

# Lawrence Hall of Science Email Policies/Norms

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## Quick Guide to Key Email Norms

Sending Email	
If you need:	Start subject line with:
To send a high priority request:	Put the word <b>URGENT</b> at the beginning of a subject line to indicate that assistance is required as soon as humanly possible
A response:	Put the words <b>Please Respond</b> at the beginning of a subject line to indicate that you would like a response.
A response from everyone on an email sent to a group:	Include <b>All Respond</b> in the body of the email
A response from one person on an email sent to a group:	Include <b>Only One Response Needed</b> in the body of the email
To share info:	Start the subject line with <b>FYI</b>

Sending Email: DOs
Do use informative subjects in the subject line. Think what might help a person find it later.
Do include a person on the <b>To: line</b> but only if you expect them to read the email carefully.
Do include a person on the <b>cc: line</b> if you are including them for informational purposes only. Use your best judgment about whether they need to be included or not.
Do cc: a person's supervisor if you are making a work request that is not routine.

Receiving and Responding to Email: DOs
Do check your email a minimum of three times in a work day (first thing, midday, end of day)
Do respond to all emails marked "URGENT" within one business day
Do respond to all emails marked "Please Respond" within 48 business hours
Do leave an automatic message explaining how and when you will respond when you are out of the office for work and will not have access to email for a full day or more.
Do leave an automatic message explaining who people can contact in lieu of you if you are on vacation or out of contact for another reason.

Receiving and Responding to Email: DO NOTs
Do not automatically "Respond all." Think carefully about who needs to read your response.

## Why Establish Email Norms at the Hall?

The intent of creating and asking people to adhere to Hall-wide email norms is to promote more efficient and professional workplace practices, with the ultimate purpose of increasing each person's effectiveness while reducing frustration and overload. Specifically, there are five objectives:

- Facilitate ways for email senders to indicate level of priority
- Clarify general expectations for timely responses and follow-up
- Clarify the types of responses that we expect of each other
- Reduce the volume of email by specifying appropriate cc: and reply-all practices
- Establish naming conventions to increase the level of predictability of finding an archived email

### Specific challenges we all face related to managing email:

**Way too much.** The volume of email that people at the Hall receive has increased over time to the point where some people are routinely receiving over 100 emails a day, requiring time people don't have to read and respond to emails. It doesn't take long for an email to get buried. This leads to a downward spiral of unanswered emails and frustration on everyone's part, and that in turn leads to more emails, and so on.

**Not always clear whether action is needed.** Some emails require response and others don't and it's not always clear what the sender's intent was. Of those emails needing response, some require a quick turn-around and others don't. Because different emails have different levels of urgency (something which may be difficult to discern), receiving a high volume of email makes it difficult to prioritize handling of the email.

**Inconsistency in communicating intended responses and response strategies.** Some people send questions and other requests including many names on the To: line, making it unclear whether everyone should respond. Some cc: a lot of people, sometimes for specific reasons and sometimes just to be complete. This might serve as a welcome FYI and it might also serve to further bury more important emails in the pile. There are those who respond-to-all on emails, while others just respond-to-sender.

**Subject line inconsistencies.** Subject lines are also handled differently, with generic titles (making it difficult to search for and find the email later); some respond with a new subject line (making it difficult to find the trail of the conversation).

## When email is great

Email has become an essential tool in the workplace, enabling more and more efficient communication. It is used for a variety of purposes, including:

**Making requests.** (e.g. asking an informational question, requesting a meeting, asking for something to be purchased, requesting quick advice, turning in paperwork that requests administrative assistance, inquiring about interest in participating in a new project, asking for feedback on something you have written, inviting a person to provide their preferences on something, etc.).

**Responding to requests.** (e.g. acknowledging receipt of a request, asking for more information regarding a request, providing an update on the status of a request, answering a question, fulfilling a request, etc.)

**Sharing information.** (e.g. informing of an upcoming meeting and its purpose, reporting back from a conference, updating your team about your thoughts on a particular topic, sharing office procedures, sharing a relevant article, updating colleagues about your whereabouts, etc.)

Often, a single email performs more than one of these functions.

# All-Hall Internal Email Norms

## Norms for Making and Responding to Requests

### Indicating the high priority of a request.

1. Put the word **URGENT** at the beginning of a subject line to indicate that assistance is required as soon as humanly possible

### When it is appropriate to request a priority response.

1. When there has been a specific request from someone, often outside the Hall, that is essential to meeting an external deadline. Note the frequently-posted sign: "Poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on mine."

### Responding to other requests.

1. To clarify that a response to your email is needed, put the words **Please Respond** at the beginning of a subject line to indicate that you would like a response.
2. If you don't put Please Respond, you may or may not get a response.
3. Respond to or acknowledge all Please Respond emails within 48 hours. (Note: Unless your group has weekend schedules, consider 48 hours as 2 business days. Thus, if a colleague sends a Please Respond email on a Friday at 4 p.m., the response needs to be sent by Tuesday at 4 p.m.)
4. Normally, you are not expected to answer internal email on evenings and weekends, though there may be situations (imminent deadlines, urgent matters, etc.) in which responding in off-hours would be called for.

### Following up on a request.

1. If you have not heard back from someone regarding an URGENT request, go find the person, send someone to find the person, B-chat or phone the person.
2. If you have not heard back from someone regarding a Please Respond request within 4 work days, it is acceptable to stop by their desk, call, or resend the email as a reminder and to write, "Getting this to the top of your mail box."

### Changing subject lines.

1. Respond to the original email rather than starting a new one to ensure that the trail stays intact
2. If the conversation changes to a different topic with different people included, please change the subject accordingly.

## **Norms for Sharing Information**

### **Sending and receiving informational emails.**

1. Think very carefully before sending an email to a whole list of people. Is this something everyone needs to know? This can be an effective way to communicate with a large team but needs to be handled judiciously.
2. If the email is purely informational without responses needed, put FYI in the subject line. For example: "FYI - Parking lot closure update." or "FYI - Report back from CSTA conference."
3. Providing an email to your whole team can be a great way to share relevant but non-essential information, Consider establishing team-specific norms, such as setting up opt-in email groups if you want to regularly send out optional kinds of information.
4. In general, informational emails don't require a response.
5. Sometimes informational emails can require a response, in the situation where a person needs to know that you read something. It is especially important to title these emails in the subject line as Please Respond so that it is clear that a response is needed.
6. Consider whether email is needed for this purpose. Perhaps it would be better to set up a google doc where this information can be regularly stored.
7. Use the Hall lists carefully. "All" should only be used when everyone who works at the Hall needs to know something. "Local" should be used for items that apply to people who work in the building (e.g., found keys). "Bbl" is an optional bulletin board and the only place that free items or things for sale should be posted.

### **Think carefully about who you put on the To: line and the cc: line.**

1. Only include a person on the To: line if you expect them to read the email carefully, either because the request pertains specifically to that person or the information pertains specifically to that person.
2. By including a person on the cc: line you are indicating that you are including them for informational purposes only. Be aware that that person may only skim your email.
3. Establish and communicate team-specific norms for who should be included on emails.
4. In general, when work requests are made, it is customary to cc: a person's supervisor (unless it is a routine procedure).
5. Find out when your supervisor wants to be copied on an email.

### **Think carefully about what response you require when you send an email to a group.**

1. If you are sending a Please Respond email to a group of people, specify whether "only one response is needed" or "responses from everyone needed."

### **Think carefully before you respond-to-all.**

1. A sender who wants you to respond-to-all should indicate that in the body of the email.
2. Otherwise, do not respond-to-all without a specific intention
3. Avoid sending emails with only the word "Thanks!" to an entire group.

### **Are playful emails ever appropriate?**

1. Colleagues who work closely together, and have frequent reason to email each other, may of course choose to evolve their email communication to suit their interaction needs.
2. Don't assume however, that people with whom you don't have a close work relationship will understand or appreciate a shorthand or playful approach to communication.
3. If you have to think about whether or not the email is appropriate, play it safe and don't send.

## **Norms for Communicating when You are Out of the Office**

### **When you are out of the office on Hall business.**

If you are traveling for work, attending a conference, etc., the expectation is that you will be checking your email on a daily basis. If for some reason you will not be able to access your email for at least 24 hours, set up your out-of-office message with an expectation of when you will be able to reply and/or who can assist in the meantime.

### **When you are out of the office on vacation.**

Please use an out-of-office message that lets people know who can help in your absence.

## **When Not to Use Email**

### **Often face-to-face communication is more effective.**

1. Consider going to talk to a person when:
  - a. The email conversation has become too complex or confusing
  - b. The email is getting long
  - c. There is conflict or emails have become contentious

## **What to do when Email Norms aren't Being Followed**

### **Assume best intent and reach out to the person directly.**

It's hard for any of us to know what a person's workload is, whether they are filling in for a colleague on top of their duties, on a high-priority project, etc. Give them the benefit of the doubt and offer a reminder that the email norms are intended to help all of us manage our workloads.

### **If the situation is still problematic, reach out to the person's supervisor.**

This can help you get a response and help the supervisor know that there might be a problem with workload.

<b>Helpful Suggestions for Language to Use</b>	
<b>If you:</b>	<b>Suggested language</b>
Want people to know what you are doing to get ready for a meeting, but don't need a response	Subject line:  Preparation for Hewlett meeting
Aren't sure about something, e.g. how the work is being divided to prepared for a meeting	Subject line:  Please respond: Preparation for Hewlett meeting
Are meeting attendees at the Visitors Desk, and you don't know where to take them	Subject line:  URGENT Need location of Hewlett meeting
Are informing people about a non-urgent change	Subject line:  FYI: Hewlett meeting location changed to Rm 222
Want to acknowledge a request when you aren't able to provide a substantive response within 48 hours:	<p>Thanks for your email. I'll get back to you after I am able to speak with xx. I expect that will be by this Friday.</p> <p>Got it. I'm swamped today and tomorrow but I'll find a way to respond by EOD Wednesday.</p> <p>Thanks for your request. While I wish I could be of assistance, this isn't something that I'll be able to take on at this point in time.</p> <p>I wish I could help out, but that wouldn't be until after the summer. If that's a problem, let me and (my supervisor) know and we'll see whether the priorities can be rearranged.</p> <p>Great question. I don't know. I'll get back to you after I am able to talk to my program officer at the NSF PI meeting in August.</p>

	<p>This is an interesting idea. Unfortunately, I don't think we'll be able to do this anytime soon unless priorities are changed.</p>
<p>Are out of the office for business:</p>	<p>Use out-of-office messages such as:</p> <p>I am out of the office on business and email access will be unpredictable, so expect a longer response time than usual. If you have an urgent need, send me an email marked URGENT and I will do my best to respond quickly.</p> <p>I am out of the office on business and will not have access to email until my return on XX. In my absence please contact XX for help with X and YY for help with Y.</p>
<p>Are out of the office on vacation:</p>	<p>Use an out-of-office message such as "I will be on vacation and unavailable until XX. In my absence please contact XX for help with X and YY for help with Y."</p>