

Over the past twenty-five years email has become an essential tool in academic communication, providing a fast and efficient means of contact between colleagues, students, and administrators. The ombuds office, however, is aware of role of email, or perhaps the misuse of email, in fostering misunderstanding and conflict among its users. It is a tool that requires care and precision in its use.

For this reason, the Ombuds recommends the following guidelines in email communication:

1. Brevity is essential. Best to keep an email to a brief paragraph. Electronic media are frequently experienced as intrusive, so it is best to limit email to a single and straightforward message.
2. Hence, do not burden your email readers with manifestoes or discussions of complex issues. These are unlikely to be read with careful attention or sympathy.
3. Avoid discussion of potentially divisive or conflict-generating material. Because of the limitations inherent in the medium itself, these are unlikely to generate understanding.
4. A limitation of email lies in the possibility of the misunderstanding of affective or ironic tone. What appears sympathetic, helpful, or jocular to the writer can be entirely misunderstood by a reader.
5. If responding to a challenging or hostile email, it is always best to delay response and consider alternative ways or responding.
6. Always, always reread an email to insure against wording or tone that can be misunderstood.
7. If in doubt, consider alternative means of communication, in person or by telephone, which afford more reliable affective control and the possibility of immediate discussion.
8. Also note, as a public institution, all UCSB emails may be subject to public disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act. Furthermore, because of the limits of technology, confidentiality cannot be assured in email communication. We strongly recommend against discussion of private or sensitive matters via email.