SFU UNIVERSITY SECRETARIAT | ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

GUIDELINE GDL-58

Email Management Best Practices

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Introduction

Email is an essential communication tool for Simon Fraser University (SFU) employees. Business decisions, key communications, and important information are regularly shared by email. The volume, variety and velocity of email received by SFU employees can make managing email a difficult task.

This guideline provides SFU employees with information that will help them organize, manage, retain, and dispose of their email in accordance with records management best practices.

Email Etiquette

Email that is sent or received from an SFU email account is subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA). This means that your email may be included in an FIPPA request and potentially disclosed to the public. By maintaining a professional tone, using professional greetings, keeping your fonts simple and classic, and proofreading your messages before sending them you can ensure that your email is an accurate reflection of the work that you do.

Listed below are some tips for ensuring proper email etiquette.

- Keep email messages to a single topic.
- Avoid mixing personal messages with business messages.
- Create clear and descriptive subject lines.
- Use the subject line to indicate actions, purpose and due dates.
- Use your signature block for all email messages going to recipients outside your department.
- If your email contains important decisions or action, always include your signature block.
- Limit the number of recipients.
- Consider only including recipients who are expected to take action or make a decision on a topic.
- Limit the use of attachments and graphics.
- Avoid using the 'reply all' function.
- Whenever possible, post your documents to a shared location (e.g., Shared Drive, SharePoint, MS Teams) and send a link to the document in the email instead of attaching it.

When to use 'Reply All'

Use 'reply all' when you want to respond to every contact on an email thread. Examples of times you should use the reply all function include:

- If your response will impact at least 50% of the people on the email thread;
- If others on the email thread will be confused if they don't see your response.
- If you are on an email thread with a small group of people working on the same project;
- If you think others on the email thread might have the same question you have; or
- If your manager solicits feedback from everyone on the email thread.

Cc vs Bcc

Cc (carbon copy) and Bcc (blind carbon copy) are used to include additional recipients on an email thread. Use Cc when you want the list of recipients to be visible to all recipients. Use Bcc when you want to keep the contact list hidden from everyone.

Cc Examples	Bcc Examples
• Initiate an email thread • Enhance an email's urgency (i.e., cc a supervisor) • Temporarily take on a coworkers' task(s) • Introduce two of your contacts	• Sharing an organization wide newsletter or communication • Using an extensive mailing list • When your recipients do not know each (and are not being introduced)

Managing and Organizing Email

Tips for managing email discussion threads

- If the topic of an email thread changes, create a new email thread.
- Do not forward unnecessary information from previous emails to a new recipient.
- Use the conversation "clean-up tool" feature in Outlook with caution. When a conversation has split into separate conversations the "clean-up-tool" may delete intermediary emails that are older than the final email in the collection. Be sure to assess and mark important decision emails prior to running the tool.

Tips for organizing email

- Create custom folders to organize your inbox. Some folders you might consider creating are:
    - Action
    - Awaiting Reply
    - For Reference
    - Personal
- Use your departments file classification plan to create subfolders according to predefined classifications. For example:
    - FIN001 Budget
    - FIN002 Expenditures
- Create subfolders for a specific project/committee. For example:
    - Records Inventory Project
    - Budget 2021-2022
    - Strategic Planning Committee
    - Academic Search Committee

- Consider using the categories feature in Outlook to allow you to visually identify your emails at a glance by colour. If used consistently, categories can allow you to sort and populate search folders quickly.
- Rules can be useful for automatically sending email to a specific folder. If there are specific people, subjects, categories, or topics that you always file in the same place consider setting up rules to pre-sort your email (this can be helpful for managing messages received from discussion lists).

Tips for organizing a shared inbox

When using shared email inboxes (e.g., advising@sfu.ca) it is important that users of the inbox have a shared understanding of how messages will be managed. The following should be agreed upon and ideally documented:

- Who should answer which messages and how will this be indicated to the team (e.g., colour coding, flagging, etc.)?
- If you are using the category feature in Outlook, agree on a taxonomy in advance.
- How should users indicate that a message has been read or is being responded to?
- Who is responsible for capturing official records contained in the email?
- Where will the different types of email be retained if needed for reference?
- How long will messages in the inbox be retained and who is responsible for managing retention?

Tips for managing attachments

- Avoid using attachments where possible. Instead send a link to a shared location (this will prevent the multiplication of different versions of documents within email accounts).
- If you need a record indicating that a document has been sent, save the email and the attachment together as a PDF outside of your email.
- Incorporate version control and a naming convention so it is always clear which version of a document has been circulated.

Protecting Sensitive Information

You are responsible for ensuring that third-party personal and confidential information is protected. Given the ease with which email messages can be distributed and accessed, you should take extra precautions when working with sensitive information.

The following steps can help protect sensitive information:

- Limit the amount of confidential information transmitted over email.
- Consider encrypting documents containing confidential information before sending to external contacts.
- Provide passwords to recipients using a separate means (e.g., verbally, via DM).
- Keep an encryption key and ensure that any encrypted messages and attachments are decrypted before they are saved. Encrypted documents will be inaccessible if encryption keys and passwords are lost.

Email Account Use

As described in GP 24 Fair Use of Information and Communications Technology, incidental personal use of ITC resources (e.g., email) is allowed; however, it is recommended that employees refrain from using their SFU account for personal activities (e.g., corresponding with family). If employees do use their SFU email account for personal activities (they should ensure that this content is separate from their SFU business activities. Shared/sponsored accounts should not be used for personal use.

It is best practice to use your SFU email account when conducting SFU business. Therefore, you should refrain from using your personal email account (e.g., gmail.com, yahoo.com, etc.) for SFU business. For example, do not forward work emails and/or documents to your personal account so you can work on them at home, instead use the tools provided by ITS such as OneDrive and MS Teams to access documents remotely.

Retention and Disposition of Email

Not every email needs to be kept. Only those emails that are official records must be retained. In order to effectively manage emails, SFU employees must be able to identify and separate official records from transitory records.

Official records are records that are evidence of the university's administrative activities, transactions, and decisions. These records are created, received, and accumulated by all university departments, governing bodies of the university, and individuals engaged in university business. Official records must be retained and disposed of in accordance with an approved Records Retention Schedules and Disposition Authority (RRSDA). More information about RRSDAs can be found in the Directory of University Records.

Transitory records are records that have temporary usefulness and are only required for a limited period of time, in order to complete a routine action, or to prepare a subsequent draft, etc. Transitory records:

- have no further value beyond an immediate and minor transaction;
- are produced or received in the preparation of other records which supersede them; and/or
- are not needed as evidence of a business activity.

Transitory records can be destroyed once their usefulness has expired, provided they:

- are not part of an ongoing FIPPA request and/or current litigation hold; and/or
- are not required to meet legislative or regulatory obligations.

Tips for deciding which emails to keep

If you answer *Yes* to any of the questions below the email is an official record and should be retained. If you answer *No* to all of the questions, it is a transitory record and you can feel confident destroying it.

- Does the email approve or authorize an action?
- Does the email signify a policy change or development?
- Does the email commit the university to an arrangement or to a business deal?
- Does the email contain advice, provide guidance or constitute formal communications with people inside or outside the organization?
- Is the email something I have used at work to make a decision?
- If I left this job tomorrow, would my successor need the information in this email to continue with this matter?
- Is the matter to which this email relates one which may be reviewed or audited later?

Examples of **official email records**	Examples of **transitory email records**
• Emails that document business transactions (initiation, authorization, or completion) • Emails that document decisions, including instructions, approvals, advice, and signed records (such as briefing notes) • Formal communications about SFU business • Emails that contain information that is integral to a file about one event, client, or issues (e.g., case files) • Emails that contain legal advice • Emails that contain other information that helps explain the history of a decision or project	• Announcements of social events • Cc copies (unless you are the main person responsible for the matter) • Emails conveying an attachment (in cases where the attachment has been saved elsewhere) • Meeting arrangements • Routine correspondence about drafts and revisions • A request to call someone • Personal emails such as lunch/coffee arrangements

Deleting transitory email records

As long as transitory email records are not part of an ongoing FIPPA request or litigation hold, as per RRSDA 1996-061 Transitory Records, they can be deleted once their usefulness has expired. Reviewing and deleting transitory email records will reduce the clutter in your email account, save storage space, and help you find information quickly. It is recommended that you regularly schedule time to review your inbox, sent items, and additional user created folders, to identify and delete transitory emails. For additional guidance on the difference between transitory and official records please see GDL-55 Official, Transitory and Personal Records: A Guide for SFU Employees.

Saving official email records

It is considered best practice to save official records in a shared filing system (e.g., shared drive, SharePoint, etc.) in which records (including email), are captured, protected, retained and destroyed in accordance with approved RRSDAs.

There are two methods for saving email.

1) Drag and drop email (from the Outlook desktop app) to the appropriate location (e.g., your department's shared drive or SharePoint site). This will result in the creation of either an MSG file (on a PC) or an EML file (on a Mac).
2) Export the email message from your email account as a PDF document and save it to the appropriate location (e.g., your department's shard drive or SharePoint site).

Keep in mind the following before saving email.

- It is not necessary to capture every email in an email conversation thread separately. Instead, emails should be captured at key-points during the conversation (i.e., when decisions are made).
- Email attachments should be saved as part of the record (i.e., email message and its associated attachment equals one complete record) to provide context to an email.
- If the title of the email does not accurately reflect the content of the message, then it should be re-titled at the point at which it is saved.
- If saving email as a PDF, add the date (or date range) to the title for clarity.

Email Formats

File Formats	Description	Status
MSG	If using the desktop version of Outlook on a PC, when you drag and drop a message to your desktop it is exported as an MSG file. This format is acceptable for saving email because all header information, message content and attachments are preserved with the file. MSG files retain a lot of their original functionality when reopened.	Acceptable
EML	If using the desktop version of Outlook on a Mac, when you drag and drop a message to your desktop it is exported as EML. This is also the format (in Windows or Mac) if you drag an old message into a new message you are composing (will be saved as an EML attachment). This format is acceptable for saving email because all header information, message content and attachments are preserved with the file. EML files retain a lot of their original functionality when reopened.	Acceptable
PDF	Emails can be exported from Outlook by printing them to a standard PDF file. PDF files are stable and generally well supported; however, once MSG or EML files are exported to a PDF they lose their previous functionality and cannot be restored as an MSG or EML file.	Preferred
PST	When the Outlook Auto-Archive function runs on your machine it creates PST files containing batches of Outlook content including emails, calendar events, tasks, etc. PST files are not recommended because they are easily corruptible, cannot be searched in most databases, and cannot be scanned for viruses.	Not recommended
MBOX	If using the desktop version of Outlook, when you drag and drop an entire folder to your desktop, all messages and attachments are exported as a single MBOX file. This is fine for transferring email for long-term preservation (e.g., transfer to the Archives), but is not recommended for day-to-day retrieval as reimporting MBOX files to Outlook is not straightforward.	Archives use only

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Guideline
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Document Control

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