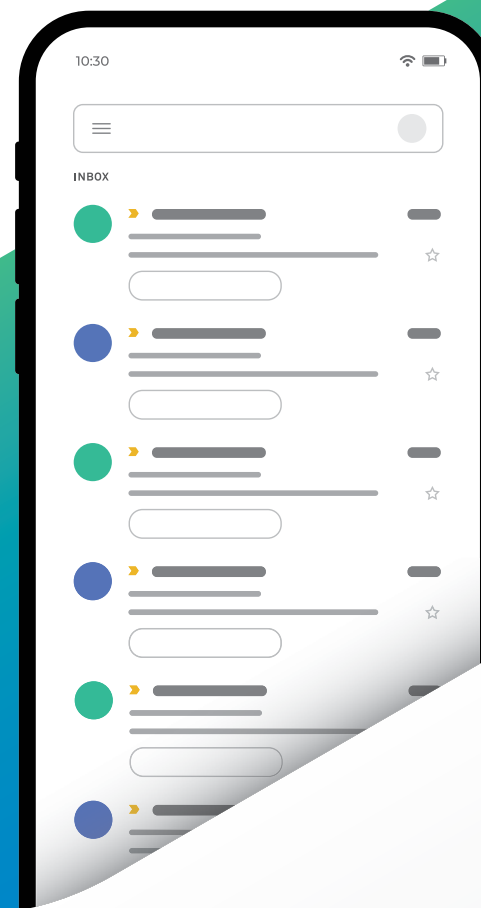


Inbox Insecurity

The State of
Workplace Email
Today



When workplace chat functions first took over the tech ecosystem, many experts believed that they would force email to become obsolete by as early as 2020.

But it's 2019, and email is still a huge part of professional life. We were curious about the ins and outs, so we turned to people we know spend time writing for work: our community.

We've never before asked people about their attitudes in exactly this way. What are their major concerns? How many times do they read an email before responding? Do exclamation points have a place at work? What we heard back, from more than 3,400 people, offers a fascinating look into the state of email in the workplace today. The major takeaway came loud and clear:

Workers still feel reliant on email and have valid—yet varied—concerns about their written communication.

Email is inescapable, wearying, and high-stakes.

From its invention in the 1970s, email swept into the workplace and began replacing paper memos and other forms of the printed communication. By 2012, a study found that professionals reportedly spent on average [28% of their workweek](#) emailing. Fast-forward to 2019, and reliance on email is as total as it's ever been.

Only **6%** of people strongly feel they could do their job without email.

36% of people spend more than 3 hours of their workday on email.

Not only is email ever-present—it provides seemingly endless opportunity for concerns. These include fears of making grammar or spelling mistakes but go far beyond writing mechanics.

Almost nobody is confident about sending perfect emails.

93% of respondents make email faux pas.

Only **7%** were bold enough to check a box claiming that their “emails are flawless.”



64%

have made embarrassing typos or grammatical errors



63%

have pressed send on an incomplete email



50%

have written something that was misunderstood by their recipient

TL;DR: Email is stressful.

The bottom line is that email communication is full of stressors in the workplace. For its centrality in professional life, email communication can be difficult.

While it wasn't surprising to us that nearly 3 out of 4 people reported concern about spelling or grammatical errors, those are by no means the only stressors:

3 out of 4

people are worried about their meaning being understood

3 out of 5

people have been embarrassed by an email they've sent in the workplace

1 out of 2

people are concerned about their emails being too long

The pressure can rise when supervisors get involved:

Nearly 1/3 of respondents have had to run emails by their supervisors before sending.

This added requirement was reported by 31 percent of women and 27 percent of men.



Is there a generational divide?

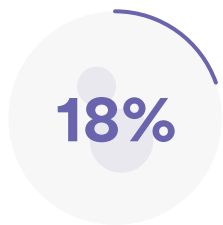
95% of those 25–44 years old have concerns about sending emails, compared to only 82% of those over 65.

Too harsh: Striking the right tone is a challenge.

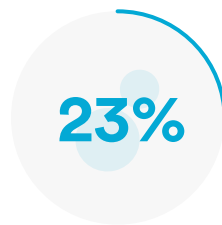
More than 1/2 of people worry about using an appropriate tone in the workplace. After all, navigating the modern workplace is complex. Colleagues represent a range of cultures and identities—and often don't even share the same physical location. The potential for misunderstanding an email is compounded by biases, mismatched context, and lack of in-person cues.

20 percent of people have been told their tone at work is too harsh or aggressive.

While **women and men** saw similar rates of feedback...

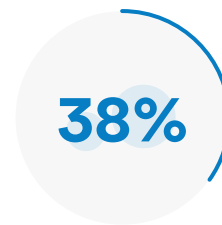


of women

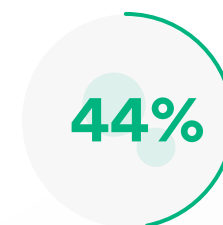


of men

...**nonbinary and gender-nonconforming** respondents reported much higher rates.



of nonbinary
people



of gender-nonconforming
people

It's no surprise that the workplace has changed over the years, as has language. We found that criticisms about formality follow trends according to age. A little less than 1/5 of respondents aged 36–54 reported receiving criticism for using an informal tone—but the difference between the youngest and oldest professionals is vast.

1 in 6 young professionals (under 35) have been told their tone is too informal.

Only 1 in 10 professionals 55 and older have ever received that feedback.

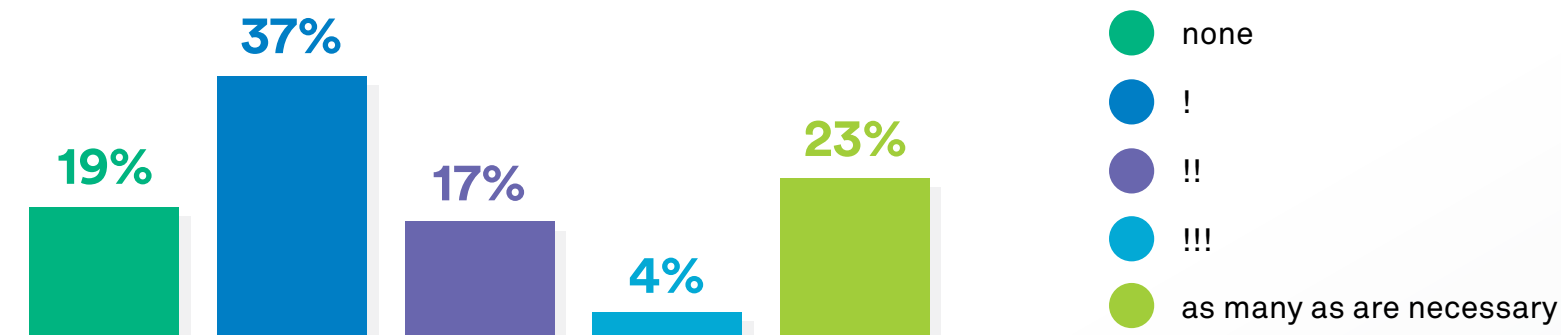


How excited should we be at work?

88% of respondents younger than 35 believe in using at least some exclamation points. **30%** of respondents over 65 believe no one should use any at all.

Excitement and exuberance also vary greatly.

We asked: How many exclamation points are appropriate in a work email?



Who feels confident about pressing send? Almost no one.

More than 1/2 of respondents read their email drafts 2–4 times before pressing send.

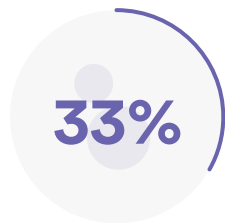


Undo?

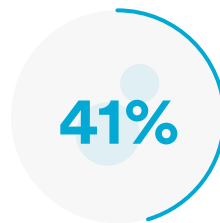
Almost 1/3 of respondents use the “unsubscribe” function in their emails to pull back after sending.

Feeling confident about shooting off that note is not equal across genders, according to our respondents.

| Reading **only once** through before sending:



of women



of men

| Reading **2–4 times** before sending:



of women



of men

When striking the right tone is hard, we supplement words with images.

Image-based communication tools like emojis, which have been around since the [1990s](#), help us express (and not explain) emotions. GIFs, which first appeared in [1987](#), help deliver thoughts, feelings, or other complex elements of communication that can sometimes be difficult to convey with words.

Only 9 percent of respondents reported sending a GIF at work whose meaning was misunderstood by the recipient—compared to **50 percent of respondents** who said their written text has been misunderstood.



Conclusion

Email is as prevalent as ever in workplaces around the world—and it's also the source of great concern. Communicating effectively in a professional setting is a struggle for many workers. Getting to the point where an email feels clear, clean, and context-appropriate enough to send can be an arduous task. While some issues are experienced more by particular age groups and genders, the overwhelming sense of our survey is that all folks have at least something they worry about getting right.

At Grammarly, we recognize that effective communication can be a difficult task and that people may need support in saying what they mean and being understood. We also know that written communication is central to achieving personal and professional objectives and goals. It's vital that people can find support to feel confident that everything they write, wherever they write it, communicates what and how they intend.



Methodology

Between July 29 and August 15, 2019, we collected survey responses from more than 3,400 members of our global community to inform our understanding of workplace communication and reveal the state of email today.

About Grammarly

Grammarly's mission is to improve lives by improving communication.

Grammarly's digital writing assistant helps more than 20 million people write more clearly and effectively every day. In building a product that scales across multiple platforms and devices—including a web editor, native desktop apps, mobile keyboards, add-ins for Microsoft Office, and browser plugins—Grammarly works to empower users whenever and wherever they communicate.

Underlying all of Grammarly's products is a sophisticated artificial intelligence system built to analyze sentences written in English. When a user writes with Grammarly, our AI analyzes each sentence and looks for ways to improve it. Feedback and suggestions are delivered in four categories: correctness (grammar and writing mechanics), clarity (conciseness and readability), engagement (vocabulary and variety), and delivery (formality, politeness, and confidence).

With integrity and innovation, Grammarly strives to help all the world's two billion English speakers feel heard and understood.

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