Show Respect Online

Essential Question: How can I make sure my emails are clear and respectful?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students explore the similarities and differences between in-person and online communications, and then learn how to write clear and respectful emails.

Students begin by discussing how to be clear and respectful when they talk with people, face to face or on the telephone. They explore the concept of tone, then compare and contrast what it is like to communicate face to face versus online. Students learn some rules that can help them express themselves clearly and respectfully when they write email messages. They then apply what they have learned by editing an email message.

objectives

Students will:

• Understand how to show respect in social situations

• Recognize the importance of tone in both face-to-face and online communications

• Learn rules for writing clear and respectful emails by editing an email message

Materials and Preparation

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Materials

• **Email Edit Student Handout**

Preparation

• Preview the **Mindful Messaging** video and prepare to show it to students

• Copy the **Email Edit Student Handout**, one for every student

• Review the **Email Edit Student Handout** and be prepared to guide students through the corrections

Parent Resources

• Send parents the **Effective Email Communication for Elementary Students Parent Tip Sheet**

Key Vocabulary

• **Respectful:** In a way that shows you care about another person's feelings

• **Tone:** The way something sounds and the feelings it expresses

• **Edit (verb):** To change something that is written to make it better

commonsense media

teaching plans

Introduce

TEACH the Key Vocabulary term **respectful**.

ASK *What are some examples of how to be clear to and **respectful** of others when you are talking in school?*

Sample responses:
- *Try to talk clearly, and explain what you mean if someone doesn't understand*
- *Listen to what other people have to say*
- *Take turns talking*
- *Speak instead of shouting*
- *Don't make fun of people*
- *Say "please" and "thank you"*
- *Say nice things to people*

Record student responses, so that you may return to them later in the lesson.

INVITE students to discuss what might happen if people did not try to be clear and respectful in the way they talked at school.

ASK *What would happen if it was okay to say mean things to other people?* (Students should understand that people's feeling would get hurt and everyone would be upset and angry.)

ASK *What would happen if we didn't take turns talking, or if we were allowed to shout in class?* (Students should conclude that without rules everyone might be talking or shouting at once, and no one could learn anything.)

Teach 1: Mindful Messaging

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **tone**.

SHOW students the **Mindful Messaging** video.

INVITE students to recount what they saw in the video. (A girl sent three of her friends the same text message. She was trying to be friendly, but they read the tone of her text message the wrong way.)

WRITE the following word on the board or on chart paper in three different ways:

<div align="center">

Whatever ☹   Whatever!!!   WHATEVER

</div>

POINT OUT that in the video, Alexa, David, and Evan sent the same text message. However, they wrote the message in different ways.

INVITE students to identify differences among the three messages. (Alexa's message has a frowny face after it. David used a lot of exclamation points. Evan wrote his message in all uppercase letters.)

HAVE students say the three different text messages aloud. Students should say Alexa's message in a soft and disappointed tone. Students should say David's message in an excited and enthusiastic tone. Students should shout Evan's message in an angry tone.)

ENCOURAGE students to think about the difference between hearing a sentence said aloud and seeing it typed. Students should understand that when a sentence is typed, the tone isn't always obvious. People miss out on communication cues, like seeing facial expressions and body language, or hearing the way a voice sounds.

Teach 2: Email Edit

EXPLAIN to students that people are increasingly connecting virtually, through texts, IMs, and emails rather than in person. That's why tone is so important when it comes to sending typed messages.

TELL students there are some rules they can follow to make sure they are being clear and polite when they send messages electronically, especially through email.

DISTRIBUTE the **Email Edit Student Handout**, one for each student.

REVIEW the Check Before You Send questions at the top of the handout as a class, and invite students to share any additional rules they can think of.

TEACH the Key Vocabulary term **edit**.

EXPLAIN to students that they will edit an email message to make sure it is clear and polite.

INVITE students to complete the editing exercise, using the Check Before You Send questions. Encourage students to read the message aloud before they edit it, as well as after. It will help them catch mistakes and show them the tone of the message. Students should make the following changes:

- Edit the first two sentences for proper uses of uppercase letters.
- Correct the spelling of "u" and "rite."
- Rewrite the last sentence to make it more polite.
- Add another sentence to conclude the email.
- Change the ending "Guess Who" to "Max."

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Wrap Up and Assess

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives.

ASK *What are some ways you can be clear and respectful in the way you talk to others in school?* (Students should name and explain some of the rules discussed in the introduction to the lesson. They should be aware that it is important to be respectful to their classmates as well as to adults.)

ASK *What are some differences between saying something aloud to someone, and writing it in an email?* (When you write something, people may not always understand your tone.)

ASK *What are some ways to be respectful when sending an email?* (Students should be able to name and explain most of the rules they learned in Teach 1.)

ASK *What should you do before you send an email?* (Students should understand that it is important to read and edit their emails before sending them.)

Extension Activity

Have students compose an email message to you. They can pretend that they are at home and need to know the homework assignment, or that they have a question about the lesson. First, have them write a message that contains errors and does not follow the rules they learned in Teach 1. Then have them edit their message. You may then invite students to send their emails from a classroom computer.

Homework

Have students share with a parent or other adult family member the rules for writing clear and respectful emails. Students can then compose an email to a relative, edit it, and send it with the adult's help. If students do not have a computer at home, invite them to bring their emails to school to send from a computer in the classroom or school library.

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students© 2007
(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

5. Digital Citizenship
  a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
  d. exhibit leadership for digital citizenship

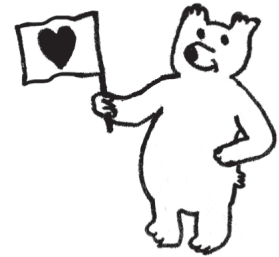# Email Edit

Name _____   **Class** _____   **Date** _____

Check Before You Send

Be sure to ask yourself the following questions before sending an email:

1. Would I say this message to someone's face?
   Never send a text, email, comment, or post that you wouldn't say to someone in person.

2. Did I check for spelling mistakes?
   Check your spelling to show that you care about your email, and that you are not in a rush.

3. Did I use capital letters correctly?
   Be careful when using UPPERCASE letters. It's like SHOUTING.

Directions

Help Max edit his message. Use the questions above to help you. Then add one sentence.

TO: joe@mainstreet.com
FROM: max@myschool.edu
SUBJECT: my birthday

Dear Uncle Joe,

HOW ARE YOU? why don't u rite to me?

Send me a video game for my birthday.

From,
Guess Who

Lesson Assessment

Name	Class	Date

1. Which is an example of being respectful?

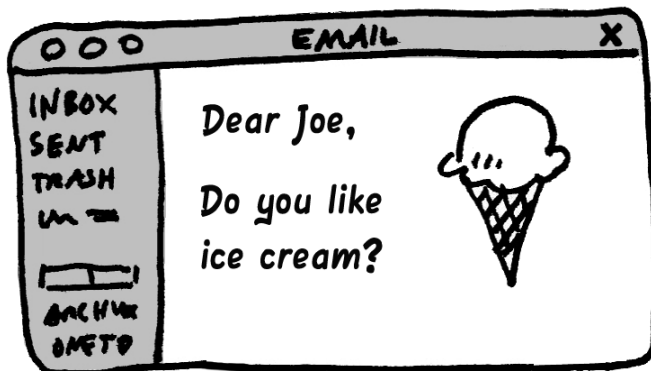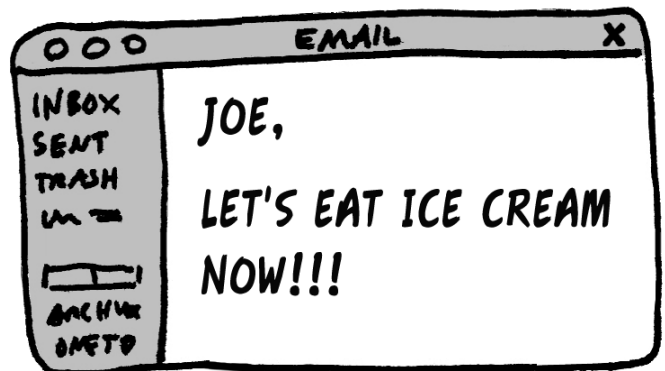a)   b)   c)

a) Shouting if someone does not agree with what you are saying

b) Taking turns talking

c) Making sure your shoes are tied

2. Which message is polite? Circle your answer.

Message a)
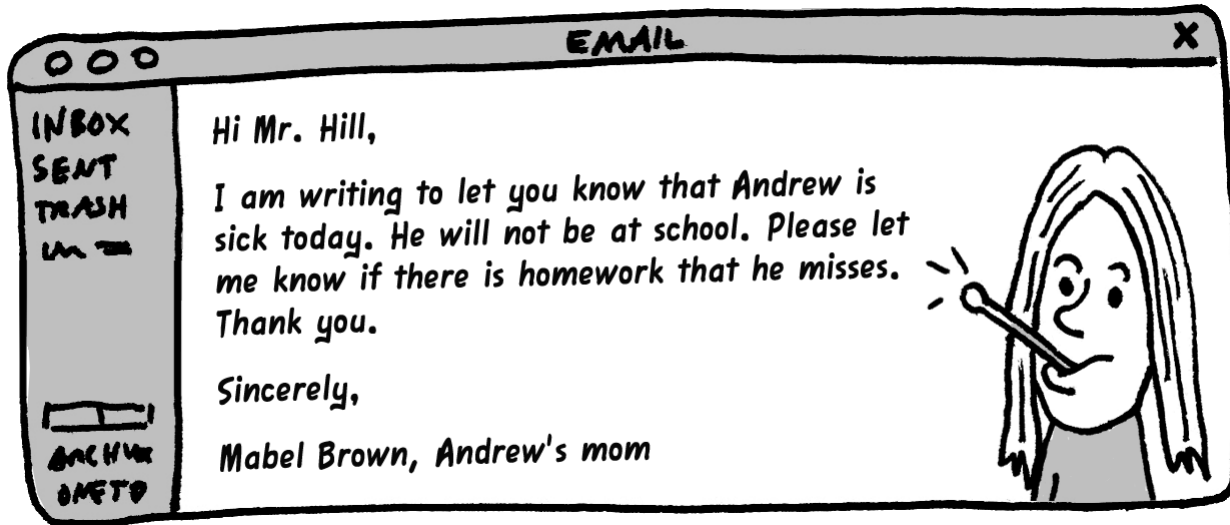A message that is written in lowercase and UPPERCASE letters

Message b)
A message with only UPPERCASE letters

3. What is the best subject line for the email below?

EMAIL

INBOX
SENT
TRASH

Hi Mr. Hill,

I am writing to let you know that Andrew is sick today. He will not be at school. Please let me know if there is homework that he misses. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mabel Brown, Andrew's mom

a) Thank you

b) Sick today

c) Let me know

Lesson Assessment

1. Which is an example of being respectful?

a)   b)   c)

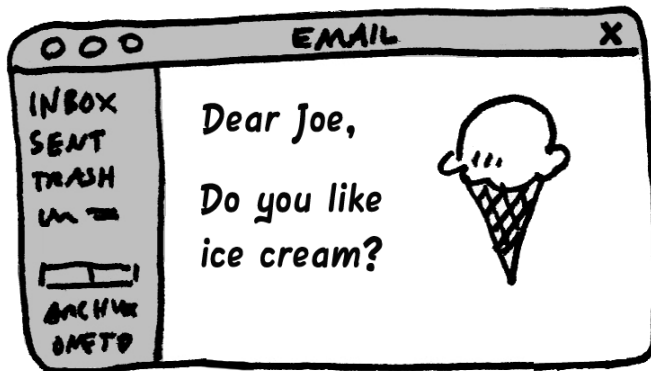a) Shouting if someone does not agree with what you are saying

b) Taking turns talking

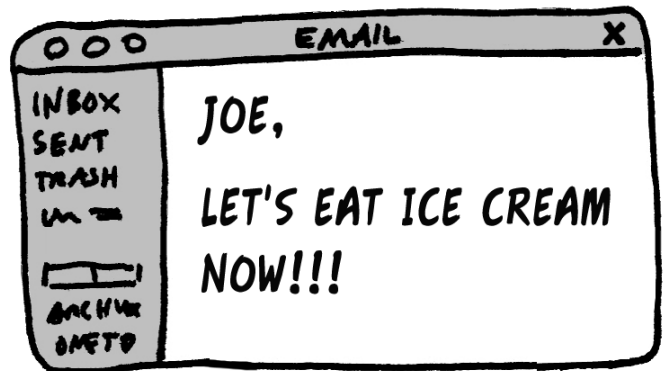c) Making sure your shoes are tied

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **b**. It is respectful to others to take turns talking. Shouting to get your point across is rude. Tying your shoes is important, but is not a sign of respect.

2. Which message is polite? Circle your answer.

Message a)
A message that is written in lowercase and UPPERCASE letters

Message b)
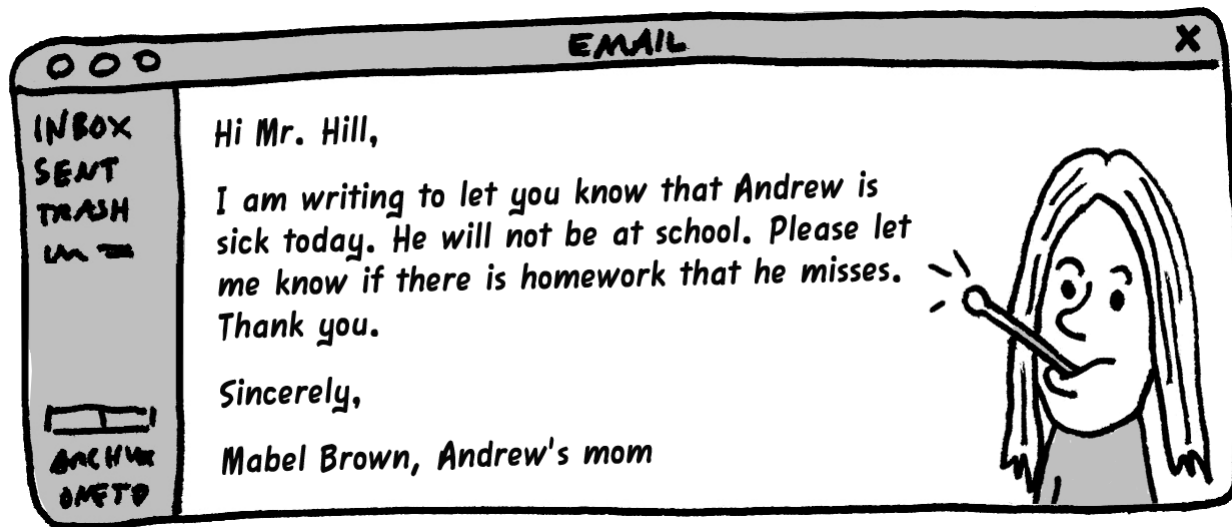A message with only UPPERCASE letters

Answer feedback

You should have circled message **a**. A polite email is not written in all UPPERCASE letters. Writing in all UPPERCASE is like shouting at someone in a message.

3. **What is the best subject line for the email below?**

Hi Mr. Hill,

I am writing to let you know that Andrew is sick today. He will not be at school. Please let me know if there is homework that he misses. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mabel Brown, Andrew's mom

a) Thank you

b) Sick today

c) Let me know

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **b**. Sick today gives a good hint to the teacher about the subject of the email and that this student will not be in school. "Thank you" is polite, but does tell what the email is about. "Let me know" is a little rude and does not tell what the email is about.

Common Sense on Effective Email Communication

Some Facts

- 52 percent of people polled believe that "students are carrying over the writing habits they pick up through text messaging into school assignments" (*Edutopia* online poll, 2008)

- 64 percent of teens ages 12 to 17 said that text abbreviations and symbols made their way into their school assignments (Pew Internet & American Life/National Commission on Writing, 2008)

- Research has shown a relationship between children's knowledge of "text speak" and good performance on standardized tests of reading and writing (Plester, Wood, and Joshi, *British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 2008*)

What's the Issue?

There is a high tolerance for misspellings and stream-of-consciousness ideas in text messages and informal emails. But what happens when kids need to write a formal message? Will they know how to change their writing style to match their audience? Sizing up your audience and making your words match are important skills for students to learn. Teaching our kids to evaluate their audience and create messages accordingly will help them gain more respect from their teachers and win better responses in any formal setting.

common sense says

- **Encourage your children to consider the audience and purpose of their email.** Using a more formal tone with people they have never met is the safest and most respectful way to communicate.

- **Prompt kids to get right to the point.** Most people have a lot of email to sift through. Keeping formal messages to one page is ideal.

- **Stress the importance of writing only what they would say to a person's face.** Anything kids would say over email should be something they are able to say to someone's face.

- **Suggest to children that they use uppercase type only on rare occasions.** Uppercase letters indicate that you are shouting. Kids should use them only if they really want to make a STRONG POINT.

- **Remind kids to proofread.** They should check their spelling, grammar, punctuation, and formatting before sending an email.

- **Coach kids to use emoticons sparingly.** Using smiley faces or exclamation points on occasion can help others understand their meaning in the absence of visual and vocal cues. However, they are usually inappropriate with more formal emails. :)