

## E-mail Subject Lines

After the "from" line, subject lines are the most important way to focus and gain your reader's attention. But most people spend far too little time crafting good subject lines. Here are a few tips to help you strengthen these e-mail elements that may well determine whether or not your message is read and acted on.

### Summarize the Message Content

Recipients want to be able to perform triage on their e-mail, using the "from" and "Subject line" information, so make your subject lines summarize, not just describe, your content and purpose. Subject lines should be brief abstracts of the main content, allowing the readers to mentally, and often literally, "file" the e-mail or memo.

### Choose from Three Approaches

Essentially, you have three options with subject lines:

1. Announce something or give news/information (best for FYI e-mails, but then you need to use strategies to ensure recipients read on)
2. "Hook" the reader in with a creative approach (know your audience well and fit topic to the context with this risky approach)
3. Emphasize reader benefits or action (most reader-focused approach: appeals to "what's in it for me?")

### Be Concise and Specific

Keep subject lines concise and concrete. As a rule of thumb: use no more than five words.

Your Order Shipped Today > Amazon.com Order Shipped Today Recommendation Discussion > Recommend We Delay Product Upgrade Conference Call Wednesday > Marketing Re-organization Conference Call Wednesday Need Information > Send Updated Figures on Smith Contract Status Report > Status Report: Need Data Today One More Thing > Sales Meeting Rescheduled - Tuesday 1pm

### Prioritizing E-mail

I have also seen some useful acronyms used to designate the type and urgency level of the e-mail sent. If these are adopted within a company, they can become useful markers that help with speedy processing of information.

NRN = No Reply Needed ASAP/URG = As Soon as Possible/Urgent EOM = End of Message (can place at end of subject line that "says it all") FYI – For Your Information ACT – Action needed

I've also seen 911 (emergency), 811 (urgent/needed within the hour), and 411 (general info.). But be aware that these don't translate well to other countries.