Email Manifesto

The first email was sent over ARPANET in 1971. That makes email more than forty years old. So you’d think we’d be pretty good at emails by now. And yet, I get the “academic” version of emails like this all the time. And so, a manifesto...

Axiom #1: An email should have one clear subject.

Axiom #2: Emails should be simple to respond to and to dismiss when completed.

Axiom #3: When an email “conversation” takes a U-turn into new territory, a new subject line is in order.
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Axiom #4: Need to arrange for an in-person meeting? Suggest several possible meeting times in the FIRST email communication. If the person has a secretary, include them in the meeting request. If there are several people involved, use a Doodle.

Doodle.com polls are free and no accounts are necessary. If you’re the one starting the poll, don’t bother including times you can’t meet.
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**Axiom #5:** If you want the recipient to take additional action outside their normal routine, make it as easy as possible for them to do so. Don’t place the text of the message within an attached document if it can be pasted into the body of the email. Include an easy-to-share blurb and link to website for more information for events, in particular. Don’t link to files on drives that are only available on-site.

**Axiom #6:** If the message contains a lot of information, make required actions clear (bold them or use another color of text). Use phrasing like “**What I need from you is ...**” Consider placing the actions at the beginning of the email, followed by the rationale.

Maria H. Andersen, 1-5-2012
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Axiom #7: There’s nothing wrong with a short email message or response – don’t take offense when you get one. The important thing is that the recipient took the time to read and respond. Lots of emails get answered from a very tiny keyboard or touch-keyboard.

Axiom #8: Because it’s difficult to read voice inflection, facial expressions, or body language from an email, consider using emoticons or expressions to convey these emotions.

- Perhaps this is a jestful comment: Are you kidding me? ;-)  
- Perhaps it makes you sad: Are you kidding me? :-(  
- Perhaps it makes you angry: Are you kidding me? <fuming>  
- Perhaps you are sympathizing: Are you kidding me? <hug>

Are there other annoying things about email? Yes.

- Forgetting to include the attachment.
  - Some programs (Gmail) have a “missing attachment detector”.
- Poor spelling and grammar. (Autocorrect on phones is not helping this cause)
  - Use a tagline from your Smartphone email like: “Sent from a device with a tiny keyboard.”
- Using “Reply All” when you meant to just press “Reply”
- Sending to “the wrong Bob”
  - Some programs (Gmail) will warn you when it thinks you’re sending to the wrong person (based on the grouping of others in the email)
- Strange formatting of text when copy/paste is used
  - Try using Ctrl-Shift-V (or Command-Shift-V) to paste text without formatting.

However, most of these types of mistakes are not intentional. They are the natural result of so much communication via email. Consider them the “typos” of the digital world.

As to the topic of student “TEXT SPEAK” in emails. That’s going to require another presentation. But I think we should stop getting our panties in a bunch over it and just consider it amusing.