

A few guidelines to simplify the collaboration for people who receive hundreds of e-mail per week:

- Any e-mail exchange should have a **very** clear **title**
- **Never add an important new topic** in an e-mail that you send in response to another topic, start a new discussion
- Always think hard about **who should be in cc** before you send an e-mail; do not include unnecessary people, but also do not forget someone who would like to know what you are doing
 - This is sometimes a difficult decision; you can always ask before you send an important e-mail who should be in cc.
- **Never forward any e-mail as is** to someone else; this is bad practice and can lead to very unpleasant situations, there is almost always a piece of confidential information in an e-mail, even if the text seems not to contain any critical information; examples are: who else received the e-mail (“aha, they did not send it to xy, why?”); when was the e-mail sent (“when the sender was in fact during this extremely important zoom meeting?”); **think three times before** you forward an e-mail, remove any unnecessary information
- **Do not respond to all recipients** if there is any risk that this ends up in a group e-mail discussion (unless it is clearly specified that you should do so of course);
 - Thus: an exchange with all your supervisors and e.g. the technician, should of course be addressed to all recipients during the entire discussion
 - A question from your group leader to the entire group most often can have a personal reply;
 - I encourage my collaborators and colleagues to actively fight group discussions; I do so by specifying “please answer to me directly only”
- What to do if someone does not respond?
 - Ask again politely after e.g. one week.
- What to do if you get an automatic “out-of-office” reply?
 - Resend your request e.g. one week after the person returns to the office or find another solution
- What to do if **I feel really bad** about an e-mail that I received, e.g. because it had the wrong tone?
 - Do not respond immediately

- If the tone / content is inappropriate, mention the problem to your supervisor; do not forward the e-mail but keep it somewhere; inappropriate e-mails are not acceptable of course
- If you have to respond: try to be neutral, do not defend yourself or send excuses, you never know where this ends up; use the phone if you think there was a real misunderstanding
- And try to adopt my philosophy as a cyclist on the road: a car driver who almost hits you and then yells out of the window how stupid you are – she probably just had a bad day
- What does it mean if I receive an e-mail from my supervisor that is written at 2 am?
 - Never try to interpret the sending time, it does not mean that it is super urgent or that you have to feel under pressure; it also does not mean that your supervisor made an inhuman effort to help you out and that you should feel bad about it; it is never your responsibility if someone sends e-mails during the night
 - Perhaps your supervisor fell asleep at 6 pm and needed something to do at 2 am?
- Should I put my “**out-of-office**” automatic reply on whenever I am on holidays or otherwise away?
 - **Never say** that you are on holidays or field work; you do not need to justify, simply say that you do not have e-mail access
 - Overall, this is a difficult question; I put it on during the semester since I have obligations towards the students;
 - Besides: inform your direct collaborators if you are away but why should everyone else need to know?
 - Answering e-mails immediately is never an obligation and not even good practice
 - No need to put it on over Christmas or obvious holiday periods (summer break) but it probably also does not hurt
- And finally: save important e-mails as pdf or an otherwise easily accessible format on your computer that has a back-up plan; your mail box is not the safest place