

# Writing a clear text or email

Easy · 10 min to read; 5 min per message · Free

Put what you need in the subject line and first sentence, say who does what by when ("Can you fix the sink by Friday?"), keep paragraphs short, and sign off with how to reach you. For a landlord, boss or school, put important requests in writing and save a copy. Never email passwords or card numbers, and double-check "Reply all" before you hit send.

## YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ The one thing you want the reader to know or do      ☐ Any dates, amounts or photos that back it up

## WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Write a subject line that says what it's about.** It helps the reader know what the message is and decide when to read it. Weak: "Question." Strong: "Kitchen sink leaking, Apt 4B."
- 2 **Open with a greeting ("Dear Ms. Smith" or "Hi Ms. Smith" for someone you don't know well), then your main point in the first sentence.** A good topic sentence organizes everything after it.
- 3 **Say who does what.** Active voice removes confusion about responsibilities: "Can you send the repair person Friday?" not "It needs to be looked at".
- 4 **Use short words, short paragraphs and present tense, and turn several items into a list.**
- 5 **Proofread: standard spelling, punctuation and capitalization; no ALL CAPS and no text abbreviations like "u" in messages to a boss, teacher or landlord.**
- 6 **Sign off with a closing ("Thanks,"), your name and how to reach you, such as your phone number or apartment number.**
- 7 **Before you send, check the To line.** Many people have meant to reply to one person and sent it to a whole group. To be safe, start a new email to the one person.

**Watch out** Email isn't private. Without extra setup it isn't encrypted, and anyone can forward or print it. Never email passwords or credit card or account numbers, and don't write anything that could hurt someone's reputation, including yours.

**DAD NOTE** *Say what you need in the first line. Busy people may not read the second.*

Full lesson: [aptkeys.com/people/clear-communication/writing-a-clear-text-or-email/](https://aptkeys.com/people/clear-communication/writing-a-clear-text-or-email/)

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: Purdue University Online Writing Lab; Digital.gov (U.S. General Services Administration).