

BONUS

5 UNWRITTEN CORPORATE EMAIL RULES NOBODY TEACHES YOU



The Silent Mistakes That
Flag You as a Junior

THE CORPORATE PLAYBOOK

Never Bury Your Ask

THE MISTAKE

You write three paragraphs of context and background before finally getting to what you actually need. By then, your reader has already skimmed past it.

WHY IT HAPPENS

You were taught to "set context" before making a request. In academic writing that works. In corporate email, it kills your response rate.

THE UNWRITTEN RULE

Busy people — especially senior ones — read email in seconds. They skim for one thing: what do you want from me? If they can't find it immediately, they move on.

THE FIX

Lead with your ask. Every time.

WRONG



Hi Chiamaka, hope you're well. I've been working on the Q3 report and wanted to share some context before asking for your input. As you know, the project started in July and we've had a few moving parts. I was wondering if you might be able to review it?

RIGHT



Hi Chiamaka, could you review the attached Q3 report by Thursday EOD? Happy to walk you through it if helpful.

THE RULE IN ONE LINE

Ask first. Explain second. Always.

Match the Formality of the Recipient

THE MISTAKE

You email a VP the same way you text a friend — or worse, you go so formal you sound like a legal document. Both are wrong.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Nobody tells you there is a formality dial in corporate communication. You either default to casual (too comfortable) or stiff (trying too hard).

THE UNWRITTEN RULE

Every person in your organization has an implicit formality preference. Your job is to read it and mirror it — but stay one notch more formal until you've built the relationship.

THE FIX

Before you write, ask: how does this person sign their emails to me? How do they open messages? Mirror that — then add one level of formality on top.

QUICK CALIBRATION GUIDE

- Your manager signs off "Cheers" → You use "Thanks" or "Best"
- Director uses full sentences, no emoji → You use full sentences, formal sign-off
- Peer uses "Hey" and exclamation marks → You can match, but don't overdo it

Working in a hierarchical culture? Start one full notch higher: titles (Sir/Ma, Mr./Mrs., Dr., Chief) and a proper greeting ("Good morning") are mandatory until you're explicitly invited to relax them. Greet first, then get to the point.

THE RULE IN ONE LINE

Read their register. Mirror it. Stay one notch more formal until trust is built.

Your Subject Line Is a Decision

THE MISTAKE

You write vague subject lines like "Question" or "Following up" or "Quick thing." The recipient has no idea what's inside and deprioritizes your email instantly.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Subject lines feel like a formality. They are not. They are the single most important line in your email.

THE UNWRITTEN RULE

Senior people receive 100+ emails per day. Your subject line is competing with all of them. A vague subject line is an invisible email. A specific subject line gets opened.

THE FIX

Every subject line should answer: what is this about and what do I need to do?

WRONG SUBJECT LINES	✗ RIGHT SUBJECT LINES ✓
"Question"	"Q3 Report — Review Needed by Thursday"
"Following up"	"Quick Question on Budget Approval Process"
"Quick thing"	"Update: Project X Timeline Has Shifted"
"Hey"	"Action Required: Client Feedback Due Friday"
"Re: Re: Re: Re: Meeting"	"Meeting Rescheduled — New Time Inside"

THE RULE IN ONE LINE

Your subject line is a decision your reader makes before they open your email. Make it easy to say yes.

"Reply All" Is a Power Move — Use It Carefully

THE MISTAKE

You reply-all out of habit, copying everyone on a thread in a response that only the original sender needed to see. Or worse — you reply-all to a company-wide email.

WHY IT HAPPENS

You don't realize that every unnecessary reply-all creates noise for everyone copied and signals poor judgment to anyone senior on the thread.

THE UNWRITTEN RULE

Reply-all is for when your response is genuinely relevant to every person copied. It is not a default. Every time you hit reply-all, you are implicitly saying: "everyone on this thread needs to see this." Make sure that's true.

THE FIX

Before hitting reply-all, ask yourself: Does everyone on this thread need my response — or just the sender?

USE REPLY-ALL WHEN 	DO NOT REPLY-ALL WHEN 
You're confirming something everyone needs to know	You're just saying "Thanks!"
Your answer changes the plan for the whole group	Your answer is only relevant to one person
The original sender specifically asked for group input	You're asking a follow-up question only the sender can answer

THE RULE IN ONE LINE

Reply-all when everyone needs it. Reply when only one person does. The difference is visible to everyone.

Tone Is a Tool — "Per My Last Email" Is Never Neutral

THE MISTAKE

You use phrases without realizing they carry passive-aggressive connotations that are widely understood in corporate culture — and they make you look difficult, not assertive.

WHY IT HAPPENS

These phrases feel factual and professional in your head. They land very differently in the reader's inbox.

THE UNWRITTEN RULE

Corporate email has a shadow language. Certain phrases are universally understood to carry subtext — regardless of your intention. Using them marks you as someone who doesn't know how to navigate conflict professionally.

THE FIX

Replace the loaded phrase with the neutral alternative.

WHAT YOU WROTE	WHAT THEY HEARD	WRITE THIS INSTEAD
"Per my last email..."	"I already told you this. Pay attention."	"To recap what I shared earlier..."
"As previously mentioned..."	"You're not listening."	"Just to revisit this point..."
"Going forward..."	"You messed up. This is your warning."	"For future reference..."
"Not sure if you saw my last message..."	"You're ignoring me."	"Happy to resend if it got buried — just let me know."
"Thanks in advance..."	"I'm not giving you a choice here."	"Let me know if you're able to help with this."

THE RULE IN ONE LINE

Every phrase in a corporate email carries a tone. Make sure the tone you're sending is the one you intend.

You Now Know the 5 Rules. But There Are 8 Full Chapters Waiting.

The Corporate Playbook They Never Sent You covers everything your onboarding skipped: how to decode your office's invisible power structure, the exact formula for managing your manager, how meetings actually work, the visibility system that gets you promoted, how to use AI at work without getting burned, and your week-by-week first 90 days plan.

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