

## e-Etiquette

*I recently gave a brief talk to aspiring scientists at the annual meeting of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology. In addition to avuncular advice about diversification, focus, and mentorship, I shared a few thoughts on e-mail.*

—A.J.G.

I love modern telecommunications. E-mail and text messages help me stay in touch with friends, family, and colleagues. They are great fun and usually make people feel good. Experience has taught me that different types of messages require different media. Electronic communications are ideal for brief messages and conveying positive emotions (“Congratulations on your grant, Molly!”). In ancient times, when we had only “snail mail,” one might compose an angry letter or memo, venting deep offense at a slight. Often the process of rereading the note before sealing it in an envelope, or staring at the envelope before mailing it, gave sufficient pause for second thoughts and sober reflection. Teachers and parents taught us to “count to 10” before lashing out in anger. It’s still good advice. Electronic communications allow us to be quick on the “send” trigger.

I suggest never using e-mail for negative messages. If you are angry, reflect on it, and consider whether giving voice to your emotions is consistent with your values and likely to be in your interest—both short- and long-term. Ask a senior colleague for advice. If you do decide to communicate displeasure, be as direct as possible. In person is best. Telephone comes second. Written words do not permit give-and-take and nonverbal cues. Written words are more permanent and can leave deeper wounds that may not heal.

Courts don’t always render justice. Grant reviewers make mistakes. Lord knows the journal review process is imperfect. If you interact with your fellow humans, I can guarantee you will be “wronged.” And when this happens, we all smart. It’s “hard wired.” But hold your fire—especially with the potent weapons that e-communications can be. Don’t create needless animus. The scientific community is small.

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