

# **Work Emails That Get to the Point**

**One Clear Ask, a Useful Subject Line,  
and the Right Next Step**

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# Start with the work you need to finish

A message draft with a clear main purpose, a useful subject and an explicit next step where one is needed.

This book is for adults writing everyday work email who need the reader to understand a request, refusal, update, apology or follow-up.

**Bring:** The actual task, recipient, relevant facts and any genuine deadline.

**The working method:** Name the job before writing the prose; put the useful information up front, keep context proportionate, and check recipients, dates and attachments before sending.

Start with the four working sheets immediately after this introduction. They are part of the book, not an external download you must obtain. You can write on paper or copy the field labels into a document. The fictional worked example shows what a completed piece can look like; the reference sections explain choices and difficult cases. You do not have to finish the reference before making your first notes.

A useful first result is a filled brief: the real task, the available facts and the missing information. A blank field tells you what to find out. It is not permission to invent a detail. Completion takes your own checking and revision; this book does not promise a fixed time or control over someone else's response.

For everyday workplace correspondence. Fictional examples. No promise of a reply or agreement; this is

not an email-marketing course or legal/HR advice.

The named people and dialogue in the examples are fictional illustrations, not customer results. Their circumstances are not instructions to copy into your own situation. Treat strong rules of thumb as drafting defaults; the actual brief, recipient, privacy needs and applicable requirements take precedence.

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# **Working sheet 1 — The message brief**

## **1. The one main job of this message**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **2. Person responsible for acting, deciding or receiving the information**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **3. Facts the reader needs for that job**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **4. Genuine deadline, if there is one; include time zone when relevant**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **5. Material that belongs in another message or a conversation**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Decision before moving on:** Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

# Working sheet 2 — Subject and first sentence

## **1. Subject: task, topic and real date if needed**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **2. First sentence: the request or most important fact**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **3. Context: only what makes that first sentence usable**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **4. Next step or a clear statement that no reply is needed**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **5. Tone check: direct, accurate and appropriate for this relationship**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Decision before moving on:** Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

# Working sheet 3 — Five useful message frames

**1. ASK: Please [action] by [real deadline] so [brief reason].**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2. NO: I cannot [request]. I can [real alternative], if appropriate.**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3. BAD NEWS: [Fact]. The next step is [action/owner/date if known].**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**4. APOLOGY: I [specific mistake]. I am [real corrective action].**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **5. FOLLOW-UP: Returning to [original request]. Is [specific next step] still possible?**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Decision before moving on:** Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

# **Working sheet 4 — The send check**

## **1. To, cc and reply-all each have a purpose**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **2. Names, dates, time zones and facts checked**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **3. Named attachment or link actually present and appropriate to share**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **4. Main job and next step easy to find**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **5. Read once as the recipient; remove avoidable extra work**

Your notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Decision before moving on:** Which fact remains unverified, and what is the next action needed?

# The edit that starts before the first sentence

This is a fictional workplace example. A sender needs the revised cost sheet before a real review meeting. The sender also wants to discuss next month's rota, but that is a separate task.

## **Before — fictional:**

Subject: Update

Hi Jordan, I hope you are well. Just following up on a few things. Could you send the latest version and let me know your thoughts on the review? Also, can we talk about next month's rota? It would be great to get this soon. Thanks!

## **After — fictional:**

Subject: Revised cost sheet for Thursday's review

Hi Jordan,

Please send the revised cost sheet by Wednesday, 16 September, at 14:00 London time so I can include it in Thursday's review pack.

The version I have is marked "Draft 2". If that is still the current version, please confirm that instead.

Thanks, Casey

The change is the decision about the job. The message now names the document, explains the deadline and gives a useful alternative if no revision exists. The rota question has its own conversation. No claim is made that Jordan will reply.

“One job” is a drafting default, not a ban on every multi-part email. If a recipient needs a coordinated checklist in a single record, label the actions, owners and dates clearly. Do not create five messages merely to obey a slogan. The test is whether the structure helps this reader do the actual work.

Try the same edit on your draft: underline the task, circle the responsible person and mark the real deadline if one exists. If you cannot find them, polish is premature. If there is no action requested, say what the information is for and whether a reply is needed.

# Guide 1 — One ask

## One job per message

Night one. You write the job as a sentence you could say standing, without a list, without an also. *Need the March numbers by Tuesday 1 pm so we can lock the agenda.* You look at it. It has a who implied in To, a what, a when, and a why small enough to live in one line. That is one ask.

You: *It looks too small. They will think I only care about one thing.* Me: *You do, in this send. Care about Thursday in the next send. Care about the deck when you have a deck. A message that cares about four things cares about none of them in a way a tired person can do.*

You: *One job is not how our week works.* Me: *The week can be four jobs. The send needs a clear main purpose. The week is a list on paper. The send is one line a person can answer without hunting.*

A cousin of that night: the job is a decision, not a file. *Need a yes or no on the Thursday slot by Tuesday 4 pm.* Still one ask. A decision is a job. A file is a job. A time is a job. A vibe is not a job. *Let me know your thoughts* is a vibe. Vibe dies. Guide 10 will sit with the yes they can do. Tonight you only need the count: one.

You put a second sticky on the bezel, your handwriting this time: *one ask*. You do not write a paragraph on the sticky. The sticky is a count. The count is the craft.

The chipped mug sits on the doorway's sticky so you cannot see the three bullets without moving the mug.

You leave the mug there while you type the one line.  
Weight as a tool. Not a ritual. A way to not copy the  
extra jobs because they are physically in the way.

## Cutting the stack

Night seven. You make a pile on paper, not in the body,  
so the week can be true without being sent.

1. March numbers by Tuesday 1 pm. This send.
2. Can they present. Second message, same morning,  
own clock at 12:00.
3. Deck. When a deck exists. Not now.
4. Thursday slot. After the one o'clock, or a third  
message if Thursday locks today.
5. Vendor. A different thread. Not this job.

The paper can hold five. The first window holds one.  
The second window holds one. The rest wait in a list a  
doorway can see, which is how you tell the doorway  
you heard them without typing their week into a grave.

You: *If I wait on Thursday I might lose the room.* Me:  
*If Thursday is the real clock, Thursday is the first send  
and the numbers wait. I am not telling you which job  
wins. I am telling you one of them wins in this  
message. Pick. Send. Then pick the next.*

You: *Picking feels like dropping work on the floor.* Me:  
*The floor is the printout. The floor is not the thread.  
Work on the printout is still work. Work in a pile in  
the body is a miss you will explain at one o'clock with  
your hands empty.*

A cousin of that night: you send the one ask, and then you feel the panic of the unsent four, and you hit reply on your own message to add them. Reply-to-self as a stack is the same burial with a timestamp. Do not chase your own send with the list. Sit on your hands. Open the second window if the second clock is real. Otherwise let the printout be the printout.

You send nothing yet, still. You look at window one. One ask. You look at window two. One ask. You look at the printout. Three waits. That is a finished cut. The send key is still slower than the feeling that you should be thorough. Slow is useful. Thorough is the second window, not the extra sentence.

The mug comes off the doorway sticky. You can see the four bullets again. You do not copy them. Seeing is not sending. The doorway can have the sticky. You can have one line.

*You: Say the rule without making it a slogan. Me: One job per message. Two asks bury both. The second message exists. The doorway's three calls to action are a neighbour's cart. That is the whole night. It does not get a fourth bullet.*

You write *window two* on the second sticky and you put it on the bezel next to *one ask*. Two stickies. Two windows. A send key that will be used twice if two clocks are real, once if only one is. Count the clocks. Do not count the doorway's fear.

# Guide 2 — The subject line

## The subject is a scan

Night one. You open your own inbox for a minute, not to empty it, not as a religion, just to see what a list does to a tired eye. Names. Subjects. A few unread marks. You do not open anything. You only notice which lines tell you the job and which lines ask you to hunt.

*Hi* asks you to hunt. *Update.* asks you to hunt. *Quick question* asks you to hunt. *Following up* asks you to hunt. *Action required: numbers by Tuesday 1 pm* does not.

You: *I hate looking at my inbox. That is not a method.*

Me: *It is a desk. You are about to put a line on someone else's desk. If you cannot scan your own list, you will not write a line they can scan. Close your inbox after a minute. Keep the lesson. Do not stay and file as a personality.*

You: *My subject can be short because they love me.*

Me: *Love is not a scan. A stranger in a forward will get this subject with no love attached. Write for the forward. Write for the thumb. Write for the lock screen. Love can live in a sentence you can stand, later, in the body, if the body needs it, which it often does not.*

A cousin of that night: the preview line under the subject, in some windows, shows the first words of the body. You will want to waste the subject and lean on the preview. Preview is a maybe. Some phones hide it. Some people turn it off. The subject has to do the job

even if the preview is a blank. Put the job in the subject. Let the preview repeat it if it must. Do not split the job across a maybe.

You write *scan* on the corner of the printout. You are not decorating. You are reminding eleven-o'clock-you that the field is not a title for a novel. It is a line in a list.

The mug leaves a ring on the phone case. You move the phone so the preview of *Update*. is in your way every time you reach for the tea. In the way is useful. *Update*. should be in the way until it dies.

## The job

Night three. The verb is not enough if the object is missing. *Need by Tuesday 1 pm* need what. *Action required* action on what. The job has to sit in the field with the verb, in words a tired person already uses.

March numbers. Not *the thing we talked about*. Not *the file*. Not *our issue*. March numbers.

You: *The job is obvious in the thread*. Me: *The subject is what they see when the thread is closed. New people get added. Forwards happen. Search happens in a week when March is a fight. The thing we talked about does not search. March numbers does.*

You: *The job is long. The field is short*. Me: *Then you did not cut the job. One job, remember. If you cannot name it in a field, you cannot name it in a body they will finish standing. Cut until the job is a phrase. March numbers. Thursday slot. Vendor contract. Deck for 1 pm. If it needs a paragraph, it is not ready to be a subject, and it may not be ready to be a send.*

A cousin of that night: you put two jobs in the subject because Guide 1 scared you out of the body and you hid the pile in the field. *Numbers by 1 / present / Thursday / vendor*. The field is not a drawer. Drawers do not open. Pick the job this message owns. Put it in the field. Put the cousins on the printout.

You type *Action required: numbers by Tuesday 1 pm*. You look at it. Numbers is almost the job. March numbers is the job. You insert the month. *Action required: March numbers by Tuesday 1 pm*. The extra word is not decoration. The extra word is how a person with two number files does not send the wrong one.

Nia, as craft, would change the subject every time the job shifted a inch, and the history would die. If you are in a thread that already has the job, you keep the subject unless the job has truly become a different job. New job, new message, new subject. Same job, same subject. Guide 7 will sit with that. Tonight you only need to know that a clever new subject on an old job is how a tired person loses the file.

You: *I want the subject to be interesting*. Me: *Interesting is a joke, or a riddle, or a novel. The job is interesting enough if they have to do it. If they do not have to do it, you may not need the send.*

## **A time if the night is a clock**

Night four. The meeting is at one. The night is a clock. The subject without a time is a job with no floor.

*Action required: March numbers by Tuesday 1 pm*.

The time is a weekday and a clock. Not soon. Not *EOD*. Not *ASAP*. Not *when you can*. Guide 14 will sit with

time zones and the death of EOD. Tonight you put Tuesday and 1 pm in the field because the invite already has them, and because a lock screen does not have the invite.

You: *The time in the subject feels like nagging.* Me: *The time in the subject is a mercy. They can see, without opening, whether this is for the next ten minutes or for next week. If it is not for them, they can leave it. Leaving it is allowed. Hiding the clock so they open you is a small trap. Traps get remembered.*

You: *What if there is no clock?* Me: *Then do not invent one. Fake urgency is a neighbour of the funnel. If the night is information, the subject can say so. Info: March numbers are in the shared folder, no action by 1 pm. The no action is a gift. If you need a decision and there is no meeting, you still pick a weekday and a clock you can stand: Decision needed: Thursday slot, yes or no by Wednesday 4 pm. A clock you made up to scare them dies. A clock they can use lives.*

A cousin of that night: you put *today* in the subject because you are in a hurry. Today is not a time. Today on a lock screen at 9 pm is a fight. Tuesday 1 pm is a time. If you mean today at 4, write today 4 pm, and say which today if the send might sit overnight.

You look at the calendar square. You copy the hour into the field by hand, not by paste, so you hear it. *Tuesday 1 pm*. If you cannot hear it, you do not have a clock, you have a wish.

The doorway says *do not put times in subjects, it looks desperate*. The doorway is not the thumb on the rail. You can nod at the sink. You keep the time in the field.

*You: If I put the time they will only read the time and skip the job. Me: Then you wrote the time without the job. Put both. Verb, job, time. Three pieces. A tired person can hold three. They cannot hold a novel, and they cannot hold a blank.*

# Guide 3 — To, cc, bcc

## Who needs it

To is the person who has to do the thing, or the person who has to decide the thing. Not the person who might be interested. Not the person you are afraid of leaving out. Not the person whose name the machine offered because you typed a letter.

You write the line you can stand.

*To: Rafi. Need the Q3 numbers by Tuesday 1 pm so we can lock the agenda.*

Rafi has the numbers. Rafi is the job. A tired person opening that message can see why they are in To without hunting. That is the field doing its work.

You try the other line, the one a doorway offered.

*To: the floor list, plus the vendor list, plus the manager, plus the person who sat next to you last year and might still care.*

You read it aloud to the empty kitchen. You cannot hear a job. You can hear a fear. Fear is a feeling. Fields are not feelings. Fields are names with a reason.

If two people both have to act, both can live in To. Two is a number you can still say in a doorway without sounding like you are hosting a town meeting. Twelve is a meeting you did not call, held in other people's inboxes, with no chairs and no end.

*You: What if Rafi is out. Me: Then you find out Rafi is out, and you send to the person covering. You do not pre-crowd the floor because Rafi might be out. Might*

*is how a list becomes a flood before anyone has even said no.*

A person in To is being asked to do something, even if the something is *read this and stop*. If you put them in To and the body is a novel with no ask, you have still asked them to spend a standing minute they do not have. Guide 1 sat with one ask. Tonight you sit with who the ask is for. The ask has a name. Type the name. Stop.

Cc is not To with manners. Cc is a person who needs to see the work and is not the one doing it. The person who will use the numbers in the meeting. The person who owns the room. The person who has to know the date because they are on the agenda. That is a short list. If you cannot finish the sentence *they are on cc because...* you do not have a cc. You have a habit.

You will want cc to mean *I was polite*. Polite is a costume. Costumes get quoted. A name in cc is a record that they saw it, or that you wanted it on record that they could have seen it. Records have a temperature. Some rooms stay warm. Some rooms remember that you copied a manager to make a junior person move. That second room is Pax's night, two headings down. Tonight you only owe the first test: who needs this message in order for the job to happen.

If the answer is one name, To has one name. Cc can be empty. Empty cc is not rude. Empty cc is a finished choice. A finished choice is rarer than a crowded field, and it reads cleaner in a thread six days later when someone asks why the whole floor was on a request for a file.

## Cc that is not a weapon

Cc has honest work. Do not throw the field away because Pax burned it once in a story I told you as craft.

Honest cc: the person who will use the thing. Eden needs to know the numbers exist so she can put them in a slide. She does not have the numbers. She should not be in To. She can be in cc, and you can say so.

*Cc: Eden (she's building the deck; numbers still from Rafi).*

Parentheses are allowed when they save a guess. Guessing is how Eden writes Rafi a side message, and Rafi writes you a side message, and the date lives in three places, and Tuesday at one is a surprise.

Honest cc: a person who owns a risk. Legal needs to see the sentence you are about to send a vendor. Legal is not the person saying yes to the vendor. Legal is a pair of eyes with a job. Put them in cc. Say *adding legal for the wording on clause four*. Clause four is a reason. *Adding legal so I am covered* is a costume for fear. Fear can still be a reason if you can stand it in a forward. Coverage as a vibe cannot.

Honest cc: a record that is actually a record. Some desks want a project box on cc so the thread is searchable later. A box is not a person. A box does not get offended. A box also does not do the job. Keep the box if the desk uses it. Do not add six people *for the record* when the record is a box.

You: *Cc feels safer. Then I didn't hide anything.* Me: *Not hiding is a good night. A crowd is not the only*

*way to not hide. To the person who must act. Cc the person who must see. A sentence at the top that names the add. That is visible. Forty silent names is not more honest. It is noisier.*

If cc is longer than To, look again. Sometimes that is right: one person must act, four people must see the act. Say that. *Rafi has the file. You four are on cc so you have the date.* Sometimes it is wrong: you were afraid to pick an actor, so you made everyone a watcher. Watchers do not bring files. Watchers bring opinions. Opinions on a Tuesday at 12:40 are how agendas slip.

Cc is not a trophy. Do not copy a person to flatter them. Flattery in a field is still a field they have to live in. They will have to see every later reply. They will have to decide whether silence is consent. You meant a compliment. You handed them a job. If you want to compliment, a separate one-line message exists, or a sentence in a room. Rooms are allowed. Fields are for work.

A person who asks to be on cc can be on cc if they have a job. A person who asks to be on cc so they can watch a fight is describing a sport. You are not hosting sports. You can say *I'll send you the outcome by Tuesday 4 pm* and keep them off the living thread. Outcome is a mercy. Watching a fight in cc is how fights grow a crowd, and crowds take sides, and sides get quoted.

When the cc is honest, keep it short, and keep it named. When it is a stick, take the name off and send the ask to the person who has the work. If the work does not move, you have a conversation, or a different To line, or a manager asked in a message that is

actually to the manager. Direct is ruder in the doorway and cleaner in the thread.

## **Bcc is a night with a stop**

Blind copy is a choice, not a personality.

The field exists. It has honest work. It also has a trap that looks like wisdom at 10:12 and looks like a small betrayal at 10:13, when someone on bcc hits reply-all because they forgot they were furniture.

Honest bcc: a person who needs a copy and must not appear. A lawyer who should not be in the vendor's room. A person who is handing you a fact they cannot be seen handing. A mailbox that archives a thread your desk requires you to keep, and the other side does not need to see the archive box. Those are jobs. Jobs can live in bcc if you can stand the hiddenness.

Hiddenness has a cost. The people in To and cc do not know who else has the words. They write as if the room is the room you showed them. If the room is larger, you have staged a play. Some plays are allowed (the lawyer, the archive). Some plays are Pax with the lights off: you bcc Sol so Rafi will move, and Rafi does not even get the dignity of seeing the stick. That is worse than cc. Cc is an open stick. Bcc is a stick in the drawer. Drawers get opened. Reply-all opens them.

*You: I'll bcc Sol. Then Rafi won't feel pressured, but Sol still sees it. Me: Rafi will feel the pressure the moment Sol mentions the file in a hallway. Sol will feel used the moment they understand they were a silent audience. You will feel clever for one send. Clever dies in the hallway. Send to Rafi, or send to Sol, or send to*

*both in the open with a reason. Do not invent a third room behind the glass.*

The reply-all accident is not a joke. It is a night. A person on bcc writes *thanks for looping me in* and the whole To line learns there was a looping. The looping is now the subject. The file is not. You wanted a quiet record. You got a small scandal with a timestamp. If you use bcc, you tell the hidden person, in a separate line they will actually read: *you are on bcc. Do not reply-all. If you must speak, send me a separate message.* That instruction is part of the choice. Without it, bcc is a personality: *I like secret rooms.* Secret rooms are not a method.

Bcc to yourself is a habit from a decade when sent folders failed. Most desks now keep sent. If yours does not, bcc yourself. That is a mechanic, not a strategy. Do not bcc yourself and three friends *so we have it*. Three friends is a crowd with the lights off.

Bcc as a trap (prove they said it, then produce the silent witness) is a kitchen tool. Kitchens are for fights at a table. Threads that are traps get quoted in rooms with worse lighting than kitchens. I am not your lawyer. I will not draw you a map of what a silent witness is worth. I will tell you the craft: if you need a record, say you are keeping a record, or put the archive box on cc, or send from a desk that logs. A trap in bcc is a night you will have to stand behind when the trap replies.

You: *Everyone uses bcc. It's normal.* Me: *Normal is a doorway word. The test is whether you can stand the hidden name if they hit reply-all in the next minute. If you cannot stand it, you do not have a bcc. You have a hope. Hope is not a field.*

A stop, then. Use bcc when the appearance of the name would break the job, and the job is still honest. Tell the hidden person not to reply into the thread. Do not use bcc to scare, to catch, to flatter in secret, or to avoid the sentence *I am copying Sol because Sol has to sign*. That sentence can live in the open. If it cannot live in the open, the send is the wrong send, and a hidden field will not make it the right one.

Ivy, if she is still in the doorway, will want bcc to be kinder than cc. Kinder than cc is a story. Hidden is hidden. Kind is a sentence you can stand in the open. Write the open sentence, or do not send the name.

# Guide 4 — Reply versus reply-all

## Default Reply

Reply is the person who wrote to you, or the person the last message was actually for. One name. Sometimes two, if To had two actors. Not the watchers. Not the archive box. Not the manager who was on cc for a reason that was last week's reason.

You write the line you can stand.

*To: Rafi. Yes. I'll send the deck by Tuesday 11 am.*

Rafi asked. You answered. The eleven other names can live without a copy of *yes*. Yes is not a fire. Yes is a file moving. Files move in small rooms.

You try the other button because the other button is what the last person used, and matching feels like belonging.

*Reply all: Yes. I'll send the deck by Tuesday 11 am.*

Eleven people now have a yes they cannot use. Two of them will tap *thanks*. One of them will tap *looping in Quinn*. Quinn does not have a job. Quinn now has a thread. The thread is now a place. Places attract visitors.

*You: It takes the same time to hit the other button. Me: The time is not yours. The time is eleven standing minutes you did not ask for. Same button-time for you. Not the same night for them.*

Default means you start on Reply and you have to have a reason to leave it. The reason is not *the thread already had people*. The thread already had people because someone else did not choose. You can choose now. Choosing now is not a snub. It is a room returning to a size that can finish a job.

If the last message was to you and only you, Reply and Reply-all are the same button in practice. You still look. Threads change clothes. A person adds a name. A person forwards. A person replies to a subset and the subset looks like the whole. Hover the names. Count. If you cannot count them without scrolling, you do not have a Reply-all. You have a crowd from last chapter, arriving as a habit.

Some desks put Reply-all first because a vendor designed a toolbar. Toolbars are not craft. Craft is the names. If your toolbar offers the flood first, you look twice. Looking twice is slower than the feeling that you are done. Slow is useful on a button that spends other people's Tuesday.

A yes, a no, a date, a file: these almost never need the whole room. A decision that is actually the room's decision might. Even then, you name why the whole room still has a job. *All of you are on this because you have to vote by Tuesday 4 pm*. That is a reason. *All of you are on this because you were on the last one* is a leftover.

You: *What if they think I'm hiding the answer*. Me: *Then you have a trust problem, and Reply-all is a poor repair. You can send the outcome in one line to the people who needed the outcome. Outcome is a fact. A play-by-play in eleven inboxes is a sport.*

Default Reply. If you leave the default, you leave it with a sentence you can stand. Without the sentence, go back to the small room.

## **Name who you add**

You will need to add a person. Adding is not a crime. Adding in silence is how a thread becomes a court.

The sentence lives at the top.

*Adding Eden to confirm the room for Tuesday 1 pm.*

Eden can see the job. The old names can see why the room got larger. A tired person does not have to scroll into history to learn that Eden is not furniture.

You try the silent add because silent feels faster, and because you told Eden in a hallway that you would *bring her in*. Hallways do not copy. Threads do. Eden arrives in a room that has been fighting for two days about a file, and her first minute is spent guessing whether she is in trouble, or in charge, or in a joke she did not hear.

*You: They'll see her name in To. That's enough. Me: A name in To is a fact. A reason is a kindness that also prevents a bad reply. Eden might Reply-all why am I on this and then you have two jobs: the file, and the explanation you should have written first.*

If you add a manager, the sentence has to be a job, not a stick. Last chapter sat with Pax and the stick. This chapter sits with the same stick arriving as a Reply-all. You add Sol in a living thread of eleven people. Eleven people now watch Sol arrive. The watching is the point, or it is not, and they cannot tell. Type the job. *Adding*

*Sol because Sol has to sign the spend before Tuesday.*  
If you cannot type that, you are not adding Sol for a job. You are staging an entrance. Entrances belong in plays. You are not writing a play.

If you add a vendor to an internal thread, look at the history above your cursor. History travels. A joke from Monday travels. A price travels. A complaint about the vendor travels to the vendor. Adding is not only a name. Adding is a decision that the past of this thread is fit for the new eyes. If it is not fit, you do not add. You start a clean message with the one ask the vendor can do, and you leave the internal weather inside.

*You: That's two messages. I don't have time. Me: You don't have time for the second message you will write when the vendor quotes the joke. Two messages now is cheaper than one apology later. Guide 12 will sit with the apology. Do not buy that chapter for a button.*

Dropping people belongs to a later night. Naming who you add belongs here because Reply-all is how silent adds get an audience. The audience will invent a reason. Invented reasons are worse than a clumsy sentence at the top. Write the clumsy sentence. Clumsy and true beats smooth and silent.

If two of you add two different people in two Reply-alls, the room doubles in a minute. Stop. Look. One add per send if you can help it. Two adds if they share a job and you can name both in one line. A handful of adds with no line is a party. You are not hosting a party. You are trying to get a file before one o'clock.

# Guide 5 — The first sentence

## Bottom line up front

You write the line you can stand.

*Need the Q3 numbers by Tuesday 1 pm so we can lock the agenda.*

Who is implied by To, or named if To is more than one. What is the numbers. When is Tuesday 1 pm. Why, if you need a why to make the when real, is the agenda. That is a first sentence. A person standing at a counter can finish it. Finishing is the test. Not liking you. Not being impressed. Finishing.

You try the other first sentence, the one a template farm offered, the one a doorway called professional.

*I hope this email finds you well. I wanted to take a moment to touch base regarding the upcoming meeting and some materials we may need if you have time to look them over at your earliest convenience.*

You read it aloud to the empty kitchen. You cannot hear a date. You can hear a person who is afraid to ask. Fear is allowed in your chest. It is not allowed to occupy the first line. The first line is expensive. Everything after it may not be read. You spend the expensive line on hope and a touch-base, which is a phrase that has never once been a job.

Bottom line means the thing they must do, or the thing they must know, in the first breath. Up front means before the history, before the apology for bothering

them, before the story of how you got here, before the compliment that is a down payment on a yes. History can live. It lives after. After is a place a willing person can go. Before is a place a tired person will not.

*You: If I put the ask first, I look like I only want something. Me: You do only want something. That is why you opened the draft. Pretending you wanted a visit is how the ask gets shy and the date gets late. Want the thing. Say the thing. Then, if there is a human sentence you can stand, it can come second.*

Some nights the bottom line is not an ask. It is a fact. *The 1 pm is now 2 pm, same room.* That is a first sentence. *I cannot do Thursday.* That is a first sentence. *The file you asked for is attached.* That is a first sentence. Facts can go first. Facts do not need a porch.

Some nights the bottom line is a no. The no has its own chapter later. Even there, the first sentence is the no, not a tour of your guilt. Tonight you only need the shape: the thing they must leave the standing minute with is the first thing they get. If they close the message after line one, they still have the job. That is success. Success is not a novel they admired.

If the subject already has the verb and the time, the first sentence can match it, not decorate it. Matching is how a tired person confirms they opened the right thing. Decorating is how they wonder whether the subject was bait. Bait is a neighbour on the sales shelf. You are not converting a list. You are doing a job in a thread.

Write the bottom line. Then stop and look at it. If a stranger could not tell what to do, you do not have a bottom line. You have a mood. Moods go after, or they go in a walk, or they do not go.

## **Context after**

Context is not the enemy. Context first is the enemy.

You have a history. The file changed. The vendor said something in a hallway. Last Thursday's sheet is the wrong sheet. Rafi was out. Sol asked a question that moved the date. All of that can be true. All of that can live in sentence two, or three, or in a short stack under the job.

*Need the Q3 numbers by Tuesday 1 pm so we can lock the agenda.*

*Use the Thursday sheet, not the Monday one. Monday had the old vendor line. If Thursday is gone from your box, say so and I'll resend.*

The job is still in line one. The context is a tool for doing the job. A person who already knows which sheet can stop after line one. A person who does not know can keep reading. That is the gift of after: the people who can finish, finish. The people who need the map, get the map. First-context makes everyone walk the map, including the people who had the file in their hand.

*You: If I don't explain, they'll say I dumped an ask with no background. Me: Then you put background second, in as few lines as the job requires. Background first is how the ask becomes a story, and stories do not have dates. You can be a person who explains. You*

*cannot be a person who hides the clock behind the explanation.*

Context also has a stop. Two or three lines. Not the meeting. Not the year. Not the relationship. If the context needs a meeting, you are in the wrong object. Send the ask. Book the meeting in a second sentence, or a second message. Guide 6 sits with length. Tonight you only need the order: job, then the least context that makes the job doable. Least is a discipline. You will want to be thorough. Thorough is a feeling that you were fair. Fair is not a paragraph. Fair is a date they can use.

A link can be context. *Thread from Thursday is below.* Below is after. Do not put the paste of Thursday above the ask. Pastes are novels. Novels kill clocks.

A name you added can be context, and it still goes at the top, because the top is where adds belong. *Adding Eden so she can confirm the room. Need the numbers by Tuesday 1 pm.* Two first jobs, which is already crowding Guide 1's one ask. If the add and the ask are the same night, keep them in two short sentences, both before any history. If they are two jobs, two messages exist. You do not solve two jobs by writing a longer porch.

You: *The context is the reason they'll say yes.* Me: *If the yes depends on a speech, you may not have a yes. You have a persuasion. Persuasion in a first paragraph is a neighbour on the sales shelf. One line of why the date is real is craft. A page of why they should care is a different You. This You has a thread, not a list to convert.*

After also means you may not need after. Some first sentences are complete. *The 1 pm is now 2 pm, same room.* Stop. Do not tell them how you arrived at two. Do not tell them who argued. Do not tell them you are sorry for the move unless the sorry is a later chapter's apology with a miss and a fix. A time change is a fact. Facts can stand without a chaperone.

# Guide 6 — Length

## Write short first

The order is the craft.

You do not write the week and then hunt for a message in it. You write the message. Four lines. Who, what, when, one context if you need it. You send that, or you sit with it long enough to see that a second job is trying to get in, and you take the second job out.

Short first is not a talent. It is a window. Blank body. First sentence the job. Second sentence the file name or the room or the one fact. Third sentence a door if a door is required (*if this is no longer yours, tell me who has it*). Stop. Look at To. Look at the date. Look at whether you said you attached a thing you attached. Then, if you still have a novel in your hands, the novel stays in a file you do not send.

*You: I can't find the short one until I write the long one. Me: Then the long one is thinking, and thinking happens off the To line. Take the To line out while you think. A draft with no names cannot flood. When the short one appears, put the names back. If the short one never appears, you do not have a message. You have a week. Weeks do not send. They sit on scrap paper until a job comes out.*

Short first also protects the subject. A long body tempts a long subject, or a lazy subject, because you believe the body will do the work. Bodies do not get a standing chance if the subject is *Update*. Last nights sat with the verb in the subject. Tonight: the short body and the

verb in the subject are the same discipline. Both refuse to make the tired person hunt. If you write short first, the subject is easy because you already know the job. If you write long first, the subject is a label on a suitcase. Labels on suitcases say *stuff*. Stuff does not get opened before one o'clock.

A short first draft can be added to. Adding is safer than crushing. You may add one context. You may add the name of a person you added in cc. You may add a link. You may not add a second job, a speech, a novel, a joke for the company, a porch of wellness. Adding has a stop. The standing test is the stop. After each add, stand up. If you cannot finish, you added too much. Take the last add out. The last add is usually your favourite. Favourites go.

*You: Short first feels rude on a hard night. Me: Hard nights are why you write short first. Hard is already heavy. A novel on top of hard is how they postpone you. Postpone is how hard gets harder. A short hard sentence (I cannot do Thursday. I can do Friday 10 am.) is a door they can use. A long hard letter is a thing they will handle when they have a better self. They do not have a better self today. Neither do you. Short is how hard things still move.*

If the machine offers you a long draft, that is a later chapter. Tonight you only need this: do not let a farm, or a model, or a template, talk you into length as a proof of care. Care is a date they can meet. Care is a To line you looked at. Care is not five hundred words of *please do not hesitate*. Hesitate is what long messages ask them to do. They hesitate. The meeting does not.

Write the four lines. Save the long thinking. Send the four. If they ask a question, you have a second standing minute. Second minutes are allowed. Pre-answering every possible question is a novel. Novels die.

## Crushing

You wrote the long one first. Now you are trying to crush it.

Crushing is how dates die.

You delete a sentence, you keep a worse one. You move the date, you lose the date. You turn three asks into a nested clause. You replace *Tuesday 1 pm* with *as above*, and then you cut *above*. You make a bullet list that is the novel in armour. You tell yourself it is shorter because the scroll is shorter. The scroll is shorter. The hunt is not. The hunt is worse, because the bones of the week are now in fragments, and fragments do not carry clocks, they carry shrapnel.

You: *I don't have time to start over.* Me: *You don't have time to send a crushed novel and then a second message at 12:40 that says the date again. Starting over is one short paragraph. Crushing is a half hour of moving wreckage. You already spent the half hour on the long one. Spend ten minutes on a new short one. Leave the long one in drafts until you are sure you do not need a sentence from it. You will not need a sentence from it. You will need the date, which you can type again.*

Crushing also produces tone accidents. You cut the porch and leave the heat. You cut the heat and leave a sentence that now reads as a slap because the sentence

that softened it is gone. Softeners were not the job, but they were load-bearing for a line that should not have been sent. Starting short means you never built the slap. Crushing means you might send the slap naked. Naked slaps get quoted. Last chapter sat with the quoted first sentence. A crushed middle sentence can be quoted too. *As you can see from the above* with no above. *Given all of this* with all of this on the floor.

A crushed draft keeps ghost asks. You thought you cut the room change. It is still in a clause. They answer the room and not the file, or the file and not the room. Ghosts are what crushing leaves. A new short draft has the number of asks you actually typed. Count them. If there are two, you are in the last heading. Split. Do not crush two jobs into one clause and call it short. Short is not a clause that contains a week. Short is one job.

You: *The long draft has details I will forget if I start over.* Me: *Then the long draft is your notes. Notes stay. The message is not notes. Copy the one date, the one file name, the one who, into a new window. New window. Not the same window with deletions. Same window is how ghosts live. New window is how you find out the job was always four lines.*

If you must crush because a desk insists on one thread and one send, crush from the top: keep sentence one as the job, keep sentence two as the one context that makes it doable, cut the rest into an attachment or into a sentence that says *I have more history if you need it.* Do not crush from the bottom, keeping your favourite paragraph. Favourites are novels. The top is the standing test.

A date that dies in a crush is often a date that moved while you edited. You had Tuesday 1 pm. You wrote it. You cut a paragraph. You changed a to two. You did not change it in the subject. You did not change it in sentence four, which still says one. They now have two clocks. Two clocks is zero clocks. Starting short, you type the clock once. Once is a number you can check.

# Guide 7 — The thread

## One topic, one thread

A thread is a room with a name on the door. The name is the subject. The room holds the job: the asks, the files, the dates, the people who were added with a line, the people who should not have been added, the correction, the yes. If the job is still the job, you keep the room. You do not rent a second room down the hall because the first one has paper on the table.

You write in the room you can stand.

Subject, already living: *Action: Q3 numbers by Tuesday 1 pm (agenda).*

Your reply, same subject: *Thursday sheet attached. If this locks the agenda, Eden will hold the room.*

A tired person who opens any message in that room can walk backward into the ask and forward into the file. Walking is the point. Search finds one door. The door has a verb. The verb is still true.

You try the other night, the one that feels like a fresh start.

New subject: *Thursday sheet.* New subject: *Room for today.* New subject: *Quick question on the agenda.*

Three doors. One Tuesday. A person with the sheet does not see the room. A person with the room does not see the sheet. You, at 12:40, do not see which door had the yes. You had the yes. It is in a room you are not looking at.

*You: The old subject was about numbers. Now I need a room. Me: If the room is for the same agenda at the same one o'clock, it is the same job. The job grew a noun. Nouns can be added in the first sentence of a reply. They do not earn a new door unless the job actually changed, which is a later heading. Same meeting, same thread.*

One topic means one object of work, not one word you are allowed to say. The object here is the Tuesday agenda: numbers, room, deck, lock. Those are parts. Parts live together. If you send a thank-you for a different night, that thank-you can be a different thread, or a spoken sentence. If you send a vendor clause that is not this meeting, that clause is a different object. Different objects get different doors. Same object keeps the door even when the part in your hand has changed.

A thread can be small. Four people, ten messages, one subject with a verb. Small is not a failure to start over. Small is a room that still works. You will want to start over when a thread has a joke in it, or a stick, or a crush you regret. Starting over to hide a stick is theatre. The stick is still searchable. The new room just has no file. If the thread is poisoned, you still do not invent a twin. You start a clean message only when the job has changed, or when the people cannot be the people of the old room (a vendor who must not see the joke). That clean message names the live fact and does not pretend the old room never happened. Pretending is a split with a lie on it.

*You: I'll put same job as the other email in the body. Me: Then you already know you split it. The other*

*email is where the work should have gone. Same as the other is a map to a house you refused to enter. Enter it. Reply there. One topic. One thread.*

Default Reply lives here too. You reply in the thread, to the people of this job, with the first sentence the job, and you name who you add. The thread is not a reason to Reply-all a company. The thread is a reason not to open a new subject for a part. Two different stops. Both keep a tired person from hunting.

## **The job that actually changed**

Sometimes you need a new subject. The rule is not a superstition. The rule has a door.

The job actually changed.

The agenda is locked. The Tuesday at one is done. What you have now is a vendor clause that came out of the meeting, a different who, a different when, a different object. That is not a part. That is a new object. New object, new door. Subject with a verb. First sentence the new job. You may one-line the parent: *Coming out of Tuesday's agenda lock: need legal on clause four by Friday 10 am.* Then you live in the new room. You do not drag the whole agenda history by forwarding the novel. You name the live fact. You add the people of this job. You do not add the people of the last job because they were there. Last job's people are ghosts unless they have a job here.

You: *How do I know it's a new object and not a part.*

Me: *If the when and the who and the what can sit in the same first sentence as the old job without an also, it is a part. If you need also, or a suitcase, or a new*

*clock that is not a move of the old clock, you are in two jobs. Two jobs can be two messages. Two messages can be two threads if the objects are different. Two messages in one thread if they are still the same lock. The also is the tell. Last chapter used it for length. Tonight it is the tell for a door.*

A time change is not a new object. *1 pm is now 2 pm* is the same meeting. Same thread. A place change is not a new object. A person added is not a new object. A file replacing a file is not a new object. A no on the file is not a new object; it is a fact in the room. A cancellation of Tuesday is still Tuesday's room, with a first sentence that says cancelled, so nobody hunts a live clock. Cancellation in a new subject is how two people still arrive.

A new object looks like this: the meeting is done, and now you are hiring, or firing, or writing a cover letter, which is a neighbour spine, one line and leave, you are not the applicant here. Or you are sending a resignation, which is another neighbour, one line, last day is not this object. Or you are not. You are sending a clause to legal. Different desk, different clock, different names. New door.

*You: I'll keep everything in one mega-thread so nothing is lost. Me: Then you have a novel with many objects, and search will find a mess, and a vendor will see a hire, and a hire will see a clause. One topic. The topic can have parts. It cannot have a second life. When the life ends, you close the work in a line if you need to (agenda locked; I'll send clause four separately) and you open the next door on purpose.*

On purpose is the difference between Nia and a person who is allowed a new subject. Nia's five were not on purpose as new objects. They were parts wearing new doors. On purpose is a sentence you can say: *this is not the agenda anymore. This is clause four*. If you cannot say that, Reply in the old room.

# Guide 8 — Adding and dropping people

## Adding X for Y

*Adding Dana for the Thursday lock. Need the revised numbers by Wednesday 3 pm so Dana can sign the agenda.*

That line can live. Dana knows why they are here. The rest of the thread knows Dana is here on purpose. The ask is still one ask. The add is a sentence, not a raid.

You: *They'll see their name in Cc. Isn't that enough.*

Me: *A name in Cc is a surprise. A sentence is a job.*

*Surprises get quoted. Jobs get done, or they don't.*

*Either way you can stand behind the sentence.*

The sentence has two parts, and both are small. Who. Why. *Adding Dana* is who. *For the Thursday lock* is why. If you cannot say the why in a clause, you are not adding a person for a job. You are adding a person for a feeling. Feelings in Cc are how a thread becomes a room that nobody wanted.

Do not write a paragraph of biography. *Adding Dana, who has been our director of planning since March and who previously sat on the steering group and who will want to see the full history before she comments.* Dana already knows who Dana is. The thread does not need a résumé. The thread needs a reason Dana is in it now.

Do not write a joke. *Look who I found. Bringing in the grown-up. Adding the person who actually decides*

*things, ha ha.* Jokes about a name in Cc are how a person arrives already insulted. The send key does not sand that down.

Do not bury the sentence in paragraph three. The add is the first line because the add is the first thing the new person must see, and the first thing the old people must see. If the first line is *Hope you're well*, Dana still does not know why they are here. Hope is a performance. The add is a job. Guide 5 already sat with the first sentence. Tonight the first sentence is the add.

If the why is a file, name the file. *Adding Reed for the vendor quote in the attached sheet.* If the why is a decision, name the decision and the clock. *Adding Dana for a yes or no on the Thursday lock by Wednesday 3 pm.* If the why is a handoff, name the handoff. *Adding Fran; she has the client from here.* Why is not a vibe. Why is a clause a person can use standing up.

You: *What if there are two reasons.* Me: *Then you have two jobs, or you have one job with a second sentence. Adding Dana for the Thursday lock. Reed will send her the sheet this afternoon. That is still one add. It is not a novel. If the second reason is a second ask, it is a second message. Guide 1 already taught that. Do not use an add as a way to sneak a second ask past yourself.*

A living thread already has a subject. Do not change the subject to announce the add. Changing the subject is how history dies, and that night already had a chapter. The sentence lives at the top of the next message in the same thread. The subject stays. The names change. The line at the top tells the truth about

the names.

If you are adding two people for two different reasons, you still owe two clauses. *Adding Dana for the Thursday lock and Reed for the sheet.* That can live if both people can hear their own job. *Adding Dana and Reed so we're all aligned* dies. Aligned is a fog. Fog is how two people arrive and neither knows who owns the next click.

Write the line. Read it once as if you were Dana, opening on a phone, having not seen messages one through eight. If the line does not tell Dana why they are here, it is not a line. It is a courtesy you invented to feel polite. Courtesy without a why is a silent add in a nicer coat.

Then send, or sit until the why is a clause. Sitting is allowed. Silent is not.

## **The person who does not have the history**

Dana is new to the thread. The thread is not new. Message four has the sheet. Message six has the fight about a cell. Message eight has a time. Dana has none of that in their head.

The add-sentence is not a briefing. It is a pointer. *Adding Dana for the Thursday lock. Sheet is in message four; latest numbers in Ellis's note from this morning. Need a yes or no on the lock by Wednesday 3 pm.*

That can live. Dana can find message four. Dana can find this morning. Dana can hear the clock. You did not

paste the whole history into a new novel. You pointed.

*You: Should I forward the whole chain as a new email so Dana has it clean. Me: Only if Dana cannot see the thread. If you are adding Dana to this thread, Dana can see the thread. A forward of the same job is a second subject. Second subjects are how history dies. Point. Do not clone.*

If Dana cannot see the attachments because your tools hide them from new people, you attach the sheet again and you say so. *Adding Dana for the Thursday lock. Re-attaching the sheet so she has it.* That is a kindness that is also a fact. Do not assume the tool did the kindness. Tools fail. Sentences that name the file fail less.

Do not write a three-page recap for the new person and a side sentence for the old people. Recaps are how you accidentally change the job. The job is still the lock. The recap will invent a second job, or a softer clock, or a nicer version of the fight. Nicer versions are fiction. Point at the message that already holds the truth.

Nia is craft. Composite. Not proof. Nia's usual object is a thread that already exists. This morning Nia adds Omar to a thread that has already split once, last week, when someone started a new subject for the same vendor. Nia does not split it again. Nia stays in the living thread, the one with the quote in it. Nia types: *Adding Omar for the Friday vendor call. Quote is in this thread, Tuesday 9:12 from Quinn. Omar, you are in for the call at 2; nothing needed before that.*

Omar can find Tuesday 9:12. Omar can hear Friday 2. Nia does not open a new subject called *Vendor call* -

*Omar added.* The dash in a new subject would feel like order. It would lose Tuesday 9:12. Nia has lost history before. Nia does not lose it to feel tidy.

You will want the tidy new subject. Use Nia's stay. The stay is the craft. The add lives at the top of the old thread. The pointer is a time and a name. Then the ask, if there is an ask, and only one.

If the history is ugly, you still do not silent-add a new person into the ugliness and hope they will not read up. They will read up. If the ugliness should not be in front of them, you do not add them here. You start a clean message with one job, and you do not attach the fight. That is not ghosting the old thread. That is choosing a To line. The old thread can close with a sentence:  
*Taking the lock to Dana and Ellis on a separate note; this thread is done.* Done is a mercy. Hidden is a mess.

# Guide 9 — The no

## One sentence

*I can't take the working group. Reed has the file and can sit in.*

That line can live. It is a no. It is a door. Reed is named. The working group is not left holding a fog.

*I can't do Tuesday 9. I can do Thursday 10.*

That line can live. It is a no of a time, and a door of a time. They can use Thursday or they can go elsewhere. They cannot use a paragraph about your week.

*I am not the person for this. Dana owns the lock.*

That line can live. You have not taken a job that is Dana's. You have not written a review of Dana. You have pointed.

*You: One sentence feels blunt. Me: Blunt is a feeling people name when they hear a door. The door is the job. Three paragraphs is how the door becomes a corridor. Corridors collect follow-ups. Follow-ups collect resentment. Write the sentence.*

The sentence needs the no in a verb a person can hear. *I can't. I am not. I will not. This isn't mine.* Softeners that delete the verb die. *I am not sure I am the best person at this moment in time to fully commit.* That is not a no. That is a weather report. Weather reports get a reply: *Could you just come to the first one.* Now you have a first one, and a second ask, and no door.

Do not open with thanks if the thanks is a way of hiding the verb. *Thank you so much for thinking of me*

*for this exciting opportunity to join the working group.* They will hear a yes forming. Then you say you cannot. The thanks has made you a person who might still be talked into it. If you are grateful and you can stand behind a clause, you may put it second. *I can't take the working group. Thank you for asking.* Second is a place thanks can live. First is a place thanks lies.

Do not put the no in sentence four. A tired person will not hunt paragraph four for the door. Guide 5 already sat with the first sentence. Tonight the first sentence is the no. Context after, if context is one line and not a diary.

You: *They'll think I don't care.* Me: *They will think whatever they think. Your job is a sentence they can use. Care is a feeling. A working group needs a person or it needs a door to another person. You cannot care a body into a room you will not be in.*

If the request had three parts, you still do not write three nos in a stack of explanations. You name the one you are answering. *I can't take the working group.* If they also asked for a file, and the file is a second job, it is a second sentence only if you are doing it: *I can't take the working group. I can send the sheet by Wednesday 3.* That is a no and a yes they can do. Guide 10 will sit with the ask. Tonight do not turn a no into a bundle of half-promises.

Write the sentence. Read it as if you were the person who has to staff a room by Friday. If they cannot tell whether you will be there, you have not written a no. You have written a stall. Stalls are how Tuesday 9 a.m. still has your name on a chair.

## A door

A no without a door is a wall. Walls get climbed, or they get walked away from in a way that makes a later Tuesday worse. A door is not a soft no. A door is a usable next step that is not you, or a time that is not this time, or a clean stop.

Other person: *I can't take the working group. Reed has the file and can sit in.* Later date: *I can't do Tuesday 9. I can do Thursday 10.* Clean stop: *I am not taking this on. I don't have a name to give you.*

All three can live. The third is allowed. You do not owe a body you do not have. Inventing Reed because you are afraid of a wall is how Reed inherits a job they did not agree to. If you name Reed, Reed knows, or you write Reed first, in a separate line, and only then do you offer the door. *Reed, can you sit in on the working group. If yes, I'll point them to you.* Then, to the asker, after Reed's yes: *Reed can sit in.* If Reed's answer is no, your door is a clean stop, not a name you guessed.

You: *A clean stop feels cruel.* Me: *Cruel is promising a person who does not exist. A clean stop is a fact. Facts are usable. They can go and ask someone else the same day. A fog keeps them waiting on you while they could have been asking Reed, or Dana, or nobody.*

Do not offer a door you cannot open. *I can't do Tuesday. Maybe sometime soon.* Soon is not a door. Soon is a stall with a smile. *I can't do this month. Ask me in the April planning week.* That can live if April is real and you will actually hear it. If you will not hear it, do not write April. Write the clean stop.

Do not offer three doors. *I can't do Tuesday 9, but Thursday 10 or Friday 2 or Reed or a written note instead of a meeting, whatever works for you.*

Whatever works for you is a second job: they now have to design your no. One door. They can take it or they can find another. They cannot use a menu.

A voice from the doorway: *Always offer an alternative. That's professionalism.* Always is a law this book will not pass. Alternatives you do not own are fiction. Professional is a word people use for a no that still sounds like a yes. This spine would rather you sound like a no. The other person can staff a room with a no. They cannot staff a room with professionalism.

If the door is a file, name the file and a clock. *I can't join the call. The sheet is attached; latest numbers are in tab two. Happy to take questions by Thursday 10 in this thread.* That is a no to the call and a door to the sheet. It is still one job in the reply: they know you will not be on the call. The sheet is a thing they can open. *Happy to* is allowed if you will actually answer Thursday. If you will not, cut it. Do not write a warmth you cannot stand behind if they quote it.

Ivy will take the clean stop when the other two doors are lies. You can too. A clean stop is not a performance of power. It is a person who will not invent Reed. Invented Reed is a cruelty with a helpful face.

# Guide 10 — The ask

## A yes they can do

*Need a yes or no on Thursday's lock by Wednesday 3 pm.*

That line can live. Ellis can say yes. Ellis can say no. Ellis can say the number is wrong and still have done a thing. The thing is shaped like a verb they already know.

*Please send tab two of the sheet, current version, by Tuesday 4 pm.*

That line can live. Sending a tab is a yes they can do. *Please take a look* is not. Looking is a fog. Fog produces *Looks good* with no lock, or silence, or a question you will have to answer in a second message you should have written as the first.

*Can you join the vendor call Friday 2. It's forty minutes. Quinn will be there. Nothing to prepare beyond the Tuesday quote.*

That line can live. Join or don't. The clock is on the page. The length is on the page. The prep is named as nothing, or would be named as a file if there were a file. A person can put a body in a chair with that sentence.

You: *They know what I need. We've been talking about it for a week.* Me: *A week of talking is not a yes they can do. A week of talking is how both of you think the other owns the next click. Write the click. If they already know, the sentence will be easy to send. If they do not, you just found out in time.*

The yes they can do has a verb you could watch happen. Send. Confirm. Approve. Join. Attach. Sign. Name a person. Name a time. *Align, review, circle back, unpack, take a pass, weigh in, stay close* are not verbs you can watch. They are moods. Moods produce threads that are still open on Friday when the lock was Thursday.

Do not ask for a feeling. *Are you comfortable with this.* Comfort is a diary. If you need a yes on the lock, ask for the yes on the lock. If they are not comfortable they can say no, which is a fact. Comfort is not a fact a calendar can use.

Do not ask for a novel. *Can you write up your thoughts on how we got here and where we might go.* That is a second book. If you need a paragraph on row twelve, ask for a paragraph on row twelve, and a clock. If you need a decision, ask for the decision. Thoughts are how a person spends an evening and still does not lock Thursday.

You: *I don't want to be pushy.* Me: *Pushy is a word for an ask with a clock. Vague is a word for an ask they cannot do. Vague is not kinder. Vague is how they guess, and guess wrong, and you both spend Thursday repairing the guess. Write the yes they can do. They can still say no. Ivy already taught them how. You do not have to hide the ask so they will not have to no you. Hiding is how you get a silence you will then follow up into a mess.*

Read the draft as if you were Ellis, standing at a counter, phone in one hand. What can Ellis do before the kettle boils. If the answer is *read all of this and figure out what I want*, you have not asked. You have

assigned a puzzle. Puzzles sit unread. Unread is a send that did not do its job.

Then put the yes in the first sentence. Guide 5 already sat with the first sentence. Tonight the first sentence is the ask. Context after. History after. The week of talking after, if it still matters, in one line. Not before. Before is how the ask dies in paragraph four.

## A date

A yes without a when is a yes that will be done someday. Someday is not a lock. Someday is a drawer.

*By Wednesday 3 pm. Before the Friday 2 call.  
Tuesday 4 pm, your time, on the sheet.*

Those can live. They are clocks a person can put next to a job. *When you get a chance* dies. *At your earliest convenience* dies. *ASAP* dies. *EOD* dies; a later chapter will sit with time on the page, and you already know *EOD* is not a time. *Soon* dies. *Before the meeting* dies if the meeting is not named. Name the meeting. Name the weekday. Name the hour if the hour matters.

You: *I don't want to put a date because I don't want to sound like I own their calendar.* Me: *You own the job you are asking for, or you do not. If Thursday's lock is real, Wednesday 3 pm is a fact about the lock, not a personality. If the lock is not real, you do not get to invent a clock to look important. Fake urgency is a neighbour of this night. Do not borrow it. A real Wednesday is enough.*

If you do not know the date, you still do not write *when you can*. You write the constraint you actually have. *I need it in time to send Dana the agenda Wednesday at*

3. *Can you get me tab two by Wednesday 1 pm.* The constraint is visible. They can say no. They can say 2 pm. They cannot say *sure* and mean next month.

If the date is a meeting, put the meeting in the ask and in the subject if the night is a clock. Subject already had a chapter. Tonight you only need to not hide the date in the last line. First sentence. *Need tab two by Wednesday 1 pm for Dana's 3 pm agenda send.* Who. What. When. They can do that yes, or they can no it.

Do not give three dates. *Wednesday 3, or Thursday morning, or Friday before the call, whatever is easiest.* Whatever is easiest is a second job: they now design your ask. One date. If they cannot do it, they will offer another. That offer is their door. You do not have to build them a menu so they will like you.

A voice from the doorway: *Don't put times. People hate times.* People hate surprises on Thursday. A time is how a surprise becomes a plan. The doorway is not the person who has to lock the agenda. You are. Write the time.

If the person is in another city, you still write a weekday and a clock, and you do not assume their EOD. You can name a city if the city is the point: *Wednesday 3 pm, New York.* You do not need a lecture on zones tonight. You need a clock a person can refuse. Refusal is useful. A clock nobody can locate is a fog.

Nia has sent asks without dates and watched them live in a thread like ghosts. You can skip that almost. Put the weekday in. If you are wrong about the weekday, Guide 12 will sit with the miss. Wrong and dated is still better than kind and undated. Kind and undated is

how both of you are polite and Thursday is empty.

# Guide 11 — Bad news

## The fact first

*Friday 2 is off. Quinn cannot do the call. Next slot I have is Thursday 10, same people.*

That line can live. The fact is in the first breath. The next step is in the second. A tired person does not have to hunt.

*The numbers in tab two are wrong. Row twelve is 3.1, not 4.2. I will send a corrected sheet by Wednesday 11 am.*

That line can live. The wrongness is named. The next file has a clock.

*We will not make Dana's Thursday 1 pm lock. Earliest I can stand behind is Friday 10 am. Dana, do you want Friday 10 or a thin agenda on Thursday without the number.*

That line can live. Dana can choose a door. The fact did not wait for a hymn.

*You: It sounds cold. Me: Cold is a feeling people name when they hear a fact without a cushion. The cushion is how they miss the fact. They will not thank you for the cushion on Thursday at 1:05 when the lock is empty. Write the fact. Then the step. Then you may be a person in a third sentence if a third sentence is true and short.*

Do not open with *I hope this email finds you well*. Hope is a performance at 16:40 when Friday is off. Do not open with *Quick update*. Quick is a size. Update is

a fog. The fact is the subject and the first sentence. *Friday 2 call cancelled; Thursday 10 offered* can live as a subject if the night is a clock. Body: the same fact, then the step. Do not make the subject a joke to soften it. Jokes about a cancelled call are how Quinn reads a shrug.

Do not write the fact as a rumour about yourself. *It appears there may be a possibility that we might not be in a position to fully meet the Thursday timeline.* That is a fog with a suit on. *We will not make Thursday 1 pm.* A person can use that. A possibility is how Dana still expects a number at 1.

If you do not have the fact yet, you do not send a pre-bad-news novel. You send a clock for the fact, or you wait. *I will know by Wednesday 11 whether Friday 2 still holds. I will write then either way.* That can live. It is not a sandwich. It is a promise of a fact. Then you send the fact at Wednesday 11. If you will not, do not write Wednesday 11.

Read the first sentence as if you were Dana in a corridor. Does Dana know the thing. If Dana only knows that you are grateful for the team, you have not started. Delete the gratitude until the fact is in the first breath. You can still be a decent person in the next step. Decency is a next step that works. It is not a paragraph of adjectives.

## Next step second

A fact with no next step is a brick on a desk. They know Friday is off. They do not know what to do with their body at Friday 2, or with Dana's lock, or with the vendor.

The next step is a yes they can do, or a step you are already doing, with a clock.

You will: *I will send the corrected sheet by Wednesday 11 am.* They will: *Dana, do you want Friday 10 or a thin agenda on Thursday without the number.* The room will: *I have moved the invite to Thursday 10. If that fails, I will cancel by Wednesday 4 pm.*

Those can live. They are steps. They are not speeches about resilience.

You: *I don't know the next step yet.* Me: *Then the next step is a clock for the next step. I do not have the new slot yet. I will send one by Wednesday 11, or I will tell you that Friday is off with no replacement. That is still a step. I don't know, as a last line, dies. I don't know is a fact that needs a when you will know.*

Do not offer five next steps. Five is a menu that becomes their job. One step, or one choice with two doors, like Dana's Friday 10 or thin Thursday. Two doors is Guide 9's shape, used here because bad news still needs a door. Three doors is a pile.

Do not hide the next step in a meeting you have not asked for. *Let's huddle. Let's grab fifteen. Let's sync.* Sync is a vibe. If you need fifteen minutes, ask for fifteen minutes with a clock: *Can you do Wednesday 9:30 for fifteen minutes on the new slot. If not, I will*

*send the options in this thread by noon.* A room is allowed. A fog that hopes a room will invent the step is how the step never arrives.

If the next step is someone else's, name them the way Guide 8 taught. *Reed will send the corrected tab two by Wednesday 11. Reed, you're on that.* Reed knows. The thread knows. Do not write *the team will take this forward*. The team is a fog of bodies. A name is a next step.

If there is no next step because the thing is over, say so. *Friday 2 is off. We will not reschedule. I will send a written note on the quote by Thursday 10 instead.* Over is a mercy. A fake next step is a second miss. Do not invent a workstream so the bad news will look busy. Busy is a feeling. Over is a fact.

Pax, in a worse mood, will write a next step that is actually a weapon: *Dana, please advise how you want us to proceed* with Ellis still in the fight. Please advise is a dump. If you need Dana's call, ask for the call as a yes she can do, with a clock, not as a ceremony of advice. Ceremony is a neighbour of this night. You are not filing a notice. You are sending a fact and a step.

## Guide 12 — The apology

### Name the miss

*I missed the Wednesday 3 pm send. The sheet is not with you.*

That line can live. The miss is a fact. They do not have to guess which part of yesterday was the problem.

*I sent this to the wrong Dana. You were not meant to have the sheet. Please ignore it. I am sending the right Dana now.*

That line can live. The wrong To is named. The instruction is usable. The next send is named.

*The file I said was attached was not attached. It is attached now.*

That line can live. Short. True. The fix is already in the same breath, which is the next heading, and you may put them in one message. The miss still has to be a clause they can hear. *Please see attached* with no mention that yesterday's *please see attached* was empty dies as an apology. It is a sneak. Sneaks make people open empty messages twice.

You: *They know I missed it. Do I have to say it.* Me: *If you do not say it, you are sending a fix into a fog. They may think this is a new ask. They may think the first file arrived and this is a second version. Name the miss. Then they can throw the empty one away, or ignore the wrong Dana, or stop waiting for a Wednesday that already passed.*

Name the thing, not your character. *I missed Wednesday 3*. Not *I am a disaster*. Not *I am the worst person on this thread*. Character is a speech. The miss is a clock, a file, a name, a number. *Row twelve was 3.1*. *I wrote 4.2*. *That was my error*. That can live. *I can't believe I am so careless* dies. Careless is a verdict on a person. 4.2 was the error. They need 3.1. They do not need your verdict.

Do not name a miss that is not yours in order to look big. *Sorry for the confusion* when Ellis sent the wrong tab and you did not, is a fog that lands on Ellis, or on the air. Confusion is a weather word. If Ellis missed, Ellis can name it, or you can name the state of the file without a fake ownership: *Tab two is still the Tuesday version*. *We need Wednesday's numbers*. *Ellis, can you attach those by 11*. That is a fact and an ask. It is not an apology for Ellis. Do not steal Ellis's miss to be generous. Generous theft is how Ellis never hears the miss, and the tab never arrives.

Do not name ten misses. Name the one in this thread. If yesterday you also missed a different job, that is a different message, or it is not this send. A list of your week's failures is a speech. The person who opened this needs the sheet.

Read the first sentence. Is the miss in it. If the first sentence is *I hope you're well*, you have not started. Guide 5 still applies when you are sorry. Sorry is not a reason to throat-clear. The miss is the job of the first line.

## The fix

A miss with no fix is a feeling you handed them. They still do not have the sheet. They still have the wrong Dana. They still have 4.2.

The fix is a yes they can use, or a step you have already taken.

*The sheet is attached now. I have sent the right Dana and I have asked the wrong Dana to ignore it.*

*Corrected tab two is attached. Row twelve is 3.1. Use this, not yesterday's. I cannot make Wednesday 3, which has passed. I can have it with you by 11 today. If 11 is too late for the lock, say so and I will tell Dana.*

Those can live. The last one is a miss, a new clock, and a door. The door is allowed because the old clock is dead. You do not pretend Wednesday 3 is still a place you can go.

*You: I don't have the fix yet. Me: Then the fix is a clock for the fix. I missed Wednesday 3. I will send the sheet by 11, or I will write at 11 to say I cannot. That is still a fix of a kind. I missed it, I'm so sorry, as a last line, with no clock, dies. They cannot do anything with your temperature.*

Do not offer a fix you cannot do. *I will make sure this never happens again* is not a fix. Never is a hymn. If there is a change in how you send, name the change as a small step: *I will attach the file before I write the body, so I cannot send empty.* That can live if you will actually do it. If you will not, do not write a process novel. Attach the file now. That is the fix that matters at 8:12.

Do not ask them to do the fix that is yours. *Can you remind me next time.* Reminders are a second job you just assigned to the person you already missed. If you need a reminder, you set one. Guide 13 is a bump you send, not a bump you demand as an apology.

If the fix is a new ask of them, you are close to smuggling Guide 10 into an apology. Allowed only if the miss created a choice they must make: *I missed Wednesday 3. I can do 11 today. Does 11 still feed Dana's lock, yes or no.* That is a yes they can do, born from your miss. Not: *Sorry I missed it, also can you send me Reed's tab and confirm Friday and let me know your thoughts.* That is a stack hiding in a sorry. They will hear the stack. They will not hear a person who is repairing.

If the wrong Dana now has a sheet they should not have, the fix includes a line to that Dana, and a look at whether anyone else was in Cc who should not have seen it. You name what you can. You do not write a legal novel about what they must do with a file. I am not a lawyer. You write: *Please ignore and delete if you can. This was meant for the other Dana. Sorry for the noise.* Then you stop. You do not threaten. You do not tell a story about how similar the names are. The picker is not a character. You missed. You say so. You send the right one.

Pax's fix, when Pax silent-added a boss last month, was not a speech in the fight. It was a sentence: *I added Dana without saying why. Dana is here for the Thursday lock. Need the numbers by Wednesday 3.* That is Guide 8's line, late. Late is still better than never. Never is a boss in a fight with no why. The

apology is the missing sentence, supplied. Not a paragraph about Pax's anxiety.

## Guide 13 — The follow-up

### One bump

*Still need a yes or no on Thursday's lock. Original note below. If I do not hear by Wednesday 3 pm I will send Dana the agenda without row twelve.*

That line can live. It is one bump. The ask is visible. The door is a clock and a default. They can still yes. They can no. They can let the default happen. All three are usable.

*Bumping this. Need the revised labour line by Thursday 10, as in Tuesday's note.*

That line can live if Thursday 10 is still a real clock. If Thursday 10 has died, you do not bump a dead clock. You name the miss of time, you offer a new clock or a door. *Thursday 10 has passed. I still need the labour line. I can take it by Friday 9, or I will go to Friday 2 with the Tuesday quote. Tell me which by 4 pm today.* That is a bump that admits the calendar moved. Honesty about a dead clock is Guide 12's cousin. You do not have to grovel. You have to not lie about Thursday 10.

*You: How long do I wait before the bump. Me: Until the clock you wrote has passed, or until a clock they wrote has passed. If you said Wednesday 3, you do not bump at Wednesday 3:05 unless the lock is Wednesday 3:30. You bump when the wait you asked them for is over. If you wrote no clock, you already missed Guide 10, and the bump has to install a clock now. Installing a clock late is still better than daily*

*weather.*

One bump is a number of sends, not a personality. You already sent the ask. This is the second note on the same job. A third note is a later heading, and it is usually a door, not another poke. If you send seven, you are not following up. You are living in their inbox. Living in their inbox is how they mute you. Mute is a silence you earned.

Do not bump twice in a morning because you thought of a nicer sentence. The first bump already landed, or it is sitting unread next to the original. A nicer sentence is a second poke. Delete it. The nicer sentence can wait for a new job.

Do not copy new people on the bump to make it sting. That is Guide 8's silent add, and Guide 3's weapon, wearing a follow-up hat. If you truly need Dana now, you add Dana with a sentence: *Adding Dana because I still need a yes or no on Thursday's lock by Wednesday 3. Ellis, original ask is below.* Who. Why. Not a raid. If you do not need Dana, do not summon Dana to punish Ellis's quiet. Quiet is not always a no. Quiet is sometimes a full inbox. A weapon-cc will get you a reply and a room that remembers.

Write the bump in the living thread. A new subject for a bump is how the original ask disappears. Nia will sit with that. Stay.

## Then a door

A bump with no door is a person who will still be here tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after, until the other person hides you. A door is a default, or a stop, or a later date, or another name.

Default: *If I do not hear by Wednesday 3 I will send Dana the agenda without row twelve.* Stop: *If I do not hear by Wednesday 3 I will close this and you can reopen if you still want the lock.* Later: *If this week is gone, I will ask again in the April planning week. I will not bump before that.* Other person: *If I do not hear by Wednesday 3 I will take the labour line from Reed's Tuesday draft and use that at Friday 2.*

Those can live if they are true. A default you will not do is a threat. Threats die when you do not fire them, and then your next clock dies with them. Only write the default you will actually do. If you will not send the agenda without row twelve, do not say you will. Write a door you own: *I will wait until Wednesday 3. After that I need a new clock from you, or I will drop this until you write.* Dropping is a mercy, Guide 8, for a job that has no owner.

You: *A default feels like an ultimatum.* Me: *Ultimatum is a word for a door you can hear. They can still send the number. They can send a no. They can send a new clock. What they cannot do is keep your Thursday open with a silence. Your Thursday is a square. Squares need a fact. A default is a fact you will use if they do not give you one. That is adult. Daily pokes are not adult. Daily pokes are a tug at a sleeve.*

Do not write a door that punishes. *If I do not hear I will copy your manager.* That is a weapon with a timer. If Dana needs to be in, Dana is in with a sentence, now, or Dana is not a threat you keep in a drawer. Drawers of threats are how you write a bump that is actually a fight. Fights lose labour lines.

Ivy's door can sit on a bump if the bump was a request of you. *I still cannot take the working group. If I do not hear, I will assume Reed is in as I wrote last week. I will not bump this again.* That is a no, restated, with a stop. Allowed. Do not bump a no every day so they will feel it. They felt it. The stop is the kindness.

A voice from the doorway: *Leave the door open forever. That's service.* Forever is how a thread becomes a piece of furniture in their inbox. Furniture does not get a yes. It gets dust. A date on a door is service. They know when the thing will move without them. They can interrupt. Interrupting is easier than excavating a person who pokes daily and never closes.

Write the door in the same message as the bump, not three days later when you are angry. Angry doors sound like punishments. Wednesday 3, written on Tuesday at 11:22 while you are still calm, is a clock. Wednesday 3, written on Friday in a mood, is a scene. Send the calm one.

# Guide 14 — Time on the page

## a weekday and a clock

*Need the numbers by Tuesday 1 pm so we can lock the agenda.*

If that is true, it can live. If Tuesday is a day you have not looked at, it dies as soon as they ask you to say the time out loud. If 1 pm is a feeling you picked because it sounded firm, it dies in the invite that still says 2.

A weekday without a clock is a fog. *By Friday* means Friday morning to the person who wants to be done, and Friday 11:50 pm to the person who will send you a file while you are asleep. You will then spend Monday writing the apology chapter because you did not name 3 pm.

A clock without a weekday is a different fog. *By 1 pm* on a thread that started last week is 1 pm today, or 1 pm the day of the meeting, or 1 pm whenever they next open you. Today is a word that moves while the message sits unread.

Name both. Tuesday. 1 pm. If the night is a meeting, the subject can carry the clock. A tired person scans subjects. They do not hunt paragraph four for a day.

You: *It sounds bossy. I'll just say soon.*

Me: *Soon is how the agenda stays blank. Bossy is a feeling you have about a clock. The clock is still a clock. They can say no to Tuesday 1 pm. They cannot say no to soon, because soon is not a thing they can*

*put on a calendar. A no to a real time is a clean night. Guide 9 already sat with the no. This night only says: give them a time they can refuse.*

If you do not know the weekday yet, you do not know the job yet. Find the calendar square. Then type. Do not send *when you get a chance* as a substitute for a hunt you were too tired to do. Chance is not a clock. Chance is how a follow-up becomes a daily poke, and daily pokes already died in Guide 13.

## **the zone**

You are in one city. They are in another. The thread has a third person in a third city, because work looks like that on a Tuesday.

*Tuesday 1 pm* without a zone is a miss waiting for a room. 1 pm Eastern is 10 am Pacific. 1 pm London is already afternoon in New York, or it is morning, depending on the month and the shift you did not write down. I will not sell you a table of offsets as a personality. I will sell you a habit: if the To line has more than one city, the time on the page names a zone.

You: *They can convert it.*

Me: *They can. They will convert it wrong on a tired day, or they will convert it and still miss, and they will quote your 1 pm in a room that runs on a different 1 pm. Conversion is not your gift to them. A named zone is a mercy.*

If you do not know their city, you still know yours. Write yours. *Tuesday 1 pm Eastern* is a thing a person can convert. *Tuesday 1 pm* is a thing a person can argue about after they miss.

A calendar invite that carries a zone does not excuse a body that says *1 pm* with no zone. People open mail without opening invites. People forward bodies. People print bodies. The page has to stand if the invite never arrives.

Nia is craft. The thread. Nia writes *1 pm* in the first message, then *2 pm your time* in a reply, then *noonish* in a new subject because the old thread felt messy. Three clocks. One job. History gone. They will open the newest subject and miss the first clock. One thread, one clock, one zone. If the clock moves, you write the move at the top of the same thread: *Moving to Tuesday 2 pm Eastern. The 1 pm is dead*. Then you change the invite. Then you stop sending *noonish*.

## **fake urgency**

The subject has *URGENT* in it. The body has *as soon as you can*. The meeting is Thursday. Today is Tuesday. You sat on the draft since last Wednesday because you did not want to sound pushy, and now you are pushing with capitals.

They will open an urgent subject. They will also learn, if the Thursday is still Thursday, that your urgent is a costume. Costumes get quoted. The next real urgent will sit unread because last week's urgent was a file you could have asked for on Wednesday with a weekday and a clock.

Fake urgency is not speed. Fake urgency is a feeling you had about your own delay, put onto their morning.

You: *If I don't mark it urgent, they won't open it.*

Me: *They might not open it anyway. I do not have a sentence that forces an open. A clock in the subject is a reason to open. A capital URGENT is a reason to distrust you after they open and find a Thursday.*

Real heat exists. A system is down. A client is in the room. A signature is needed before a door closes at noon. Those nights still get a weekday and a clock. They do not get a novel. *Need the signed page by today 12 pm Eastern. The door closes at noon.* That can live if it is true. If it is not true, you are in the costume again.

Do not manufacture a door. Do not invent a client in a room. Do not put *time-sensitive* on a recap that could wait until Friday 3 pm. Time-sensitive is EOD in a nicer suit. Name the time. If you cannot name it, the night is not sensitive. It is only yours.

Pax adds *URGENT* and a manager on cc because Pax wants a yes before lunch. The lunch is Pax's. The manager did not ask to be a clock. The person in To feels the weapon. The yes dies. Even if a file arrives, the room remembers that time was used as a crowd. You can love a result. You cannot unsend a reputation. Guide 17 will sit with after. This night only says: do not spend a reputation on a fake noon.

# Guide 15 — The machine wrote it

## the machine invented a fact

The paragraph mentions a file you do not have. A meeting on Wednesday. A budget number you did not give it. A person who left in March, still *looped in*. A charity. A policy. A *as we agreed last week* when last week you agreed to nothing.

Invented facts are not a style problem. They are a lie you will sign if you send.

You do not argue with the panel about truth. You open the calendar. You open the folder. You open the last thread. You check the name. You check the date. You check the To line. If the panel's Wednesday is not on the calendar, Wednesday dies. If you cannot find the file, *attached* dies. If you did not agree last week, *as we agreed* dies. What remains is your Tuesday. You type that. You throw away the rest.

You: *It's close enough. They'll know what I meant.*

Me: *They will know you did not look. Close enough is how a room shows up on Wednesday to a meeting that is Tuesday, because a panel likes Wednesday. Close enough is how a number you never had becomes a number they quote as yours. You will then want Guide 12. Name the miss. The fix. Stop. This night is how you avoid needing 14 for a sentence you never spoke.*

Nia is craft. The thread. Nia pastes a long thread into a panel and asks for a summary to forward. The summary invents a decision: *The group agreed to Friday 3 pm*. The group agreed to nothing. Two people said maybe. Nia forwards the summary anyway, because the thread was long and the meeting is soon. The summary is now a fact in other people's boxes. Other people will act. Nia will spend a week unsaying a Friday the machine made up.

Nia writes her own three lines. *No decision yet. I still need a yes or no on Tuesday 1 pm Eastern. If I do not have it by Monday 10 am Eastern, I will lock the agenda without the numbers*. Those lines are a mouth. A summary of a thread you did not read with your own eyes is not a mouth. It is a rumour with formatting.

## brackets

The paste still has [Name]. It has [insert date]. It has [Company]. It has TBD. It has {meeting\_time}. You saw them. You thought you would fill them after you fixed the tone. You fixed a tone that was never yours. You did not fill the brackets. You hit the key labelled SEND.

They open it. They see [Name]. They know you did not look. They may still do the job. They will not trust the next clock. A bracket is a confession that a prior page was the author.

Find-and-replace is a panel you run with your own hands. Search for [. Search for {. Search for TBD. Search for TODO. Search for XXX. Search for lorem. If any of those live in the box, you are not sending. You are drafting. Drafts stay in Drafts.

A cousin of brackets: a name the panel invented because you said *write to the team*. The team is three people. The panel wrote *Dear all* and then a fourth name from a famous company it likes. The fourth name is not in the room. If you send it, you have added a ghost. Ghosts get forwarded. Cut the ghost. Name the people who need it, or name no one and let the To line do the naming.

Pax almost sends *Dear [Manager]*, *looping you in for visibility*. Visibility is a weapon. The bracket is a second weapon, accidental. Pax fills the name, then takes the manager off To unless the manager needs the file. Filling a bracket does not make a cc honest. Honesty is who needs it.

# Guide 16 — Send

## the To line

Look at To before you admire the tone. Look at cc.  
Look at bcc.

Autocomplete in the address field is a different machine from Guide 15, and the same death. It offers a name you have mailed before. It offers a name you have never mailed, because the directory is a crowd. It offers a list. Lists are how a no becomes a performance.

If the night is one ask to one person, To is one person. Cc is empty unless a person needs the file and will not be asked to act. Bcc is a night with a stop. Bcc of a boss is a weapon. Bcc of a crowd is a later leak when someone hits reply-all and the crowd appears. If you cannot explain the bcc in one sentence you would put at the top (*adding X for Y*), you do not bcc.

You: *I'll bcc myself so I have a copy.*

Me: *Sent is a copy. A folder is a copy. Bcc of yourself is a superstition. Superstition is not craft. Keep a copy is craft. A copy is a thing you can find without a hidden line.*

A special death: Reply-all when you meant Reply. Default Reply. Reply-all is a flood. If you add a person, you name them at the top. Guide 4 already sat with that. This night only says: the last look is the look at who will receive this, not the look at whether you sound kind. Kind to a crowd is often cruel to the person whose no is now public.

Pax's finger stops on a title in cc. Pax takes the title off. Pax's ask can live without a weapon. If the title needs the file, Pax writes *adding [name] for the numbers, not for a yes*. Then the title is a person, not a crowd. Then send.

If To is empty and cc is full, you have a crowd and no owner. Put the person who must act in To. Put the people who must know, if they must, in cc. Empty To is how nobody answers and everybody watches.

## **the attachment you said you attached**

The body says *please see attached*. The paperclip is empty. They open you. They have no file. They must write *you forgot the file*. You must write *here it is*. Two extra messages. A small shame. A delay that eats Tuesday 11 am if the meeting is 1.

Open the paperclip. See the file. Open the file. See that it is the right file, not last week's, not a file with a different person's numbers, not a file named `final_final_USE_THIS` that is empty. See that it is not a file you are not allowed to send. Then send.

If the file is too large, the send may bounce, or the file may be stripped. I will not print a size table. I will print the habit: if the file is a brick, you use a folder the person can already open, and the email names the folder and the file, and you do not pretend a brick went through a paperclip. If they cannot open the folder, that is a different night: access. You ask for access, or you send a smaller object, or you do not claim *attached*.

*You: I'll send and then attach in a second message if I forgot.*

*Me: Then look now, and you will not need the second message. Second messages are how a thread splits. Second messages are how the person who only reads the first has no file in the meeting.*

A special death: the right file, the wrong sheet inside. You attached the workbook. The tab they need is hidden behind a tab called old. Open the tab. If the live numbers are not in front, put them in front, or name the tab in the body. *Numbers are on the tab called Tuesday.* Dull. Lives.

Ivy's no does not need a file. Ivy still looks at the paperclip, because last week's apology had a file and this draft is a reply on that thread, and some tools keep offering the old file. An old file on a no is a new job you did not mean to send. Remove it. Then send the no.

## **the last look, in order**

Use the following sequence as a practical final check. Adapt it to the actual message rather than treating it as an inflexible rule.

One. To, cc, bcc. Finger on each name. Wrong Sam off. Empty To filled with the person who must act. Crowd removed.

Two. Subject. A job a tired person can scan. A clock if the night is a clock. Not *Update*. Not *URGENT* as a costume. Not *Hi*.

Three. First sentence. The job. Who, what, when. Not *I hope this finds you well*.

Four. Dates. Weekday, clock, zone. Match the invite.

Five. The word *attached*. Paperclip. Right file. Right tab. Allowed to send.

Six. Names in the body. Hi matches To. No leftover Chris. No [Name].

Seven. If the night is a record, your mouth. If the night is a machine draft, your mouth or you refuse.

Eight. Aloud. Once. If you cannot say it, you do not send it.

Then the key. Then you watch undo only if you already know you might need it, which you should not, because you looked. Then you stop touching it.

If that order feels like a stall, you are stalling. Four pairs of eyes on adjectives is a stall. Eight is a stall. One pass on objects is craft. Do the pass. Send.

You: *What if I still feel sick.*

Me: *Sick is a feeling. The To line is a fact. If the fact is clean and the job is true, send. If the fact is not clean, fix the fact. Do not wait for the stomach to become a yes. The stomach is not a second pair of eyes.*

# Guide 17 — After it is live

## correction

You sent Tuesday. You meant Thursday. You sent 1 pm. The invite is 2. You spelled Sarah as Sara. You said attached and the file was wrong. You left a bracket. You left a title on cc. You invented a Wednesday because a panel likes Wednesday.

Correct the fact. One dull line. The fact first. Next step second. Not a sandwich of fake praise. Not a speech. Guide 11 already sat with bad news. A correction is small bad news. It does not become a memoir of how careful you usually are.

*Correction: the numbers are due Thursday 1 pm Eastern, not Tuesday. The invite is updated. Please ignore Tuesday in my last.*

That can live.

*I am so sorry, I can't believe I did that, I was up late, I hope this doesn't cause any issues, you are all amazing,* then the clock in paragraph four, dies.

If the miss is a wrong person who received a thing they should not have, you say *sent in error, please delete*, and you tell a human who is paid to know the line if the night is a salary, a health line, a password, a person being fired. This book is not a lawyer. Fear of a thread is a night. You do not hide. You do not write a legal novel in the thread. You do the dull line and the phone to the room that handles the line.

If the miss is small (Sara/Sarah) and the job is clear, you may correct the name once, or you may let it stand if a correction would be louder than the miss. Loud corrections of tiny names are how a thread becomes a joke. Jokes travel. Use a mouth: if Sarah will be in a room with the mail on a wall, fix Sarah. If Sarah already replied as Sarah and the work is moving, you can spell it right next time and stop performing a ritual.

Nia corrects a clock in a new subject called *CORRECTION*. History splits. The people in the old subject still have Tuesday. Nia corrects in the same thread, at the top. *Correction: Thursday 1 pm Eastern. Tuesday is dead*. Same subject if the tool allows. Then the invite. Then stop sending a third clock.

## **the angry reply**

Caps. A novel. A reply-all. A sentence about your tone. A sentence about your lateness. A sentence that is not about this job.

You will want to match them. Matching is a second novel. Second novels get quoted next to yours. You send, if you must send, the job and the clock. You do not send a diagnosis of their character. You do not send *I will not be spoken to like this* into a thread with ten people unless you are prepared for those ten people to have that sentence forever. Prepared is not a feeling. Prepared is a choice about a record.

If the anger is a no, take the no.

If the anger is a fact (*you sent the wrong file*), correct the fact.

If the anger is a score from a different year, you do not settle it in this thread. You take it to a room, or you leave it. Mail is a bad courtroom. This book is not a lawyer and not a referee.

Ivy gets an angry reply to a clean no. Ivy's hands want a defence. Ivy writes the defence in a note that is not mail. Ivy sends nothing, or Ivy sends *I can still do Friday 10 am Eastern if that helps. I cannot do Tuesday*. The door, again. The defence stays off the page.

Pax gets an angry reply-all because Pax cc'd a title. Pax does not reply-all a defence. Pax replies to the person, or Pax stops. If Pax must correct the crowd, one line: *The ask is only for the numbers by Tuesday 1 pm Eastern. No action needed from others*. Then Pax lives with the weapon Pax used. Living is not therapy. Living is not writing a memoir to the crowd about how cc seemed like a good idea at 9:12.