

"Dear Beloved": options for email greetings (part I)



By [Tiffany Markman](#)

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Dear Sir/Madam. Hi there. Greetings. Howdy. Howzit. Dear Beloved. However you choose to kick off your business emails, there's a message there. And that message is the very first impression your reader gets. So you may as well get it right.

Or, at the very least, not botch it entirely.

I run courses on business writing and I've yet to get through a single training day during which someone hasn't identified email salutations (the 'hello' part) and closes (the 'goodbye' part) as two of the things they most desperately want to cover. So here's a quick lesson on the 'hello'; I'll deal with the 'goodbye' next time.

The flowery

When an email begins with "Honoured Friend", "Dear Beloved", or "Greetings", there's a little bell in your head (or, there *should* be) that trills "Spammer!", "Russian bride" or "Someone asking me for money". Stay away from these. Even if you really want to convey your affection, respect or honour, this is not the place for it.

Tip: I don't have the heart to deal with the evil "To whom it may concern" and the complacent 'Dear Sir/Madam' except to say that both read like direct mail - or laziness. If they're neither, you've created distance between you and your reader, so rather take the time to find out name and gender, or use another salutation.

The casual

"Howdy", "Howzit", "Hey", and very casual greetings have their place. They do. I'm not going to hop atop the keep-it-formal bandwagon and urge you to abandon all personality and friendliness.

But keep in mind that business emails are just that, and that these salutations are more suited to intra-colleague communication, those with whom you correspond really, really often and your personal email.

The simple

"Hi" and "Hi there" are nice. Plain. Straightforward. Vanilla yoghurt, if you will, at room temperature. They're relaxed enough to work for most email, which is in your reader's face (as opposed to his/her mailbox), and they're *palpable* enough not to offend anyone.

First prize with 'Hi' is to combine it with a first name, if you have one (but not with a full name - "Hi John Smith" - this is spammy).

Tip: Another nicely generic set of salutations is the 'Good morning/Good afternoon/Good day' trio. They're sufficiently bland to serve when you don't have a name, or when you're unsure about the appropriate level of formality. But be sure your reader's in the right time zone or you'll unnecessarily date your email - or sound like a pyramid schemer from a remote developing country.

The standard

"Dear [Name]". Students on my courses ask me if this is "too boring" to use for business writing, as it's by far the most common. It's also the longest-lasting, going back centuries.

But, like the ever-present "said" in fiction, "Dear" is so standard; so typical; so *expected*, that we can use it almost always with little problem.

It's also useful in that it works across formal and informal emails.

A final word

Apart from a disclaimer regarding the tongue-in-cheekness of everything I write (of which the aforesaid is one), this piece requires a proviso on *salutation usage*:

In an ideal world, how you start your emails should depend on two things:

- the **context** of your relationship with the reader (formal, informal; unfamiliar, familiar; whether he or she is a superior, an equal or a subordinate, etc) and
- the **content** of the message in question (what it's about, what the history is, whether there's tact and diplomacy required, etc).

So make your selection based on that.

ABOUT TIFFANY MARKMAN

Tiffany Markman is a freelance web and print copywriter, editor and trainer who works for diverse clients, large and small, in South Africa and overseas. For more on her business writing courses, give her a shout on cell +27 (0)82 492 1715, go to www.tiffanymarkman.co.za and sign up for her newsletter.

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