



## **EMAIL IS WONDERFUL**

*Say hello. Land a job. Tell your story. Make someone laugh.  
Offer advice. Send a gift. Schedule a date.*

*How many amazing, beautiful things will you do with email...  
Today?*

By Alexandra Franzen

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## Introduction.

Do you remember your very first email address?

I do.

It was:

[sharklife@aol.com](mailto:sharklife@aol.com)

I was about 11 years old. I had thick glasses, a mouth full of braces, and huge chubby cheeks. I loved reading and baking and dancing and watching *The X-Files*, which my dad would record for me once a week on big, clunky black VHS tapes. I was bright and curious about everything—especially this cool new thing called “the World Wide Web.”

Also, I really, really loved sharks. I wanted to be a “shark scientist” when I got older. Hence my email address.

I can still remember logging on to AOL (America Online) to check my email.

I remember the excruciatingly slow dial-up connection. The whirrrrrring sound the computer made, as if it was working very, very hard to heave me onto the Internet. The thrilling ping—“You’ve got mail!”—issuing through the computer speakers in a tinny, robotic voice.

Email fascinated me then.

Twenty years later, it still does.

My relationship with email is very different today, of course.

I have moments where I loathe email. I have moments where I love email.

I have days where email seems to consume my entire life. I have other days where everything feels tidily under control.

Today, I use email to write X-rated love letters to my boyfriend. I use email to correspond with clients and customers. I use email to pitch story ideas to journalists. I use email to

organize project notes and timelines. I use email to carry my work into the world—and also to fritter away time when I don't really feel like “working.”

Email allows us to do, share, and receive so many things.

It is easy to take all of those abilities for granted.

It is easy to blame email for our personal time-management problems.

It is easy to forget that email is our friend.

A miraculous, amazingly helpful friend.

So let's start treating it that way.

After all...

Every single day, you can use email to... Say hello. Land a job. Tell your story. Make someone laugh. Offer advice. Send a gift. Schedule a date. Blast out a newsletter to inspire hundreds or thousands of recipients. Or send one heartfelt note that changes one special person's day.

So much power. Literally, right at your fingertips.

I hope this booklet inspires you to think about email differently... to play with some new writing techniques... to infuse more personality and purposefulness into the emails you send out... and ultimately, begin a new kind of relationship with email. A satisfying, exciting relationship where email no longer feels like a “burden” or a “chore,” but rather, a wonderful tool.

A tool that you can use to make other people's lives brighter, and make the entire world a better place.

How many amazing, uplifting, beautiful things will you do with email... today?

-A/lex

## 5 fascinating facts about email.

Email is amazing.

After reading these neat factoids, you'll never look at your inbox the same way again!

Did you know that...

### 1. Email travels at half the speed of light.

That sweet email you just blasted out to Aunt Sadie?

With a good, clear Internet connection, it's traveling at about [85,000 miles per second](#).

Exponentially faster than a cheetah, a speed-boat, a Japanese magnetic levitation train, the core of a tornado—even interstellar spacecraft. Whoa.

### 2. Email is the love-child of two robots from the '70s.

The very first email in history was sent by a giant machine named BBN-TENEXB to another big machine named BBN-TENEXA.

And then it was immediately printed by another machine named TELETYPE KSR-33. A [digital ménage à trois!](#) How romantic!

### 3. Email connects 1 in 5 human beings on earth.

A research group called [Radicati](#) has found that 1 in 5 human beings have an email account—and the numbers keep growing. Email connects our world like nothing else.

### 4. Email can soar down from OUTER SPACE!

In 1991, astronauts aboard the STS-43 Atlantis used Apple technology to send the following message back home:

*"Hello Earth! Greetings from the STS-43 Crew. This is the first AppleLink from space. Having a GREAT time, wish you were here... send cryo and RCS! Hasta la vista, baby... we'll be back!"*

Space-mail! The final frontier!

## **5. Email can make you a highly prolific writer.**

Don't consider yourself a "writer?"

Well, you're probably going to write [a novel's worth of emails](#) this year, so... actually, you are a writer. And a very prolific one at that!

## **7 guidelines for clearer, stronger, better writing.**

If you don't read anything else in this booklet: read these 7 guidelines.

These suggestions apply to writing emails, writing essays, writing speeches, writing stories, writing just about anything. Some of these suggestions may seem very "obvious" or "simple," but it's often the simplest things (eat well, drink water, be kind, exercise) that we humans forget to do! A gentle reminder never hurts...

### **1. First, set your intention.**

Before you start typing away, ask yourself: *Why am I writing?*

What are you hoping to achieve? What is your intention?

Are you writing to brighten someone's morning? To inspire people to purchase your product? To motivate your team to head back into the ring after a crushing defeat? To make a particular person feel loved and appreciated? To correct a misunderstanding? To issue an important reminder?

Try to choose one clear, strong intention per email, rather than trying to pack a whole slurry of intentions, invitations, ideas and requests all into one message.

Just like you might set a clear, loving intention before meditating or doing yoga, you can set an intention before you start writing.

Your writing will become so much clearer.

Your readers will feel the difference.

### **2. Write from your "happy place."**

Ever notice how when you're stressed out and trying to "force" yourself to write something amazing... it never works?

Research shows that getting yourself into a happy, relaxed state—think: taking a shower—is the key to creativity-on-command.

When your body is experiencing a rush of dopamine, that’s when those a-ha! moments (“Ooh! I know exactly what to say!”) tend to happen.

There are plenty of ways to get into your happy place before you sit down to write. You can play energizing music, light a scented candle, bounce on an exercise ball—whatever it takes to help you unclench and relax!

### **3. Give yourself a time limit.**

Personally, the longer that I fuss and fret over a piece of writing, the worse it gets. I find this is true for most of my clients and colleagues, too.

When you have a clear reason for writing and feel happy and relaxed (see tips #1 and 2), your first draft is usually just fine. There’s no need to endlessly chew it over.

If you are trying to clear out your inbox, for example, give yourself a time limit—say, three minutes per email—to prevent yourself from slipping into a state of “analysis-paralysis.”

You can [set up a “smart playlist” in iTunes](#) comprised entirely of three-minute songs (or any time frame that you want) to keep yourself rockin’ along. When the song changes, finish your email, hit “send” and move on!

### **4. Ask, “What would my hero write?”**

If you’re struggling with an especially tricky piece of writing—and you just can’t figure out what to say or how to make it sound right—try channeling one of your personal heroes.

*“What would Mister Rogers write in this situation?”*

*“How would Oprah handle this email chain?”*

*“What would the Dalai Lama say?”*

Let their words flow through your fingertips.

Your hero will guide you along.



## **5. Say it out loud.**

Whenever possible, read your writing out loud.

Does it sound like it was written by a human being or a cyborg? Are you stumbling over excessively long sentences? Catch any typos or duplicate words? If so, tweak and read it out loud again.

Ideally, your writing should sound pretty close to the way you naturally speak. Conversational and human, not robotic.

## **6. Finish strong.**

Whenever possible, end your emails with a decisive statement or a simple “yes” or “no” question rather than an open-ended question. This is a huge time-saver.

This: “I feel the following approach is the best choice. If you agree, write back to say ‘yes,’ and I’ll get started right away.”

Not this: “So, what do you guys think? I’m open to everyone’s input!”

This: “Let’s meet for brunch on Sunday at [HunnyMilk](#) at 10am. My treat. Sound good?”

Not this: “Should we do brunch, lunch, coffee, dinner, or...? What days are you free? I’m cool with whatever!”

By being decisive, you’re giving your email recipient a gift: the gift of having one less decision that they have to make today! Ahhh. Relief!

## **7. Don’t worry about “perfection.” Just strive to be a “Daymaker.”**

David Wagner, CEO of Juut Salonspa, often speaks about being a “Daymaker.” I love this philosophy so much.

When you choose to be a Daymaker, you are choosing to be a source of positivity, energy, and encouragement for everyone that you encounter throughout your day.

You are not just “going through the motions” of your work or life or relationships. You are choosing to “make someone’s day.”

With everything you write—every email, every text, every tweet—you have an opportunity to be a Daymaker. (Or not!)

Often, all it takes is a few words of kindness, a thoughtful compliment, or an insightful reminder that leaves your email recipient thinking, “Yeah. I needed that.”

Try to be a Daymaker through your writing and everything else that you do.

It really doesn’t matter if your writing is “perfect” or not. If you are striving to be a Daymaker, people will feel it. Your intention will shine through.

## **How to write emails using the FEEL - KNOW - DO principle.**

In the previous section of this booklet, I encouraged you to “set an intention” before you begin writing.

If you’re not exactly sure how to do that, there’s a technique that I call FEEL - KNOW - DO that can really help.

You can use FEEL - KNOW - DO to help organize your thoughts before writing an email, an article, a blog post, pretty much anything.

Here’s how it works:

Before you start writing, start by asking yourself the following three questions:

**1. How do I want my reader to FEEL?**

**2. What do I want my reader to KNOW?**

**3. What do I want my reader to DO?**

Once you’ve answered those three questions for yourself, now you’ve got a “roadmap” for what you intend to say and how you intend to say it.

### **EXAMPLE**

Let’s say... you have a client who is continually pestering you with emails.

All day long, she’s sending relentless questions. Tons of emails late at night, too. She always wants an immediate response. Everything is labeled “urgent.”

Her behavior is becoming very intrusive. You like this person very much, and you are grateful that she chose to hire you, but this has got to stop.

You want your client to FEEL: *Respected and appreciated.*

You want your client to KNOW: *That the constant emailing is not OK.*

You want your client to DO: *Something different, like save all of her questions for your upcoming conference call rather than emailing you all day long.*

So, your email might go...

*Hey [person's name],*

*It's always so much fun to work with you. I love your passion and eagerness to get things moving forward quickly—and you always ask such intriguing questions!*

*Speaking of which... I've answered your last couple of questions below.*

*Going forward, however, I ask that you "save up" your list of questions for our weekly conference call (rather than asking them via email). That weekly call is our designated time for going through questions like the ones you've been asking. Let's stick to that plan. Thanks so much.*

*[your name here]*

In the example just above, you can see how we've hit all three elements—FEEL - KNOW - DO—in one brief email. It's firm but still respectful and appreciative.

## **TRY IT OUT**

Before writing your next email, decide what you want your reader to FEEL - KNOW - DO.

*I want my email recipient to FEEL \_\_\_\_\_.*

*I want my email recipient to KNOW \_\_\_\_\_.*

*I want my email recipient to DO \_\_\_\_\_.*

Once you're feeling clear about all three elements, then go ahead and write your email.

Repeat this experiment a couple of times with a couple different types of emails.

Notice if writing feels a bit easier. Notice how people respond to your words.

(If you really like this FEEL - KNOW - DO technique and want to practice using it more, visit the ["Free Workbook" section of my Shop](#). You'll find a workbook all about the FEEL - KNOW - DO philosophy with other examples and exercises for you to try. Enjoy!)

## How to write emails that are extremely brief.

Isn't it refreshing when you get an email that's crisp, clear and blessedly short?

To me, short emails say: *"Life is precious. I respect your time and mine. Let's wrap this up and get offline!"*

If you really struggle to express yourself briefly, here is a fun word-game that can help you to practice and improve: [Haiku-mail](#).

What is Haiku-mail?

To try it out, simply pretend that you're writing a [haiku](#)—a three line, seventeen-syllable poem—instead of an email.

You don't have to literally write a poem, but let "three-line haiku" be your intention.

### EXAMPLE

Original email:

*Hey girrrrrl. What's up? How's life? Man, I miss you. So much to say. I was thinking we could grab dinner sometime? Or not. Coffee, too. Whatever. When are you free this week? Or if not this week, next week is cool. Are you still living in that same apartment? Remember that one restaurant we used to always go to on Lake Street? We oughta go there. Or somewhere new. Up to you. Just let me know. Love ya. Text me. Bye.*

Haiku-mail:

*I miss your sweet face.  
Dinner at eight-ish? My treat.  
The usual place.*

Even if you just "pretend" to write a haiku, your emails will naturally become much, much shorter.

## **TRY IT OUT**

For the rest of today, try to write all of your emails in the style of a three-line poem... or as close to that goal as you can get. Keep it light and playful. See if you can get a few of your friends to do it with you!

*Cherry blossom dream*

*Inbox, full of poetry*

*Brevity is love*

## How to write emails that captivate very busy peoples' attention.

When I am writing to a very, very busy person—someone who holds a ton of responsibility, someone who is a sought-after “celebrity,” someone who fields hundreds of emails every day, or an extremely busy friend or colleague whose time I do not want to waste (aka: basically everyone!)—I often use an approach that I call “Three Things.”

A “Three Things” email goes something like this:

*Hey there, [name of busy person],*

*Three things:*

*1. I'm writing today because \_\_\_\_\_.*

*2. I'm wondering if you'd be willing to \_\_\_\_\_.*

*3. Just for fun, here's something that I think will make you smile: \_\_\_\_\_.*

*Thanks for your time.*

*Have an excellent [Tuesday]...*

*[your name here]*

### **EXAMPLE**

In the following example, I am writing to a local journalist.

I am hoping to get some publicity for an event I'm hosting. I want to encourage her to mention my event in her column, but I don't want to be too pushy, too wordy, or take up too much of her time. I want to get my point across as quickly as possible.

After all: she gets tons of similar requests every day. She's very busy!

*Hey there, Jennifer,*



*Three things:*

*1. I'm writing today because I am hosting an event called [Letters & Brunch](#). It's a get-together where people can write heartfelt letters while sipping mimosas and eating delicious food. Paper, envelopes, and postage stamps will be provided for free. More info: [here](#).*

*2. I'm wondering if you'd be willing to mention this event in your "Things To Do This Weekend" column? Since you often feature stories about local food & cultural events, I figure Letters & Brunch might be something your readers would like to know about!*

*3. Just for fun, here's something that that I think will make you smile: it's a list of [the 20 best bacon recipes of all time](#). I noticed (by reading your bio) that you're a bacon fanatic. Me too. Enjoy. :)*

*If you have any questions for me regarding Letters & Brunch, feel free to ask away!*

*Thanks for your time.*

*Have an excellent Tuesday...*

*-Alex*

The "Three Things" approach works wonders because it's brief, clear and there's no confusion about why you're writing—or what you want.

Best of all: it includes a touch of generosity and sweetness at the end. Something to encourage that very busy person to take a deep breath, take a micro-break, and smile.

## **TRY IT OUT**

Choose one very busy person that you've been meaning to write to for awhile.

Could be a supervisor at the company you work for. Or a blogger you admire. Or an author whose work has touched your heart. Or someone you'd love to collaborate with.

Use the "Three Things" approach—or a similar approach of your own devising—to start a conversation. Keep it brief. See what happens.

## How to write kind, loving, patient emails even when you're feeling annoyed.

With thousands of emails flying in and out of your inbox every year, there are bound to be at least one or two messages that irritate you—or even hurt you.

And unfortunately, those one or two icky emails are always the emails that burn into our brains. They're the ones we can't stop thinking about, days or weeks later.

Maybe it's a demanding request from a distant relative you barely know. (*"Hey, I know we haven't spoken for three years, but could you design my entire website for free? Thaaanks."*)

Maybe it's a message from your boss, asking you to work over-time on a holiday weekend when you clearly stated that you're NOT available. (Gah!)

Maybe it's a vicious attack from a total stranger—an anonymous troll who feels compelled to tell you that you're ugly and stupid and don't deserve to share your thoughts online. (This may sound insane, but colleagues of mine have experienced this exact type of online-bullying. It's awful and tough to wash out of your mind.)

When yucky emails come flying into my inbox, I rarely respond while my emotions are hot. That's usually not productive.

Instead, I park the email for a few hours (or days), cool my jets, and then ask myself a series of self-reflection questions like these:

### 1. Why is this email so intensely upsetting?

Is it pricking at a particular insecurity of yours? (*"If this 1 customer wants a refund, that must mean ALL of my work is total garbage! Nooo!"*)

Is it making you feel resentful because you mismanaged your time? (*"Ugh. I told them I'd be willing to finish this project by insert-deadline-here. Now I actually have to do it."*)

Is it just plain snarky and mean?

Once you've figured out why that particular email is pushing your buttons, you can decide...

## **2. Would it be helpful for me to respond?**

Would it help to repair your reputation? Would it help to correct a misunderstanding? Would it help to mend a relationship? Would it help to point someone in a productive direction? Is there any benefit to responding?

In some situations (like with total creeps / bullies) responding is just not going to help anyone to achieve anything. Sometimes the best response is no response.

But if you decide that responding is, in fact, a good idea, you might then ask yourself...

## **3. What would my personal hero say or do in this situation?**

How would he want your reader to feel?

What would he want your reader to know?

What would he want your reader to do?

And what would he be willing... to forgive?

My personal hero is [Mister Rogers](#). I often try to channel his voice and temperament when I'm writing prickly, tricky, emotionally sensitive emails.

But if Mister Rogers doesn't resonate with you, insert a peaceful, compassionate role model of your choice. Say, Mother Teresa. The Dalai Lama. Your wise auntie. Your favorite Care Bear. Oprah. Someone you love and admire.

Channeling one of your heroes makes it easier to "detach" yourself from the heightened emotions of the situation so that you can respond with brevity, directness and care.

## **TRY IT OUT**

Think about something that happened recently—something that really bothered you, hurt you, or made you want to smash a dozen eggs over somebody's head.

Write an email to the person (or people) who triggered those feelings.

You don't have to actually send your email—just practice using your compassion muscles.

Channel one of your heroes as you write.

See what comes out of your heart.

## **How to write an entertaining “auto responder” or “out of office” message.**

Have you ever gotten an automatic email-reply from someone who's away from their desk?

It might say something like:

*Hey there, valued customer and / beloved friend!*

*I'm sunning myself on a private beach in Hawaii until January 30th. I won't be checking email until then.*

*If it's an emergency, you can call me at 555-555-5555.*

*Mahalo!*

That bounce-back blurb is often called a vacation “auto-responder” or an “out of office” message.”

But here's the thing:

You can use auto-responders any time you want—not just when you're on vacation!

You can use auto-responders for lots of other reasons, too, like sharing answers to Frequently Asked Questions that people typically email you about, or explaining that you don't check email on weekends, or sharing info about your latest product, or informing people that you're immersed in a big project and that you won't be responding to emails super-quickly this week, or any other info you want to share.

Here's an example of an auto-responder that you could turn on during a hectic, busy week to encourage people to be patient with you:

### **EXAMPLE**

*Hello & thanks for your email!*

*I'm juggling a couple of big projects this week—with tight deadlines—so I won't be responding to emails as quickly as I usually do. Thanks for your patience.*

*Meanwhile... while you're waiting for a reply to your email, why not...*

- Listen to this [awesome playlist](#)
- [Write a letter](#) to someone you love
- Explore my [blog archives](#)

*Or set down your digital device and go play outside. It's nice out there.*

*Back soon-ish,*

*-Alex*

## **TRY IT OUT**

This week, write an email auto-responder.

It can be short, long, playful, or serious. You can fill it with interesting links, like entertaining things for people to do while they are waiting to hear back from you. You can share a few projects you're working on, reiterate your office hours or email policies, share a phone number for special emergencies, explain why you're not answering emails right now, some, all, or none of the above. Whatever makes sense for you.

Turn it on and try it out—even just for a single day.

You might notice that once you've flipped on a friendly auto-responder, you start to feel a bit calmer about your inbox. Like, "Ahhh... now people won't be expecting an instantaneous reply from me. I can relax and focus on other things."

Not sure how to set up an auto-responder?

Google: "How do I set up a vacation auto-responder in [your email platform, here]?"  
Google will tell you everything you need to know.

## How to write ready-to-use email templates that save you lots of time.

My [brother](#) once told me a hilarious story about a buddy of his—a fellow musician and composer.

This guy was very successful and sought-after. He received an immense number of emails every day.

He told my brother that he wanted to invent a special computer keyboard especially for answering emails.

This keyboard would only have five buttons.

Those five buttons?

1. Yes.
2. No.
3. Maybe.
4. How much?
5. \$#%^ you.

OK, that last button is extremely rude, but I must admit: I love the concept of a five-button keyboard. Think of how much time it would save!

Until the Tech Gods invent a magical five-button keyboard that changes our lives, we'll have to find other ways to save time.

My advice: create ready-to-use email templates for common scenarios that pop into your life—and inbox—very frequently.

If people are constantly asking you, “How much do you charge for \_\_\_\_\_?” ... you can write a template to respond to that question.

If people are constantly asking you, “Where can I find the \_\_\_\_\_ and how does it work again?” ... you can write a template to respond to that question.

If people are constantly asking you, “Will you do \_\_\_\_\_ for free?” ... you can write a template to respond to that question.

And so on.

Keep all of your pre-written responses handy so that you can copy, paste, do a bit of personalization... and send them off!

This will save you a tremendous amount of time and energy—particularly if you are self-employed (like me) or have a job that entails a lot of repetitive emailing where you're answering similar questions over and over.

Wondering what types of templates you ought to create?

Glance back at the last 30 emails you sent and received.

See any common themes? Frequently asked questions? Recurring requests?

If you're self-employed, you might notice that you need templates for...

- Announcing new products and services.
- Answering commonly-asked questions about your work.
- Assisting customers who are having technical issues.
- Helping clients prepare for their time with you.
- Introducing two colleagues who you think ought to meet.
- Pitching yourself to the media.
- Requesting testimonials from past clients.
- Sending out (and following up on) invoices.

If you work for a company, you might notice that you need templates for...

- Clarifying what you actually do (and don't do) for co-workers who are slightly confused.
- Delivering reports to your boss.
- Outlining timelines for projects.
- Requesting and collecting feedback.
- Scheduling (or rescheduling) meetings.
- Sending out a 'progress update' on a particular project.
- Sending out important reminders to your team.

... or something completely different! Your "Sent" folder will illuminate everything.



## TRY IT OUT

Choose one question / topic / issue / scenario that frequently pops into your inbox, and write a template response for it.

Tuck that template into your "drafts" folder so it's ready to roll the next time you need it.

Here's a simple "I would be happy to assist you!" template response that works for almost every conceivable request:

*Hey there!*

*Thanks for your email.*

*It looks like you're writing about \_\_\_\_\_. Happy to help!*

*I'd recommend starting with \_\_\_\_\_ and then trying \_\_\_\_\_.*

*Last but not least, you can always try: \_\_\_\_\_.*

*If you still need help after that, feel free to circle back to me.*

*[your name here]*

## How to add extra pizzaz and personality to your emails.

From time to time, I like to add a little extra sparkle to my emails.

Rather than writing a plain ol' text email, I'll insert or attach an audio file, a video, or some other creative twist. Adding a teensy bit of extra flair can make your recipient feel so special and appreciated. You'll be making their day!

Here are a few flourishes that you can try out...

- **Vocaroo.** Visit the Vocaroo website. Click the gigantic red button to record an audio message. Then download your mp3 file and attach it to an email. You can tell your email recipient, "Surprise! I recorded a little audio love-note for you. Check out the attachment. Enjoy." [vocaroo.com](http://vocaroo.com)

(Don't want to use Vocaroo? You can do this with your smartphone, too. Just use whatever "Voice Recorder" app came with your phone or download one for free.)

- **Eyejot.** Send video messages from your computer or iPhone. [corp.eyejot.com](http://corp.eyejot.com)

- **mailVU.** A video message app for Android phones. [mailvu.com](http://mailvu.com)

- **Someecards.** Customizable e-cards with trendy designs. [someecards.com](http://someecards.com)

- **Rattlebox.** Video e-cards with a cheeky, edgy vibe. [rattlebox.com](http://rattlebox.com)

- **WiseStamp.** You can use this to create a cool email signature that has a picture of your smiling face & whatnot. Snazzy! [wisestamp.com](http://wisestamp.com)

- **Giftbit.** Send a digital card with a personalized message and gift certificate. Here's the twist, though: you only pay for the gift if your recipient actually claims it! Zero waste. Brilliant. [giftbit.com](http://giftbit.com)

- **The Postal Service.** It's this amazing service that delivers pieces of paper, folded into larger pieces of paper, to anyone in the world, often for under a dollar! Seriously, try it! ;)

Another simple way to add some pizzaz to your emails is to come up with a unique farewell statement, closing phrase, or sign off!

Maybe instead of “Sincerely yours” or “Fond regards” you would rather say...

*Stay classy!*

*Keep calm and email on.*

*Champagne wishes and caviar dreams...*

*This email will self-destruct unless you crack a smile right... now.*

Or... something else.

What will it be?

## **TRY IT OUT**

Choose three emails that are sitting in your inbox, right now, and respond to each one in a non-traditional way—with a video note, an audio note, a flowchart, an e-card or (gasp!) a handwritten letter or personal phone call. Add some personal flourishes. Go buck wild.

See how it feels to re-mix your communication.

Notice how others respond. (I bet they'll be charmed and inspired!)

## How to shift your behavior and communication so that you get fewer emails.

*"Be the change that you wish to see in the world."  
—Mahatma Gandhi*

*"Send the emails that you wish to see in the world."  
—Me*

If you live to be 100 years old, you will be alive for about 876,000 hours.

If you operate like the "average worker," about 35,000 of those hours will be spent sending and responding to emails. (And that's just counting work-related emails—not personal ones!)

Email is a wonderful tool, certainly, but I don't think any of us want to spend 35,000 hours doing email-related tasks. That's just too many life-minutes to give away! But there are just so many emails to contend with every day! And more flooding in at every moment! We can try to limit ourselves to two or three minutes per email to speed things up a bit, but at a certain point, you just can't write any faster. The bigger question, then, is...

How can we GET fewer emails in the first place?

Here are 5 practices that work really well for me:

### **1. Send fewer emails.**

Simple and true. If you want to get fewer emails, send fewer emails. Magic!

### **2. Unsubscribe from things you don't want, love or need anymore.**

Use [unroll.me](https://unroll.me) to unsubscribe from hundreds of unnecessary email-lists all at once. You won't believe how many lists you are on. This tool is LIFE CHANGING.

### **3. Don't answer every email right away.**

You don't have to leap to answer every single email that flutters into your inbox as if you are a firefighter or a paramedic rushing to save lives. 99% of the time, it can wait. Nobody is going to perish if you don't respond right this second.

(Also, I've noticed that quite a lot of people with "urgent questions" tend to write back one or two hours later to say, "Never mind! Figured it out." "Urgent" emails often resolve themselves without requiring any input from you.)

### **4. Don't answer certain emails... ever.**

There are some situations where the best response... is no response. Rather than open up a conversation that could harm you, frustrate you, or drain your energy, just hit delete.

You can archive or delete mass-blasted emails from people you barely know... threatening, cruel or just plain weird emails from people of questionable sanity... spam emails... promotional emails that don't resonate with you... and so many others. *Click.* Goodbye forever!

Most importantly of all...

### **5. Model the type of behavior that you wish to see in the world.**

This goes for emails and for pretty much every other aspect of life, as well.

If you make a habit of emailing friends, colleagues (or even total strangers) asking for advice on things you could easily Google or figure out by yourself, then other people will probably do the same to you.

If you write emails from a bitter, angry, resentful frame of mind, the responses you receive won't be much fun either.

If you write long, rambling, jigsaw-puzzle-esque emails with no clear intention or purpose, then you'll get responses that are equally mystifying.

But... if you are clear, brief, and articulate, that's exactly the type of communication you'll be likely to receive in return.

To paraphrase our ol' buddy Dr. Phil:

*"You teach people how to treat you."*

And that includes how to communicate with you.

If you want fewer emails, better emails, kinder emails, clearer emails... lead by example. Set the bar higher. People (not everyone, but many people) will rise up to meet you there.

### **TRY IT OUT**

From this moment forward, make an effort to teach people how to treat you and how to communicate with you.

Be the email-change you wish to see in the world.

## What could you do with just one email?

With one email...

- You can make someone's day a little brighter.
- You can help a struggling person to solve a problem.
- You can give a frustrated person the inspiration to keep going.
- You can reconnect with a long-lost friend and remind them that they are missed.
- You can uplift, motivate and inspire. You can help, instruct, and assist.
- You can share a true story that brings someone to tears.
- You can make someone laugh in the midst of a terrible, rocky day.
- You can share a piece of advice or a valuable resource that saves someone one hundred dollars of wasted money or one hundred hours of wasted time.
- You can inspire someone to hire you for a wonderful project.
- You can tell someone how much they are appreciated and treasured.

You don't have to be an "expert writer" or "the next Shakespeare" in order to do any of these things.

You just have to set a clear intention, write from the gut (heart + gut), and click "send."

With one email...

You can change your own life or someone else's—for the better.

This may sound "cheesy" or overly "bubbly," but it's really quite true:

Every email you write is an opportunity to [add to the love in the world](#).

So today... why not choose one person that you love very, very much. Like a parent. A friend. A helper. A mentor. A stranger that you don't know very well but totally admire and adore. Send that person a heartfelt email. Tell them:

*[name],*

*This note is simply to say:*

*Thank you for all that you've given me.*

*Specifically:*

*[List a few things this person has added to your life]*

*I hope that you'll tuck this email in a safe place and return to it whenever you're feeling down.*

*And if there's anything I can do for you, call on me.*

*Consider me a friend & a fan.*

*In gratitude,*

*[your name here]*

Send off your love note with no strings attached, no agenda, and no expectations.

Your only intention is: to make someone's day a little more wonderful.

To add a little more love to the world.

You can do that... with just one email.



## **Take back your power.**

We've talked about the beauty and wonderfulness of email.

We've talked about how to write better, clearer, more inspiring emails.

We've talked about how emails can be used to do great things in the world.

Now let's dip over to the dark side...

Here, I want to talk about how email can suck away our precious time and energy in a very unproductive way—if we allow it.

To set up this essay on technology and the power we give it, I want to tell you a story about the very first time I got my heart broken...

I was sixteen years old. He was seventeen.

He swept me off my feet, full of rakish charm, drenched in CK One cologne.

I was the center of his world for a few blissful weeks and he was the center of mine. Truly, I was obsessed with him. I adored him. I would do anything he wanted, be anyone he wanted, go anywhere at any time. He called all the shots. I just waited by the phone for my instructions. Then after a few weeks he got bored of me. There was another sixteen year old siren who caught his eye...

I got tossed aside.

I couldn't eat, could barely breathe. I fell into despair.

My mom held me and said, "Sweetheart, what is the lesson here?"

"I don't knooooooow," I blubbered.

"No, you DO know," she said. "The lesson is that you gave all of your power away to this boy. You lost yourself. Always hold onto your power. When you fall in love again, next time, you remember that."

My mom was right. (She's always right—it's so annoying sometimes!)

When we give all of our power away—when we let other people make decisions for us, dictate all the rules, take away excessive amounts of our time, dominate our whole day, overstep our boundaries—it's not OK. Our creativity saps away. We become shriveled and depleted. We lose ourselves. We forget our own wonderfulness.

We don't just give away our power to other people, of course—we also give our power away to systems, beliefs, and even tools like email, the Internet, and social media.

But it doesn't have to be that way. You don't have to be shackled to a person, profession, to an online account or an inbox.

You can take back your power.

If something is draining your power, you can walk away.

If something is stealing your time, you can make adjustments.

If someone is treating you disrespectfully, you don't have to just take it.

If technology is becoming a negative drain on your life instead of a meaningful, helpful tool, you don't have to let that continue. You're in charge. You can make changes. You can set new policies. You can bring things back into balance.

You are allowed, for example...

- To delete your Facebook account. [Yes, really](#). Completely. You can still [run a profitable business](#)... get a book deal... stay connected with friends... get invited to parties... and have a fulfilling social life. It's possible. (I am living proof.)

- To let certain emails rest peacefully in your inbox for days, weeks, even months before answering them. Not every email needs to be answered right away. In fact, I would argue: most do not.

- To shut down your computer and take a “digital sabbatical.” For a month. A week. A few hours every evening. Or the rest of your life.

- To un-subscribe, un-follow, un-like, un-pin, un-participate in any online communities that no longer feel meaningful or fulfilling for you.

- To shut your laptop right now and spend the rest of the day basking in the sunshine. Or curled under a blanket. Or making biscuits with your kids.

- To only hang out (or write / text / email / chat / correspond) with people who fuel you, inspire you, uplift you, and make you feel more powerful than ever.

**What is one way that you could “take back your power”—online, offline, in any aspect of your life—today?**

I recommend that you do it.

(My mom totally agrees.)

## **When you die you won't care about emails.**

A journalist once asked if I'd be willing to offer my thoughts on "email etiquette" and "ideal communication practices in the digital era" for a story she was putting together. I love talking about email (obviously) and I happily agreed.

But as I began typing my responses to her questions, I felt a powerful urge to delete everything I had written, replacing all of my "email advice" with just one sentence:

***When you die you won't care about emails.***

It's true.

At the end of your life, as you are waving farewell to this world, will you reflect fondly upon all the various emails you've written? Will you regret not sending more emails? Will you mentally recap your top ten most treasured emails of all time? Will your final words be, "Please, my children, don't forget to clear out my inbox..."? As you pass into heaven, will visions of beloved emails flash before your eyes?

Obviously not. None of that will matter.

Because when you die you won't care about emails.

The truth is that even though many of us spend a huge portion of our days dealing with emails, emails are not really that important in the grand scheme of things.

This may seem strange for me to say.

After all, you just finished reading over 30 pages of advice (written by me!) on how to write better emails.

I suppose I am expressing a bit of a contradiction.

On the one hand:

Email is a wonderful tool and we can use it to do great things in the world.

On the other hand:

Who cares about email? I mean, really?

On that somewhat uncomfortable note of tension and contradiction, here are my closing thoughts for you:

There are many, many ways to create a positive ripple effect in the world.

Email is just one of many tools at your disposal.

While it's terrific to work on becoming a better writer, communicator, and emailer, don't fret over it too much. Don't forget to travel, have sex, have adventures, and lift your gaze from your computer screen from time to time, too.

Live your life in such a way... that you can die with a full, happy heart.

You might wind up having an inbox full of unanswered messages, or a pristine empty inbox, or something in the middle, or whatever. Who cares? As long as you're happy, in the end, what else matters?

**To sum everything up in 63 final words:**

*Email is wonderful.*

*You are wonderful.*

*Life is full of infinite wonders.*

*And also: the clock of your life is ticking.*

*You don't have "forever" to experience the wonderfulness.*

*So don't spend too much time whirling down a digital rabbit-hole.*

*Don't forget to experience the pleasures, experiences, and meaningful projects that exist outside of your inbox, too.*

*They are waiting for you.*

-Alex

## You've reached the end! Now what?

If you enjoyed this booklet, here are a few things you can do next:

### — Write lots of beautiful emails. Also: write letters!

I created a free digital workbook—similar to this one—called [One Letter Today](#).

If you love writing and receiving old-school, snail mail, handwritten, ink and paper letters—and if you'd like some templates and inspiration to help get the words flowing—you'll love this booklet. [You can download it here](#).

### — Check out more of my work.

If you like my writing style and philosophy, you might want to scope out the books in my [Shop](#), my collection of free [articles](#) and [advice columns](#), my [newsletter](#), and [Unstoppable](#): an online course for people who are tired of feeling stuck, blocked, and distracted and just want to *write something already*.

I also have a bunch of free resources [here](#). Download as many as you desire.

### — Go outside.

It's nice out there. Email is wonderful, but fresh air and sunshine are wonderful too.

...

## Books to read.

Here are a few of my favorite books on writing, communication, compassion, creativity and doing excellent work.

Some are novels. Some are not. There's some poetry, too. Enjoy!

[\*Design Your Self\*](#). Karim Rashid.

[\*Die Empty\*](#). Todd Henry.

[\*I'm Proud of You: My Friendship with Fred Rogers\*](#). Tim Madigan.

[\*It's Not How Good You Are, It's How Good You Want to Be\*](#). Paul Arden.

[\*Michelle Kwan: Heart of a Champion: An Autobiography\*](#). Michelle Kwan.

[\*My Fight / Your Fight\*](#). Ronda Rousey.

[\*Start Where You Are\*](#). Pema Chödrön.

[\*Steal Like An Artist\*](#). Austin Kleon.

[\*The Art of Communicating\*](#). Thich Nhat Hanh.

[\*The Alchemist\*](#). Paulo Coelho.

[\*The Book of Awakening\*](#). Mark Nepo.

[\*The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou\*](#). Maya Angelou.

[\*The Desire Map\*](#). Danielle LaPorte.

[\*The Essential Rumi\*](#). Rumi.

[\*The Four Agreements\*](#). Don Miguel Ruiz.

[\*The Right To Write\*](#). Julia Cameron.

*The Subject Tonight Is Love.* Hafiz.

*The Usual Error.* Pace and Kyeli Smith.

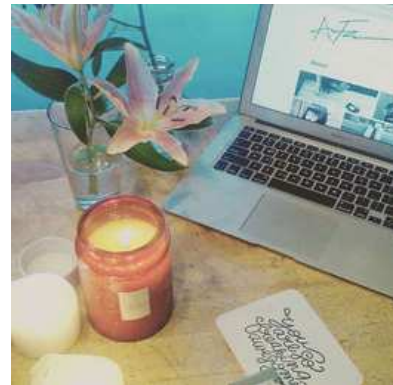
*Workin' It!* RuPaul.

*The World According To Mister Rogers.* Fred Rogers.

*Writing Down The Bones.* Natalie Goldberg.



## About the creator of this booklet



### Hey! It's me, Alex.

I'm a writer based in Portland.

I work with clients on all kinds of [writing projects](#): websites, TEDx talks, educational programs, book proposals, blog posts, and beyond.

I am the author of three books, including a [bestselling journal](#), an [illustrated book](#) on the power of gratitude, and a love story called [Milk & Honey](#).

My words have also been used on product packaging, in [song lyrics](#) and on [paintings](#).

### Other things & stuff:

My favorite human is [Mister Rogers](#). My favorite poet is [Rumi](#). My favorite spiritual leader is [RuPaul](#). I'm a Sagittarius, Type 1 on [The Enneagram](#), and very introverted. I love almond croissants, strong coffee, and all kinds of music. My hair is usually brown but currently it is blue. I have one fake tooth. I don't use social media. My personal mantra is: "[Today is not over yet.](#)"

You can learn more about my current projects at: [AlexandraFranzen.com](http://AlexandraFranzen.com).

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*Thank you for reading.*

**Alexandra Franzen. 2015.**