We aim to use email in a way that enhances internal and external communications. There are a variety of conventions relating to email. These guidelines are intended to encourage good practice for BMA members, representatives and staff.

**Don’t write in All CAPITALS**

If you write in all-capital letters it will come across as if you are shouting, as will the use of exclamation marks. Don’t be trigger happy with punctuation, it can prompt an unintended response. Offence can be taken when ending an angry question with "?!?!?!?". Consider other ways to get your message across while conveying its importance.

**Abbreviations & emoticons**

Save abbreviations like LOL (laugh out loud) or IDK (I don’t know), kisses (xx) and emoticons for text messages among friends. Some may not understand your abbreviations. While emoticons can be fun, they may not be appropriate in a professional environment and you don’t know how the recipient will receive them. Just like abbreviations, readers may not know what they mean. It’s better to spell it out and write what you mean.

**Be concise**

Do not make an email longer than it needs to be. Email is harder to read than printed communications. A long email can be discouraging and be abandoned before the recipient gets to your final point all the way down at the bottom. If it has to be long, consider including a synopsis at the top of the email.

**Jokes and banter**

There is a time and place for satire – the therapeutic value of humour has long been recognised. While humour may help people to bond, especially when dealing with difficult situations, whether or not you find a joke funny one person’s sense of humour can be another’s insult.

An ironic tone is humorous if it is understood. When the recipient of your message can see you, or when they know you well, this usually works. Because it is so difficult to convey via email that something was meant ironically, misunderstandings are common and can lead to offence being taken.

Increasingly many jokes have a discriminatory element. Jokes, banter, gossip are often cited in discrimination claims. If you’re about to comment on someone’s sex, race, sexual orientation, religion, disability or age in a flippant or negative way then alarm bells should be ringing.

It’s not just discriminatory comments that should be avoided. Any unpleasant or negative comments to a colleague could constitute harassment. Sometimes good friends do build up relationships which involve teasing each other. It’s often a natural instinct for someone to laugh along and pretend they’re not bothered, when really they are. Unless you know someone really well, you won’t be able to tell the difference.

**Finally – take another look before you press send**

Treat email like any other official association document. Read it before you send it. Errors are just as unfortunate in email as anywhere else in your corporate correspondence. Look out for potential misunderstandings, and check for tone, and inappropriate comments; we use email because it is quick and easy but precisely that quickness may cause more trouble than you bargained for. Allow every message some minutes of rest after you have finished and before pressing the ‘send’ button. When you return to it, read it through from the recipient’s perspective. This can help you avoid any unintended consequences.

*Remember, on the listserver messages are read by all and it is not a communication tool for one-to-one exchanges.*