

The Email Edge:

**101 tips for maximizing the power
and minimizing the hassle of email**

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Foreword

I love email. It's fast, it's flexible, it's fun. That said, email comes with a host of problems ranging from mildly irritating spam to virtually incapacitating viruses. This manual is intended to get you up to 'Net speed so that you can enjoy the advantages and minimize the disadvantages of this wonderful medium.

The 101 tips in this manual have been gathered from my own experience and that of the thousands of people with whom I carry on a personal and professional correspondence. I'd love to include your email tips in future editions of this book. Send them to me at molly@mollygordon.com.

Happy emailing!

Molly Gordon, CPC

June, 2000

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Acknowledgements

One of the joys of the Internet is the culture of knowledge sharing. In that tradition, a number of people contributed their knowledge to this booklet. Chief among them are the members of the [Seattle Chapter of Webgrrls International](#).

Julia Wilkinson, who is working on her own guide to the Internet, contributed valuable tips. When her book goes online, I'll post a link to it on my Web site in the [Resources](#) section.

Readers of my email newsletter, [The New Leaf](#), also contributed pet peeves and usability tips.

In spite of the best efforts of these fine folks, errors are bound to have crept into the text. I take full responsibility for these, and will value your corrections. Send them to molly@mollygordon.com.

How to Use this Booklet

There are a number of email programs on the market, and some programs are available for a number of platforms (Windows, Mac, Linux). In order to serve the greatest number of readers, I give general instructions for using these programs, which—supplemented by judicious references to your manual—will get you pointed in the right direction. You'll get the best results from this book (and all of your software) if you develop the habit of exploring the menus in your programs, selecting different items, and discovering what you can do to tailor your software to your needs.

I have included numerous links to Web sites where you can get up-to-the-minute information about email programs, virus protection, and related matters. These links are indicated by blue text, as in the names of search engines on the next page. If you read this manual on your computer's monitor while you are connected to the Internet, you'll be able to click on the links and go directly to the corresponding Web sites.

The Internet is a dynamic environment. Links change constantly. In addition, popular sites may be temporarily inaccessible due to the intense user activity. If a link does not work right away, try it again in a few minutes and then on the following day. If it still does not work, try other links or use one of the popular search engines and directories, such as:

[Lycos](#)

[Hotbot](#)

[Alta Vista](#)

[Ask Jeeves](#)

[Google](#)

[Yahoo](#)

[Infoseek](#)

Most search engines have Help sections that will teach you how to search effectively. Investing 10 or 15 minutes at the beginning of your search to learn how to use each search engine can save you hours of weeding through irrelevant results. A good tutorial is [Bare Bones 101](#), which defines a search engine, gives searching tips, and goes through the features of some of the major engines.

At the end of the booklet, you'll find a Bibliography of references available from your local bookseller or computer store or online through the links to Amazon.com. Sometimes there's just no substitute for an old-fashioned book.

I trust you will use this booklet as a starting point for mastering the art and science of email so that you can use this tool to live on purpose and prosper. I welcome your suggestions and tips: send them to me at molly@mollygordon.com for inclusion in future editions of this booklet.

101 Tips

Getting an Email Program

1. If you do not already have an email program, or if you want to be sure you have the latest version of your program, visit one of the following sites to download software.
2. Download [Eudora Lite and Eudora Pro](#).
3. Download Microsoft [Outlook and Outlook Express](#).
4. Download [Pegasus Mail](#).

Headers

5. Headers contain information about the sender, the recipient, and the subject. It's important to know what a header and its component fields are so that you can protect your correspondents' privacy (Tip 11), use filters to manage high volumes of email efficiently (Tip 9), and keep conversations threaded (Tips 9 and 10).
6. Extended headers include information about how a particular email traveled from the originating computer to the destination computer. (See Tip 68.)
7. To: This is where you put the email address of the person you are writing.
8. From: Configure your email program to show your real name in the From field so that it is easy for correspondents to identify messages from you.
Jo5k3@mysterymail.com is simply not enough information! Look under such menus as Tools, Options or (sometimes) Edit for items like Settings or

Preferences. Click on such items to configure your return address. (See also Tips 43-45.)

9. **Subject:** This field is the key to effectively threading and filtering messages.
10. **CC:** This is the equivalent of sending a carbon copy by conventional mail and of advising each recipient of the identity of all the other recipients. Use this only when each recipient needs to know the identity of every other recipient.
11. Use the **Subject** field to summarize the content of your message. When you reply to a message, your email program automatically keeps the same subject that was used in the incoming message. If your message is on a different topic, remember to change the subject.
12. **BCC:** This is the equivalent of sending a blind carbon by conventional mail. Use this field whenever you are sending a message to multiple recipients who are not known to each other and/or who have no need to know of each other's receipt of the message. In most email programs you can leave the **TO** field blank when you use the **BCC** field.

Netiquette

13. Netiquette is the online equivalent of etiquette, and it is important for the same reasons. The rules of netiquette support civil discourse, respect for other users, and good will. Good netiquette conserves resources so that the Information Super Highway does not become the Information Super Dump.
14. Check your email at least once a day. You can configure your program to check the mail automatically. Look under Preferences, Settings, Tools or Options.

15. If you start a conversation or initiate an action by email, be prepared to follow through in the same mode and in a timely manner. That means checking and answering email at least once daily and letting a correspondent know (by email) if you are shifting to another channel, such as phone or a meeting to complete a project.
16. Subject email jokes and witticisms to the same taste test you would use for cartoons on your office door.
17. Email tends to be brief and informal and it lacks the context–body language, intonation, and facial expressions–of phone conversations or face-to-face communication. Think about how your message may come across and be prepared to clear up misunderstandings graciously.
18. Be tolerant and think twice before reacting harshly to an email message. Chances are the person who appears rude, pushy, or ignorant is every bit as lovely as you are. Give your correspondents the benefit of the doubt and avoid flame wars.
19. Refrain from saying anything in email that you would not say to someone’s face. If you’re all fired up when you write an email, let it sit for a day before you send it. Some programs have a Draft box that’s ideal for this purpose.
20. Use upper and lower case letters in your emails. **IT IS HARDER TO READ ALL CAPS AND USING THEM (EXCEPT FOR A FEW WORDS AT A TIME, SUCH AS IN HEADINGS OR FOR EMPHASIS) IS THE EMAIL EQUIVALENT OF SHOUTING.**
21. Quoting is the practice of keeping all or part of an original message in the reply. Quote all pertinent material so that the recipient can follow your train of thought.

22. When quoting, delete any extraneous material so that your response is no longer than necessary. (Long messages take longer to download, take more time to read, use up more screen real estate, and take more paper when printed.)
23. Don't use the Reply to All command unless you really want to reach everyone who received the initial message.
24. Double-check your settings to make sure that your default reply mode is not Reply to All.
25. Many viruses proliferate through email attachments, with the results that many experienced email users will not open a message with an attachment unless they are expecting it and know the sender. Keep this in mind and let folks know in advance if you plan to send them mail with an attachment. (See Tips 54-61 for more information about email attachments.)
26. Double-check the email address of the outgoing message when you Reply to a listserv message. Is your response going to the individual who posted? The whole list? Both? Every list handles this differently and it is easy (as I know to my regret) to inadvertently send a response to *way* more folks than will be happy to hear from you.
27. When you post to a listserv, be sure that others can reply to you directly. Some listservs suppress your email address when you post to the list (using the listserv address in the From field). Therefore, it is a good idea to include your email address in your signature line.
28. One of the best resources for E-mail and netiquette is Mary Houten-Kemp's [Everything E-Mail](#).
29. Here's another extensive [Netiquette](#) guide.

Keyboard Know How

30. Use your spell checker! Most folks make errors on the keyboard that they would never make in speech or when using pen and paper. In addition, it is notoriously difficult to adequately proof your own work. Use your email program's spell checker. If it does not have one, upgrade!

31. Abbreviations: Email and chat rooms have spawned dozens, perhaps hundreds, of abbreviations. Here are just a few of the most common. If you see an unfamiliar abbreviation, ask the writer what he or she meant.

FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

BTW: by the way

IMHO: in my humble opinion

ROTFL: rolling on the floor laughing

LOL: laughing out loud

TTYL: talk to you later

32. Smileys or emoticons are images made from standard keyboard characters that are intended to convey facial expressions. Some examples:

:-) a smile

;-) a smile with a wink

Be sparing in your use of these until you ascertain that your correspondents appreciate them.

33. Want to know more about abbreviations and smileys? There's a glossary of email acronyms and emoticons at [Everything Email](#).

Forwarding Messages

34. STOP, link to an information site (see those listed in Tip 40), and listen before you forward any email message.
35. Consider copyright laws before you forward written material. A good rule of thumb is to always ask the author before forwarding his or her work. If you cannot identify the author, don't forward it.
36. Refrain from forwarding chain letters. They are as unwelcome (and as illegal) in email boxes as they are at the post office.
37. Ask your correspondents if they are interested before forwarding your favorite joke. Not everyone appreciates an inbox full of jokes, and some employers may discourage receipt of this sort of mail at work.
38. When you forward an email, your program automatically inserts a quote symbol, usually a >, in front of each line to distinguish the original material from anything you might have inserted. This means that every time an email gets forwarded, another > gets added, until your very important notice about this week's meeting looks like:
 - > > > > Don't forget our monthly book club meeting
 - > > > > Thursday. Bring something terrific for dessert,
 - > > > > and finish the book.
 - > > > > We meet at 6 PM
 - > > > > at Josie's,
 - > > > > 12345 12th Street
 - > > > > 999-999-0000

That's irritatingly hard to read. Prevent it by copying and pasting the text you want to forward into a new message.

39. You can forward email without quotes using Redirect and Send Again commands. These commands re-send a message *as if it were coming from the original sender*. Your software may use different names for these commands. Check your manual for details.
40. Want to forward something that is already full of those irritating symbols, and don't have the time to clean it up yourself? Use the free [Format-It Utility](#) online to remove the symbols in a jiffy.
41. In six years on the Internet, I have never received an effective, valid email petition. Before you forward petitions, however worthy they sound, check out their legitimacy. Some petitions are good ideas gone bad. Some are downright hoaxes. To find out which one you have, make a quick trip to one of the following sites:

[The Department of Energy Computer Incident Advisory Capability](#)

[Symantec Anti Virus Research Center](#)

[The Urban Legends Web Site](#)

[Urban Legends Reference Pages](#)

[Datafellows Hoax Warnings](#)

If you don't have time to check it out, why would you think anyone else has the time to read it?

Formatting

42. Choose fonts and sizes conservatively. That fancy font may not even exist on someone else's system. Avoid using italics, light colors, and small type sizes—all of which make messages hard to read. (Note to PC users. Type shows up smaller on a Macintosh than on a PC. Have mercy on your Mac correspondents and avoid type sizes smaller than 10 points.)
43. Use a signature file to identify yourself to your correspondents and, at your option, to make a concise personal or business statement or to make it easy for folks to contact you by including your phone number.
44. Avoid signature lines longer than five or six lines. Long files take up screen space and are considered to be rude.
45. Do create different signature files for different uses. Then you can sign off with an informal "Bye" in personal emails or with a professional flourish in business messages.
46. Use filters to sort email into useful categories and manage your time. You'll find out how by looking in your documentation (or checking the Web site of your program's manufacturer).
47. Create groups or distribution lists to streamline sending email to your book club, work group, or swim team.
48. Test group emails or emails with new formatting in them by sending them to yourself first. This way you can find out how your messages will really look to the recipients. Remember, though, that you cannot predict how things will look on different platforms or in different software.

49. Short lines of text are easier to read than long lines. Set your program to a line length of 60 to 80 to strike a balance that is readable without making your messages look like blank verse.
50. Use stationery (pre-formatted letters) for things you send over and over, such as directions to your office or how to subscribe to your email newsletter.
51. Those long lines in Netscape's Mail window are not the fault of your correspondents. Fix them yourself by pulling down under View in the menu bar and check the Wrap Long Lines option. Your long lines will immediately do a nice wrap around. (There are similar fixes in other programs.)
52. Avoid the temptation to send HTML formatted email. While HTML gives your messages graphic interest, most folks don't want to sacrifice the time it takes to download those bigger files. There is also some increased risk of virus transmission when you send HTML formatted messages. (See Tip 83.)
53. If you must use HTML in your messages, ask your correspondents first if they will accept them.

Attachments

54. Attachments are the bane of many an email user. They can carry viruses, tie up system resources while they are being downloaded, or simply prove impossible to open, or, if they can be opened, impossible to read. Learn as much as you can about attachments before you use them so you can use them effectively. (See Tips 74-91 for more information about viruses.)
55. Many corporate email servers are protected by firewalls— security software and hardware that are designed to prevent access by hackers or infected files. Some

- firewalls will not allow *any* attachment in. If you have an important attachment to send, let your correspondent know it is coming, ask what file type to send, and ask for confirmation that it was received intact and readable.
56. Avoid sending files with an .exe or .vbs extension. (Extensions are the three letter codes that appear after the period in a file name.) These types of extensions designate program files, which have the capacity to carry viruses.
 57. Avoid sending Word files as attachments unless you are certain that you do not have a macro virus. It's best to err on the side of caution as it is possible to pass on a virus without knowing your machine is infected.
 58. The safest and most universally readable file formats for sending attachments are: PDF, RTF, TXT, and HTML for text and GIF and JPG for graphics. The three letter designations of these formats sometimes show up as file extensions. (See Tip 55.)
 59. Check the file size of your attachments and get an advance okay before sending files larger than about 900k. Some Internet Service Providers (ISPs) automatically reject files over a certain size, and you might never realize your attachments were dropped.
 60. Use a file compression program to minimize file size, speed transmission and, some folks say, prevent file corruption en route. For the Mac, try Stuffit Lite (shareware) or Stuffit Deluxe from [Aladdin](#). For PCs, use a Zip utility, such as [WinZip](#). To explore other options, browse the Computers and Internet area of [Yahoo](#).
 61. There's an extensive tutorial about attachments online at [Emailman.com](#).

Security

62. Do not send credit card numbers via email. Although the chances of your message being intercepted are less than the chance that your waiter will steal your credit card number next time you charge lunch, it's just not smart. One workaround: send half the number in one email, half in another. This reduces odds of interception to virtually zero.
63. Instead of sending credit card information by email, try online payment services such as [PayPal](#). Sign up using this URL and you and I each get \$5. An even better reason to sign up is that [PayPal](#) offers a simple, secure way to pay bills or reimburse friends for that lunch they bought last week.

Spam

64. Spam is the widely despised email equivalent of junk mail. It is loosely defined as unwanted and unsolicited email.
65. This should be obvious: do NOT send bulk unsolicited email and expect to make money doing so. Effective marketing builds relationships. Spam destroys them before they are born.
66. As a general rule, do not divulge your email address unless you are willing to receive email as a result. Bonus Tip: Use a separate email address (perhaps a free email account such as those available from [Yahoo](#) or [Hotmail](#)) for all those Web sites that require registration. Then filter incoming mail for that address to a separate file.
67. Many Web sites and offline media such as warranty cards ask for your email address and give you an opportunity to “opt in” or “opt out” of email solicitations.

Read these forms carefully to be sure what your options are. Pay special attention to the check boxes and radio buttons in forms you fill out on the web.

68. An important way to stop spam is to forward the offending message—with all of the headers intact—to the service provider, if you can ascertain who that is. Many spammers use false email addresses and other disguises that make it difficult for the average person to track them down. (See Tip 6.)
69. Be careful when you submit your Web site to search engines. Some, such as FFA (Free for All) appear to be fronts for collecting email addresses and sending spam—lots of spam.
70. If you want to be really effective in the battle against spam, you can learn about the laws in each state at [The Email Abuse Center](#).
71. Report email fraud to the [Federal Trade Commission](#) or the [National Consumer Complaint Center](#).
72. Visit and use the resources at the [Email Abuse Center](#). The resources include a glossary, information about identifying and reporting email abusers, and tips for preventing abuse.
73. Opt-out. Here's a [handy site](#) you can use to notify marketers that you want to be removed from their mailing lists.

Viruses

74. Email viruses are a fact of life on the Internet. It is essential that you learn how to avoid catching and spreading these critters. Start by investing in an anti-virus program ([McAfee](#), [Symantec](#)) and run it as a matter of course.

75. Read your anti-virus program documentation and learn how to use it as well as how to keep it updated.
76. Software companies update email programs with new versions or with patches to fight new viruses as they appear. Keep your email program updated with the latest patches and anti-virus features.
77. Never open an attachment unless you know what it is. Many viruses replicate in the address books of email programs, and they will arrive at your inbox attached to a message that appears to be coming to you from friends or colleagues. If you receive an unexpected attachment—even from someone you know well—email him or her and ask what it is before you open it. (See Tips 54-61 for more information about attachments.)
78. Do not open or run an attachment with a .vbs or .exe extension unless you know what it will do to your system. (See Tips 56 and 58.)
79. You must execute a program in order to contract a virus. This is why email attachments are so problematic, as a program must be launched to open and read the attachment. Configure your email programs to alert you before automatically previewing or opening attachments. (See Tip 81.)
80. Know that simply reading the text of an email is harmless as long as you are not automatically opening or activating any attached files. You can be pretty sure a virus warning is a hoax if it claims that simply opening an email will destroy the world. (See Tip 86.)
81. In Microsoft Outlook, turn off the Preview Pane to prevent attachments from opening without your okay. On the View menu, click Layout or Preview Pane to

- toggle the Preview Pane off. Under the Tools menu, Options, Read tab, turn off the option for automatically downloading messages in the preview pane.
82. On a PC running Windows, disable your Windows Scripting Host. For most people it is not needed. If you later find you need it, it can be reinstalled from this same window. To disable Windows Scripting Host on your desktop:
- Enter Start/Settings/Control Panel.
 - Open Add/Remove Programs
 - Choose the Windows Setup tab.
 - Double-click on Accessories and make sure Windows Scripting Host is deselected (no checkmark).
83. HTML email messages can carry such viruses as the KAK virus. This is one more reason to avoid HTML formatting unless you have an over-riding business purpose for using it *and* you have verified that recipient wants messages in that format. (For more information about formatting emails, see Tips 42-53.)
84. If you have Microsoft Outlook Express, you are especially vulnerable to the KAK.hta virus, among others. Make it a point to regularly download updates at [Microsoft's Web site](#).
85. Learn more about what a virus is at this [CNET page](#).
86. It's just as important to understand what viruses are not. [Common virus hoaxes](#) .
87. [McAfee](#) sells anti-virus software for PCs and has an extensive anti-virus library online.
88. Symantec's Web site provides information about common viruses and anti-virus software for both Macintosh and PC computers. Visit Symantec's [worldwide](#) home page or the [US](#) site.

89. If you simply cannot afford anti-virus software (how can you afford not to?), try [Freeware Virus Protection Programs](#), listed under Utilities, Anti-virus.
90. For security-related information about Microsoft products, please visit the [Microsoft Security Advisor](#) web site.
91. For more virus protection information, visit:
 - [The Lycos Virus Protection Center](#)
 - [Symantec AntiVirus Research Center](#)
 - [McAfee Virus Information Library](#)

Learning More

92. [Eudora](#) official technical support.
93. [Microsoft](#) official technical support.
94. [Pegasus](#) official technical support.
95. You'll find unofficial (but often excellent) support for a variety of programs, at www.emailman.com.
96. [Eudora online tutorial](#).
97. [Outlook online tutorial](#).
98. Learn how to use Pine or Elm text-based email applications from Patrick Crispen's Roadmap 96 [Email Tutorial](#).

99. Broaden your knowledge of email and other Internet applications with a variety of good tutorials at the [WebReference Internet Tutorial](#) page.

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[E-Mail Security: How to Keep Your Electronic Messages Private](#) by Bruce Schneier

About the Author

Molly Gordon is a Certified Professional Coach. Her practice is devoted to men and women who are ready to play their bigger game: to build lives full of meaning and prosperity. Since 1996, she has coached dozens of clients through personal and professional transformation. Her unique coaching style is informed by her experience as a business owner and artist as well as her lifetime commitment to service and creativity.



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A Word about Coaching

I support my clients to live lives of meaning and prosperity. Learn more about coaching at my [Web site](#). When you are ready to transform your life, [email me](#), for a complimentary sample session. Until then, please accept my heartfelt good wishes.