Lost in Translation: The Platinum Rules of International Email Etiquette

1) If you are the first one to email someone from another culture, follow Robert Hickey’s guidelines for names, titles and forms of address. Use Mr., Ms., Dr., and Mrs. depending on the culture.

2) When replying to an email, mirror and match the sender’s style and format. Use their surname and title if they use it in introductions of emails.

3) With a new introductory email, use an email handshake with a personal introduction. Use polite conversation to establish rapport such as inquiring about the weather.

4) In time conscious cultures, consider including the degree of urgency in the subject line. For example, ‘action required’ for urgent matters and ‘action needed’ for important matters. Write a clear, specific subject line in the destination & English language.

5) Consider style: the ‘new brutal’ or the ‘old courteous.’ New trend is to begin email with name only, which most internationals find demotivating. However, in Eastern Europe & parts of Asia, very polite email is considered non-priority and placed on hold. Avoid ‘would you mind...could you’ and instead use direct requests such as ‘Please send the Board Meeting Agenda by...’

6) Select the best closing phrase for the destination culture: Kind regards, Sincerely, Best regards.

7) Respond to Germany, Israel, Switzerland and the U.S. within 24 hours, with information or simply ‘Thanks for your email, we will respond with details at a later time.’

8) Many countries use a 24-hour clock (which is known in the U.S. as military time) instead of the 12-hour clock. For example, 7:00 p.m. in 12-hour clock time would be written as 19:00.

9) Eighteen (18) Countries use the 12-hour clock: Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Colombia, Egypt, El Salvador, Honduras, India, Ireland, Jordan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia and U.S. (although the military uses the 24-hour clock).

10) Understand that dates are written differently worldwide. The following partial list is helpful:
   a. ISO8601 International Standard: year-month-day, 2020-04-30
   b. Asia Pacific: year-month-day, 2020.04.30
   c. Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada: day-month-year, 30/04/2020
   d. The U.S.: month-day-year, 04-30-2020

11) Consider email using the Celsius temperature and Metric system conversions. (only Liberia, Myanmar & U.S. use Imperial measurement system) Most countries use the metric system.
   a. 0 degrees Celsius = 32 degrees Fahrenheit
   b. 1 kilometer = 0.621 miles
   c. 1 liter = 0.264 gallons

12) Humor is culture specific, meaning that most jokes tend to be funny only among people who share experiences in that culture. For instance, an Inuit may not understand a joke about the desert. Jokes referencing Western culture, stereotypes and slang may be misunderstood in an email.
13) Most of us have experienced copying or replying to the wrong person. Copy or reply to necessary persons only. Be careful with cc: and bcc:

14) Organize the email by priorities. Utilize bullet points or numbers; most important items first. Categorize related information.

15) Avoid using capital letters. *Italics* are preferable. Color meaning varies across cultures.

16) Avoid writing with intense emotion. Walk away and return with a clear, calm mind.

17) Make sure your email is succinct, clear and to the point by doing the following: Use one thought per sentence. Write short sentences of 15-20 words. Start each new topic with a new paragraph.

18) Include your contact information such as phone, Skype, and website.

19) Proofread for proper tone, overall flow, spelling, and grammar errors.

20) Ask the recipient to include questions in their reply email.

**LIST OF COUNTRIES USING 12-HOUR CLOCK**

**Africa:**
Egypt

**Asia:**
Bangladesh
India
Jordan
Pakistan
Philippines
Malaysia
Saudi Arabia

**Central America:**
El Salvador
Honduras
Nicaragua

**Europe:**
Ireland

**North America:**
Canada
Mexico
U.S.

**Oceania:**
Australia
New Zealand

**South America:**
Colombia
ALA Intellectual Property Conference for Legal Professionals
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA & CANADA QUIZ
September 15, 2016

1. Canada is one of the top five energy producing countries in the world.
2. In the U.S., English is the official national language.
3. 10% of the world’s forests is in Canada.
4. There are three U.S. territories: American Samoa, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. There are two U.S. commonwealths: Puerto Rico and the Northern Mariana Islands.
5. Individualism impacts business relationships, decision-making and negotiating in the U.S.
6. In U.S. business, ‘Mrs.’ is an inappropriate courtesy title.
7. There are 10 Canadian provinces: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Saskatchewan.
8. The U.S. is an achievement-oriented culture as opposed to an ascription-oriented culture.
9. Canada has the world’s tenth highest GDP.
10. The Canadian Head of State is the British monarch Queen Elizabeth II.
11. In the U.S., wardrobe varies by industry and geography; business-casual and professional attire are both common.
12. The United States has the 16th fastest internet speed in the world and Canada the 24th.
13. The U.S. is one of only three countries still using the Imperial system of measurement instead of the international metric system.
14. The U.S. is a rules based society, as opposed to a relationship based society.
15. Canada celebrates Thanksgiving on the same day as the United States.