

### 3 Tips to Creating Effective and Easy to Read Subject Lines

1. **Use 'Keywords'** - All email messages fall into one or more of 4 possible categories:
  - Questions (or messages that elicit a response from the reader)
  - Responses (messages that are in response to questions or other inquiring messages)
  - Informational (or FYI - messages that are meant to inform but don't require a response)
  - Spam (jokes, pictures of your nephew's baseball game, etc. - as well as actual spam)

The first tip is a simple one - label your messages with one of these keywords. For example, if I'm going to be emailing my buddy Ted about the fishing trip this weekend and I'd like him to respond, my subject might look something like: "Question: Fishing Trip this weekend". Alternately, if I need to email my entire family about my upcoming appearance on Oprah, it might resemble this: "FYI: Upcoming Oprah appearance".

Basically, use a keyword from one of these 4 categories to immediately identify what type of message it is: "**Question**", "**Response**", "**FYI**" and "**Spam**". This makes it very easy to quickly skim the inbox (or, better yet, sort it) and pick out which stuff needs to be acted upon.

2. **Briefly describe the subject** - This is best done *before* you start writing your message. Finding the right balance between vague and overly-specific can be tough. Personally, I think it's like anything else - you get better at it with time. A few examples of what I mean:

Let's say you're emailing a coworker about a presentation you'll be giving to Joe's Chili Cookery next week. You're not sure if you should use the green pepper graphic or the red pepper graphic. Some people would be tempted to create a subject like this: "Are we using the green pepper or the red pepper graphic for the Joe's Chili presentation?" A better subject might be: "Question: Joe's Chili Presentation - Graphic". You could omit the "Graphic" word altogether because the recipient will read all about that in the body of the email. The point is to be brief and concise.

Using the same example, some other folks might have a subject like this: "Graphic". Obviously, that's terribly vague and says virtually nothing about the rest of the message.

Give a preview of what's to come - don't try to shoehorn the whole message into the subject, and don't make the recipient open the email just to figure out what the hell you're talking about.

### 3. **Never leave the subject blank**

Tom walks over to Mary's desk and asks, "Mary, can you send over that Proposal template again? I've somehow lost my copy!". Mary says "Sure thing, Tom!" and immediately opens a new email message. She drags the document into the window, fills in Tom's address and hits "Send". So, what's wrong with leaving the subject blank in this situation? Well, a blank subject accomplishes one pretty crippling thing:

**It makes it pretty certain that Tom will never be able to find the email again!**

Most email applications have what are referred to as "search capabilities". So, if Tom takes the email and drops it into his "Templates" archive folder, the next time he needs it he'll have to search through every message Mary has sent him without a subject to figure out which one contains the template he's looking for. So, Mary's doing Tom a disservice by being too lazy to type "Proposal Template" in the subject line of the email before sending it.