

Keeping up with your inbox – the evolution of the email signoff

Level: Intermediate (B1–B2)

Time: Approximately 90 minutes

Business topics: Communication, email

Business language: Useful business vocabulary, email language

Activities: Key words, understanding the text, register, discussion, emailing conventions and register

Groups: Whole class, one-to-one, small groups

Overview: This article discusses the current (dire) state of work email, including the trend of using a self-promotional sign-offs and permanent out-of-office replies.

1. Warmer

- a. Ask students to discuss the questions in pairs or small groups. Elicit main ideas that arise from the discussion from the whole class.

2. Reading for gist

- a. Have students skim the article (perhaps give them a time limit of two minutes) and choose the main idea.

Key: 3

3. Key words

- a. Have students choose the correct words from the word box and compare their answers in pairs. Elicit answers from the whole class.

Key:

1. *baffling*
2. *dire*
3. *naff*
4. *rummage, rummaging*
5. *nudge, nudged*
6. *pointless*

7. *bombardment*
8. *unsolicited*
9. *exceed, exceeded*
10. *accumulate*
11. *strain*
12. *feasible*

4. Understanding the article

- a. Ask students to scan the article individually to complete this activity and then to compare their answers. Remind them that they don't need to read the whole article each time, but that they should rather look over it very quickly to locate the information and then read carefully to see that each part of the statement matches the text.

Key:

1. *False. It is no longer cool or popular to do that.*
2. *True*
3. *False. She found them pointless.*
4. *True*
5. *False. She "does not see it fading any time soon".*
6. *False. She has considered it.*
7. *True*
8. *True*

5. Business language – register

- a. First check understanding of register by asking students to give examples of formal and informal greetings. (E.g. formal: *Good morning, Ms West. / Dear sir or madam / Ladies and gentlemen*; Informal: *Hi Sue / Hey*)
Ask students to complete the activity in pairs or small groups and to discuss each word or phrase. Then elicit answers from the whole class.

Key:

1. *had already been deemed (F) / people already thought (it) was (I)*
2. *naff (I) / unstylish (F)*
3. *becoming increasingly unpopular (F) / trending down (I)*
4. *declared (F) / said (I)*
5. *baffling (F) / confusing (I)*
6. *I asked anyone within earshot in the office (F) / I asked anyone who could hear me (I)*
7. *loads of people (I) / several people (F)*

8. *as a rummage through my own inbox confirmed (F) / as I saw when looking through my inbox (I)*
9. *capacity strains will make it unlikely for me to (F) / I won't be able to (I)*
10. *it will be impossible to (I) / it would not be feasible to (F)*

b. Ask students to work together to rewrite the sentences.

Key (suggested answers):

1. *Other people, who work for performance coaches, were probably told to write things like that.*
2. *I think this sort of thing is more pointless than annoying.*
3. *"Who writes something like that to end an email?" I asked anyone close enough to hear / who could hear / who was around.*
4. *Turns out, loads of people, as I saw scrolling through my inbox.*

c. Discussion

a. Put the students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. When students have covered all the questions, bring the whole class back together so that they can share their answers and any interesting information that arose from their discussions. Make note of good examples of vocabulary and language on the board, as well as incorrect usage that needs to be corrected. Ask the class to identify which is which and help you with corrections.

7. Wider business theme – email writing

a. For this first step, ask students to work in pairs or small groups. Then go over the answers with the class.

Key:

1. *d (This is formal and the tone is respectful.)*
2. *c (Formal. Informal could be:
Hi Ross,
We would like to schedule a visit to have our DWXN-03 machine serviced.)*
3. *a (Rather neutral. More informal could be: How are you? Wanted to ask you about... More formal could be: I hope this email finds you well. I am writing with regard to/with reference to)*
4. *e (Slightly formal – next activity contains more formal and informal versions)*
5. *b (Informal. More neutral could be "Best" or simply ending with your name; More formal could be: "Best regards", "Kind regards")*

b. If you have more time, you can ask students to research all the different elements mentioned in the previous activity. Alternatively, you can assign one or two elements to each small group or ask each group to focus on a different register. Give students time to do their research and encourage them to find several examples of emailing phrases for each section.

Ask students to include something that is relevant to their work in "other". E.g. giving customers information, asking for a quote, asking a provider for changes.

c. Regroup students so they can share their phrases with each other to complete the table.

Key (possible answers):

	Neutral / Less formal	Formal
Greeting	<i>Hi James</i>	<i>Dear Ms Fines</i>
Opening	<i>I hope your week is going well. I'm writing to you to ...</i>	<i>I hope this email finds you well. I am writing with regard to/with reference to ...</i>
Giving background information	<i>My name's Jenny Arnaud, I am a journalism student at Sunhill University. I attended your recent talk on citizen journalism, and I found your points fascinating.</i>	<i>My name is Jenny Arnaud and I am in my third year of Journalism Studies at Sunhill University. I was delighted to attend your presentation on citizen journalism last week.</i>
Making a request	<i>We would like to schedule a visit to have our DWXN-03 machine serviced.</i>	<i>I am writing to request your assistance with our DWXN-03 machine, which requires a service.</i>
Signing off	<i>Currently reading: Best/Regards,</i>	<i>Best regards, Kind regards,</i>
Out of office reply / permanent no reply	<i>Thank you for your email. I am away from the office until 5 June. If you have an urgent request, please contact Noah Simons.</i>	<i>Due to the high number of emails I receive daily, I am unable to respond to all messages. For urgent matters, please call ...</i>