Email Etiquette: Myths vs. Reality

We think we know email, but do we really? This handout reviews some of the myths about email messaging. By moving beyond these myths, we can learn how to use email to our advantage.

Myths

⇒ Email writers should follow the same rules of etiquette despite regardless of their intended audience.

⇒ Texting is replacing email. No one uses email anymore.

⇒ Email is impersonal.

⇒ Unlike formal papers, there's no time to revise email messages.

Reality

⇒ What is and isn't appropriate in email depends on the audience.

⇒ Email is still the most commonly used form of written communication in the workplace.

⇒ Email involves relationships with people and is, therefore, quite personal.

⇒ There are several tricks to revising email messages.

Tips for Drafting and Revising Email Messages

1. Take time to consider the message you are sending from the recipient's point of view.

2. Play with word choice and formatting until the message is clear.

3. Although email messages tend to follow a format (with a greeting, body, and closing), the format can be tweaked depending on the relationship between the reader and writer.

4. What's appropriate in an email—such as the use of emoticons—depends on the audience and setting. A good rule of thumb is to err on the side of formality until the other person becomes less formal with you.

5. Use email to set up a face-to-face conversation or phone call, not to hash out disagreements or share lengthy information.