

E-mail: Do's and Don'ts

E-mail systems provide you with a fast and efficient way to exchange electronic information. The advantages of e-mail are commonly known. However, the use of e-mail also provokes some risks:

- People tend to use their e-mail addresses alternately for informal (personal) and formal (business) communications, but usually there are no mutual agreements between sender and recipient(s) on appropriate etiquettes;
- E-mail systems offer easy ways to send information to large groups of persons, resulting in widespread and infinite availability of this information;
- E-mail is more and more available anyplace anytime. This increases the risk of answering or reacting without due care.

These risks can result in miscommunications, nuisances and even formal complaints.

These Webpages provide you with do's and don'ts regarding the use of your UM e-mail address. The information is placed under the following headings:

- UM Guidelines for e-mail use;
- Best practices on composing your e-mail;
- How to react on undesired e-mail;
- How to use your options for sending (Cc:, Bcc:, Reply-to-All, etc.)
- Disclaimer text

Should you have any questions, remarks or suggestions regarding the use of e-mail, please contact your local ICT-support or Servicedesk ICTS: <mailto:servicedesk-icts@maastrichtuniversity.nl> ; Tel. 043-3885555.

UM Guidelines for e-mail

Maastricht Universities e-mail system is intended to optimally facilitate UM employees, students and Alumni in communicating among themselves and with external parties. First of all UM asks you, as a user, to use your common sense when you are composing and sending e-mail messages. General rules of conduct which you adhere to in your contact with other people are also applicable to your e-mail communications.

However, in order to prevent you from stepping into some known pitfalls using your e-mail, UM has set up some general guidelines.

- UM has provisioned you with a personal e-mail account and e-mail address to support your work or study at our university. Keep your account strictly for personal use, protect your account from use by others and never use an account yourself if it is not specifically assigned to you.
Note: The use of your UM e-mail address for private purposes is not always avoidable and therefore this is allowed to a certain extent. However, be aware that your UM e-mail address represents you as member of the Maastricht University community. Protect your e-mail address from abuse and protect the UM's values in you messages;
- Whenever you copy, edit or pass on (information from) e-mail messages you should be sure that this is with consent of the parties involved.
Note: If content from earlier messages is embedded in your message (reply- or forward-threads), you should be careful if new addressees are added and consider to remove irrelevant content;
- Do not send any e-mail with indecent, discriminating, offending or threatening content;
- Do not send any unsolicited and therefore presumably undesired e-mail messages to large amounts of recipients (so called SPAM) and act accordingly if recipients ask you to refrain from sending them specific e-mails in the future;

- Make sure that your recipients are able to identify you as the sender of the message. The [official UM-signature](#) is mandatory for this purpose and contains a link to [UM's E-mail disclaimer](#).

Best practices on composing your e-mail

Before you actually send your e-mail message, please take a moment to consider whether your message is not open for misinterpretation, has the right tone and shows due respect to (the privacy of) your recipient(s) and other parties involved.

It should be clear to the recipient(s) whether or not an answer is expected and what the recipient is allowed or supposed to do with the information in your message.

- If you have a very personal or a highly complicated message, it is being advised to use the telephone or even to choose for a direct contact;
- Try to avoid your messages to be emotionally charged;
- For a formal message a conventional written letter is advised or (if available) you could digitally sign your e-mail message.

How to react on undesired e-mail

If you receive a message obviously by mistake, simply use "Reply" to inform the sender.

In some cases an e-mail will appear in your inbox which has an inappropriate content or which you consider undesired for some other reason.

If an undesired message appears to be unimportant, like most of so called SPAM messages, you can simply delete the message.

If you are not sure how to act, you can forward it to your local IT support or Servicedesk-ICTS.

Here are some general guidelines in case an undesired e-mail is addressed directly to you or has a more personal content. You can react individually:

- If it concerns a misunderstanding, an addressing error or content which is not relevant to you (anymore), simply compose a formal reply to the sender.
- If the content of the message is not necessarily personal but has possible criminal intentions or might be a threat to UM's imago or operational processes:
 - o Do not react to the sender yourself,
 - o Keep an electronic copy of the original message in your mailbox,
 - o Report this incident to your manager, your faculty, the Student Service Centre or Servicedesk-ICTS;
- If the message is addressed to you personally and its content is offensive, threatening or inadmissible to your opinion:
 - o Keep an electronic copy of the original message in your mailbox,
 - o Report this incident to your manager, your faculty, the Student Service Centre or Servicedesk-ICTS. You can also contact somebody you trust or UM's confidential advisor,
 - o If you decide to send a reply, keep it short and formal.

How to use your options for sending

Incorrect use of the functions To:, Cc:, Bcc:, Forward, Reply and Reply-to-all can easily lead to uncontrolled e-mail storms, miscommunications or nuisance. In some cases it can also lead to violation of the privacy of the parties involved. This paragraph shows you the general applicability of the functions mentioned earlier:

- To: for persons directly involved;
- Cc: for persons you want to be additionally informed and who should know about each others involvement. These persons can react to each other if necessary;
- Bcc: To be used if you maintain a specific relationship with the addressees, but the addressees have no direct relationships among themselves. Using Bcc guards you from

undesired disclosing of these e-mail addresses. Use BCC in combination with your own e-mail address or a general e-mail address in the To: -field.

Note: Do NOT use BCC to inform others about your communication with the addressees "behind their back". You can inform others by "Forwarding" the sent message to them, complying to the "To" and "Cc" guidelines described above;

- Forward: Of course the content of a message can be a direct lead to Forward an e-mail message, e.g. for further processing.
But Forwarding a message also enables you to inform persons who "need to know" without starting a conversation between these persons and the original sender or other addressees. Forwarding gives you the opportunity to add additional comment or information relevant only to your addressee(s).
Make sure the addressees know why they receive your message and what they are supposed to do with the information.
- Reply: is the preferred function if your answer is first of all addressed to the original sender. If necessary you can add addressees, but please consider to remove irrelevant or confidential content from the reply-thread and act in accordance with the guidelines for To and Cc;
- Reply-to-all: Is only to be used if ALL persons in the original To- and Cc-fields have to stay involved or informed, again while adhering to the guidelines for To and Cc.

Disclaimer text

The following link is applicable for the generic UM e-mail disclaimer:

<https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/disclaimer>

Disclaimer text:

This message (and any attachments) is solely intended for addressee(s) and may contain confidential information. If you are not the intended recipient please notify the sender immediately and delete this message. Unauthorized use, disclosure, dissemination or making a copy is not allowed. Maastricht University accepts no liability for incorrect, incomplete or delayed transmission of the contents of an e-mail message, or for email born viruses.

Click the following link to read more about information security at UM:

<http://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/informationsecurity>