# 3 E-writing

Increasingly we write to be read on screen rather than on paper. This chapter looks at the ways in which this affects *what* we write and *how* we write it.

#### **Email**

Email is a medium which has revolutionized the way in which we communicate with each other. It is relatively new and very popular. It is frequently influenced, and sometimes replaced, by social media and texting. Partly as a result of this, it can be used without sufficient thought. In particular it is important to consider:

- 1 Why you are using email.
- 2 The ways in which emails differ from letters and telephone conversations.

These affect:

- how the email is 'topped and tailed'
- the structure of the email
- how attachments are used
- how the email is formatted
- **3** How to use emails as effectively as possible. This involves:
  - perspective
  - reflection
  - response
  - organization
- 4 Email etiquette:
  - formality
  - formatting
  - emotion
  - initialisms
  - context

### Writing for intranets and the web

Increasingly organizations and individuals are replacing paper documents with information and ideas published on intranets and the web. It is important to recognize that the two media are different and require different approaches to writing.

When writing for the web, we need to be aware of:

- 1 How the different format affects the way in which people read:
  - the importance of line length
  - the impact of different textual and graphic elements on reading
- 2 Web users' expectations: the difference between 'grazing' books and 'browsing' websites.
- **3** The implications of this for the writer:
  - writing shorter more self-contained sections
  - the need for variety
  - adopting a pyramid structure
- **4** The importance of structure and navigation:
  - the positioning and use of menus
  - the effective use of hyperlinks
  - achieving easy navigation routes

# E-writing? What's that?

The computer has changed writing irrevocably. This chapter focuses on forms of writing which exist almost wholly on computers:

- Email
- Writing for organizational intranets
- Writing for the web: websites and blogging

There is no widely accepted term covering these forms, so I have chosen 'e-writing'.

### **Email**

Email has revolutionized business and personal communication, making it possible to communicate cheaply and almost instantly with people anywhere in the world. You can send any type of message, from a single word to a book-length document complete with pictures and sound files. The recipient can respond at once, or think carefully before replying. You can communicate just with one person or with a large group, every member of which can participate as much or as little as they wish.

Emails inhabit a space somewhere between personal meetings, telephones, and letters. They share

advantages with each of these means of communication. Like face-to-face meetings they are instant and direct and allow a number of people to participate. Like telephone calls they are quick and inexpensive. Like letters they allow those involved to keep a permanent record of messages sent and received. But they also have disadvantages. Like letters they rely on written language. When you send them you cannot monitor the recipient's reaction to your message and then modify your message; when you receive them you may misjudge the sender's tone, because you only have words on the screen to go by. One of the great advantages of emails is that they are quick to send. On the other hand, as in a face-to-face or telephone conversation, it is easy to say something that we soon regret. By contrast, letters take longer to compose and seem to allow more time for reflection before sending. And because emails are a fairly new technology, the 'rules' governing them are less well established—different people have different ideas about the conventions and etiquette of the medium.

The situation is further complicated by the popularity of social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Many people now use Facebook rather than email to communicate with 'friends'. And for short messages (up to 140 characters) you can rapidly tweet your thoughts to your 'followers'. Mobile phone texting, too, is frequently used instead of email for short, instant messages. All these media have two important features: they are very rapid and they are generally very informal.

It is easy to carry social media habits over into more formal uses of email. While it is, of course, possible to be very informal in email, you should remember that email is also used for more formal communications between people who do not know each other. Similarly it is too easy to hit the 'Send' button on an email that is ill-considered and even rude, and which you may well later regret. Your use of email needs to be calibrated with these things in mind.

# What are you using email for?

Emails are used for a wide range of different purposes. Imagine that you weren't able to send a particular email. What would you do instead? The answer is usually one of these three:

- Make a telephone call, or
- Write a letter, or
- · Send a fax.

The answer you choose tells you something about why you want to send an email:

### • Telephone call

If you want an immediate response (and if you would like to be able to judge a person's reactions to what you have to say) you are likely to use the phone. On the other hand, if you don't want to interrupt someone who is busy, or if they aren't answering the phone, for whatever reason, then you will probably use email.

#### • Letter

As we saw in the previous chapter, letters have a particular place in communications between organizations and individuals: they are permanent, often formal, and 'important'.

#### • Fax

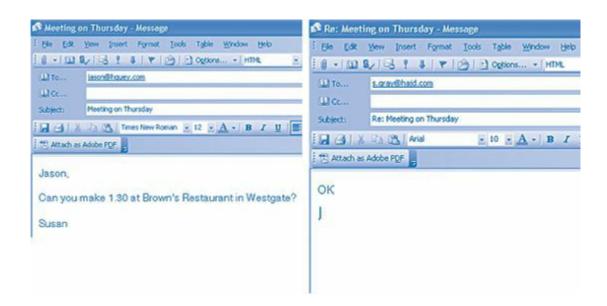
In the past, if you wanted a speedy response, but the message (and possibly the response) needed to be in visual form, you used a fax. To a large extent this has been replaced by email, with or without

attachments. However, in some organizations a fax can still be a useful way of 'jumping the queue' of emails waiting to be answered.

So here there are three variables: time, permanence, and visual elements. But other factors also affect how you use an email.

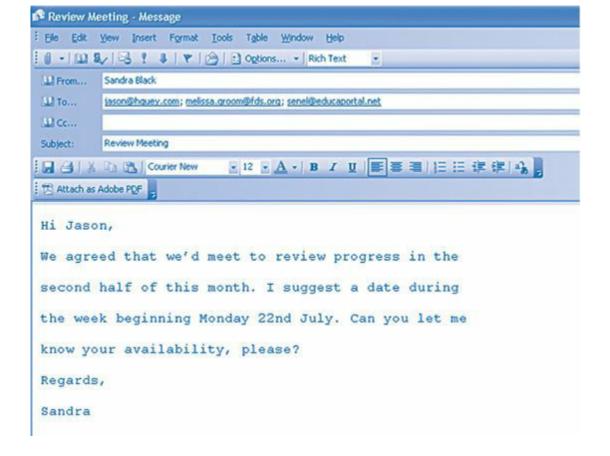
### 1 Is the email a one-off, or part of an extended exchange of messages?

In the first case, you have to make it clear at the beginning of the message what it is about. The 'Subject' line will help with this, but usually the first sentence or two also need to offer some kind of explanation. On the other hand if the email is part of a sequence, then this is unnecessary. For example:



# 2 Is this exchange of messages just between two people, or is it part of a group communication?

In the exchange illustrated above, there were only two people involved, but email is also used to communicate with groups of people. Suppose Sandra was trying to set up a meeting involving a group of people working for different organizations. She might email them like this:



There are more people to consider here, so Sandra can't just suggest a time; she has to ask people when they are free to meet. The others have a choice about how they reply to her message: they can either hit the 'Reply' button, or they can choose to 'Reply to all'.

#### 3 Is this a business message, or a personal one?

As with other forms of communication, the relationship between the sender and recipient of a message affects its content, form, and tone. Here there are similarities between letters and emails. Once a letter or email has been sent the writer has no control over who will read it. Emails are even more likely than letters to be read by people other than the intended recipient. Some organizations routinely monitor emails going to employees. Errors occur and an email can end up in the inbox of someone completely unknown to the sender. This is why many people prefer to use the telephone—or even arrange a face-to-face meeting—if they have anything confidential to discuss.

There is more about the question of 'Reply to all' later in this chapter (see 'Your message in its context', p. 33).

### What difference does it make?

Some people contend that it doesn't make any difference who you are emailing, or why, or what the

circumstances are. Email is a new medium of communication, they argue, and it has its own rules; if you use email you don't have to concern yourself with the conventions that apply to other forms of communication. Spelling, punctuation, and conventional grammar are all old hat.



These are dealt with at length in Section B: 'Getting the message across' (p. 115).

It is true that email is a relatively new and much more relaxed form of communication. Nevertheless it remains a way in which one person communicates with another. And people are still people. So if you wish to communicate effectively with people you still need to be aware of:

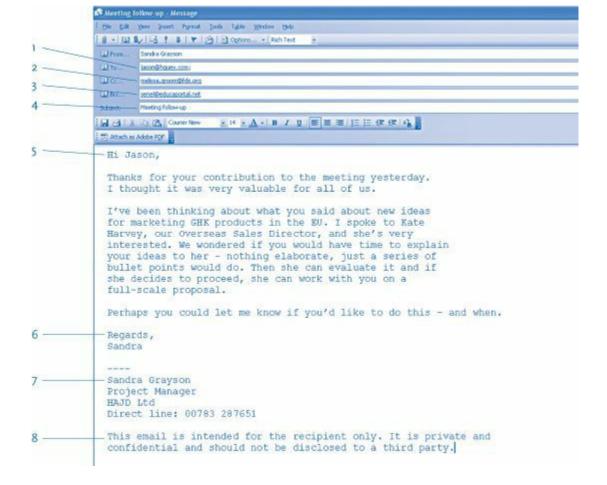
- audience
- situation
- purpose

These considerations affect these aspects of emails:

- Topping and tailing
- Structure
- Attachments
- Formatting

# Topping and tailing

When you compose an email you have to consider the frame within which your message is set. This consists of a number of elements illustrated in the following document.



#### **1** To

The person you are addressing.

#### 2 Cc

Anyone you want to receive a copy. Jason will see that Melissa has been sent a copy.

#### 3 Bcc

Blind copy. Senel will receive a copy, but Jason and Melissa won't know. (And Senel will know that they don't know.) Blind copying can be useful, but you need to be aware of its implications and the implied message that you are sending to the person receiving the blind copy.

#### 4 Subject

A brief description of what the email is about – for ease of reference.

#### 5 The greeting

There is a much bigger range of possibilities in an email than in a letter. You can treat an email just like an electronic letter, using 'Dear Jason'. On the other hand, because an email is a cross between a written letter and a conversation, this can seem quite formal: a bit like saying 'Good morning' to a close friend. So many people choose to open with the kind of greeting they would use in speech: 'Hello', or 'Hi'.

### **6** The closing salutation

Much the same applies here. 'Regards', 'Kind regards', and variations on them are frequently used

#### 7 Signature

Email applications allow you to use a signature block, which can contain whatever you care to include. It is commonly used for business titles, phone numbers, and publicity material.

### 8 Warning

Many organizations add a legal warning, in case the email falls into the wrong hands.

#### **Structure**

As we've seen, an email can vary in length from one word to thousands. Short emails are often relaxed, informal, and unstructured. But longer messages usually need a clear structure. As with letters, the structure often consists of three main parts:



#### 9 Introduction

You explain briefly what the message is about. This can be done purely in the 'Subject' line, but sometimes this may make the message appear somewhat abrupt. A short introduction is a good way of beginning your interaction with the recipient.

### 10 Body

The main part of the message.

#### 11 Conclusion

This spells out whatever action you would like the email to lead to. It also rounds off your interaction with the person you are emailing.

#### **Attachments**

If your message is rather longer than this, you may prefer to write it as a separate document and attach it to a covering email. Attaching separate documents has a number of advantages:

- 1 You can send documents that already exist in digital form, or you can compose a document specially for the purpose. Either way the document itself is separate from the email and can be distributed separately from it.
- 2 If you are composing the document specially for the purpose you can take advantage of the formatting that is available in your word processing software—different fonts and sizes, different font formats (bold, italic, and so on), spacing, and visuals. Some of this is possible in an email but can cause problems—see Formatting, below.
- **3** If you are working with others on a document, you can each add your own alterations, suggestions, and comments to an original document but using a word processing feature such as Microsoft<sup>TM</sup> Word 'Track changes'.

There are, however, a few disadvantages:

- Large files can take a long time to upload and download. This can delay the receipt of other messages and waste space on the receiver's computer system. Indeed, many organizations' IT systems will not allow the downloading of a large file and simply bounce it back. This can be avoided, to some extent at least, by compressing files before sending.
- There can be problems when you transfer files from one platform to another (for example from Windows to Apple), although this is much easier than it used to be.
- Attachments can carry computer viruses, so care is needed when opening them.

# Formatting emails

By default, emails usually work in plain text mode. This means that you cannot use formatting features such as bold and italic text, or different fonts and font sizes. With most email clients it is also possible to use HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) which does allow you to format in the same way that a web page is formatted. This allows you to construct messages that are better set out and clearer to read, and which can be colourful and elaborate. But there are also disadvantages. The most important are:

- HTML messages make bigger files and so take longer to download;
- the recipients may not have suitable fonts on their systems and so the message may not display properly;
- not all recipients have an email client that can read HTML messages.

So when in doubt it is better to stick to 'penny plain' text emails.

# Getting the most out of email

Email is quick, effective, and convenient. But it does have some drawbacks. It is so direct and

immediate that it is all too easy to read and respond to important messages without proper thought. We have all pressed the 'Send' button only to regret the action seconds later. But once a message has been sent it cannot be recalled.

# An email strategy

If you adopt a conscious strategy for handling emails, you stand a much better chance of avoiding any problems. A sensible strategy has four main elements:

### **Perspective**

However unusual or special any particular email may appear, it always exists in a context. It was either sent by someone you know and have corresponded with before or it came from a stranger. If it is from someone you know, then the context is a personal or professional relationship (or, sometimes, a mixture of the two). There may well be a particular issue or group of issues that help define that context further. All this should help you define your audience and purpose fairly clearly, and these are the key elements that determine how you should compose your message.

If the sender is unknown to you, this in itself is a significant part of the context. The subject matter will help define things further, but the key point in interpreting the situation is that you do not know this person or how they think or express themselves. You need to bear this in mind when reading and responding to the message.



■ CHAPTER 10 Audience (p. 117)

## Reflection

It is easy to respond to emails emotionally rather than rationally. If you feel under pressure, or your relationship with the sender has some rough edges, it is very tempting to blast off a response to an irritating email without proper thought about how this will affect the person(s) at the other end, or your relationship with them.

As the poet Horace said, *Semel emissum volat irrevocabile verbum*. Once a word has escaped it cannot be recalled. It is far better in such situations to wait until later and then compose a more considered reply. Alternatively, compose a message that expresses how you feel, but then save it in the Drafts folder. After you have had time to cool down, return to your draft and consider whether this wording is really what you want your correspondent to receive.

# Response

When you do respond, bear in mind that, like you, the other person probably leads a busy life. Keep your message as short as is feasible, and structure it so that it is easy to read and understand. When you have finished the message, read it through for sense and errors. If your email application includes

a spell checker, keep it switched on, so that you can spot careless mistakes. (There is a strange theory that in emails spelling, punctuation, and grammar don't matter. They do. The fact is that many people will judge you by these external signs, just as they do in letters or speech, so there is no reason to be slack just because it's an email, although, of course, what you do in a personal email is a matter of personal style.) When you are happy that the message represents clearly what you want to say—and represents you as a person—then hit 'Send'.

### **Organization**

One of the drawbacks of the growth of email is the sheer number of messages we receive every day. Many of them are junk, or only of brief importance, and can be discarded. Others need to be kept while a particular subject or project is relevant. These need to be stored for a period and can then be thrown away. A third group have long-term importance and will need to be stored more or less indefinitely, for example for legal reasons.

So it is important to have a system for organizing your emails. Most email applications offer a folder system so that you can store messages about the same subject, or from the same person in a named file. Many also offer a filtering system so that messages will automatically be placed in the relevant folder as soon as they arrive. These are useful features. Even so it is necessary to check through folders of messages periodically to identify those which can now safely be thrown away, and those which need to be archived.

# **Email etiquette**

Email does encourage a more relaxed way of writing than other more traditional forms of communication. Nevertheless a number of conventions have been established, which are often referred to as email etiquette.

### The message itself

### 1 Salutation and formality

Some email users are unsure about how to address the person to whom they are sending their message. Should they treat the email like an electronic letter with a formal salutation and farewell? Or is it more like a note you leave on someone's desk, with their first name at the top, underlined, followed by a short message, and ending with your first name?

As was suggested earlier, the answer depends on the way you see your relationship with the other person. If it is someone you don't know and do not wish to offend or irritate, it is best to play safe and use a fairly formal tone, opening with 'Dear Mr X ...' and ending with 'Yours sincerely ...' With someone you do know and have fairly frequent contact with, you can adopt a much more informal tone, opening with just their first name and ending with yours. There are many variations of formality and informality in between.

### 2 Formatting

As pointed out earlier, you can compose an email in HTML. This is useful if you wish to include any of the following:

- a) Emphasis (using bold or italic text)
- b) Bulleted lists
- c) Numbered lists

One further point to remember about formatting is that it is safer not to write dates in a purely numerical format: the date '5/7/05' means different things to different people. To a reader in the US it is 7th May, while to someone in Britain it is 5th July.

#### 3 Emotion

As we have already seen, it is easy to respond over-emotionally to an email. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as 'flaming'. It can be avoided in the ways already suggested: taking time to reflect, not sending messages off straightaway, and so on. You should also do everything you can to avoid your message being at all ambiguous. Jokes and irony can be very tricky when composing an email message. Some writers try to get round this by putting brief explanations in brackets:

'and if I don't hear from you by the end of the week I shall get on to your father (only joking) ....'

Some emailers use what many people refer to as acronyms (or 'text-speak'), but which are in fact initialisms. These can please or irritate depending on your age and experience. On the whole these are a form of jargon that is best avoided, especially in more formal emails.

Initialism	Meaning
AAMOF	As a matter of fact
AFAIK	As far as I know
ASL	Age, sex, location
ATB	All the best
В	Be
B2B	Business to business
B4	Before
BFN	Bye for now
BTW	By the way
C	See
CUL8R	See you later
FAQ	Frequently asked questions
F2F	Face to face

E)T	Euro to tolla
F2T	Free to talk
FWIW	For what it's worth
FYI	For your information
GAL	Get a life
GR8	Great
HAND	Have a nice day
H8	Hate
HSIK	How should I know?
HTH	Hope this helps
IMO/IMCO/IMHO	In my opinion/in my considered opinion/in my humble opinion
IOW	In other words
JIC	Just in case
JK	Just kidding
KISS	Keep it simple, stupid!
KIT	Keep in touch
L8R	Later
LOL	Laugh out loud
MOB	Mobile
MSG	Message
MYOB	Mind your own business
NE	Any
NE1	Anyone
NO1	No one
ОТОН	On the other hand
PCM	Please call me
PLS	Please
PPL	People
R	Are
ROTF(L)	Rolling on the floor (laughing)

RTFM	Read the flaming (or worse) manual
SOM1	Someone
SPK	Speak
TTYL	Talk to you later
TX	Thanks
U	You
WAN2	Want to
W/	With
WKND	Weekend
WYSIWYG	What you see is what you get
XLNT	Excellent
XOXOX	Hugs and kisses
YR	Your
2	To, too
2DAY	Today
2MORO	Tomorrow
2NITE	Tonight
4	For

#### 4 Your message in its context

As said earlier, your message has to be seen its context. This means thinking about the other person(s) you are communicating with. There are a number of rules it is worth following:

#### a Don't break the thread

When replying to a message do so by using 'Reply' rather than creating a new message; this means that the thread of messages on a single subject can be kept together by those involved.

#### b Reply to whom?

In general it is better not to 'Reply to all' unless there is a good reason for doing so. Overuse of this feature contributes to the mass of useless emails that flow into your Inbox. Work groups often set up their own rules on this.

### c Reply when?

Emails are a rapid form of communication, but they can go astray, and the sender is never

entirely sure if they have arrived. For all these reasons it is helpful to reply promptly, even if only with a one-liner acknowledging receipt, and promising to answer more fully later.

#### d Quoting in the reply

Another thing that bulks out emails unnecessarily is the habit of copying the whole of the message you have received in your reply. Some email clients do this by default, but it is usually possible to organize things so that the program copies only those parts that you want it to. Doing this can be very useful, especially if you have been asked a number of questions—you can follow each copied question with your answer.

#### e Cc or Bcc?

If you are sending the email to more than one person, think for a moment about how you are going to do this. The person in the 'To' box is regarded as more important than anyone in the 'Cc' box, so if you are addressing two people of equal status, put them both in the 'To' box. If you are sending to a large number of people, you have to choose between the 'Cc' and 'Bcc' boxes. Many people don't like their email addresses being known by strangers, so it is better to address the email to yourself, and then put all the recipients in the 'Bcc' box. That way the recipients don't have to share their contact details with all and sundry.

#### f Forwarding

You may wish to forward a message you have received to someone else to whom it was not originally sent. There are a couple of things to remember here. The sender may not have wished anyone else but you to see the message at this stage, so it is only courteous to ask permission before forwarding it. Strictly speaking all messages are the copyright of the person who sent them (or of their employer, if the email is written as part of their work), so copying them without permission is a breach of the copyright law. In fact forwarding emails is normal practice within organizations or amongst other groups where there is a clear common goal, and forwarding is expected by those concerned.

### **5 Paper Trail**

Although they may seem insubstantial, emails never really disappear. They are retained on other people's servers more or less indefinitely. If you work for an organization, or are dealing with one, your emails become part of that organization's email archive. In the event of any kind of legal dispute, the organization can call up the relevant exchange of emails as part of a chain of evidence. When you write an email in any organizational context, you should remember this. Your email may be dredged up many years later and examined by readers with little knowledge of the original context beyond what appears in the chain of emails.

# Writing for intranets and the web

Just as letters are increasingly replaced by emails, many of the paper documents produced within and for organizations are moving to intranets and the web. Reports, training materials, and other written documents are placed on a company's intranet rather than being circulated in printed form. Paper catalogues, brochures, and flyers about new products are still distributed to customers by mail, but

people also expect to find them online, or receive them as email newsletters.

Within many companies and other organizations, this is still a straight translation: written documents appear online in the same form as they do on paper. However, this is to ignore the major differences that exist between reading on the printed page and on screen. It also fails to take advantage of the many benefits that electronic presentation affords.

### **Differences of format**

Books are most commonly in portrait format: the height is greater than the width. By contrast, computer screens are in landscape format. Sometimes there is a choice, as with tablets such as Apple's iPad, where you can rotate the screen and the presentation automatically adjusts from landscape to portrait and vice versa. However, websites are generally designed for viewing in landscape mode.

A typical book consisting mainly of text carries that text across the full width of the page. It is generally considered that a full line of text should contain an average of between 50 and 75 characters, or 10–15 words. There is some evidence to suggest that on screen, lines of up to 95 characters (19 words) can be read more rapidly, but that once the length exceeds about 100 characters reading speed drops off. (This is not to say that readers *prefer* lines as long as 95 characters.)

A typical web page has far more space available than will be taken up by a single column of text even 100 characters wide—unless those characters are very large. So very often web pages consist of a number of different elements, both text and graphics. While the same is true of an illustrated book, web pages frequently contain a greater number and variety of these different elements. As a result readers have to make more choices of where to look to find the information they are looking for. In addition, research suggests that some readers, at least, read more slowly on screen, and retain less of what they read than on the printed page.

All of which suggests that simply transferring printed material—or the habits of thought that produce it—from book to screen is unlikely to be the best strategy. Instead e-writers need to spend time re-working (or 're-purposing', as some prefer to call it) their material for this new medium.

# **Differences of expectation**

The application we use to view websites and intranets is commonly called a 'browser'. The name is significant. It describes the way people approach websites and the expectations they have. Wild animals that feed by browsing typically move from tree to tree, nibbling one tasty morsel here and another there. By contrast, animals that *graze* move more slowly, focusing on one small area of pasture, only moving when the food in that section has been exhausted. It is not too fanciful to argue that reading a book is grazing, while interacting with a website is browsing.

# Implications for the writer

The implication of this is that writing for intranets and the web requires a radically different kind of writing:

- Individual items of information need to be shorter and more easily digested.
- Items need to be as self-contained as possible, so that if readers leave after reading only one item in a group, they still take away a complete idea or piece of information.
- The writer needs to incorporate more variety to hold the reader's interest, using not only different kinds of text, but incorporating visuals, headings, and lists.
- Since readers may move on at any time, it is best to adopt the journalist's pyramid structure, placing the gist of the story in the opening paragraphs, then expanding into more detailed information.
- On longer web pages, where the reader may have to scroll downwards, it is important to place the most important information in the top section ('above the fold' in newspaper terms). Many readers become impatient of long screens and, instead of scrolling down, move on to another page.

# Structure and navigation

Just as longer printed documents have their conventions about structure and navigation, so do websites, and sections within them. While this is not the place for an extended treatment of designing websites, one or two general points are worth making.

- Increasingly there is a standardized basic navigation on a website, with the main menu along the top of the screen and subsidiary menus placed in a side column. This is where users will look first for navigation.
- The second, but equally important, means of navigating is by hyperlinks inserted in the text. While these are usually marked by colour and style, the supporting text should also make it clear where these links will take the reader.
- A subsidiary way in which the purpose of hyperlinks can be indicated is by giving the hyperlink a title when setting it up. This will then show up when the user allows the mouse pointer to hover over it. A well-chosen title provides useful feedback for the reader.
- When planning a series of web pages, it is important to think carefully about how easy or difficult it is for the reader to find any individual piece of information: how many mouse clicks does it take to get there? In order to avoid frustrating users you may need to rearrange pages and the relationships between them.

# Writing for e-books

Just as emails have increasingly replaced traditional letters, e-books are doing something very similar to printed books. Especially in the field of fiction, readers expect new books to be published on Kindle and EPUB as well as in physical book form. While this development is, of course, commercially driven, particularly by Amazon, there is something very attractive about being able to 'carry' dozens of books in a slim, lightweight e-reader.

In a conventional printed book the relationship between the different elements—headings, body text, and illustrations—is fixed. The 'traditional' way of digitizing print is to use the Portable Document Format (PDF), which keeps this fixed relationship exactly as it is. In a PDF the fonts, pictures, and layout all appear exactly as the designer intended. If you reduce the size of the PDF page, all the elements are scaled down proportionately, until you reach a point where the text is too small to read—as anyone who has tried to read a PDF on a smartphone will know. The only alternative is to choose to view part of the page at a readable size and scroll through it bit by bit, but this is laborious and time-consuming.

E-readers, on the other hand, are formatted in variations of Hypertext Markup Language (HTML). As a result, they are more like portable websites than rigidly formatted books. This means that their content flows to fill the space available to them in the window in which they are being viewed. The viewer can determine the size of type (and sometimes the actual font) in which the text appears, and headings are shown relative to the chosen size. Images are not fixed, but flow with the text. The implications for the book designer are profound, but those for the writer are less obvious.

If the text is illustrated with pictures or diagrams, then the way the words relate to the images must be considered, along with the fact that some e-readers have very small screens. This means that large and complex images will not work very well and will probably have to be broken down into smaller units. Navigation, too, is very different in an e-book. By their nature, e-books cannot have fixed page numbering, so it is impossible to insert cross-references such as 'There is more about this on page 58'. Instead the writer has to insert a hyperlink with suitable wording: 'There is more about this here.' By tapping or clicking on the word 'here' the reader can navigate to the cross reference. Alternatively a clickable footnote or endnote can be inserted with the same effect. Internal hyperlinks can also be used to construct lists of chapter or section contents, and external hyperlinks can take the reader to relevant websites.

By comparison with print, e-books have both advantages and disadvantages. As ever, the best training for the writer is to become a practised reader of the medium.

#### **Guidelines**

#### **Emails**

- 1 Bear in mind why you are using email rather than a letter or a telephone call. Sometimes the formality and permanence of a letter may be preferable. At other times a telephone call may be more private (or conveniently impermanent!).
- **2** Although emails are relatively new, they share key features with other means of communication. You still need to have in mind:
  - your purpose in communicating
  - the audience you are addressing
  - the situation in which the email occurs (business, personal ...)
- 3 Make proper use of email format:
  - always give the message a subject
  - distinguish properly between open and blind copies
  - use a signature, and a warning, if appropriate
- 4 In extended business emails, structure your message so that readers can grasp the essentials quickly and without risk of misunderstanding.
- 5 When responding to other people's emails, think about the effect your reply will have; don't hit the 'send' button and then regret it immediately you have done so. If in doubt, save your reply in the 'Drafts' folder and return to it later in the day.
- **6** In replies avoid breaking the thread of a sequence of messages.
- 7 Don't automatically 'Reply to all', unless it is expected or useful.
- **8** In replies only quote as much as is necessary to place your message in its context (often the subject line will do this).
- 9 Think before forwarding someone else's message; if in doubt ask their permission.

- 10 Set up a proper system for filing emails and weed out unwanted messages regularly.
- 11 When composing a message be aware of the context within which you are communicating; make a judgement about how informal you can afford to be.
- 12 Avoid excessive use of capital letters and don't use HTML formatting unless its special features are really necessary.
- 13 Be aware of the dangers of flaming.
- 14 Only use initialisms in messages to people who are likely to appreciate them.

#### Intranets and the web

- 15 Don't assume that a printed document can be transferred to the web without re-working.
- 16 When you write, see your text as part of a whole web page and be aware of how the different elements on it interact.
- 17 Remember that web readers are more likely to 'browse' than 'graze', and write accordingly.
- 18 Aim to write short, self-contained sections.
- 19 Produce sufficient variety to hold the reader's interest.
- 20 Use a pyramid structure, placing the gist of the text at the beginning.
- **21** Be aware of the need for clear, simple navigation.

#### E-books

- 22 Remember that e-books are formatted, and therefore read, in a different way from print books.
- 23 Think carefully about the way in which your text relates to illustrations.
- **24** Plan the navigation of your text with the medium in mind: use hyperlinks and clickable footnotes for cross-referencing.
- 25 Remember that e-books make it possible for the reader to move seamlessly from the book to the web and back again.

# Further reading

#### **Email**

David Shipley and Will Schwalbe, Send: Why People Email So Badly and How to Do It Better (Vintage, 2007), ISBN 9780307275998.

#### Web writing

Janice Redish, *Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content that Works* (2nd edn, Morgan Kaufman, 2012), ISBN 9780123859303.

# E-books

**John Seely,** *ePublish! From Manuscript to Finished E-book in 10 Easy Stages* (Oxpecker, 2012), ISBN 9781908948021 (print and e-book versions).