trash** or **Deleted** folder. Beware that the deleted message still exists on your computer. In order to get rid of it completely, you must also delete the file from the Trash folder itself.

Setting Up and Managing Your Addresses

Most email programs have an address book feature where you can record the email addresses and other information of people you contact frequently. By using the **address book**, you won't have to retype an email address each time you want to send a message. This saves time and avoids returned mail due to typing mistakes.

With some email clients, you can store multiple email addresses for each person as well as additional information, such as a company name, telephone number, and street address.

With most email clients, you can create a set of email addresses called a **group**. When you address a message to a group, the message is automatically addressed to all the people in the group. This is sometimes referred to as a **mailing list**.

As your recipient list grows, you may want to use the **Search** or **Find** function in the address book to locate an email address based on a person's first or last name.

Email Etiquette

When we communicate, we expect other people to observe certain rules of behavior. The same is true online. In order to improve how your email messages are received and avoid potential trouble, there are a few unwritten rules, called **netiquette (networking etiquette)** that you should be aware of. These include:

- **Clearly summarize the contents of your message in the subject line.** Properly titled messages help people organize and prioritize their email. Blank subject lines confuse readers.
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- **Don't use CC (Carbon Copy) to copy your message to everyone.** This is particularly true at work. These days everyone receives too many emails. Unnecessary messages are annoying. If only a few people really need to receive your message, direct it to them exclusively. Similarly, when responding to email, **do not respond to all recipients**. By choosing **Reply to All** when responding to a message, you may end up broadcasting your response to far too many people.
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- **Use BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) when addressing a message that will go to a large group of people who don't necessarily know each other.** Just as it is not polite to give out a person's telephone number without his or her knowledge, it is not polite to give out someone's email address. For instance, when you send an email message to 30 people and use the 'To' or 'CC' command to address the message, all 30 people see each other's email addresses. By using BCC, each recipient sees only two addresses -- theirs and yours.
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- **Keep your messages short and focused.** Few people enjoy reading on their computer screens; fewer still on the tiny screens in cell phones, pagers and other mobile devices that are becoming increasingly popular for email purposes. Recipients tend to ignore long messages. Also, when replying make sure to **trim messages** whenever possible.
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- **Avoid using all capital letters.** USING ALL CAPS MAKES IT LOOK LIKE YOU'RE SHOUTING! IT'S ALSO MORE DIFFICULT TO READ.
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- **Don't write anything you wouldn't say in public.** Email is not private and anyone can easily forward your message, even if done accidentally. Therefore do not divulge personal or confidential information. If you want to keep your content private, consider using the telephone.
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- **Use a smiley to make sure that a statement is not misunderstood.** Smileys can help you communicate in the Internet's text-only environment. They are typically used in personal email and are not considered appropriate for business. Beware that even with a smiley, someone may misunderstand you.
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- **Avoid sending emails to large numbers of people unless you have a legitimate reason to do so.** Email broadcast to many recipients may be considered **spam** which is an unacceptable use of email.
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- **Nasty emails should be avoided.** An angry or volatile message is called a **flame**. Flame email is an insulting or angry message of any kind. Be careful what you write and always reread your messages before clicking 'send' since you may regret it later on.
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- **Include your name at the bottom of the message.** All email messages you send contain your email address (in the header), but the recipient may not know that the return address belongs to you, especially if it is different from your real name. In other words, do not count on others being able to decipher who you are from your email address alone.

Email etiquette may take you some time to learn, but do not let your fear of making mistakes inhibit you. All Internet users were beginners at one time, and most people are quite forgiving, especially when you follow the above rules of netiquette.