Critique an Email Activity

Professional Communications OER: Writing

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# Introduction

Email is a communication tool that the vast of majority of people use every day. Often one of the first things a person receives when starting a new job or enrolling in school is an email address and account. Email plays a large role in workplace communications, both internally and externally. For this reason, it is important that those in the workforce are able to review their emails with a critical eye before sending.

The purpose of this activity is to give students an opportunity to combine the knowledge and skills they have been developing in the formatting and writing of specific workplace documents, in this case emails. Students will critique a pair of related emails using the table “Review of Email” for guidance. Students should also incorporate what they have learned about writing in plain language (included in the Foundations Module) and the rules of grammar and punctuation (included in the Writing Module).

# Attribution Statement

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# Instructions for Critiquing an Email

* Each student will receive a copy of the Sample emails, and the “Review of Email” table.
* Students will read the original email and the response to it. Then students should use the table “Review of Email from Charles Beckner to A. Thomas Lighthouse” to critique elements in the *original email* for 10–15 minutes.\*
* Students may form pairs and discuss their critiques of the original email with each other, for 5–10 minutes. This should be used as an opportunity to reveal elements students missed, or engage in debate if students’ critiques differ.
* The instructor will lead a large group critique of the original email. A critique guide/key has been provided.

\*Note that it is important to critique each element in the table and to recognize that some elements have **more** than one problem.

# Extension Activity

This extension activity requires that students revise an existing email and response. The eText includes a chapter about revising one’s own writing; therefore, this extension may be best positioned after students have engaged with that material.

* Upon completing the critique, students will rewrite *both* the original and response emails either individually or in pairs. This may be done in class (approximately 20 minutes) or in preparation for the next class.
* Students should use their completed critiques of the original email to guide their suggested revisions. Note that while the revised emails should improve the elements criticized, there is more than one way to do so, and thus the revised emails will not be the same as the example’s answers.
* Students may then be asked by the instructor to submit their revised emails for feedback, or students may present their revision in class.
* Feedback on the revised emails should be provided using the single-point rubric included.

# Preparing this Document for Students

The first part of this activity—critiquing the email from Charles Beckner to A. Thomas Lighthouse—includes a sample completed critique form. Answers in this form are provided in blue text. Prior to distributing the table “Review of Email from Charles Beckner to A. Thomas Lighthouse,”the blue text should be deleted. The blue text is meant to support the instructor lead discussion at the end of the activity.

In addition, there is a sample set of revised emails provided in this activity package for use in the extension activity. These sample revisions are intended to be provided to students following their own attempt to revise the emails. The sample revisions may also be used during a large group critique of revisions led by the instructor.

# Using the Single-Point Rubric

The purpose of the single-point rubric is to provide narrative formative feedback to students. It may be used by either students or instructors. For example, the instructor can use it as an evaluation tool, while the student can refer to it as an outline of what is expected of them and use it for peer evaluation. The centre column of this rubric describes the target that students need to meet to be considered proficient. We have provided a blank right column for specific feedback about what the student did that went above and beyond proficiency; a left blank column, for noting areas in which the student did not meet the expectations.

Sample Initial Email

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| TO: A. Thomas Lighthouse <atlight@lighthousehorses.com>  FROM: Charles Beckner <beckner\_farm@gmail.com>  SENT: Wed, July 27, 2015  SUBJECT: Colt  Hello,  I have a 2 month old colt here you should probably consider as a stallion prospect. He’s by Crossroads Laurentian http://www.allbreedpedigree.com/crossroads+laurentian and out of Glorious Seed – http://www.pedigreequery.com/glorious+seed (with Bold Axe in her pedigree = priceless!!!)  He is liver chestnut with a crescent moon on his face and one small hind sock. Named The Glorious Mooner. He is stunning. Gorgeous mover. Reinhardt Blaumann put my mare together with Laurentian because she is so refined.  Crossroads Laurentian has sired some world beaters – Midnight Run, Once Again In Time and the deceased Highcliff Honors. The first two are Champ & Reserve every time out in 2011 I believe.  His half sister is winning with an amateur rider (I have attached two pictures of her). She is Champ most times out as well and always wins the hack too.  Sorry the picture of him was with my Blackberry. Let me know what you think. I’m trying to do some things here at the farm since my wife died and the time it takes are more than I can manage so he needs to be sold – $12,000. Thanks so much. |

Sample Response Email

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| TO: Charles Beckner <beckner\_farm@gmail.com>  FROM: A. Thomas Lighthouse <atlight@lighthousehorses.com>  CC: Caroline Woods <fortheloveofponies@yahoo.com>  SENT: Thursday, July 28, 2015  SUBJECT: Re: Colt/Stallion Prospect  Dear Charles,  Thank you for considering my program for your stallion prospect, and my condolences on the loss of your wife.  At this time, however, I am more than satisfied with the hunter prospects my mares are producing crossed on Glory Days Ben Earl.  I have cc’ed this email to Caroline Woods, a young lady here in Florida who is in the start-up phase of her own breeding operation. Since her family maintains property in Virginia, perhaps she will have a place for your colt in her plans. Good luck with him.  A. Thomas Lighthouse  Lighthorse Ranch, LLC  http://www.Lighthorse.com |

Review of Email from Charles Beckner to A. Thomas Lighthouse

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| **Format**  The document exhibits appropriate formatting choices for “To:/From:” date, salutation, subject line, CC, BCC, body, closing remarks, signature, etc. | **Signature** element is missing; it should be included to identify the business and provide additional contact information, such as an address. The email address alone is insufficient.  **Subject line**: insufficient information to identify the subject or purpose of e-mail |
| **Audience**  demonstrates careful consideration of audience (e.g., audience-specific salutation, complimentary closing, formality, etc.) | **salutation** too informal and does not identify the recipient by name  **Content** is focused on sender’s information rather than recipient’s needs. Descriptions are too subjective. |
| **Style**  Vocabulary, level of writing, level of formality, point of view (first/second/third person), conciseness, colloquialisms, etc., match purpose, context, and intended audience of document. | Too informal and demonstrates a lack of professionalism. This is seen through omitting words (“the picture . . . was with” instead of “the picture . . . was taken with”; “Sorry . . .” instead of “I am sorry…”)  Too many short, choppy sentences and paragraphs. Lacks transitional devices to connect ideas.  Paragraphs should be merged so they do not exceed the three-paragraph standard.  Should embed hyperlinks to avoid sentence clutter.  Should not have sent a poor image—lack of effort in presentation implies an unprofessional approach to the business relationship and is made more unfortunately memorable by emphasizing the problem in the closing paragraph.  The residual element “Let me know what you think” is unlikely to spur action; the request is vague.  Inclusion of personal information to justify price is unnecessary and unprofessional.  Shorthand style referring to colt’s traits and to price is abrupt and does not prepare reader to receive important final points.  Thanking someone before they have done anything is presumptive and could imply carelessness, rushing, or lack of effort to end with a meaningful statement. |
| **Tone**  Choice of negative or positive tone is intentional and appropriate. Writer uses active voice over passive voice. Writer effectively employs fun vs. serious, informational vs. persuasive, where appropriate. | **Tone** is very demanding and abrupt, producing an approach that is too casual, and thus fails to establish a professional environment for any potential business transactions  **Grammar**: Needs to use complete sentences throughout, omit exclamations, reduce wordiness, avoid parenthetical afterthoughts, spell out abbreviations and numbers under 10, use words instead of symbols, omit unnecessary capitalization. Also contains some missing commas and subject–verb agreement errors (e.g., “the time . . . are” should be “the time . . . is”). |

Extension: Sample Rewritten Emails

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| TO: A. Thomas Lighthouse <ATLight@LighthouseHorses.com>  FROM: Charles Beckner <Beckner\_Farm@gmail.com>  SENT: Wed, July 27, 2015  SUBJECT: Stallion Prospect  Dear Mr. Lighthouse,  I am contacting you to let you know about a nice colt I have: The Glorious Mooner, a two-month-old chestnut with a crescent moon on his face. Reinhardt Blaumann recommended that I breed my mare Glorious Seed (sired by Bold Ace) to Crossroads Laurentian last year, and this colt is the result. I am hoping you will recognize his potential as a breeding stallion.  Crossroads Laurentian has himself sired some very nice show horses, including 2011 champions Midnight Run and Once Again In Time as well as the deceased Highcliff Honors. I do not have a picture of Crossroad Laurentian, but I have attached two pictures of his half-sister, a frequent champion and consistent hack winner.  Unfortunately, the picture I’ve attached of the Glorious Mooner was taken with my Blackberry, so it isn’t the best quality—but I do think the colt is! I have priced him at $12,000, but even if you aren’t interested in a purchase at this time, I’d appreciate getting your opinion of him. I am motivated to sell and respect your experience and judgment.  Respectfully, Charles Beckner  Beckner Farm  21 Front River Rd. Altamont, VA 23456 (704) 989-125 |

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| TO: Charles Beckner <[Beckner\_Farm@gmail.com](mailto:Beckner_Farm@gmail.com)>  FROM: A. Thomas Lighthouse <ATLight@LighthouseHorses.com>  CC: Caroline Woods <[fortheloveofhorses@yahoo.com](mailto:fortheloveofhorses@yahoo.com)>  SENT: Thursday, July 28, 20115  SUBJECT: Re: Stallion Prospect  Dear Charles,  I was saddened to learn of your wife’s passing. Please extend my condolences to your family and recognize that I am honoured that you would consider my breeding program during these difficult times.  Your colt’s bloodlines are very impressive, and from what I could see in the photo, he does appear to have the qualities breeders appreciate. However, since I am committed to using Ben Earl for my mares right now, I am unable to act on the availability of the Glorious Mooner. Nevertheless, I will keep him in mind for the future.  In addition, I have copied this email to Caroline Woods, a young lady who is starting her own breeding program here in Florida. Because her family maintains property in Virginia, perhaps she will have a place for your colt in her plans. If there is anything else I can do to help, please do not hesitate to contact me.  Sincerely,  Tom  A. Thomas Lighthouse  Lighthorse Ranch, LLC  http://www.lighthorse.com |

Critiquing an Email: Single Point Rubric

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| Concerns Areas that need work | Criteria Standards for this Task | Demonstrated Evidence of Excellence |
|  | **Format**  The document exhibits appropriate formatting choices for “To:/From:” date, salutation, subject line, CC, BCC, body, closing remarks, signature, etc. |  |
|  | **Audience**  Student’s writing demonstrates careful consideration of audience (e.g., audience-specific salutation, complimentary closing, formality, etc.) |  |
|  | **Style**  Vocabulary, level of writing, level of formality, point of view (first/second/third person), conciseness, colloquialisms, etc., match purpose and context of document. |  |
|  | **Tone**  Choice of negative or positive tone is intentional and appropriate. Writer uses active voice over passive voice. Writer effectively employs fun vs. serious, informational vs. persuasive, where appropriate. |  |
|  | **Grammar and Mechanics**  Sentences are complete and well-formed. Complex sentences are used correctly and appropriately.  Grammar, spelling, and punctuation are consistent and correct.  Verbs, including irregular verbs, are conjugated correctly. Verb tense is correct. |  |