

KHANYA EMAIL POLICY

Since email is the main medium of communication internally in Khanya, as well as between Khanya staff members and schools and other stakeholders, it is necessary to adhere to certain email usage principles. Internal email correspondence is often printed and filed and used at a later stage and should therefore reflect a high quality at all times. Correspondence with Khanya stakeholders likewise should reflect a high degree of professionalism.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Electronic Communication Policy document of the Provincial Government of the Western Cape, which governs official email use. The Khanya Email Policy does not replace this Policy, but augments it in the sense that it provides additional principles which all Khanya staff must adhere to while engaged in official Khanya duties, regardless of whether state or their own equipment is used.

The objectives of the Khanya Email Policy are to ensure that all Khanya staff will:

- Convey a professional image to our stakeholders
- Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our communication
- Avoid unnecessary wastage of valuable time

The basic principles are presented under the following headings:

- Professional use of emails
- Courtesy
- Effectiveness (doing the right thing)
- Efficiency (doing things right)

PROFESSIONAL USE OF EMAILS

- 1 **Use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation.** Improper spelling, grammar and punctuation portray an unprofessional impression; it also makes reading difficult and can even change the meaning or obscure the meaning of the text. Use the spell checker to ensure that all words are spelled correctly. Since Khanya staff members are seen as representatives of an education department, there is an expectation that they possess the ability to write properly.
- 2 **Avoid abbreviations and emoticons.** Even though abbreviations and contractions are becoming common (eg “fyi” for “for your information, or “b4” for “before”) these should be avoided. Your reader may not understand the abbreviation and it may detract from the professional image one wants to portray. The same holds true for emoticons (eg smiley faces: ☺). Acronyms should only be used if one is sure that the reader will understand it.

- 3 **Avoid sending an incomplete email.** One may accidentally press the send button before an email is completed and properly edited. An easy way to avoid such a disaster is to delay filling in the TO email address until one is certain that the email is in a fit state to be sent.
- 4 **Read the email before you send it.** Many people do not bother to read an email before they send it, as is evident from the many spelling, typing, grammatical and other errors contained in their messages. Reading the email before it is sent gives one the opportunity to correct these mistakes. It is also useful to reflect on the tone of the message.
- 5 **Do not indiscriminately forward emails.** People use different tones when corresponding with their colleagues, superiors or other stakeholders. It may also contain confidential material. It is therefore inappropriate simply to forward a message to others without considering the consequences carefully. As a rule, no message should be forwarded unless one has scrutinized the message carefully and considered what the effect on the recipient would be, and what image of Khanya would be portrayed by the particular message. Before forwarding an email, make sure that the person has not already been copied in on that same message.

COURTESY

- 1 **Observe basic rules of courtesy.** Use terms such as “please” and “thank you” where appropriate.
- 2 **Use the proper form of address.** Address people in the way one would in a letter: Mr, Mrs, Dr, etc in the case of people one does not know, and using the first name only when one is sure it is in order to do so.
- 3 **Write in an acceptable tone.** Tone can be defined as an “accent or inflection expressive of a mood or emotion”. While it is difficult to reflect tone in writing, one wants to make sure to come across as respectful, friendly and approachable; a curt, demanding and rude tone must be avoided.
- 4 **Use a proper structure and layout.** Since reading from a screen is more difficult than reading from paper, one must use a structure that improves readability. Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph. When making a number of points, use numbering or bullet points.
- 5 **Do not write in capitals.** IF ONE WRITES IN CAPITALS IT SEEMS AS IF ONE IS SHOUTING. This can be highly annoying and trigger an unwanted irate response. Likewise, remember the rule to use only one exclamation mark (! is as effective as !!!!!) when it is deemed necessary to use at all.
- 6 **Do not forward chain letters.** It is against the policy of the Provincial Government of the Western Cape to use its email facilities to forward chain letters (including hoaxes and other spam). Furthermore, it wastes valuable time of Khanya staff. It is therefore important to refrain from sending such

emails to Khanya colleagues or other stakeholders, regardless of whether one is using departmental or one's own email facilities. Likewise, do not respond to any such mail.

- 7 **Do not send emails containing objectionable remarks.** Do not send emails containing libelous, defamatory, racist, sexist or otherwise offensive remarks. Only one such message may result in judicial action against one. Even just forwarding an email containing such comments may make one reprehensible.
- 8 **Use a gender-neutral language.** Avoid using language that may be portrayed as sexist by not using pronouns such as he, she, him, his, or her unless one refers to a particular individual. Some people are very sensitive to this issue and one wishes to avoid confrontation wherever possible.

EFFECTIVENESS (doing the right things)

- 1 **When responding to another email, answer all questions asked.** If all questions in the original email are not answered, further emails will be sent regarding the unanswered questions, resulting in a waste of time of both parties.
- 2 **Reply to emails promptly.** One corresponds by email because of the expectation of a quick response. Respond within 24 hours. If one thinks that it may take more time to gather the required information to respond, send an email to inform the other party that the matter is receiving attention, indicating when a response could be expected.
- 3 **Be selective in sending attachments.** Do not include an attachment unless it is absolutely essential. In the case of very large Word or Excel files, make an extract of the relevant part of the file and only send that with the email.
- 4 **Include the message thread.** When replying to an email, include the original mail in the reply (use the reply option, rather than new mail). The thread reminds the reader about previous correspondence. It would, however, be a courtesy to edit out superfluous text, such as disclaimers, or >>>>> characters, to make the message shorter and easier to read.
- 5 **Use a meaningful subject header.** Use a unique subject that is meaningful to the recipient and oneself, and that would clearly identify the message from others. This saves time if one searches for a specific message, particularly if there is frequent email communication between two parties. If similar messages are sent regularly, one may consider including the date in the subject header. Refrain from replying to an email message using the same subject header as the original message when the reply no longer relates to the subject heading.

EFFICIENCY (doing things right)

- 1 **Be concise and to the point.** Do not make an email longer than it needs to be. Keep in mind that reading an email is more difficult than reading printed communication and a long message may be skimmed over and not receive the attention one would desire.
- 2 **Avoid long sentences.** Try to keep sentences to a maximum of 15 – 20 words. Email is meant to be a quick medium and requires a different kind of writing than letters.
- 3 **Do not overuse the high priority option.** Remembering the story of the boy who cried wolf, one must use the high priority option with due consideration, since it becomes meaningless if overused and will then be ignored when really needed. Similarly, avoid using words such as URGENT or IMPORTANT in the subject header, since overuse of such terms defeats its purpose in the long run.
- 4 **Do not overuse the reply requested option.** This option should only be used when a reply is required by a specific date in important instances. Otherwise it becomes meaningless, and becomes an annoyance when trying to delete the message without having replied.
- 5 **Do not overuse the reply to all option.** Only use this option when one really needs the message to be seen by each person who received the original message. A lot of time is wasted in opening and reading emails that contain responses that are of no real interest to one.
- 6 **Copy or blind copy only when necessary.** Consider carefully before copying email to someone. It has become a practice of some to copy emails to long lists of people who may only have a marginal interest in the topic. Only copy the message if one expects a response, or when it is important for the person to take note of the contents of the message. It may be good to check with one's colleagues to determine who wishes to receive copies of one's communications. When replying to a blind copy message, be careful not to use the reply to all option, since it could embarrass the original sender.
- 7 **Copy emails to relevant stakeholders.** The flip side of point 6 above is that one must ensure that all relevant stakeholders are copied when sending an email. Consider whether the recipient of the email would possibly forward it to someone else for action and then save everyone the time by copying this person in on the message. The point about inclusion (or exclusion) of a person in your communication is that it requires careful forethought.