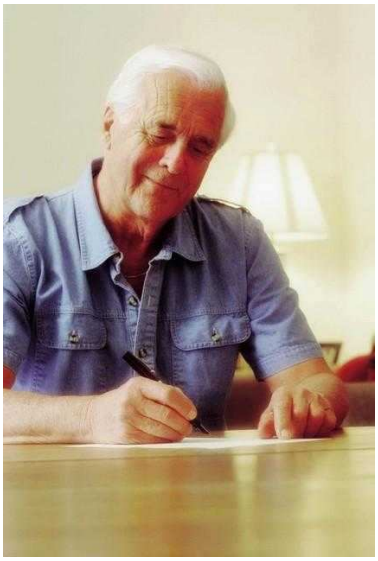

Writing to a Prospective Collaborator

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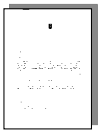
This presentation will tell you how to compose a letter to a prospective collaborator, what information to include, and what tone to use so that the recipient will be more likely to respond positively to your request.

Goals for this session



Learn the rules for writing a formal letter

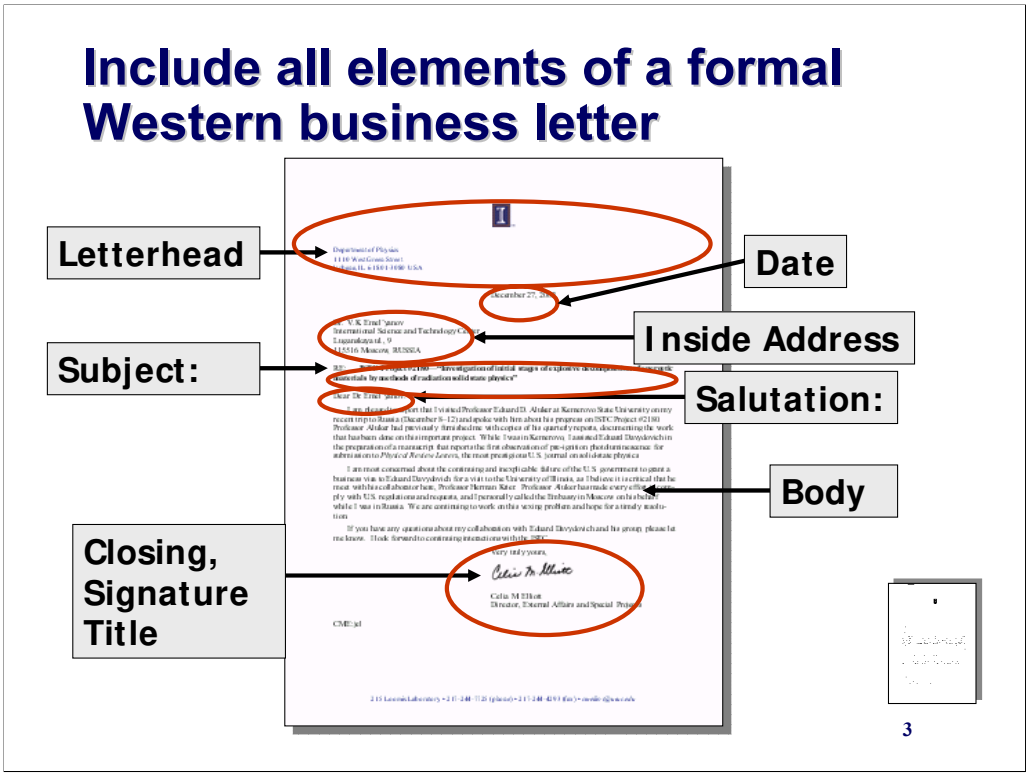
Learn how to ensure that your email actually gets read

Learn how to make a Western scientist want to collaborate with your team

2

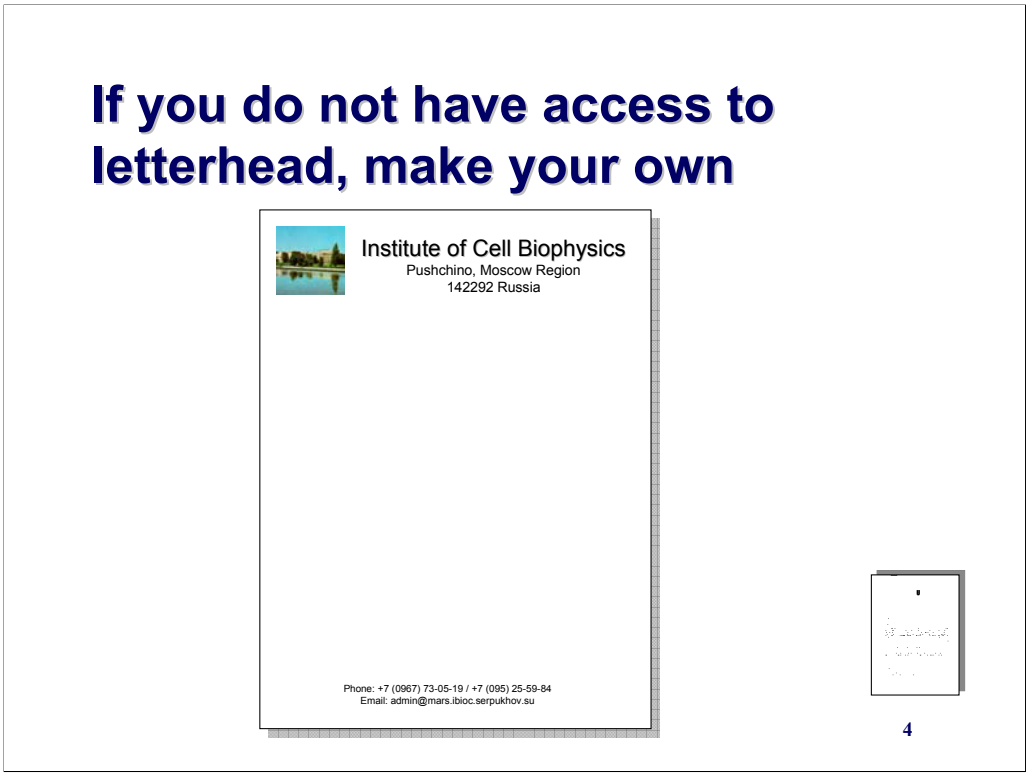
Goals:

1) Learn the rules for writing a formal letter
2) Learn how to ensure that your email actually gets read
3) Learn how to make a Western scientist want to collaborate with your team



Elements of a formal Western business letter (see slide):

1) Use letterhead from your institution, if available
2) Date
3) Inside address
4) Subject
5) Salutation/ "greeting"
6) Body
7) Closing/your signature/title



Make your own letterhead—be creative in order to be professional.

After the date, type the "inside address"

Repeats the same information that is on the envelope

Arrange in the following order (each bullet is a separate line):

- **[Title] [First name] [Initial] [Family Name]**
- **Department or Division**
- **Name of the Institution**
- **Post Office Box or Street Address**
- **City, State Postal Code Country**

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- Inside address is a repeat of what appears on the envelope
- Order:
    1) [Title] [First name] [Initial] [Family Name]
    2) Department or Division
    3) Name of the Institution
    4) Post Office Box or Street Address
    5) City, State Postal Code Country

Provide a concise, descriptive subject line after the inside address

Restrict to one or two lines

Begin with "RE:" or "Subject:"

RE: Research Opportunity in High-Energy Astrophysics

Subject: Joint Research on Black Hole Physics and Relativistic Astrophysics funded by International Agency

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Subject line = concise description of your purpose for the letter:

1) 1-2 lines only
2) Begin with "RE:" or "Subject:"
3) PUNCTUATION is important if you want to be professional
4) See examples on slide

After the inside address comes the "salutation"

"Dear" [Title] [Family Name]:

- If the person works at a university, address him or her as "Dear Professor" [Family Name]:
- If the person works at a national lab or a private company, address him or her as "Dear Dr." [Family Name]:

Follow the salutation with a colon (:)

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Salutation = Greeting

1) "Dear [title] [Family name] (see slide)
2) If person is at natn'l lab or private company, use "Dr."
3) Follow salutation w/ a colon (not an exclamation mark)

The body of the letter should cover five main points

- Explain who you are and why you are writing
- Describe your work, your proposed project, your team, your facilities and resources, your qualifications
- Explain why you need a collaborator and what the collaborator's duties are
- Specifically ask the person to be your collaborator
- Provide contact information and offer to answer any questions

8

Body – 5 Main Points:

1. Explain who you are and why you are writing
2. Describe your work, your proposed project, your team, your facilities and resources, your qualifications
3. Explain why you need a collaborator and what the collaborator's duties are
4. Specifically ask the person to be your collaborator
5. Provide contact information and offer to answer any questions

1. Explain who you are and why you are writing

Identify yourself

Explain that a U.S. collaborator is needed for a proposal that you are preparing for an international funding agency

Describe your scientific interests and qualifications

Tell the person how you learned of his research interests

9

Explaining who you are:

1. Identify yourself
2. Explain that a U.S. collaborator is needed for a proposal that you are preparing for an international funding agency
3. Describe your scientific interests and qualifications
4. Tell the person how you learned of his research interests

2. Describe your proposed project

- Explain the project's objectives and methods
- Describe preliminary results or your success on related problems
- Introduce your team and their qualifications
- Describe the facilities and resources that will be used for the project
- Emphasize your unique capabilities
- Explain what the collaborator will gain from participating in the project

10

Describing Your Project:

1. Explain the project's objectives and methods
2. Describe preliminary results or your success on related problems
3. Introduce your team and their qualifications
4. Describe the facilities and resources that will be used for the project
5. Emphasize your unique capabilities
6. Explain what the collaborator will gain from participating in the project

3. Explain why a collaborator is needed and what his duties are

Provide information about the funder and the purposes of the program

List the collaborator's duties

- Review the research plan
- Assist with the submission of the proposal
- Provide technical guidance
- Host visits from your team
- Visit your laboratory

Give eligibility requirements for the collaborator

- Must be a U.S. citizen
- Must hold a PhD or equivalent

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Explain your NEED for the collaborator and his/her DUTIES:

1. Provide information about the funder and the purposes of the program
2. List the collaborator's duties
    - Review the research plan
    - Assist with the submission of the proposal
    - Provide technical guidance
    - Host visits from your team
    - Attend a workshop in Russia OR YOUR HOME COUNTRY
3. Give eligibility requirements for the collaborator
    - Must be a U.S. citizen
    - Must hold a PhD or equivalent

4. Specifically ask the person to be your collaborator

Emphasize how he will benefit from working with your team

Give him a deadline for his reply

Ask him to pass your letter on to colleagues who might also be interested in collaborating with you

Ask him to give you suggestions on how to improve your proposal

12

Specifically ask the person to be your collaborator:

1. Emphasize how he will benefit from working with your team
2. Give him a deadline for his reply
3. Ask him to pass your letter on to colleagues who might also be interested in collaborating with you
4. Ask him to give you suggestions on how to improve your proposal

5. Provide contact information and offer to answer any questions

Include your complete (and correct!) email address, phone, and fax number

Refer him to your English-language technical publications; provide complete bibliographic citations and URLs if possible

Give addresses for websites that give information about your institution, your facilities, and your research group

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Provide contact info and offer to answer any Qs:

1. Include your complete (and correct!) email address, phone, and fax number
2. Refer him to your English-language technical publications;
3. Provide complete bibliographic citations and URLs if possible
4. Give addresses for websites that give information about your:
    - institution,
    - your facilities
    - your research group

Use a standard Western closing

Use one of the following phrases:

- **Very truly yours,**
- **Sincerely yours,**
- **Respectfully yours,**

Follow the closing with a comma (,)

Leave four blank lines for your signature

- **Sign the letter in blue or black ink**
- **Write neatly**

After the blank lines, on one line print your name and title

14

Standard Western Closing:

- Very truly yours,
- Sincerely yours,
- Respectfully yours,

1. Follow the closing with a comma (,)
2. Leave four blank lines for your signature
   - Sign the letter in blue or black ink
   - Write neatly
3. After the blank lines, on one line print your name and title

An email message should be as professional as a formal letter

- Include the same five main points
- Put your name in the "From" line
- Use a descriptive "Subject" line
  - ~~"Letter"~~
  - "Collaborator Needed for Bilateral U.S./ Polish Research Initiative in High-Energy Astrophysics"
- Send the message with "High Priority"

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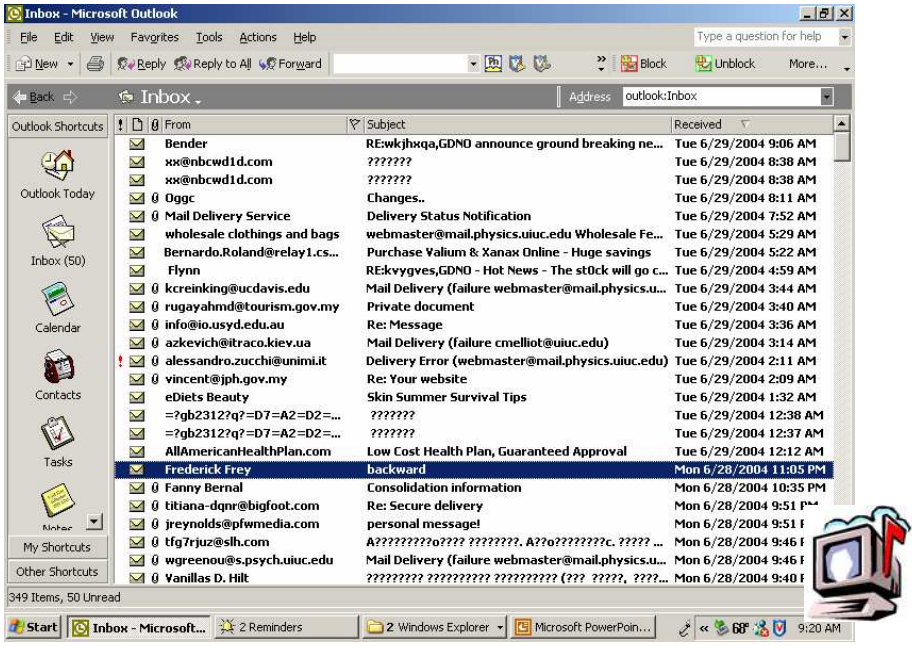
Email messages should be AS PROFESSIONAL AS a formal, mailed letter:

1. Include the same five main points
2. Put your name in the "From" line
3. Use a ***descriptive*** "Subject" line
    1. Do not say for the subject "Letter"
    2. Ex: "Collaborator Needed for Bilateral U.S./[your country] Research Initiative in Hepatitis C Recombination Incidence and Prevalence "
    3. Send w/ HIGH priority

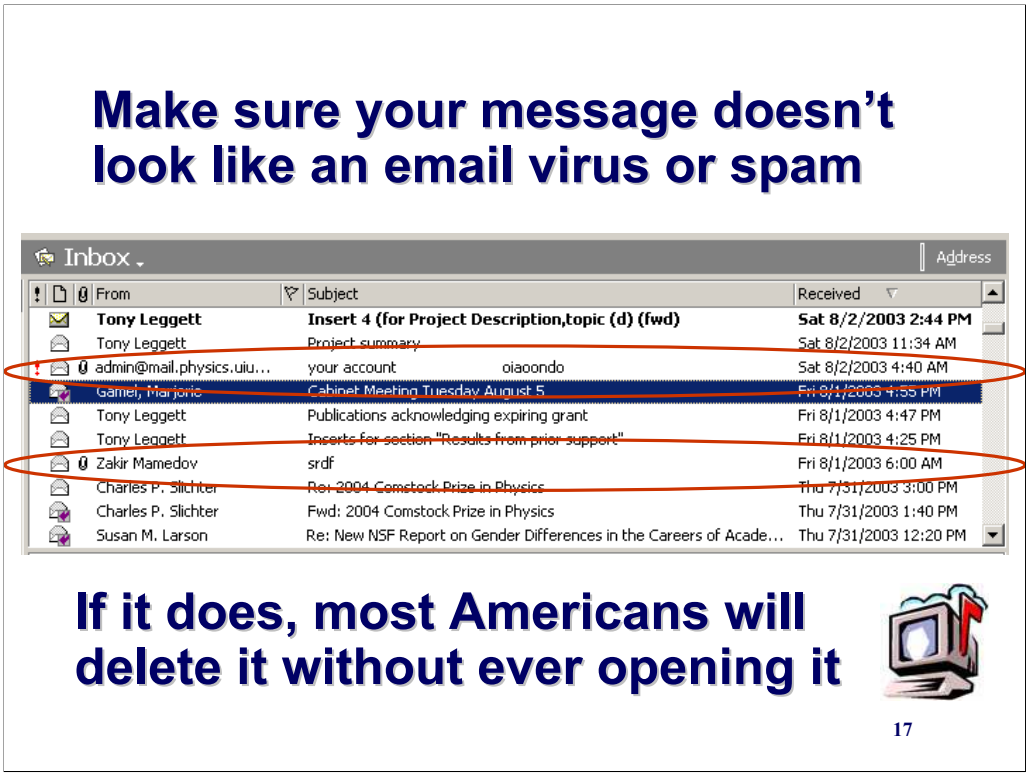
This is what I see every morning …



This is what your potential collaborator sees every morning in his/her inbox …

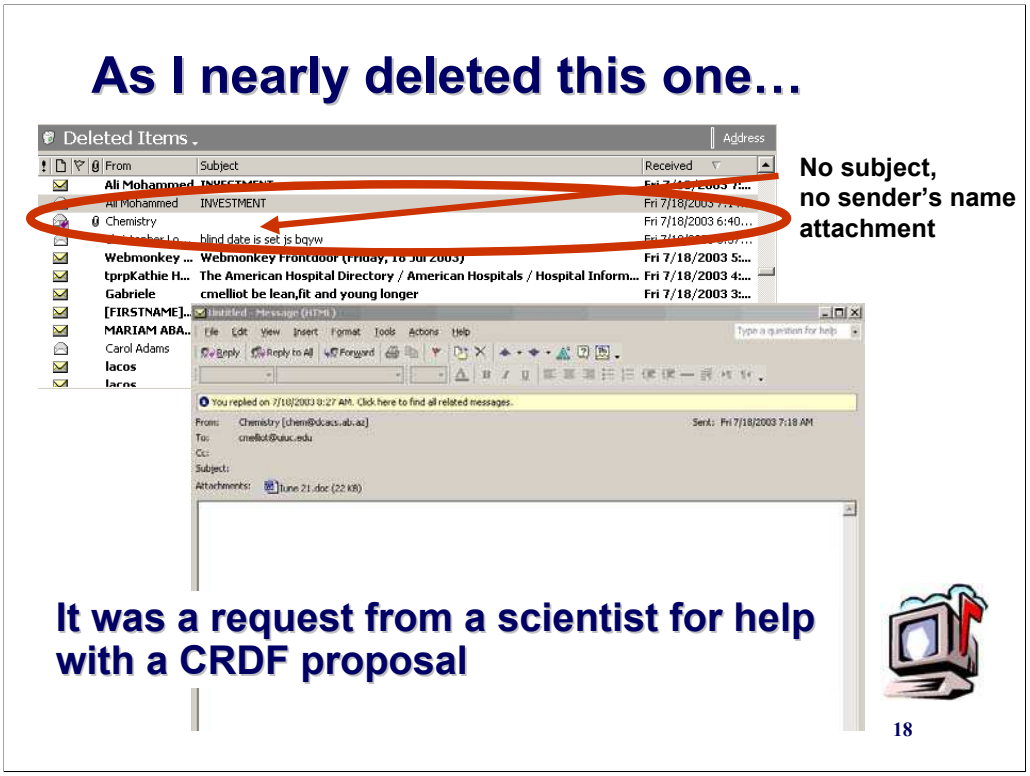
a few genuine messages in an ocean of spam

Most Americans to do not read every email message we receive (we simply cannot); so we scan quickly down the list, looking for messages from people we know, and deleting—unread—anything that we don't recognize.



Make sure your message doesn't look like an email virus or spam or it will get DELETED

The first circled message is spam; the second, from someone I did not know, with a subject line that was also unrecognizable (it should have said Crdf), was very likely to get deleted, unread.



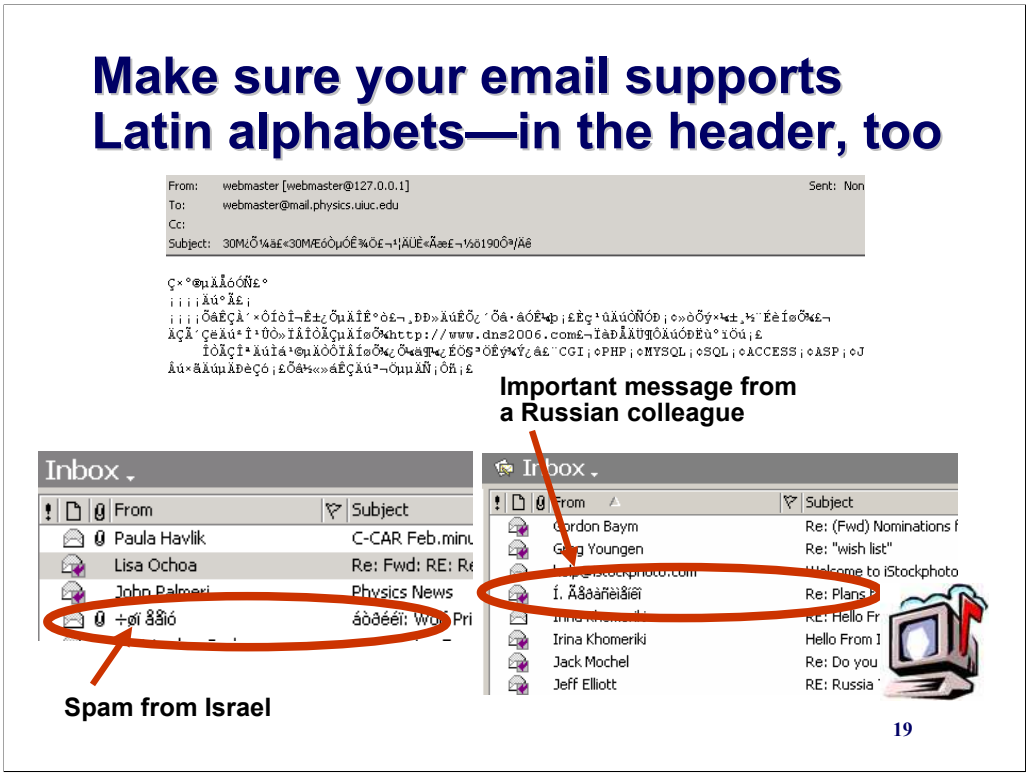
One consultant that works with grantees nearly deleted this email, which was actually a request for help with a CRDF proposal . . .

Why would I delete this message? Because it looks like spam—

It doesn't look like it came from a real person (the From: is "Chemistry")

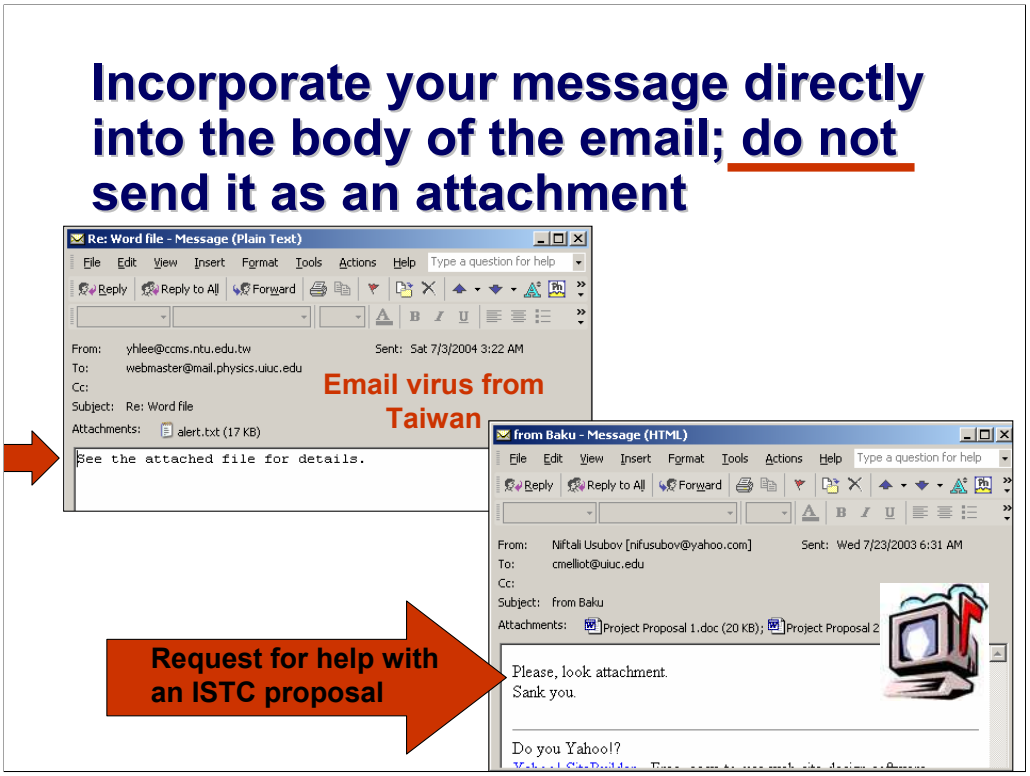
It does not contain a subject line

It contains an attachment—the preferred method of propagating email viruses



Make sure your email supports Latin alphabets—in the header, too

Spam from Israel and other UNSUPPORTED fonts look the same and ARE DELETED



Don’t send your message as an attachment!

Most computer viruses are in attachment form and this may be another reason your message will be DELETED before it is read.

Put yourself in your colleague's place; why should he want to collaborate with you?

You must be familiar enough with his research—his current research—to explain what he has to gain by working with your team

The more personal you can make your initial letter, the more likely you'll be to get a response

21

Put yourself in your colleague's place:

1. Why should he want to collaborate with you?
2. You must be familiar enough with his research—his current research—to explain what he has to gain by working with your team
3. The more personal you can make your initial letter, the more likely you'll be to get a response

Send your letter well in advance of any deadlines

Send it via "Air Mail" to avoid delays

Allow time for the letter to be delivered to your prospective collaborator

- **Usually takes 3 to 4 weeks for mail to go from FSU to US, even via air mail**
- **Takes 2 to 3 months via regular mail**

Allow time for your collaborator to think about your proposal, consult with colleagues, and send a response back to you

22

Send letters requesting collaborations IN ADVANCE of deadlines!

1. Send it via "Air Mail" to avoid delays
2. Allow time for the letter to be delivered to your prospective collaborator
    - Usually takes 3 to 4 weeks for mail to go from FSU to US, even via air mail
    - Takes 2 to 3 months via regular mail
3. Allow time for your collaborator to think about your proposal,

Be sure to use Western formatting for the envelope

Dr. Stanislav Kolesnikov
Institute of Cell Biophysics, RAS
Pushchino, Moscow reg.
142292 Russia

Professor Celia M. Elliott
Department of Physics
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
1110 West Green Street
Urbana, IL 61801-3080 USA

VIA AIR MAIL
PAR AVION

Remember "Air Mail"

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Example of Western Formatting for Envelope (see slide)

Remember AIR MAIL

If you fax your letter to a scientist in the United States…

- Standard US office paper is wider and shorter than A4 paper used in Russia and Europe
- Some fax machines, particularly older ones, may cut off the bottom of your letter if the text area is more than 27 cm from the top of the page
- THUS, print your letter with wider bottom margins before you fax it

24

A word on FAXES:

1. Standard US office paper is wider and shorter than A4 paper used in the FSU and Europe
2. Some fax machines may cut off the bottom of your letter
3. THUS, print your letter with wider bottom margins before you fax it

Increase the chances that a scientist actually *reads* your letter

Address your letter to a real person

- Use the web to find names, titles, and addresses
- Do not send a letter to "President" or "Director" or "Rector" or "Sir" —the probability that it will get read ≅ 0

Follow the "KISS" rule

Keep
It
Short and
Simple

25

To increase the chances that someone READS your letter:

1. Address your letter to a real person
   - Use the web to find names, titles, and addresses
   - Do not send a letter to "President" or "Director" or "Rector" or "Sir" —the probability that it will get read ≅ 0
2. Follow the "KISS" rule AKA "keep it short and simple"

Here's the person who is going to receive your letter or email …

K I S S !

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Improve your chances of a positive response

Be direct

"I write to ask you to consider serving as the American principal investigator on a joint Polish-US project to carry out numerical studies of binary black hole dynamics and waveforms"

Be concise

Try to get all important information on one page

Put supplementary information in attachments or refer to URLs

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Improve chances of a POSITIVE response:

1. Be direct
    - EX: "I write to ask you to consider serving as the American principal investigator on a joint Russia-US project to study the effects of non-ionizing radiation on human epithelial cells."
2. Be concise
    - Try to get all important information on one page
    - Put supplementary information in attachments or refer to URLs

Come directly to the point

Example of a Poor Opening

Dear Laboratory Director:
In recent years NM generally and NF in particular have attracted great attention. Transition to nanocrystalline (nc) state is believed to be accompanied by increase of hardness, wear resistance and other properties. However, the relationships between crystallite size in NF and their physico-mechanical/chemical properties have not been adequately studied. There is lack of understanding nature of size effects especially with regard to many PVD methods such as IBAD, d.c/r.f. magnetron sputtering and unbalanced sputtering (CMS and UMS), EBPVD and others which are used to produce advanced NF. Therefore, from the above, having decided by way of example Ti-B-N film as model system, and joining forces of different teams at VNIIM, our group is interested in preparing a proposal to the ISTC to study these problems.

Example of a Good Opening

Dear Professor Jones:
I write to ask you to consider becoming the U.S. investigator on a joint U.S./Russian project to study the effects of crystal size on the properties of TiBN thin films. My group at the Bochvar Institute of Inorganic Materials in Moscow, Russia, has developed a number of novel techniques to fabricate and characterize TiBN films. We are preparing a proposal for the International Science and Technology Center (ISTC), but to be considered for funding, we must include in the project an American collaborator who can evaluate our work and give us advice. After reading your most recent paper in JMRS, I am certain that you could provide invaluable help to our group.

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Poor Opening versus Good Opening

The poor opening is not addressed to the actual person, and it starts out with a very general and vague description of current research, which the person reading the letter already knows perfectly well. Most Americans wouldn't read beyond the third sentence before saying, "What is this all about? Why is this person writing to me? I already know all this. They're probably trying to sell me something." and throwing away the letter.

The good opening addresses the person directly and comes directly to the point. It captures the reader's attention and interest immediately.

Make the tone of your letter positive and professional

- Use good English
- Use the straightforward language of business—not flowery, grandiose prose or artificially technical language
- Don't use unfamiliar Russian jargon
- Don't overuse acronyms and always define them at first use
- Be courteous but not overly familiar
- Write with the expectation of a positive response
- Respect the reader's time

29

Make the tone POSITIVE and PROFESSIONAL:

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2. Use the straightforward language of business—not flowery, grandiose prose or artificially technical language
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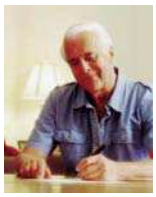
4. Don't overuse acronyms and always define them at first use
5. Be courteous but not overly familiar
6. Write with the expectation of a positive response
7. Respect the reader's time

Let's review what we've learned

- ✓ How to format a formal letter in Western style
- ✓ The five components of a letter asking for collaboration
- ✓ How to ensure that your letter or email message actually gets read
- ✓ The tone and style of effective collaboration messages



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REVIEW:

1. How to format a formal letter in Western style
2. The five components of a letter asking for collaboration
3. How to ensure that your letter or email message actually gets read
4. The tone and style of effective collaboration messages

Questions on the above topics?