



# **Guidelines on communication and work-life balance whilst working at home.**

**Updated April 2023**



**Working at home**, without the easy and convenient option of being in an open plan office, presents a wholly new challenge. Communication is only 7% verbal, and we rely heavily on body language and tone of voice to determine what is being said to us. So, it has become really important to think about how we communicate with each other while in lockdown.

Firstly, we need to ensure that our discussions compensate for the 93% of our communication which is now invisible and inaudible. Secondly, it's important to establish work and home boundaries, with clear routines, so that communications with our peers still remain mindful of personal space.

Additionally, you might not know if someone is working or not. They may have fallen ill, or have a home emergency. To help this, we now have a daily update system in place to tell you who's unavailable for work. This will help us remain considerate to colleagues who need space.

There are four ways to communicate with each other:

- Email
- Text/WhatsApp
- Phone Call
- Video Call

We need to determine the most effective way before we reach out. How intrusive will an unexpected phone call be? How full is that person's inbox? Do they check their phone during the day? Obviously, this will change person to person and interaction to interaction, but we still need to be mindful of what form of communication works best to initiate a conversation.

### **Some questions we should ask before using any form of communication:**

- Is email the best means of communication for something that is urgent? If our inboxes are all full, will your colleague notice it?
- If something is urgent, use SMS text whenever possible. Start your message with 'sorry to disturb you in case you're not on duty today but...' But use it very sparingly, especially for colleagues you don't know so well. We should expect during a lock down that the definition of 'urgent' is a lot more serious than it used to be.
- Is email the best form of communication for something that is sensitive, requires deliberation, or could upset the person receiving it? Why not arrange an appointment and then pick up the phone!

If others need to join into that conversation, we have Zoom. Zoom's also fun for going off topic for a bit and having some downtime. No-one's counting, so long as we're respectful of each other's time and other commitments.

Also, just because the person is working from home, please give people time. Your colleague may have popped out for their daily exercise. Or be in a 100m queue for a pint of milk. Trying to re-learn trigonometry to help the children with their home-schooling. Calling a loved one. Or just really, really in need of a break. If you need an immediate response and its urgent, consider a range of people who may be able to answer your query.



## Email Etiquette

Email is one of the most difficult mediums to compensate for that 93% non-verbal communication. It is important to get that balance right, as emails can often come across insensitive or bossy. This can be especially true if you are firing out a string of emails in a hurry.

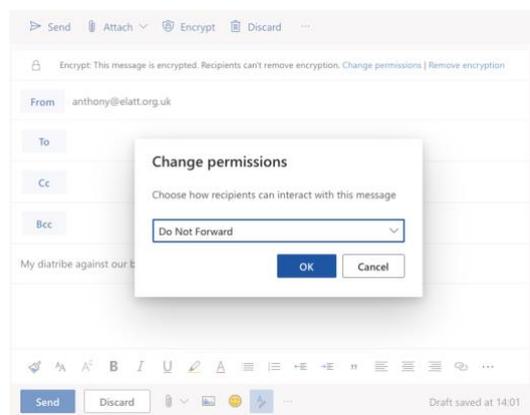
Take an extra moment to consider who the email is for, what actions or information you are requesting, how urgent it is before you send it.

### Since we all need to use email, please consider this guidance:

1. Be courteous, clear and patient. Solving a problem will be a lot tougher when you can't see someone or don't know whether they are working or not. ELATT colleagues will want you to be polite - especially in the opening email of a thread, or when you haven't spoken to the colleague in question for some time. Being polite doesn't need to take long – for example, you can use BW for 'best wishes' and BR for 'best regards'.
2. Make the subject of your email as specific as possible, include course codes and stock terms, like **safeguarding**, **behaviour** or **enrolment**, which makes categorising emails easier.
3. Make sure it's clear in your message what you want each recipient to know and what they need to do next:
  1. Write as clearly and succinctly as possible.
  2. When the email is complex or long, use bullet points, headings and colours to make it easier for the reader.
  3. If setting actions, make clear who needs to do what
  4. If setting deadlines, make sure the deadline gives the reader enough time – and don't assume they will read it the minute you send it!
4. If something is confidential, urgent, or for info only, make it clear in the subject. State: **For information only**; or **Urgent**: (and make sure you use this very rarely!). How people react to your email depends on how you frame it for them.
5. Avoid using ALL CAPITALS, **bold** or **red** text especially when making requests or giving instructions. This may come across as harsh or rude. Use another colour, **blue** or **green**, to highlight text that is quoted or needs to be forwarded on.
6. If you want to indicate a specific person you are referring to in an email, use **bold** or **@** and then the person's name so they know you are expecting a response directly from them.
7. Put the person in **TO** that you want to answer.
8. If there are others you want to keep in the loop, use **CC**. They can then join in if the first recipient brings them in by name. But until they do, please leave the person in **TO** enough time to make a response. No doubt you want to be helpful. But it's not your name in the **TO** box, and you don't necessarily know what the addressee is thinking.
9. Put as few people in the email **TO**, and the **CC**, as you possibly can. Remember email inboxes are already full so we don't want to add to them if we can avoid it.



10. If you want someone to know that you're working on something as an FYI, but don't want or need them to join the conversation, use **BCC**.
11. If you answer a group email, decide whether everyone in that group really needs to hear your response to the first respondent's thoughts. Could you take it offline? If so, let the group know what you're doing and that you'll report back.
12. If a lot of people are answering, it can be very difficult to follow the thread. If you were the person who originally sent the email, consider sending a recap email with clear instructions stating who is now doing what. Remember you may only need to email the people allocated the new tasks and not everyone in the original chain.
13. If you are using Outlook online, use the 'like' button  to show acknowledgement of a message. That means you don't have to add further to our bulging email inboxes. But please bear in mind colleagues who use Desktop Outlook won't see it.
14. Be considerate when you reply to a message:
  1. Make sure you read the email content carefully, to reduce misunderstandings
  2. If a subject is sensitive or controversial, **never hit reply in the heat of the moment**: walk away and come back to it! Or call your colleague instead – phone can make things a lot easier to work out sometimes.
15. If you're saying something sensitive or confidential, use the **Encryption** option found at the top of the email dialogue box. You can choose Do not forward, which makes it much harder for someone to accidentally forward your diatribe against our biggest funder to ... our biggest funder.



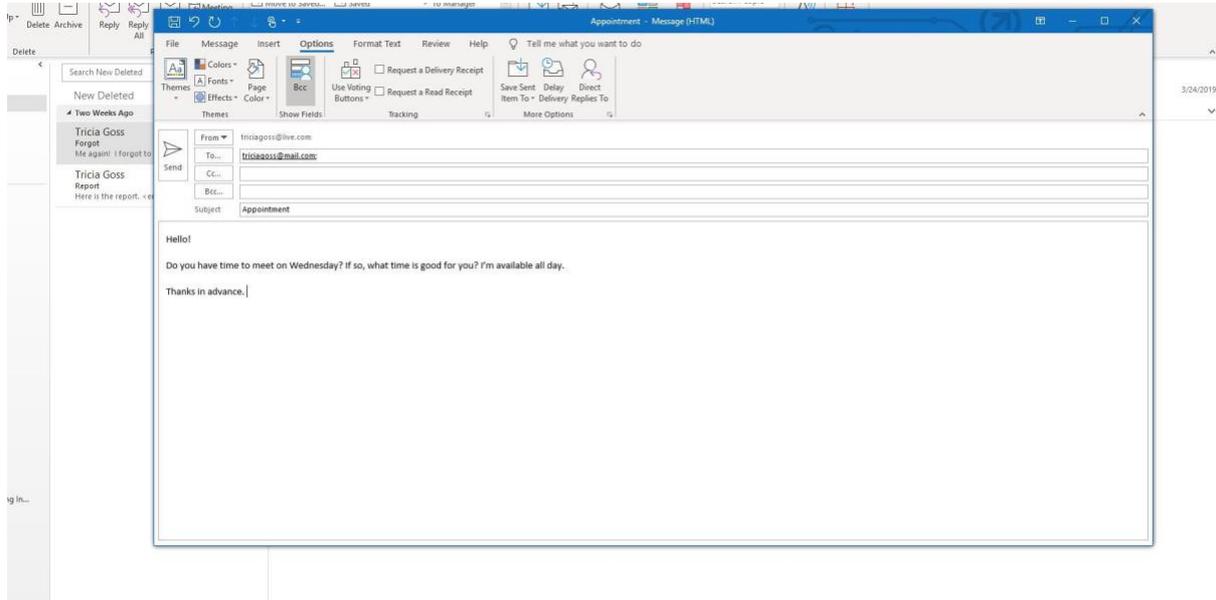
16. You can send an email whenever you like. But your colleague doesn't have to read it until they're ready. So, I might send you a message at 8 p.m., but you don't have to read it until 10 a.m. You can also **schedule to send an email later** in Outlook Desktop so that you don't send your email until the next morning (**see below**). If you use Outlook online, simply leave the message in **draft** until we reach a more sociable hour. That way no-one feels guilty or pressured to answer at midnight!
17. If you're part-time, add your current hours of availability to your **email signature**. For example, I work Mondays, Tuesday and Thursdays. Please contact Tech Support to do this.
18. If you're signing out for some time, especially if you are unwell, use your **Out of Office**. And remember to update it to the current week (we already know you were away between 10 - 17 October 2017...)



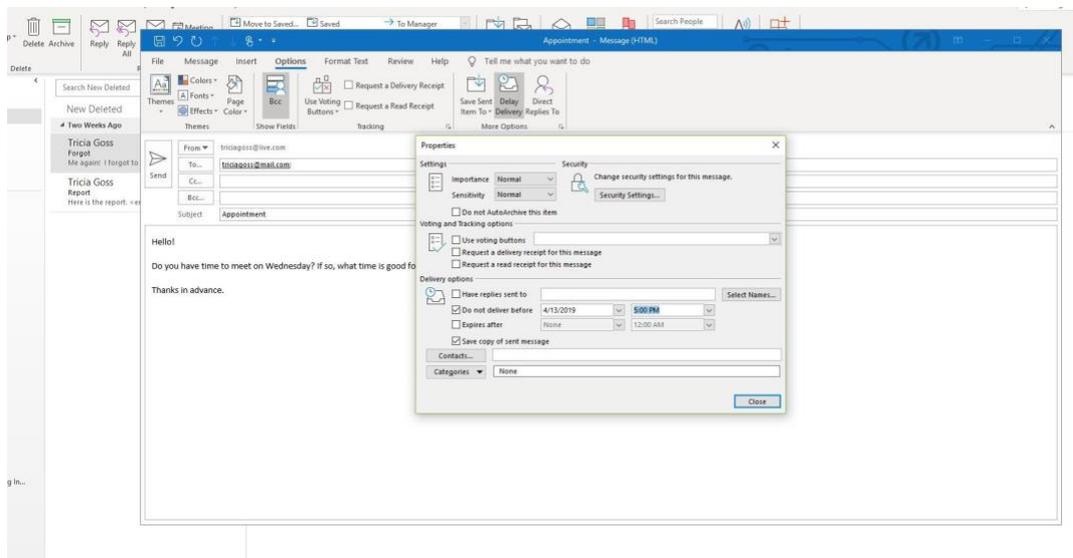
## Schedule an Email to Send Later in Outlook on Windows

Outlook allows you to specify exactly when you'd like your email to be sent.

- a) Compose a message. Either create a new message, reply to a message, or forward a message.
- b) Go to the **Options** tab.



- c) In the **More Options** group, select **Delay Delivery**.
- d) In the **Properties** dialog box, select the **Do not deliver before** check box.



- e) Choose the date and time when you want to send the message.
- f) Select **Close**.
- g) In the message window, select **Send**.

This puts your message in the Outbox until the time your specified time arrives, and then it is sent. This is not available on Outlook online, so you can leave the message in draft until morning.



## Digital Boundaries

Now that lines between work and home are blurred, digital boundaries have never been more important. If you are sitting on your sofa at 8pm with your mobile next to you it is easy to forget that your living room has stopped being your office and you may be tempted to send out a quick message instead of watching Netflix.

**So here are some tips to manage your home/work balance:**

1. **Have a routine:** based on your home commitments, you may need to spread your working hours across the day. For example, you may have children and so need to take three hours out of the day to supervise home-learning.
2. **Tell us:** Once you have established a routine, let everyone know when is best to contact you and using what medium. It is really important to be honest about what forms of communication best works for you.
3. **Take breaks:** it isn't healthy to sit in front of your screen all day long. Take regular breaks, drink plenty of water, distract your mind with music, a crossword puzzle etc. Put all digital devices away at these times, because as you're flipping through Instagram you might be interrupted by a work email coming through.
4. **Schedule your work phone:** if you have a work phone, auto-schedule your phone to go silent after offices hours. This can be done on both Android and iPhones.
5. **Schedule your private phone:** schedule your private phone to be silent when you don't want to be contacted too. This is especially important if you have set up Outlook on your phone to receive emails.
6. **Consider security:** if you are using your private phone, change your phone settings so your number is blocked. This will keep your number secure and you won't get students, social workers or parents ringing all times of the day or night. You can also set your phone number to be private when setting up WhatsApp groups. Remember, blocking your number when texting requires another app and is not supported on iPhones. Don't call someone and then text them if they don't respond, unless you really want that person to have your number!