

Email Writing & Inbox Mastery — Workbook

This workbook puts every framework from the course into immediate practice. Work through each section alongside the corresponding module: draft real emails, audit your current inbox setup, build your template library, and track your improvement over 30 days. The exercises use your actual work context — not hypothetical scenarios — so everything you produce here is immediately usable.

The Architecture of an Effective Email

Practice diagnosing weak emails, applying BLUF, and writing subject lines that get opened.

Exercise: Email Autopsy — Find the Three Root Causes

Select three emails you sent in the last two weeks that received no reply or a late reply. For each email, identify which of the three root causes (unclear subject line, buried ask, or no single owner) contributed to the poor outcome. Then rewrite the opening two sentences of each using BLUF.

- Copy the original subject line. Rewrite it using one of the five subject line formulas from the course.

- Where was the actual ask in the original email? Sentence 1, 2, 3, or later? Rewrite it as sentence 1.

- Was there a named person responsible for replying? If not, add one explicit owner and deadline.

- Apply the Newspaper Test: read only the first two sentences of your rewrite — does the reader know the topic and the ask? If not, revise again.

Worksheet: BLUF Drafting Template

Use this template for every new email you draft this week. Fill in all fields before writing the email body. After five emails, this structure will become automatic.

Email purpose (one sentence — what outcome do you need?)

BLUF sentence (the ask or decision in under 20 words):

Context needed (2–3 sentences max — what does the reader need to act?):

Supporting detail (data, attachments, or options if required — or write NONE):

CTA (one action + one owner + one deadline):

Subject line (use one of the five formulas — under 40 characters):

Checklist: Pre-Send Clarity Checklist

- Subject line names the topic and the type of action required (DECISION, FYI, QUESTION, etc.)
- The ask or key update appears in sentence 1 (BLUF applied)
- Context is limited to what the reader needs to act — no backstory the reader already knows
- There is exactly one primary call to action
- One named person is responsible for replying or acting
- A specific deadline is stated (not 'when you get a chance')
- Email passes the Newspaper Test on sentences 1 and 2
- Word count is under 150 words for a routine request

Writing Emails That Drive Action

Apply SBI to real requests, calibrate your tone, and design a follow-up sequence for a current open item.

Exercise: SBI Rewrite Lab

Identify one email you need to send this week that involves a request for someone to change behavior, correct an error, or approve something sensitive. Draft it twice: once without SBI (write it naturally as you normally would), then once using the full SBI structure. Compare the two drafts for clarity, tone, and specificity.

- Situation: what is the specific project, meeting, or document context? Name it precisely.

- Behavior: what observable fact or action needs to change or be approved? Describe it without adjectives like 'bad' or 'wrong' — only what can be seen.

- Impact: what happens if this is not addressed, and what is your specific ask? Include a deadline.

- Read both drafts aloud. Which one would you feel comfortable receiving? Use that one.

Worksheet: Tone Audit — Sent Email Review

Review 10 emails from your sent folder from the past two weeks. For each, score the tone on the passive-assertive-aggressive spectrum and note any of the five hedges identified in the course.

Email 1 — topic/recipient:

Email 1 — tone score (1=passive, 3=assertive, 5=aggressive):

Email 1 — hedges found (list them or write NONE):

Email 2 — topic/recipient:

Email 2 — tone score:

Email 2 — hedges found:

Email 3 — topic/recipient:

Email 3 — tone score:

Email 3 — hedges found:

Pattern observation: which hedge appears most frequently in your writing?

Rewrite your most hedge-heavy email using assertive language:

Checklist: Follow-Up Sequence Builder

- Identify one open item currently buried in your sent folder that has not received a reply
- Confirm the 3-touch schedule: Day 3 follow-up date, Day 7 follow-up date, Day 14 close-loop date
- Draft the Day 3 follow-up: reply in thread, add one new piece of value (simplified ask, updated deadline, or yes/no question)
- Draft the Day 7 follow-up: under 40 words, offer an alternative path (call, simplified format, or option A/B)
- Draft the Day 14 close-loop: 'Going to table this — let me know if timing changes' format
- Each follow-up is shorter than the previous one
- No follow-up uses the phrase 'just following up' or 'checking in' without naming the specific item

Inbox Systems and Triage Workflows

Set up your four-folder system, configure eight filters, and design your two daily processing windows.

Exercise: Inbox Archaeology — Classify 50 Emails

Open your inbox and apply the four-folder model to the 50 most recent emails without reading any of them in depth — use only the sender name and subject line. This exercise trains your triage instinct and reveals where your current label/filter gaps are.

- How many of the 50 emails are in the Action Today category? What percentage is that?

- How many could have been filtered automatically before reaching your inbox (newsletters, CC threads, notifications)?

- Which sender or subject pattern appears most frequently in emails that required no action from you?

- Based on this audit, which two filters from the eight-filter list would eliminate the most inbox noise for you?

Worksheet: Filter and Label Setup Tracker

Document each of your eight filters as you set them up, including the trigger condition, the label applied, and whether the email skips the inbox. Use this as your living system reference.

Filter 1 — condition (e.g. 'From: newsletter'):

Filter 1 — label applied:

Filter 1 — skips inbox? (yes/no):

Filter 2 — condition:

Filter 2 — label applied:

Filter 2 — skips inbox?:

Filter 3 — condition:

Filter 3 — label applied:

Filter 3 — skips inbox?:

VIP sender list (names or domains that should NEVER skip inbox):

Label color-coding scheme (red=, yellow=, grey=, blue=):

Checklist: Processing Window Launch Checklist

- Block 9am and 4pm processing windows in your calendar as recurring events
- Set email client notifications to off outside processing windows
- Add 'I process email at 9am and 4pm. For urgent matters, use Slack or call.' to email signature
- Four folders exist and are labeled: Action Today, Waiting, Reference, Archive
- All eight filters are active and tested with one email each
- One-touch rule posted visibly near your workstation as a reminder for the first two weeks
- Team async SLAs agreed: internal email response within 4 hours, external same business day

Templates, Delegation, and Advanced Email Habits

Build your 10-template library, practice the channel decision matrix, and launch your 30-day measurement sprint.

Exercise: Template Library Build Sprint

Allocate 60 minutes to draft all 10 core templates. Start with the three email types you send most frequently. For each template, write the full draft once, then strip it to only the essential sentences. Every template should be under 150 words before placeholders.

- Which three email types do you send more than twice per week? Start with those.
- For each template, list every field that requires personalization and mark it as [PLACEHOLDER].
- Read each template as if you are the recipient. Does it contain any information that only applies to one specific situation and should be removed from the template?
- Share your three most-used templates with one colleague and ask: 'Would you find this clear and actionable if I sent it to you?'

Worksheet: Channel Decision Log — One Week Audit

For one week, log every time you initiate a communication. Record the channel you used and the channel you should have used based on the decision matrix. At the end of the week, calculate the percentage of correctly-routed communications.

Day 1 — communication topic:

Day 1 — channel used:

Day 1 — better channel (or 'correct' if right):

Day 2 — communication topic:

Day 2 — channel used:

Day 2 — better channel:

Day 3 — communication topic:

Day 3 — channel used:

Day 3 — better channel:

Week total: how many of your email threads hit the 3-email rule and should have become calls?

Most common channel mismatch pattern identified:

Checklist: 30-Day Email Improvement Sprint Tracker

- Week 1: Apply BLUF to 100% of emails sent — track by reviewing sent folder end of each day
- Week 1: Complete the Email Autopsy exercise with three real emails
- Week 2: All eight filters active; four-folder triage applied to every email
- Week 2: Two daily processing blocks held without exception for seven consecutive days
- Week 3: All 10 templates drafted and saved in email client
- Week 3: At least one template used per day — log which template and time saved
- Week 4: Track reply rate on action-required emails (target: above 70%)
- Week 4: Measure average email length from sent folder (target: under 150 words)
- Week 4: Time each processing block (target: under 45 minutes)
- Day 30: Identify the two weakest email types and rewrite those templates

Your Action Plan

1. Set up the four-folder triage system (Action Today, Waiting, Reference, Archive) in your email client today — this takes under 15 minutes and is the foundation for every other habit
2. Configure all eight inbox filters within 48 hours; start with the two that will eliminate the most noise based on your Inbox Archaeology exercise
3. Add the batch-processing statement to your email signature and block two 30-minute calendar slots daily at 9am and 4pm
4. Apply BLUF to every email you send for the next 7 days — even routine messages; this builds the habit faster than selective use
5. Complete the Tone Audit on 10 sent emails this week and identify your most frequent hedge word; eliminate it deliberately for two weeks
6. Draft your 10-template library in one 60-minute sprint; use the three most frequent types first and expand from there
7. Apply the 3-Email Rule immediately: the next time a thread reaches three replies without resolution, send a call invitation instead of a fourth email
8. Run the Channel Decision Log audit for one full work week and calculate your channel-mismatch rate
9. At the end of Week 2, measure your triage time per processing block and reply rate on action-required emails — establish your personal baseline
10. After 30 days, review all three metrics (reply rate, email length, triage time) and identify the one template or habit that produced the biggest improvement to reinforce it

