Workplace Writing: Email and Business Letters

Nearly all first-year English courses focus mainly on the traditional 500-750 word essay. But various other kinds of writing exist as well, so we should explore a couple of those: email and business letters. Email is by far the most common form of written communication in today’s workplace, and by now almost everyone is familiar with how to use it. Typically, you log onto the system by typing your name and a secure password that prevents unauthorized access. You can then read any new email listed in the inbox. Depending on your preferences, those messages can be deleted, saved for future reference, printed, answered, or forwarded—or some combination of these options. To respond to a message, you choose the appropriate prompt and insert the reply. To create an entirely new email, choose the appropriate prompt, causing a blank template to appear on the screen, ready to be completed. When you finish the message it can then be sent to as many other persons as you wish simply by typing their email addresses into the TO line. Like replies, this new email is also stored in your electronic SENT file and kept there for future reference. Format: Virtually all email includes the following features in addition to the message itself:• DATE line: This is provided automatically and usually includes the time of transmission as well.• TO line: This enables the email to be addressed.• FROM line: Like the date line, this is provided automatically as soon as the writer logs into the system.• SUBJECT line: This identifies the topic. Like the title of an essay or the headline on a newspaper story, but even more concisely, the subject line prepares the reader for what’s ahead. A good subject line answers this question: “In no more than three words, what is this email about?” Purpose: Although email’s usual purpose is to inform, often its secondary purpose is to create an electronic “paper trail”—a written record of a request or other message previously conveyed in person, by phone, or through the grapevine. Accordingly, email comes directly to the point, focusing sharply on what the reader needs to know. Depending on the subject, an email can usually do that in three or four short paragraphs: a concise introduction, a body paragraph or two conveying the details, and perhaps a brief conclusion. But—like text messages—some emails are as short as one paragraph or even one sentence. As in all writing, length is determined by purpose and audience. Tone: The model email that follows embodies all of the features listed above and provides an opportunity to consider further the principle of tone. Date: April 9, 2021 9:00 A.M. To: All Employees From: Frank Scott Subject: Ernest Fitz Gerald As you may already know, Ernest Fitzgerald of the Claims Department was admitted to Duval Memorial Hospital over the weekend and is scheduled for surgery tomorrow. Although Ernie will not be receiving visitors or phone calls for a while, you may want to send him a “Get Well” card to cheer him up. He’s in Room 9.We’ll keep you posted on Ernie’s progress. Frank Scott, Director Human Resources. The Human Resources director has picked his words carefully to avoid sounding bossy. He says, “You may want to send him a get-well card” rather than “You should” even though that’s what he really means. As this message demonstrates, a tactful writer can soften a recommendation, a request, or even a demand by phrasing it diplomatically. In the college setting—especially in the distance learning situation—students find it necessary to email their professors. They may be seeking clarification of an assignment or attending to some other matter. In the context of on-line study, such correspondence is of course routine. In any case, however, nearly all professors expect students to observe the norms of conventional spelling, punctuation, and grammar, and to maintain an appropriately respectful tone