Workshop: Professional Email

Subject, Opening, One Ask, Tone, Follow-Up

Bonus material for uniquestoremarket.com's "How to Write a Professional Email That Gets a Reply" guide. A facilitator script that walks a client or small group through the guide's five chapters live, in one session, using emails the participants actually have to send.

Session objective

By the end of this session, each participant leaves with: (1) a real email rewritten with a subject line that carries topic plus type, (2) an opening that puts the ask first, with what, who and by when, and (3) one hard email and one follow-up drafted using the guide's structures.

Format and length

75–90 minutes. Works 1-on-1 or with a small group (up to 6–8 keeps the share-outs short). Needs: each participant brings 3–4 real emails from their sent folder (one that got no reply, one with several questions, one difficult message they are avoiding), plus paper or a shared doc.

Agenda

1. Opening: the four-second test (10 min)

Tell the guide's premise: an email is judged on whether someone reading on a phone, between meetings, can tell in four seconds what it is about and what they are supposed to do. Run the Ch. 1 micro-start: each person reads only the subject lines of their last ten sent emails and counts how many could be acted on without opening the message. Ask for the numbers out loud.

2. Subject lines (Ch. 1) (12 min)

Show the guide's rewrites: "Quick question" → "Question: which supplier for the March print run?" and "Meeting" → "Decision needed by Thu: move the team meeting to Wednesdays?" Make the point that each rewrite is longer and faster to deal with. Exercise: each person rewrites the subject lines of three of their sent emails using topic plus type, with the useful words in the first 40 characters. Pairs read them aloud and guess what the email asks.

3. Delete the first paragraph (Ch. 2) (13 min)

Show the Marta example: the 61-word "I hope you're doing well... touch base..." version versus the 38-word version with the ask in the first sentence. Exercise: each person deletes the entire first sentence of one sent email and reads what is left, then rewrites it so the ask is in the first sentence. Compare word counts. Also have them cut every "just", "quickly" and "I wanted to" and see whether anything was lost.

4. One email, one ask (Ch. 3) (15 min)

Teach the three parts of an actionable ask: what you want, who is doing it, and by when. Use the offsite example: four questions in one paragraph got a reply about Tom and nothing else; restructured as "3 decisions needed for the May offsite (by Fri)" with three numbered lines each naming an owner, and the fourth item sent to Tom as its own email. Exercise: each person takes a multi-ask email from their sent folder and splits it into the emails it should have been, then rewrites three vague asks into the what/who/when form.

5. Tone when the news is bad (Ch. 4) (15 min)

Show the missed-deadline example three ways: too soft, too blunt, and the working version. Teach the structure: state the outcome, give the reason in one sentence, offer what you can actually offer, and apologise

once for the specific thing. Exercise: each person drafts the refusal, delay or correction they are avoiding, using outcome, one reason, one offer. Rule for the room: if you are angry, write it and do not send it; re-read it tomorrow.

6. Following up without nagging (Ch. 5) (15 min)

Teach timing (commonly three to five working days, sooner with a real deadline), restating the ask in one line in the same thread, and lowering the bar. Show the Marta follow-up: “Unless I hear otherwise by 4pm, I'll move the order to the 12th and we can sign this week.” Exercise: each person writes a follow-up for their oldest unanswered email using restate plus easy out, then decides the fate of any chase already sent twice: different channel, different person, or drop it.

7. Share-out and close (5–10 min)

Each person reads out one rewritten subject line and one ask in what/who/when form. Close with: “Send one of these today and note what comes back.”

Facilitator notes

- Participants often rewrite the subject line but leave the point buried in paragraph three. Check Ch. 2 and Ch. 3 work on the same email: can the first two lines be read alone and still carry the ask?
- Watch for asks addressed to everybody. The guide is blunt: an ask addressed to everybody is an ask addressed to nobody, so make each person name an owner.
- In the bad-news exercise, expect either a stack of hedges and apologies or a two-line refusal. Both fail in the guide's terms; send them back to outcome first, one reason, one offer.
- If someone wants a third chase, point to the guide's limit: after two follow-ups, stop emailing and change channel, ask someone else, or let it go.

Full guide: uniquestoremarket.com/write-a-professional-email-that-gets-a-reply