

# How to Write a Professional Business Email in English: Complete Guide

You sit at your desk, staring at a blank email. You need to ask your manager for time off, but you're not sure how formal to be. Should you start with 'Dear' or 'Hi'? Should you explain your reasons in detail, or keep it brief? You type a sentence, delete it, type another. Twenty minutes later, you're still not confident about pressing send.

So, you turn to ChatGPT. It writes the email for you in seconds. Perfect grammar, professional tone, ready to send.

But here's the problem: tomorrow, you'll face another blank email. And you still won't know how to write it yourself.

This is the trap I see constantly. Professionals rely on AI to write their emails, but they never actually learn the skills. They copy, paste, and hope it sounds right. They spend time checking the AI's output, editing it, second-guessing whether the tone is appropriate. Ironically, they end up spending more time on emails, not less. And they're building a dependency, not a skill.

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. Business email writing is one of the most common challenges for non-native English speakers. The stakes feel high, and one poorly worded email can damage a professional relationship or create misunderstandings that take days to resolve.

But here's the good news: professional email writing follows predictable patterns. Once you understand the structure and have the right phrases in your own toolkit, writing emails becomes quick and confident. No AI needed. Just you, communicating clearly in **your own voice**.

In this guide, I'll show you the exact system I teach to professionals across Europe. You'll learn the 3-paragraph structure that works for 90% of situations, the phrases that make you sound polished, and the common mistakes to avoid.

By the end, you'll be able to write clear, professional emails in 10 minutes or less, independently, confidently, and authentically.

## Section 1: Why Email Structure Matters More Than Perfect Grammar

Most non-native speakers worry about grammar mistakes. They spend 10 minutes checking whether they should use 'could' or 'would', or whether their comma placement is correct.

But here's what I've learned from working with hundreds of professionals: your colleagues care more about clarity than perfect grammar. A well-structured email with minor grammar errors is far more effective than a grammatically perfect email that's disorganised and unclear.

### What makes a good business email?

- 1. Clear purpose:** The reader understands why you're writing within the first sentence
- 2. Logical structure:** Information flows in a sensible order
- 3. Specific action:** The reader knows exactly what to do next
- 4. Appropriate tone:** The level of formality matches the situation

Notice that grammar isn't on this list. Yes, you should aim for correct grammar, but don't let that stop you from focusing on what really matters: communication.

### The cost of unclear emails:

When your email lacks structure, several things happen:

- Recipients have to read it multiple times to understand
- They ask clarifying questions, creating back-and-forth delays
- Important information gets missed
- Projects slow down

One of my students, Carlos, calculated that unclear emails were costing his team 3-4 hours per week in unnecessary follow-ups. Once he implemented a clear structure, response times improved and misunderstandings dropped by 70%. That's the power of structure.

### Section 2: Why English Word Order Is Non-Negotiable

Here's something that makes English particularly challenging for many professionals: word order is rigid and critical for meaning.

Unlike languages with grammatical cases such as Greek, German, Latin, or Polish where word endings show grammatical relationships regardless of position, English relies almost entirely on word order to convey meaning. In those languages, you can rearrange words for emphasis or style while maintaining the same basic meaning. English doesn't allow this flexibility. Move a word to the wrong position in English, and you completely change what you're saying, or make it nonsensical. Consider these two sentences:

"The manager approved the budget." "The budget approved the manager."

Same words. Completely different meanings. One makes perfect sense. The other is absurd.

### In English, you must follow this pattern: Subject → Verb → Object. Always.

The first element in your sentence is understood as the subject (who does the action). The second element is the verb (the action). The third element is the object (who or what receives the action). Change this order, and you change the meaning entirely.

If your native language allows flexible word order for emphasis or style, English will feel restrictive and frustrating. But understanding this rule is essential for clear business communication.

When you write "The proposal the client sent reviewed I have," your reader has to work hard to decode what you meant: "I have reviewed the proposal the client sent." They'll eventually figure it out, but you've made them work unnecessarily. In busy work environments, this creates frustration and misunderstanding.

This is exactly why structure matters so much in English emails. The position of each word determines its grammatical role, and there's very little room for flexibility. You can't rely on context or word endings to clarify meaning, thus, the order must be correct.

This might feel limiting, but it's also liberating: once you know the rules, they're consistent. Master the basic structure, and you can write clearly every time.

### Section 3: The 3-Paragraph Email Structure That Works for 90% of Situations

I'm going to show you a structure that works for the vast majority of business emails. Once you master this, you'll never stare at a blank screen again.

#### The structure:

**Paragraph 1: Purpose (1-2 sentences)** State why you're writing. Be direct and specific.

**Paragraph 2: Details (2-4 sentences)** Provide the necessary information, context, or explanation.

**Paragraph 3: Action (1-2 sentences)** Tell the reader what happens next or what you need from them.

That's it. Three paragraphs, 4-8 sentences total. Most business emails should be 80-120 words or less depending on the message.

Let me show you this structure in action.

#### Example 1: Requesting information

*Paragraph 1 - Purpose:* 'I'm writing to request the Q3 sales figures for the European region.'

*Paragraph 2 - Details:* 'We're preparing the annual report and need to finalise the data by next Wednesday. I specifically need the breakdown by country and product category. If you have the figures in Excel format, that would be ideal for our analysis.'

*Paragraph 3 - Action:* 'Could you send this by Tuesday, 15th March? Please let me know if you need any clarification.'

Total: 76 words. Clear, professional, complete.

#### Example 2: Giving an update

*Paragraph 1 - Purpose:* 'I wanted to update you on the Miller project timeline.'

*Paragraph 2 - Details:* 'We've completed the initial research phase and are now moving into design. The client approved our proposals yesterday with minor changes. We're on track to deliver the first prototype by the end of June as planned.'

*Paragraph 3 - Action:* 'I'll send you a detailed progress report by Friday. Let me know if you'd like to schedule a call to discuss any aspects.'

Total: 72 words. Informative, structured, professional.

#### Example 3: Following up

*Paragraph 1 - Purpose:* 'I'm following up on my email from last Tuesday about the marketing budget.'

*Paragraph 2 - Details:* 'I understand you're busy, and this isn't urgent. However, we need to finalise the budget by the end of this month to secure the advertising space for Q2. The proposal is in the shared folder for your review.'

*Paragraph 3 - Action:* 'When you have a moment, could you let me know your thoughts? Happy to discuss any questions.'

Total: 71 words. Polite, clear, provides context.



**Notice the pattern:**

Each email follows the same structure, but the tone and details adapt to the situation. This is what makes the structure so powerful and flexible enough for any context although rigid enough to keep you focused.

**When to break this structure:**

Very short emails, for example, confirmations or thank yous can be 1-2 sentences. Very complex topics might need 4-5 paragraphs. But 80% of your emails will fit this 3-paragraph model perfectly."

**Section 4: Essential Email Phrases for Each Paragraph**

Now you understand the structure, let me give you specific phrases for each paragraph. Think of these as your email toolkit - copy and adapt them as needed.

**PARAGRAPH 1: Opening phrases (stating your purpose) For requests:**

- 'I'm writing to request...'
- 'I would like to ask if you could...'
- 'Could you please send me...?'

**For updates:**

- 'I wanted to update you on...'
- 'This is a quick update regarding...'
- 'I'm writing to inform you that...'

**For responses:**

- 'Thank you for your email about...'
- 'Following up on your question about...'
- 'In response to your inquiry...'

**For follow-ups:**

- 'I'm following up on my previous email about...'
- 'I wanted to check if you had a chance to...'
- 'Just circling back on...'

**For introductions:**

- 'I'm reaching out to introduce...'
- 'I'm contacting you regarding...'
- 'I was referred to you by [name] about...'

**PARAGRAPH 2: Providing details Adding context:**

- 'The reason I'm asking is...'
- 'To give you some background...'
- 'This is important because...'

**Explaining timeline:**

- 'We need this by [date] to...'
- 'The deadline is [date].'
- 'Ideally, we'd like to start next week.'

**Providing options:**

- 'We have two options: either... or...'
- 'You could either... or alternatively...'
- 'I've outlined three possible approaches below.'

**Referring to attachments:**

- 'I've attached the document for your review.'
- 'Please find the report attached.'
- 'The details are in the attached file.'

**Making suggestions:**

- 'I suggest we...'
- 'One option would be to...'
- 'It might be helpful to...'

**PARAGRAPH 3: Call to action phrases Making requests:**

- 'Could you please send this by [date]?'
- 'I'd appreciate it if you could...'
- 'Would it be possible to...?'

**Offering help:**

- 'Please let me know if you have any questions.'
- 'I'm happy to provide more information if needed.'
- 'Feel free to reach out if you need clarification.'

**Suggesting next steps:**

- 'Let's schedule a call to discuss this further.'
- 'I'll follow up with you next week.'
- 'I look forward to your response.'

**Setting expectations:**

- 'I'll send you an update by Friday.'
- 'Please confirm by end of day tomorrow.'
- 'Let me know your availability for a meeting.'

**How to use these phrases:**

Don't memorise them all. Instead:

1. Save this list somewhere accessible (bookmark this page or print it)
2. Before writing an email, skim the list for your situation
3. Pick 2-3 phrases that fit your message
4. Adapt them to your specific context

Over time, you'll naturally remember the phrases you use most often. However, having this reference means you'll never feel stuck wondering how to phrase something professionally.

## Section 5: Formal vs Informal - Getting the Tone Right

One question I hear constantly: 'Should I write formally or informally?' The answer: It depends on who you're writing to and why.

### Use FORMAL language when:

- Writing to senior management
- Contacting someone for the first time
- Discussing serious issues or complaints
- Writing to external clients or partners
- The situation requires documentation

### Use INFORMAL (but still professional) language when:

- Writing to close colleagues you work with daily
- Following up on casual conversations
- Internal team communications
- You've already established a relaxed relationship

### Here's the same email in both styles:

#### FORMAL VERSION:

Dear Mr. Thompson,

I am writing to request an extension for the project deadline. Due to unexpected delays in receiving client feedback, we require an additional week to complete the final revisions. We anticipate delivery by 30th March.

I apologise for any inconvenience this may cause. Please let me know if this is acceptable.

Kind regards, Sarah

#### INFORMAL VERSION:

Hi James,

Quick update on the project. We're going to need an extra week. The client took longer than expected to send feedback, so we're now looking at 30th March for final delivery.

Hope that works for you. Let me know if it's a problem. Thanks,

Sarah



#### Notice what changed:

- Greeting: 'Dear Mr Thompson' → 'Hi James'
- Opening: 'I am writing to request' → 'Quick update'
- Language: 'Due to unexpected delays' → 'took longer than expected'
- Closing: 'Kind regards' → 'Thanks'

The information is identical. Only the tone changed.



### The golden rule:

When in doubt, start slightly more formal. You can always become less formal in subsequent emails, but it's awkward to suddenly become more formal.

### Cultural considerations:

Email formality also varies by country:

- German business culture tends toward formal
- UK/US can be quite casual, especially in tech and creative industries
- French business culture values formal politeness
- Nordic countries often prefer direct, informal communication Pay attention to how people write to you and mirror their style."

## Section 6: Common Mistakes That Make You Sound Unprofessional

Even experienced professionals make these mistakes. Here's what to avoid:

### 1. Apologising excessively

- ✗ 'I'm so sorry to bother you, I know you're probably very busy, but I was wondering if maybe you could possibly...'
- ✓ 'Could you send me the report by Friday?'

Excessive apologies undermine your confidence. One apology is enough, or none if you're not actually inconveniencing someone.

### 2. Using 'I think' or 'I believe' unnecessarily

- ✗ 'I think we should probably start the project next week, but I'm not sure.'
- ✓ 'I suggest we start the project next week. What do you think?'

These phrases make you sound uncertain. If you have a professional opinion, state it clearly.

### 3. Writing overly long emails

- ✗ A 300-word email with 5 paragraphs for a simple question
- ✓ An 80-word email with clear structure

If your email is longer than one screen, it's probably too long. Break complex topics into multiple emails or suggest a call.

### 4. Burying the main point

- ✗ Three paragraphs of context before you get to the actual question
- ✓ State your purpose in the first sentence, then add context Get to the point immediately. Your reader is busy.

### 5. No clear next step

- ✗ 'Let me know what you think. Thanks!'
- ✓ 'Please send me your feedback by Tuesday so we can finalise the proposal.' Always include a specific action or timeline.

### 6. Subject lines that don't match the content

- ✗ Subject: 'Quick question' (when it's actually a complex request)
- ✓ Subject: 'Request: Budget approval for Q2 marketing campaign'

Your subject line should tell the reader what the email is about and whether it requires action.

## 7. Too many exclamation marks

✘ 'Hi! Thanks for your email! I'd love to help! Let me know!'

✓ 'Hi. Thanks for your email. I'd be happy to help. Let me know if you need anything else.'

One exclamation mark per email maximum. They make you sound overly enthusiastic or unprofessional.



### Quick self-check:

Before sending any email, ask yourself:

- Can I delete any sentences without losing meaning?
- Is my main point in the first paragraph?
- Does the reader know what to do next?
- Would I send this to my CEO?

If you answer yes to all four, press send."

## Section 7: Subject Line Best Practices

Your subject line determines whether your email gets opened immediately, later, or ignored.

### Good subject lines are:

- Specific
- Action-oriented (when appropriate)
- Scannable in mobile preview

**Bad subject lines:** ✘ 'Question' ✘ 'Hi' ✘ 'Important' ✘ 'Meeting' ✘ 'Re: Re: Re: Re: Project update'

These tell the reader nothing. They're lazy and unprofessional.

**Good subject lines:** ✓ 'Request: Q3 sales figures needed by 15 March' ✓ 'Meeting: Budget review - 2pm Thursday' ✓ 'Action required: Approve invoice #3847 by Friday' ✓ 'Update: Miller project - timeline change' ✓ 'Question: Client presentation format'

### Subject line formulas that work:

**[Category]: [Specific topic]** 'Request: Time off 10-14 June' 'Update: Website launch delayed one week' 'Question: Invoice payment terms'

**[Action required/FYI]: [What they need to know]** 'Action required: Approve proposal by EOD' 'FYI: New office hours from Monday'

**[Project name] - [Specific detail]** 'Parker account - revised proposal attached' 'Website redesign - feedback needed'

### The 50-character rule:

Many email clients show only 40-50 characters of subject lines on mobile. Put the most important information first.

✘ 'Following up on our conversation from last Tuesday about the budget meeting where we discussed Q2 allocations'

✓ 'Q2 budget meeting follow-up''

## Section 8: Email Etiquette Essentials

Beyond structure and phrases, there are unwritten rules of email etiquette. Here's what matters:

### Response times:

- Urgent/time-sensitive: Within 4 hours during business hours
- Standard requests: Within 24 hours
- Non-urgent information: Within 48 hours

If you can't provide a full response quickly, send a brief acknowledgment: 'Thanks for your email. I'll get back to you with full details by Thursday.'

### CC vs BCC:

- **CC (Carbon Copy):** Use when everyone needs to see who else received the email. Typical for keeping managers or teams informed.
- **BCC (Blind Carbon Copy):** Use when emailing multiple people who don't know each other (privacy) or to hide a long recipient list.

Never use 'Reply All' unless your response is genuinely relevant to everyone copied.

### Attachments:

- Mention attachments in the email body: 'I've attached the Q3 report for your review'
- Keep file sizes reasonable (under 10MB)
- Use clear file names: 'Q3\_Sales\_Report\_2025.pdf' not 'Document1.pdf'
- Always check you've actually attached the file before sending

**Proofreading:** Read your email once before sending, especially:

- Recipient email address (are you sending to the right person?)
- Attachments included
- Tone (does it sound professional?)
- Spelling of names (very important)
- Numbers and dates (are they accurate?)

**Out of office:** Set an out-of-office reply when you're away for more than one day. Include:

- When you'll return
- Who to contact for urgent matters
- Whether you'll have limited access to email

**Mobile etiquette:** 'Sent from my iPhone' isn't an excuse for sloppy emails. If you're responding from mobile:

- Keep it very brief
- State you'll send a fuller response later if needed
- Still use proper greetings and closings"

## Section 9: Email Templates for Common Business Situations

Here are templates for situations that come up constantly. Adapt them to your specific needs.

**Template 1: Requesting time off** Subject: Time off request: (dates) Hi (Manager's name),

I'd like to request time off from (start date) to (end date) for (brief reason – optional).

I've checked with the team, and (colleague name) has agreed to cover my responsibilities during this period. I'll ensure all urgent tasks are completed before I leave and will prepare handover notes.

Please let me know if these dates work, or if you'd prefer alternative dates. Thanks, (Your name)

### **Template 2: Following up when you haven't received a response**

Subject: Re: (original subject line) Hi (Name),

I'm following up on my email from (date) regarding (topic).

I understand you're busy, and this isn't urgent. However, I need (what you need) by (date) to (reason).

When you have a moment, could you let me know (specific question or action)?

Thanks, (Your name)

**Template 3: Saying no politely** Subject: Re: (original subject) Hi (Name),

Thanks for thinking of me for (request/opportunity).

Unfortunately, I won't be able to (do what they asked) because (brief, honest reason – optional). I'm currently focused on (your priority), and I don't want to overcommit and deliver poor results.

(If appropriate: I'd recommend contacting (alternative person/resource).) I appreciate your understanding.

Best regards, (Your name)

### **Template 4: Giving difficult feedback or bad news**

Subject: (Specific topic) - update needed Hi (Name),

I need to discuss a concern regarding (specific issue).

(Describe the issue factually - what happened, when, impact). This is affecting (consequence) and needs to be addressed.

I'd like to schedule a call this week to discuss how we can resolve this. Are you available (suggest 2-3 times)?

Thanks, (Your name)

### **Template 5: Requesting a meeting**

Subject: Meeting request: (topic) Hi (Name),

I'd like to schedule a meeting to discuss (specific topic).

(Brief context: why the meeting is needed, what you hope to accomplish). I estimate we'll need (duration).

Are you available any of these times?

- (Option 1)
- (Option 2)
- (Option 3)

Let me know what works best, or suggest alternative times. Thanks, (Your name)

### **How to use these templates:**

1. Copy the template
2. Replace bracketed items with your specifics
3. Read through and adjust tone if needed
4. Delete any optional elements that don't apply
5. Send

These aren't meant to be rigid scripts - they're starting points that ensure you include all necessary information.

## Section 10: Conclusion and Next Steps

You now have everything you need to write professional business emails confidently.

### Let's recap:

- ✓ Use the 3-paragraph structure for 90% of emails.
- ✓ State your purpose in the first sentence.
- ✓ Keep emails to 80-120 words when possible.
- ✓ Choose formal or informal tone based on context.
- ✓ Avoid common mistakes like excessive apologizing.
- ✓ Write specific, scannable subject lines.
- ✓ Use templates to save time and ensure completeness.

### Your next step: Practice

Don't try to implement everything at once. Start with one change:

Tomorrow, use the 3-paragraph structure for every email you write. Just that one thing.

Once that feels natural (probably after a week), add the professional phrases. Then work on your subject lines. Then focus on tone.

Small, consistent improvements are more effective than trying to perfect everything immediately.

## Want more support?

This guide gives you the foundation, but if you want interactive practice with immediate feedback, plus downloadable reference materials you can use forever, check out my complete Business Email Communication course.

It includes:

- Interactive exercises for every scenario
- 100+ professional phrases organised by situation
- Before/after examples you can learn from
- Lifetime PDF reference materials
- 30 day access to structured training

See the course details [here](#).

Good luck with your emails!"