
Tips for Communicating with Investigators (and everyone else...)

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Tips

- ☐ General
- ☐ eMail
- ☐ Dealing with Difficult People

General Principle 1

- Your internal customers and external partners all want the same thing: research success.
 - Think of yourself as a member of a team
 - Keep the big goal in mind and don't sweat the little stuff
 - In conflict, it can be helpful to remind the other person that you are on their "side"

General Principle 2

- It is not necessary to have personal friendships with everyone at work—it's a job.
- Although friendships make work more fun, you don't have to see eye-to-eye with your colleagues or customers on politics, religion, sports, etc.
- Maintaining professional boundaries is healthy (e.g. FB vs. LinkedIn)

General Principle 3

- ❑ Professionalism is mandatory at all times.
 - Yelling is never ok
 - Only use language you'd feel comfortable seeing re-printed in the newspaper
 - In disputes, take the high ground
 - Always respond to customer call and emails– even if just to say you'll get back to them later
 - Your actions represent the office, the institution, and the profession

Specific eMail Principles

- ☐ Never send an email when you are angry.
- ☐ Treat your emails like a postcard – assume anyone might read them.
- ☐ Put yourself in the other person's shoes.
- ☐ When in doubt, remember the "Golden Rule."

Emails Are Forever

- ❑ When you delete them, they're not really gone.
- ❑ They can be forwarded without your knowledge or permission.
- ❑ They are discoverable under Public Records laws.
- ❑ Think before you send: How would I feel if this were published in the Plain Dealer?

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. Lack of a proper salutation
2. Lack of a “kiss” intro. sentence
3. Imprecise use of language/confusing prose
4. Incorrect grammar, punctuation
5. Overly familiar tone
6. “Yelling” your message (ALL CAPS)

Common Mistakes, cont.

7. Sloppy forwards
8. Disrespectful use of quotation marks
9. Lack of a “kiss” concluding sentence
10. Spelling errors
11. Sloppy copies
12. Unhelpful subject lines
13. Using email when face-to-face or phone contact would be better

Problem eMail

Subject: Your Research

Hunter:

Your protocol is expired so we cant process your grant renewal. You CANNOT do any work during a lapse!!!!!! Expiration means you cannot renew...please submit your paperwork, OK? our office needs you to comply. You' re email said you were "not aware" of the deadline. Even if you are "not aware," you are still rspnsble. I know the rules are harsh, but other people in your department are able to get there paperwork in on time. I hope you don' t care I' m gonna copy your Dean and study coord on this to close the loop. YOU MUST RESPOND BY FRIDAY.

Cindy-Lou

cc: Designated Administrative Contact, Co-investigators, Division Chief, Department Chair, Institutional Official

>>> Suzanne Rivera 03/11/11 2:30 PM >>>

Here we go again...another lapsed protocol! sheesh!

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Alternative

Subject: Protocol 3456, PI-Peckham

Dear Dr. Peckham,

I am writing to ask for your assistance.

As you may be aware, IRB approval of your protocol 3456 expired on December 12, 2010. Unfortunately, we are unable to process your grant renewal during the lapse period. I regret any inconvenience this may cause.

To assist you with resolving this matter, the IRB will need to receive your continuing review paperwork as soon as possible. You can find the forms at www.xxxx.edu. Please let me know if you should have any questions about how to complete the forms. I will be happy to help.

Sincerely,

Cindy-Lou Who

Office of Research Administration

cc: Designated Administrative Contact

Specific Principles for DWDP

- ☐ Don't take it personally.
- ☐ Figure out who owns the problem.
- ☐ Avoid a power struggle.
- ☐ Choose your words.
- ☐ Facilitate positive behavior.*

* An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Rule #1: Don't take it personally.

- ☐ The person could be having a bad day.
- ☐ You might be the fifth person they called for a solution.
- ☐ Everything isn't about you.
- ☐ They might be right.

Rule #2: Who “owns” the problem?

DP owns problem:

- ☐ Listen actively
- ☐ Offer reflective responses
- ☐ Try to understand and recognize DP's interests
- ☐ Show empathy
- ☐ Find a kernel of truth in DP's argument you can agree with
- ☐ Suggest a constructive path to resolution you can live with

You own problem:

- ☐ Express your concern calmly before you explode
- ☐ Initiate an “I” message
- ☐ Communicate DP's effect on you objectively
- ☐ Accentuate the positive whenever possible
- ☐ Show appreciation for efforts at resolution

What is an “I” Message?

A non-blameful description of the listener's behavior, the effect of that behavior on the speaker, and the speaker's feelings about that effect.

Good Examples:

- ☐ I feel frustrated when you interrupt me.
- ☐ I feel uncomfortable when you raise your voice.

Poor Examples:

- ☐ I think you are a jerk.
(This is a “You” message in disguise.)
- ☐ I don't now why I even put up with your nonsense.

Rule #3: Avoid a power struggle.

- ☐ Whenever possible, say “yes”
- ☐ Accept the validity of viewpoints other than your own; not every issue needs a winner
- ☐ Aim for dispassionate enforcement, employing natural and logical consequences

Rule #4: Choose your words.

- ☐ Use as few as possible
- ☐ Avoid inflammatory and/or emotional words
- ☐ Avoid overgeneralizing (e.g., "You always...")
- ☐ Be as objective as possible
- ☐ Avoid the impulse to respond directly to each attack
- ☐ Remove angry and judgmental inflection from your voice

Delivering Bad News



Your request is denied.	Although we are unable to do X, we will be happy to help by...
We must reject your proposal.	Your proposal can be approved once the following issues have been addressed...
I cannot allow an extension.	Please send the documents by...
You are mistaken.	I'm afraid there may have been a misunderstanding. I thought XYZ but I may be mistaken. Can you please clarify?
You really screwed up this time!	I am very disappointed. OR This incident was very unfortunate.

Rule #5: Facilitate positive behavior.

- ❑ Set clear, logical rules prospectively
- ❑ Avoid S.L.A.G.I.A.T.T.
- ❑ Anticipate and minimize obstacles to compliance
- ❑ Enlist input from stakeholders

Role Play #1

- DP is a PI who is angry that RGC's mistake caused her to miss a grant deadline.

Role Play #2

- DP is a Department Administrator who failed to complete and deliver forms by a deadline and wants RGC staff to backdate the PI's paperwork.