

E-xcellent Mail

How to write electronic letters that are actually worth reading

Automatic reply subject line lacks creativity

To: Chris <cthurber@camptech.net>
From: Dad <cft8e@loa.com>
Subject: Re: Hi Dad
Date: 7/24/05

No formal greeting makes your e-mail sound like a memo, not a letter.

Unnecessary (lol) acronyms give your e-mail a trendy, rushed tone.

Lack of capitalization here and elsewhere makes your e-mail hard to read and diminishes the importance of key words.

chris: TYVM for 7/23 fax...glad baseball was fun. FYI, mom liked the lentil stew i made on fri. -dad

Where's the love? Here was your chance to give a cyber-hug.

Overall brevity is disappointing and suggests you had more important things to do.

Abbreviations also convey a hurried tone, rather than thoughtful correspondence that you enjoyed writing.

Funny subject line starts things off with a smile.

To: Chris <cthurber@camptech.net>
From: Dad <cft8e@loa.com>
Subject: Exploding Baseballs and Zucchini
Date: 7/24/05

Formal greeting is affectionate and caring.

Dear Chris,

Interesting detail shows you read and thought about previous correspondence

Capitalization, punctuation, and paragraph breaks make your e-mail easy and pleasant to read, while conveying a range of tones.

The content is newsy and upbeat. It reassures the child and gives him something to look forward to when camp is over.

It was great to get your letter yesterday. I read it once at the office and again when I got home. Your baseball game sounds amazing! When you get home, I want to hear more about the last inning and the double play you and Pat handed to Camp Dewitt. It must feel good to be getting better and better at baseball.

Last night, I made Mom's favorite: lentil stew. We've also been eating lots of the zucchini, which has been exploding from the garden. Don't worry, though. When you come home, we'll cook lots of the things you like: mac and cheese, lasagna, and barbeque.

I'm psyched you're having an awesome time at camp. Write again when you have time. We always love hearing how you're doing!

No pressure to write back immediately, even though technology makes that possible.

Love, _____
Dad

Warm closing conveys just the right message and can be reread as often as needed.

Overall length is modest, but just long enough to show you care enough to write thoughtfully. Write more whenever you have time. Children covet letters from home.