

# Tips for Email Success and Accessibility

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## Font Size and Color

### Fonts should be 15px at a minimum

Smaller fonts are difficult to read, especially on mobile devices.

### Be aware of color contrast

For text to be readable it needs to have sufficient contrast with the background. In addition to color vision deficiency in some users, screens vary widely in size, resolution and contrast and may be viewed in a variety of lighting conditions. **For ideal readability and accessibility, use black text on white background.**

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## Make Your Email Scannable

Users rarely read emails (or anything digital) word by word. Rather, they scan the page for words, headlines, keywords, etc. This is done the same through assistive technology, which allows the user to tab through headers quickly to give context before they read in more detail.

### Use paragraph returns and/or subheadings

Chunk your text into topics and short paragraphs.

### Use bulleted lists where appropriate

Bulleted lists break up and/or shorten large blocks of text, make complex information more understandable and highlight key points.

## Avoid center-aligned or justified paragraphs

Most users scan top to bottom and left to right. Left-aligned paragraphs are easiest for all to read, while center-aligned or justified text/buttons can often be difficult for people with dyslexia to read.

## Use bolding to highlight important words or phrases

Call out important words or phrases so that users scanning can identify context quickly.

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# Links and Buttons

## Clearly indicate what is a link

- Links should always be indicated by a color different from the body text, and with high enough contrast so that it stands out from the body text. (Simmons standard is blue or hex value: #0a60b0)
- **In addition** - links should be indicated by a secondary indicator: bold, underline or symbol (>).

## Link text should be meaningful

Write link text so that it describes the content of the link target. Avoid using ambiguous link text, such as “here”, “click here”, “website”, “form”, etc.:

- ✗ To sign an image waiver, visit University Communications [here](#).
- ✓ Visit University Communications to complete an [image waiver form](#).

- ✗ Students who want to register are invited to fill out this [form](#).
- ✓ Interested students can register now for [Fun Movie Fridays](#).

When linking to email addresses, indicate who/where the email is going:

- ✗ If you have questions, please contact University Communications [via email](#) or at 617-521-2110.
- ✓ If you have questions, please [email University Communications](#) or call 617-521-2110.

## Social media handles should be live links

When referencing a person's social media profile, make the profile name a live link to the profile page.

- ✗ Follow us @SimmonsUniv
- ✓ Follow us [@SimmonsUniv](#)

## Button link text

Avoid using "click here for" in your button link text. The action is implicit.

✗ Not Recommended:

CLICK HERE FOR ZOOM LINK

✓ Good:

ZOOM LINK

✓ Better:

OPEN HOUSE ZOOM LINK

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# Headings

## Avoid using link colors or underline to denote headings

If your heading is NOT a link, don't use your link color or underlining to show headings as these may be confused for links.

### ✘ Academics

For more than a century, Simmons University has offered pioneering undergraduate and graduate programs that combine theory, practice, and real-world experience that will challenge you to see more broadly, think more deeply, and prepare you for leadership in the world.

### ✘ The journey starts here

Located in the heart of Boston, Simmons is home to a respected women's undergraduate program, as well as coeducational graduate programs in nursing and health sciences, liberal arts, business, communications, social work, public health, and library and information science.

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# Images

## Alt Text

Use an ALT attribute for all images. The ALT attribute attached to an image displays when the image doesn't load to help the user "see" the email if they have images off or if they are using a screen reader to read the email.

To correctly use the ALT attribute, the context of the image must be fully understood in relation to the content surrounding it.

- Describe the image as specifically as possible.
- Keep it short - under 125 characters.
- Don't include "image of", "picture of", etc.

✗ Not Recommended: "lab classroom"

✗ Not Recommended: "picture of lab instruction"

✓ Okay: "Student and faculty member working together in a scientific lab"

✓ Good: "Simmons student and faculty member working together in a scientific lab on campus"



## Don't use images of text

**Unless it is the use of a logo or wordmark.**

Images of text for the sake of design (e.g., text overlaying a photo or stylized section headings) are not recommended. Users with images turned off or who are using assistive technology may miss some of the content/messaging. If you do use images with text, make sure to use the ALT attribute to describe the text.

## Infographics, Data Tables and Event Flyers

Images with lots of information (e.g., infographics, event flyers or tables/graphs) should be fully explained in the body of the email.

- Infographics should be linked to an accessible or plain text version.
- For tables/graphs, provide an explanation of what the data set is meant to communicate to the user.
- Event flyers can be included, but should be presented as a thumbnail-style image to accompany the full event information. Another option is to include graphic elements from the flyer to create a look/feel similar to the flyer.
  - The ALT text for a flyer should be “flyer of event/program/etc” since the content of should be included in the email itself

## Building a Great Email

### Planning and Strategy

- What is the goal of your campaign?
- How will you measure success?
- What is your audience/segment?

Your target audience can be based on program interests, geolocation, engagement activity, etc. Segment your audience to maximize results.

### Write With Your Audience in Mind

**Shorten up your copy.** Don't use academic language and excessive acronyms. The text should be more conversational.

## **Use bolding and bullets to make the content easily scannable.**

Remember that you have mere seconds to grab attention. Most people do not read emails in detail, they scan them.

**Include a main “call to action”.** This is what you want the recipient to do once they receive the email. Make your call to action specific. Buttons make great calls to action.

## **Don't use long URLs.**

✗ <https://www.simmons.edu/maps-directions/parking/parking-commuter-students-faculty-and-staff>

✓ Link words instead: [parking options and application forms](#)

## **Craft Your Content**

**Shorten up your copy.** Don't use academic language and excessive acronyms. The text should be more conversational.

**News stories/interviews/profiles are archived from the website after 5 years.** So any story about a student, alum, or faculty member should be current. Look for these when reviewing copy.

**Update old content on faculty members** who have left or are emeriti.

**Personalization.** How will you be delivering content relevant to your subscribers?

**Your [calls-to-action](#) (CTAs).** Are they strong and compelling?

- Your [subject line](#), sender name, and preview text. Do they work together to encourage subscribers to open?
- Use a recognizable and consistent **“from” name and address.**

- Verify that your **reply-to address** is friendly and active (i.e., not [donotreply@brand.com](mailto:donotreply@brand.com)).

## Subject Lines

Front load the subject line with the most relevant part. Don't bury the point of the email at the end of a subject line. Keep in mind that mobile devices have shorter subject line space.

**Make your reader curious.** For example - ask a question

**Be specific instead of vague.** Let them know what's in the email.

**Use urgency—sparingly.**

**Avoid the fake RE: or FWD:** We've all received these emails, and they are so annoying!

**Stop shouting.** Don't use all caps or excessive exclamation points.

**Humor your audience.** If you can find a way to be funny that's appropriate, give it a try.

**Focus on your subscriber**

[Emily McGuire](#), Principal of [Flourish & Grit](#), shares her best tip to polish your subject line game:

"Start injecting the word 'you' into subject lines more. As marketers, our job is to make it really easy for people to say yes. Making it obvious for your subscribers to see themselves in your copy will do just that."

1. Subject lines are commonly written with the brand as the subject making it more about the brand than the subscriber.
2. Subscribers need to know WHY they should open your emails. If it doesn't have anything to do directly with them, why should they care?



3. It's a mental shift that helps you start writing copy that centers your subscriber as the subject instead of you or your business.

## Testing

### Check across browsers and email clients

**Test to make sure an email looks good on the desktop and mobile devices.** Send tests to yourself. Use preview buttons in the email builder you are using.

### Check all links

This is a best practice that is critical. Errors happen, and websites change frequently, so make sure to test your links!

To future proof this, we've set up short URLs called "Go links" for each of the schools that will always stay updated as the website changes.

<https://www.simmons.edu/go/ssw-programs>

<https://www.simmons.edu/go/ssw-events>

<https://www.simmons.edu/go/ssw-faculty>

<https://www.simmons.edu/go/ssw-news>

- Optimize your **preview text**: Use our [preview text hack](#) in cases where copy is too long or short.

## Why you should check your emails before you send them

Have you ever opened an email to find that ...

- A link isn't working?
- Images aren't loading?
- Personalization is wrong?

These email mistakes are just skimming the surface of all the potential mishaps that can happen.

Broken emails lead to a poor subscriber experience; they have the potential to damage your brand and significantly drive down the performance of your emails.

### Phase #1: Planning and strategy

Step one is—and should always be—to determine the goal of your campaign. At the start of your planning phase, ask: what is the goal? Is it to educate your audience, encourage sign ups, or [winback your subscribers](#)?

Some ideas include:

- Education
- Sign ups
- Referrals
- Purchases
- Registrations
- Customer re-engagement

### Phase #2: Craft your content

After you've determined your plan and email strategy, you'll need to create the content of your email. This next phase requires you to think about email copy, email design, and email development—and what the scope of work looks like. Consider:

- **Personalization.** How will you be delivering content relevant to your subscribers?
- **Your [calls-to-action](#) (CTAs).** Are they strong and compelling?
- **Your [subject line](#), sender name, and preview text.** Do they work together to encourage subscribers to open?

Here's a tip from Jaina Mistry, Litmus' Director of Email Marketing:



“Your subject line, sender name, and preview text all work hand-in-hand. Think of your preview text as an extension to your subject line. Craft subject lines and preview text that work together and make sense when read together. And avoid repeating your sender name in your subject line or preview text.”

—Jaina Mistry, Director of Email Marketing at Litmus

Phase #3: Enhance your inbox view

Your inbox view is what subscribers see from your brand or business in their inbox. It will look a little something like this:

And includes your:

- Your subject line
- “From” name and address
- Preview text
- Reply-to address (i.e., not donotreply@brand.com)
- Verified sender logo via [Brand Indicators for Message Identification \(BIMI\)](#), if set up

It’s one of the first things your subscribers see, so you’ll want to make a good impression. Here are some specific things to check:

- Use a recognizable and consistent **“from” name and address**.
- Verify that your **reply-to address** is friendly and active (i.e., not donotreply@brand.com).
- Optimize your **preview text**: Use our [preview text hack](#) in cases where copy is too long or short.

## Phase #4: Optimize your email design

Well-designed emails are essential for engaging your audience and driving results. Consider double-checking these points to ensure your emails are beautiful, actionable—and optimized.

- Check that your email [renders correctly](#) across mobile, desktop, and webmail environments.
- Make sure your [plain-text version](#) is visually attractive and has working links.
- Use [retina images](#) to ensure images load and are not blurry.
- Test [dynamic content](#) and personalization—and ensure you have fallbacks in place.
- Confirm that no images are broken and [ALT text](#) is in place.

- Test in [Dark Mode](#) to make sure your colors aren't inverted.
- Confirm **merge tags** work as intended and have fallbacks.
- Check your **load time**: try to keep under two or three seconds.
- Ensure your email file size is **less than 102KB** (the size at which Gmail will clip your email).
- Ensure your [email is accessible](#) to screen readers and those with visual impairments.

## Phase #5: Prepare your insights

In order to analyze your insights, you'll need to make sure they're set up properly, and that you've confirmed the following:

- **Check your links** to ensure they're working and being tracked appropriately (e.g. UTM parameters, if applicable)
- Add an **analytics code** to your campaign and ensure it's activated.

## Phase #6: Email deliverability

Email deliverability is all about getting your email into your subscriber's inbox (and not spam). Here are some checkpoints to consider:

- Verify your subscribers have **explicit opt-in**.
- Follow all **applicable spam laws** for the countries where your subscribers reside (this varies by country and region).
- Include **company contact information**, including a physical mailing address, to avoid spam filters.
- Check for **spelling and grammar errors**.
- Include a working [unsubscribe link](#).
- Get a **reputation check** of your IP addresses and domain names.
- Run a [Spam Filter Test](#) to ensure email authentication records are in place.