

Digital Citizenship

Lesson Title: Stop Before You Send

Middle School



Essential Question:

Why is it important to slow down the pace of online e-mail communication?

Materials:

- Bring and place cheerful, calming items around your classroom that are not normally there — a poster, a vase of flowers, a stuffed animal or two. Play music of your preference (calm or upbeat) when the students enter the classroom.
- Poster/sign/some form of notification: Enter Slowly. Take Note.
- True Email Mistakes Story Scenarios
- 10 Email Tips to Avoid Being an E-diot Handout
- Access to the Internet and teacher's school email address

Procedure:

Discussion Guidelines:

1. Before class begins, post a sign in the entry way of the classroom that says **Enter Slowly. Take Note.**
2. Begin the class session by simply standing quietly before the class and ask them to quietly think for a moment about the comment: Take Note. Ask students how that phrase is different than a common beginning of class instruction: Take notes. Ask students what the instruction, "take note" means to them. What action is required to "take note" (Answer: be observant, thoughtful, quiet, deliberate). Continue the discussion by asking your students what they observe in your classroom today. What is different? What is the same? Did they notice at first, or did your cue to stop and take notice cause them to become better observers?
3. Next, explain to your students that today's session is simply to think about how often we really don't take time to think. In a rush to complete a task, or simply to get it done and check it off the list, our fast-paced communications often are filled with mistakes. Share the "true story" scenarios below that highlight e-mails sent with spelling errors, wrong recipients, bad language, etc.

True Story No. 1

A top staffer for Republican Presidential Nominee Donald Trump accidentally copied a reporter on an email meant for a Republican researcher, unwittingly revealing the campaign's plans to go hard after Hillary Clinton on decades-old scandals. Michael Caputo, a campaign adviser, emailed a researcher at the Republican National Committee requesting a full "work up information on HRC/Whitewater as soon as possible." The message became public knowledge when Hope Hicks, Trump's campaign spokeswoman who was copied on the email, replied not to Michael Caputo, but to Marc Caputo, a reporter at Politico.

Source: <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-05-25/trump-campaign-sends-strategic-email-to-reporter-by-mistake>

True Story No. 2

As written by a middle school teacher:

"I use email on a daily basis during the school year to communicate with parents. I'm very careful to use straightforward wording to avoid any misunderstandings or hurt feelings. One day a few years ago, I was cruising my personal email late one night and received a joke from a friend. You know the one, 'Deep inside there is a skinny me screaming to get out, but I can usually control the [undesirable word] with chocolate.'

"As I set in motion the 'Famous Forward' I apparently hit the wrong contact. Seconds after hitting 'Send,' I realized that I had clicked on the group that sends emails to ALL of my students' parents. I almost died, but there was no way to take it back. I immediately sent an apology email to those same parents and headed to bed to try to forget about my pending doom.

"The next morning I confessed my mistake to my principal just in case she received any complaints, then I braced myself as I opened my email for the first time since 'The Incident.' To my surprise, I had several emails from parents thanking me for the good laugh, and absolutely NO complaints! I was shocked, but not as shocked as when a student walked into my classroom that morning with a gift bag full of chocolate and a cute note from her mom. What a relief it was to see that people really do still have a sense of humor, although I suspect some were laughing AT me instead of WITH me!"

Source: <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/message-2020-viewers-hilarious-email-blunders/story?id=17674231>

True Story No. 3

All official road signs in Wales are bilingual, so the local authority e-mailed its in-house translation service for the Welsh version of: "No entry for heavy goods vehicles. Residential site only." When officials asked for the Welsh translation of a road sign, they thought the reply was what they needed. Unfortunately, the e-mail response said in Welsh: "I am not in the office at the moment. Send any work to be translated."

So that was what went up under the English version of the sign placed near a local supermarket. The notice went up and all seemed well - until Welsh speakers began pointing out the embarrassing error. "When they're proofing signs, they should really use someone who speaks Welsh," said journalist Dylan Iorwerth.

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7702913.stm>

4. Ask students which of the scenarios seemed to be the most serious blunder. Why? What could have been done to avoid any of the above mistakes? Why do you think the parents of the middle school teacher's students reacted in such a calm way? Perhaps because we all make e-mail mistakes—and the cause is usually from rushing to send or not taking a moment to check ourselves.
5. Continue the discussion by pointing out that email errors, let's call them "e-diot" moments, are made by everyone: kids, adults, teachers, people in the business world, and journalists. However, even these small details can make a big difference.
6. Share the following 10 common e-mail mistakes to avoid. Questions are bulleted below each example (this is provided as a handout at the end of the lesson).
7. Provide the following opportunities to craft a short e-mail directed to your school email address:
 - Apply for a job opportunity
 - Contact a teacher regarding an upcoming assignment
 - Reach out to a coach with questions about the upcoming season
 - Recommend a fellow student to serve on a special school committee
 - Request an appointment with a counselor
 - Excuse yourself from attending a meeting
 - Write to a club about a recent good experience
 - Thank a teacher for a personal favor
 - Give courteous feedback to a teacher about a recent class experience

Remind students to think about the subject line, spelling, tone, and the 10 Tips provided in the Don't be an E-diot handout.

8. Ask students to print out their emails/share screens with a peer. Have the pairs check the email against the 10 points made in the list. How would they feel if they received this email? Why?

Conclusion

Review the theme of the lesson with the students. Have them discuss:

- Why is email etiquette important?
- Why might it be important to slow down the pace of online e-mail communication?

10 Email Tips to Avoid Being an E-diot

#1. Forgetting to use a greeting or closing

Always open with a greeting when beginning a conversation. Otherwise, your email will come off as terse and demanding. The same goes for including a closing line. Leaving out these simple pleasantries won't give off a friendly or professional vibe.

- What are some appropriate greetings and/or closings for emails?
- Why should you be concerned about a "friendly or professional vibe" in an email?
- How is this like entering and/or exiting a room full of people?

#2. Becoming too informal too quickly

While an email thread can swiftly become short and friendly, starting off too informally — for example, saying "Hey, Megan" instead of "Hello, Ms. Smith" to a new contact — may seem disrespectful. Always start a conversation politely and formally, and follow the other person's lead.

- What are some polite and formal ways to begin an email conversation with someone you don't know very well?
- Why should we be concerned with formality or politeness in our emails?

#3. Saying "to whom it may concern"

This greeting is the email kiss of death, showing you have not looked into who really will be reading the email. When applying for a job or contacting a business, try to find a specific name or try something like "To the consumer affairs department" or "Dear hiring manager."

- What are some examples of times you should research the title of the person to whom you are writing?

#4. Forgetting to change the subject line

Most people forget about the subject line, one of the most important parts of any email. Every time you begin discussing a new topic, change the subject line of your email thread to make your conversations easy to locate in the future.

- How do subject lines help a reader?
- Should you ever open an email that lacks a subject line? Why or why not?

#5. Hitting "reply all"

Unless what you're saying applies to absolutely everyone, respond only to the sender. It's annoying to receive one-sentence responses from 40 different people, especially if the topic isn't relevant to what you're working on.

- What are some examples of times you should hit 'reply all'?
- What are some examples of times you should not?
- What else do you need to check before replying to everyone on the list? Why?

#6. Not paying attention to detail

Small details speak volumes in email, as any stray keystroke can completely change the tone or tell the recipient that you don't care enough to put in more of an effort. Always be sure to spell names correctly and double check for typos. Additionally, never put names in all lowercase or all caps either. It makes it look as though you didn't care enough to properly format their name.

- How do you react when someone misspells your name? Explain your answer.
- What are some ways to check for typos?
- Why is it important to check for typos?

#7. Not monitoring your tone

People read an email using their own tone of voice. This makes phrasing and formatting extremely important to clearly getting your point across. People will take things the wrong way, so avoid even giving them the chance to.

- How do emails convey tone?
- What are some specific words that convey different tones?
- What is the tone of a sentence all in caps?

#8. Saying something over email that should be done face-to-face

Some things, such as offering criticism, can't be said over email without creating a misunderstanding. Learn to recognize these situations, and pick up the phone or walk over instead of sending an email.

- Do you think people avoid face to face conversations by using emails and texts? Why?
- What are some examples of conversations that should be face to face and not via email? Why?

#9. Using emoji's or abbreviations

Emoji's and abbreviations are generally unprofessional in emails. Leave out the smiley faces and LOLs, and be sure to spell out words like "appointment" instead of writing "appt."

- When is it appropriate to use an emoji or an abbreviation? Why?

#10. Don't press send without re-reading and double-checking

Take a moment to walk away and then return to the email, re-reading it with fresh eyes. Look for misspellings, grammatical errors and other mistakes listed above.

- Do you make a practice of checking your emails for misspellings, grammatical errors, and other mistakes? Why or why not?
- What would be considered a 'formal email' for someone your age? Why?

Source: www.NetManners.com