

## Integrity Unit

### Effective Online Communication

Aim: The Integrity Unit has compiled this document to help University of Queensland (UQ) staff ensure email and online communication is always appropriate and to minimise miscommunication and/or misinterpretation.

### Background

Miscommunication can easily occur when people have different expectations about the messages that they send and receive. Email and online communications are used for many different purposes within UQ such as providing information or advice to colleagues or students and requesting information. Depending on your purposes, the messages you send will differ in their formality, intended audience, and desired outcomes.

### Here are some tips for avoiding inappropriate communications and/or misinterpretation of your messages:

- **Avoid using caps, exclamation points, and slang.** Email can be a relaxed way of communicating, making it tempting to add a few exclamation points or using all caps for emphasis. Using all caps give the impression you're yelling and too many exclamation points come across as being overly enthusiastic or insincere.
- **Overuse of bold, underline, and italics void emphasis.** While it is acceptable to use one form of emphasis, such as bold, avoid using multiple forms of emphasis in a single email. That goes for overusing bold, underline, or italics in a single email. Use emphasis to draw the eye from one point to another. Think of emphasised words as creating their own sentence as the reader scans from one bolded word to the next and so on.
- **Be respectful with your tone.** Stay positive and professional by avoiding negative or accusatory language. Rephrase sentences to deliver the message in a neutral tone. When you are communicating via email, your words are not supported by gestures, voice inflections, or other cues, so it may be easier for someone to misread your tone. For example, sarcasm and jokes are often misinterpreted and may offend your audience.
- **Think about your message before you write it.** Don't send messages in haste and never send emails when you are feeling angry or emotional.
- **Be aware of your audience** -for example, is there a power imbalance in the relationship with reader? If the reader is a junior staff member or student always be conscious this power imbalance could affect their interpretation of the content. Ensure professional boundaries are always maintained and avoid emotive language.
- **Keep messages brief and to the point.** Miscommunication can occur if a message is unclear, disorganized, or just too long and complex for readers to easily follow.
- **Re-read messages before you send them.** Try reading your message out loud to help you catch any mistakes or awkward phrasing that you might otherwise miss. If you're unsure about how your message might be received, you might try reading it out loud to a colleague to test its tone.