

# **Business Language Etiquette**

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Improper body language or an off-color comment can be detrimental to your business. Maintaining a professional image is important when dealing with clients, co-workers and potential customers. Whether you're communicating face-to-face, via email, or over the phone, always observe professional language and a tactful communication style.

While phone, email and face-to-face conversations have their own respective etiquette rules, in each scenario, a little courtesy can go a long way.

## **Introduce Yourself**

When you make a call, dial into a phone conference, or are meeting new people, introduce yourself. State your name, your role and if the situation demands, your place of business. If you're meeting someone in person, give a firm handshake and reiterate the names of the people you are meeting in your head. Saying the names of the people you've just met will help you remember them later.

## **Using Titles**

Not everyone in the workplace needs to, or wants to, be addressed as Mr. or Mrs. How someone introduces himself or herself to you is how they expect to be addressed by you. As a general matter, if you are addressing someone who ranks highly in the company or a client, address him or her by the proper title.

## **Proper Grammar**

When writing and speaking, employ grammatical rules. Use complete sentences. In emails, use proper capitalization and spell check your work. Keep exclamation points to a minimum. Slang and emoticons do not belong in professional exchanges. Not every exchange needs to be formal, but don't use the same casual tone with your boss that you use with your associates.

## **Professional Tone**

Don't insult management or your co-workers, berate your employees or use profanity in the workplace. The office is not the proper place to casually vent your work-related grievances. Private emails can easily be forwarded to unintended parties, and private conversations may be overheard, resulting in your embarrassment and possible sanctions from your employer. Even if you are friends with the people you work with, limit your office chatter to work-related issues. Avoid slang and jargon. Also avoid sensitive subjects. Personal and intimate conversations are not appropriate for the workplace. Politics, someone's financial situation, religious beliefs and political ideologies are off limits. Stay away from crass and off-color humor.

## **Body Language**

Be mindful of body language. Keep good posture and maintain eye contact. When you are presenting yourself, look at the person you are addressing and don't slouch. Be alert and continually acknowledge the speaker. Remember to respect personal space. Keep at least a foot

between yourself and the person you are talking to. Also, don't touch the person you are speaking with. Although you may not mind when someone touches your arm or shoulder when speaking, it may make others uncomfortable.

### **Email Subject Line**

In emails, describe the subject of the email in the memo line. Readers appreciate the heads-up on what they are about to read and can better prioritize emails if they understand the contents. Having a clear and specific subject line will also help you and the recipient locate the email later on.

### **Using Speakerphone**

Ask before using speakerphone. Most people will want to know if there are others, apart from yourself, on the line. If it's a one-on-one conversation, avoid using speakerphone. People may assume that you are multitasking and your full attention is not on the call if you are on speaker.

### **Voice Mail Etiquette**

Observe a professional tone for your voice mail. Keep your outgoing message straightforward and professional. If you will be away from your phone for an extended period of time, explain that you are out of the office and identify your return date. You may also want to note an alternative person to contact in light of your absence. When you are leaving a message on a person's voice mail or answering machine, state your name, number and a brief explanation of your call.

Again, be professional. If you are leaving a message with someone's assistant or secretary, leave the same information.

### **About the Author**

Bri James has been writing professionally since 2011. As a prize-winning cook, self-proclaimed humorist and enthusiast for all things delicious, she brings her foremost loves to life through food writing. James holds a Juris Doctor from Duke University and a Bachelor of Arts in political science from Emory University.

\* <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/business-language-etiquette-46815.html>