In the following self-assessment, you will be asked to evaluate your typical email practices with regard to school or work for each item listed.

Source: Pete Cardon

Read each statement and select the rating that reflects the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement. There are no right or wrong answers. After completing the self-assessment, read the feedback that explains how to understand your score and interpret your results.

You must respond to all statements in order to receive full credit for this self-assessment activity.

1. I almost always reread my email message in its entirety before sending it.

Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Somewhat Agree
Agree

2. I write emails in a professional and sufficiently formal manner.

Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Somewhat Agree
Agree

3. I think carefully about what to write in the subject line.

Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Somewhat Agree
Agree

4. I use a spell-checker for important email messages.

Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Somewhat Agree
Agree

5. I envision how the recipient of my email message will respond when she/he receives it.

Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Somewhat Agree
Agree

6. I think about the preferred communication channel of my message recipient before writing an email.

Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Somewhat Agree
Agree

7. I read emails from others carefully and in their entirety before responding.

Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Somewhat Agree
Agree

8. Before sending a reply email, I make one last check to see that I have responded to everything requested.

Disagree
Somewhat Disagree

Somewhat Agree

| Agree |

9. I regularly schedule uninterrupted time to focus on reading and responding to emails.

○   ○   ○
                     ●

Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Somewhat Agree

| Agree |

10. I set up an automatic email response or in other ways let others know when I will not be responsive to emails for an extended period (e.g., during vacation time).

○   ○   ○
                     ●

Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Somewhat Agree

| Agree |

Score		
Score		38/40
Range 33 to 40	0 You may be a strategic email communicator.	38 40

Effective email writing is essential to effective performance and advancement in most organizational contexts. To quote the text, "Email is the dominant communication tool for private, written business messages." Therefore, it is essential you develop professional email practices. This self-assessment is intended to allow you to evaluate your use of the skills associated with effective email writing, and to offer some direction as to how you might improve.

If your score is in the "need considerable improvement" category, this might indicate you approach email communication in the same way you

approach more informally oriented social media messaging. You should pay particular attention to the Action Steps given below and to advice provided in the text. You will not thrive in a business context without marked improvement in this area.

If your score is in the "may need some improvement" category, you have adopted some of the basic elements of effective email communication, but not enough. You would do well to work on continuing to transition from an informal approach of communication which may well be appropriate and useful with your friends, but which is inappropriate in a professional context.

If your score is in the "careful email communicator" category, you may be well on your way to the status of a professional email communicator. You appear to have adopted many of the skills associated with effective email practices in a business context. However, you have some room for improvement.

If your score is in the "strategic email communicator" category, congratulations. You appear to be well along in the transition from informal social media communication to a professional approach to business writing. Of course, no matter how good you are, there is always room for improvement. Keep going!

As with other types of business writing, there are two keys to improving your email writing skill. First, you need to practice professional email communication. Second, you need to seek feedback as to the extent to which you are effectively communicating in a professional manner.

Because email is electronic and easily accessible on the same devices which are used to access other social media platforms such as Twitter, it is easy to transfer the same type of communication patterns such as quick messages, rapid-fire responses, brevity, and a kind of humorous bantering which – while perfectly appropriate in many social media contexts – is inappropriate in professional email. In contrast, it is better to think of email communication in the same category as writing a business memo or report. Many of the rules which apply to these formal channels of business communication also apply to emails. For example, you should not use social media abbreviations such as "lol" or "omg" in email messages. In addition, spelling and grammatical errors are just as bad in an email as they are in a printed memo.

Perhaps an analogy would be helpful here. We well understand our choice of clothing, footwear, and accessories will be much different when we are working in a professional business context compared to our preferred style of dress as students or on weekends. This is not hard to understand. The same contrast exists with email communication. Do not transfer the informal qualities of social media – informality which is often entirely appropriate – to the professional email communication.

The text offers several guidelines for writing professional emails.

- Only use when appropriate – much communication should only happen in person.
- Ensure ease of reading
- Show respect for other's time
- Protect privacy and confidentiality
- Respond promptly
- Manage emotion and civility – email is not the place for an argument!

Specific writing tips include:

- Avoid the appearance of casual communication
- Apply the same standards of professional report writing (spelling, punctuation, etc.)
- Use greetings and names (for example, "Good morning, Mary:"), rather than launching right into the body of the message.

These are habits you can begin to develop even while you are in school. Communications with your professors and other staff at the institution are a good place to start. As you initiate or respond to email communications, take the time to construct professional quality emails. Further, if you are in a leadership position in a student organization, practice professional email practices as you communicate with members about meetings, initiatives, and other organizational business. The most important thing you can do is to take the time to read a draft of your email while putting yourself in the position of your audience. Does the email accomplish what you want to accomplish in a way which is clear and concise? Better yet, share a draft of your email with a fellow student and ask for helpful feedback on ways to improve the quality of the communication.

Remember your score on this self-assessment, while useful for self-understanding, should not be over-interpreted. First, as with all self-assessments, it is only as valuable and as helpful to the extent you have been accurately self-reflective in your responses. Second, every person is complex, and it is impossible to fully capture your uniqueness in a short self-assessment. Third, you may well find your email writing skills may change over time, particularly as you proceed through your educational requirements, or you may come to understand what your actual abilities are only later in life. Finally, in contrast to some other of our personal characteristics or abilities which are hard to change, writing can be much improved by asking for feedback. So, if your scores are lower than you hoped, you have a clear path to improvement.