

Rules and guidelines for the use of electronic mail

1 Introduction

Email is an immensely useful and versatile communication medium. Should email however be misused, it could result in users growing a negative attitude towards it, avoiding or even impairing it. We commend a few suggestions to make email a more user-friendly and valuable experience (and to diminish pessimistic perceptions).

2 Guidelines

2.1 Email protocol

Email has two main functions (followed by a few rules and practical guidelines):

2.1.1 Sending of messages

- Do not communicate anything in email messages that you are not prepared to say personally to a person.
- Be professional and formulate your message in detail.
- Prevent 'shotgun' messages: messages sent to a group, instead of an individual. Sending the message to a group of people doesn't make the message more meaningful, and is not an acceptable way of escalating a problem. This explained, please use CC and BC very carefully.
- When sending an email to a group of contacts external to the NWU, type the group name or email addresses in the BC-field. This will protect the contacts, because then the individuals in the group cannot view each other's addresses.
- By providing a descriptive subject line, the addressee can immediately determine the topic of the email. A blank subject line is unacceptable.
- Do not type the whole message in capital letters – in the IT world, it is regarded as SCREAMING.
- Should you be asked a question, or given an order in an email, it is expected that you reply on the message. However, should you be waiting for a reply from someone, do not expect it back immediately (email is an asynchronous medium).
- The NWU does not allow spam, chain letters and emails with offensive messages.
- Be careful when communicating your email address to an unknown person or an organization – you might receive loads of spam as a result.
- Do not mark messages as high priority unnecessarily (red envelope).
- Email attachments are very useful, but are not accepted everywhere. Take note that some organisations set limits on the size of messages and approved attachments.

2.1.2 Scheduling of meetings

Electronic diaries are commonly used nowadays, and enjoy increasing popularity due to the advantages it provides (especially when big groups must be scheduled for meetings).

- GroupWise has a 'Busy search' function to search the availability of users. It is highly recommended to run this search before scheduling an electronic appointment. It is bad practice to make 'double appointments', unless it is cleared with the appropriate user beforehand.
- Appointments must be scheduled well in advance, as many people coordinate their calendars only once a day. Should you have to schedule an appointment on short notice, inform the appropriate parties in another way as well (example per telephone).
- To improve productivity, the reason for the meeting should be mentioned, and documentation available and needed should be listed.
- Remember: only after the person accepted the meeting, can the meeting be regarded as confirmed. The person can also decline the meeting with the option to supply a reason. It is the responsibility of the person scheduling the meeting, to manage the properties of the sent appointment on GroupWise to

control who accepted the appointment. We recommend that a more specific email be sent to the person requesting the appointment.

- The electronic calendar is a help tool, and in many instances not the only calendar. Different calendars (paper, GroupWise, cell phone) should be synchronized as often as possible. To ensure that someone doesn't schedule an appointment for an unsuitable time, make sure that your GroupWise calendar is always updated (even in times when you have urgent office work).
- Should you reschedule or delete an appointment, it will automatically be deleted from all the recipients' calendars regardless if they accepted the appointment. We recommend that you send a normal email to all those concerned to inform them of the changes (or inform them telephonically should there be time constraints).

2.2 The Archiving facility

Archiving is useful to keep your e-post-box small and speedy: the smaller the post-box, the faster the functionality. Costs are also reduced when using archiving, because the archive is allocated on a disk that is cheaper than the GroupWise disk space. Read more about archiving at http://www.nwu.ac.za/it/apr/gw_argief.html

2.3 Virus protection (viruses that can spread through email)

A virus program scans all emails sent from outside the NWU to an internal post-box. Should a message or attachment contain a virus, the message will not be delivered, but sent back to the sender and marked as undeliverable.

2.4 Spam filter

Every user must activate the spam filter on his/her post-box, and determine the threshold (the intensity of the filter). It is highly recommended that this filter be used to keep the post-box as clean and streamline as possible. It is also financially feasible to use this filter, because users are charged for all incoming messages. More info available at: <http://www.nwu.ac.za/it/net/spam/index.html>

Remember to activate your spamfilter for your primary address (Name.Surname@nwu.ac.za) as well as your alternate addresses like itbxxx@puk.ac.za or 12345678@nwu.ac.za).

Some useful tips for setting up your spamfilter:

- When you set up your spamfilter for the first time, begin by setting the threshold on 5 , and mark (TAG) the messages rather than blocking them for a period like one or two weeks, so that you can make sure wanted emails are not marked. If important messages are marked, you can also put the sender's address in your "Whitelist" (if it is the same address all the time), otherwise you can increase the threshold to 6. When you are sure that you have tested it thoroughly, you can REJECT the messages
- If you want to refine your spamfilter's threshold, use the TAG option for a while, so that you can see which email messages are marked as spam. After a week or so, you can choose the REJECT option again.

2.5 Security of information sent by means of email

Before sending any GroupWise messages and attachments, the messages are encrypted and are saved on the database. Only the sender and the recipient can read the message or attachment. The message and attachment are deleted from the database only after the sender and receiver deleted it.

Security is divided into three categories:

1. Normal security (can be compared to documents in a closed envelope sent via normal mail): Normally it does not contain sensitive information, but you do not expect anyone to read it before it reaching the addressee. No excessive security is necessary, and only the automatic encrypting of GroupWise is required.
2. Sensitive information (can be compared to documents in a sealed envelope sent via normal mail): It contains sensitive information that can adversely affect a particular person or department of the NWU should it be revealed. Only the normal encrypting of GroupWise, return notification and control in Sent items will be necessary.
3. Confidential information that should it is made public could result in legal steps taken against the University, example exam papers (can be compared to registered post in a sealed envelope): In this instance, we recommend a password on your email, encrypting, Return Notification and control in the Sent Items Folder.

With reference to number 3, we suggest:

- Set a GroupWise password.
- The sender can:
 - Mark the message as Secret or Top Secret or Confidential (go to Send Options and then to the Classification field) before sending the message, in order to make sure the recipient is aware of the confidentiality and security of the document or message; and/or
 - Send the message as high priority – it will display a red icon at the recipient; and/or
 - Activate Return notification to be able to view information relating to the receiving of the message.
- The recipient can:
 - Mark all highly confidential messages as Private; and/or
 - Make sure the document was sent by the correct person (right click on the message, click on Properties and read the line Created By).

It is very important that your information is kept safe, and we will do everything possible to ensure that information do not fall in the wrong hands. However, each user has a great responsibility as described in this document.

3 Rules

3.1 Sending email messages to groups

Standard email is messages sent to all personnel (or big groups) and / or students. The reasoning behind this rule is that email traffic places an extraordinary big burden on the email infrastructure, and that the misuse of this facility must be prevented.

A big group can be defined as users exceeding 100. This figure is however only a guideline. For example, a Dean can still send an email to his whole faculty even if they exceed 100.

Messages that must reach big groups of personnel must be sent via the campus Notice Board on the Staff Intranet (communicated by means of the @NWU email messages). This Notice Boards change daily and the messages are sent to all personnel.

We also recommend that lecturers use the announcement functionality in eFundi, when sending messages to big student groups.

3.2 Prohibited use of email

Unauthorised or prohibited use includes the following (in some instances against the policy of the NWU):

1. Spam, petitions and chain letters promoting a belief that does not involve the mission of the NWU.
2. Big attachments that can alternatively be sent more economically (for example through FTP, CD, DVD or flash drive).
3. Utilizing the email backup facility when your P:-disk is full.
4. Distributing digital photos and other graphics not essential for doing your job. These attachments are normally huge, and use ample disk space.

It is recommended that the GroupWise archiving facility be utilized in order to 'keep your post-box clean'. It is also requested that messages with big attachments should be deleted after use. Keep in mind that GroupWise has a faster response time when the post-box has only a few messages.

4 Mail box limitations

A limit of 200 Mb is set on the majority of personnel post-boxes, which means that the owner of that post-box cannot send email when the post-box exceeds 200 Mb. No incoming mail will be lost though, because the post-box will still be able to receive email.