

NETIQUETTE

There is no standard format for **netiquette** - etiquette for the net. Netiquette is a new word. Etiquette is a system of social rules or polite behaviour relating to a particular group of people - in this case all the people who use the web for emails.

Here are some rules for letters and email messages.

SNAIL MAIL

For letters, whose progress can be as slow as that of a snail when they are entrusted to the postal system, there are clearly defined conventions for **opening** and **closing**:

For **formal letters** when the name or sex of the recipient is not known:

OPENING: Dear Sir(s), Dear Madam or Dear Sir or Madam

CLOSING: Yours faithfully (In American English, sometimes: Yours truly,)

For the **more formal style of letter** when their name is known but you do not know them very well:

OPENING: Dear Mr Jenkins, Dear Ms Hopkins (or, if you know their marital status and know that they prefer to be addressed as Mrs or Miss: Dear Miss Hopwell, Dear Mrs Jenkinson)

CLOSING: Yours sincerely (In American English, sometimes: Sincerely Yours, Sincerely,

For **informal letters to business contacts** that you know well:

OPENING: Dear Tony, Dear Estelle

CLOSING: With best wishes or With kind regards followed by Yours sincerely or, sometimes, in public service Yours ever

For **letters to friends** or close family members:

OPENING: Dear Maggy, Dear Freddie

CLOSING: Yours, Your, Love, Lots of Love (Hugs and Kisses)

EMAILS

However, there are no standard formulas for starting or finishing emails. Only one thing is clear. Emails are invariably of an informal nature, so informal language tends to be the norm.

Starting emails

Hi, Roger, Hello Roger, Dear Roger

These seem to represent an informal norm, as far as there is one.

Roger, Dear Mr Woodham

These formats are used more in business correspondence. Note that using the given name alone, as above, is reminiscent of business memos among colleagues within the same organisation.

But there is a wide variety of other opening formulas. Here is a list of possibilities ordered from most formal to least formal:

Dear Professor Cappelli,

Dear Gloria Cappelli (note that this formula is also used in letters sometimes),

Hello Gloria Cappelli, Hi Gloria Cappelli, Good morning Gloria, Hey Gloria, Hey you girls (this one to me and my colleagues)

Ending emails

Best wishes, Regards, Best regards, Good wishes.

These seem to represent the informal norm, followed by the given name of the sender.

Occasionally, Yours sincerely is combined with Best wishes or stands alone before the given name of the sender, as in a semi-formal letter. Very occasionally, I have received emails ending, e.g. Yours sincerely and then on the next line the given name plus family name, David Green, but this is an exception.

Sometimes, a pre-closing formula is used instead of or in addition to the standard closure, e.g.

Let me know if you need more information,
Dave

Look forward to hearing from you.
Best wishes,
Dave

THE TEXT ITSELF

There is also a trend, particularly in informal emails, to dispense with capitalisation, punctuation and to use shortened forms and shortened words as in text-messaging. This is a slightly extreme example, but you might one day get an email looking something like this:

Hey babe

b4 u leave b'ham pls spk 2 NG & tell her we'll b @ r hse in sth ldn till nxt weds. Ta v much. C u soon. Luv ND

Translated into more standard English (the opening here is slightly old-fashioned), this would read:

Dearest

Before you leave Birmingham, please speak to Angie and tell her we'll be at our house in South London until next Wednesday. Thanks very much.

See you soon.
Love,
Andy