

## THE LANGUAGE USED IN COMPOSING EMAIL TO SHOW A PROFESSIONAL NETIQUETTE OF SECRETARIAL STUDENTS

### PENGUNAAN BAHASA SURAT ELEKTRONIK DALAM MENUNJUKKAN NETIKET MAHASISWA SEKRETARI

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#### **Abstract**

*Email communication has become an everyday occurrence in the modern digital era since it is believed to be an easy and fast way to reach a larger audience, even in various regions of the world. The purpose of this study is to analyze how students at Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Komunikasi dan Sekretari Tarakanita (STARKI) behave when emailing their lecturer. Their emails were examined in accordance with the principle of effective email composition. This study also aims to reinforce the notion that good netiquette is a necessary ability in the current digital environment to raise the professionalism of secretaries in the workplace. In this investigation, document analysis was used. The information was gathered from the lecturer's email. In this article, the research results from the students' emails are presented. The subject line, email body, and language usage were all examined. Still currently, a lot of business emails are sent without adhering to the proper format and professionalism. The netiquette needs to be included in STARKI's curriculum since it is a secretarial school. It is crucial to include this content in the Business Writing course so that students may demonstrate professionalism by sending emails within business hours, using acceptable and official language, and organizing their information in the proper way.*

*Keyword: email, netiquette, secretary's professionalism*

#### **Abstrak**

Komunikasi melalui email sudah menjadi hal yang lumrah di era digital modern karena diyakini sebagai cara yang mudah dan cepat untuk menjangkau khalayak yang lebih luas, bahkan di berbagai wilayah di dunia. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis bagaimana mahasiswa Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Komunikasi dan Sekretari Tarakanita (STARKI) ketika mengirim surat elektronik (surel) ke dosennya. Surel mereka diperiksa sesuai dengan prinsip komposisi email yang efektif. Penelitian ini juga bertujuan untuk memperkuat anggapan bahwa netiket yang baik adalah kemampuan yang diperlukan dalam lingkungan digital saat ini untuk meningkatkan profesionalisme sekretaris di tempat kerja. Dalam penyelidikan ini, analisis dokumen digunakan. Informasi tersebut diperoleh dari email dosen. Dalam artikel ini disajikan hasil penelitian dari email siswa. Baris subjek, isi surel, dan penggunaan bahasa semuanya diperiksa. Namun, saat ini banyak sekali email bisnis yang dikirim tanpa mengikuti format dan

profesionalisme yang tepat. Netiket tersebut perlu dimasukkan dalam kurikulum STARKI karena merupakan sekolah kesekretariatan. Sangat penting untuk memasukkan konten ini dalam kursus Penulisan Bisnis sehingga siswa dapat menunjukkan profesionalisme dengan mengirimkan email dalam jam kerja, menggunakan bahasa yang dapat diterima dan resmi, dan mengatur informasi mereka dengan cara yang benar.

Kata kunci: netiket, profesionalisme sekretaris, surel

## A. BACKGROUND

Communication is the key to maintain the business. In the current digital era, communication through email has become a common practice as it is seen as a means to reach a broader audience, even in different parts of the world, easily and quickly. In the current digital era, communication through email has become a common practice as it is seen as a means to reach a broader audience, even in different parts of the world, easily and quickly. Email, known as *surat elektronik* or *surel* in Bahasa Indonesia, is widely used. However, not all secretaries who frequently engage in correspondence, whether with internal or external parties of the organization, understand the etiquette of communicating via email. For a secretary, understanding email communication etiquette is crucial to maintain the professional reputation of themselves, their leaders, and the organization.

However, not all secretaries who frequently engage in correspondence, whether with internal or external parties of the organization, understand the etiquette of communicating via email. For a secretary, understanding email communication etiquette is crucial to maintain the professional reputation of themselves, their leaders, and the organization. The online etiquette is so-called netiquette is a basic skill to be possessed in digital era. Taylor netiquette is important because cyberspace has its own culture. Usually when we enter a new culture, we often have a culture shock; we think that communicating online is the same as face-to-face communication. That is why it is common to make a mistake while communicating online (Taylor, 2017, p. 38).

Netiquette is an important skill to possess because the change in demand due to technology advancement. The technology advancement goes hand in hand with internet and digital sphere. Lubis mentioned digital technology focuses on using automatization and internet compared to using human's power (Lubis, 2020). Because more jobs are done using technology, the time spent to finish the jobs is also shorter. The development in technology cannot be stopped or slowed down because human always seek a way to finish their job efficiently and effectively (Danuri, 2019); thus it is unlikely for a secretary, in this study, sending letter through expedition (unless for a certain or special consideration). Charlotte, Soedjarwo, and Setyawati on their research found that Google Mail (Gmail) can be used as the reminder what letter that needs to be handled and a secretary will not forget what letters that have not been processed yet because Gmail has a system that allows the recipient knows which email that has not been read yet (Charlotte, Soedjarwo, & Setyawati, 2022, p. 171)

Email is a crucial component of day-to-day online life, according to Statista, a provider of market and consumer data. Global email usage hit four billion users in 2020 and is projected to increase to 4.6 billion users by 2025. Globally, 306 billion emails were sent and received per day in 2020. By 2025, this number is anticipated to reach more than 376 billion daily emails (Statista, 2020). Email's rapid integration into our daily lives has profoundly changed how we communicate.

Email has emerged as the go-to method for professional contact because it allows for speedy information exchange, coordination, and collaboration across time zones and geographic boundaries. Email is widely used, but it also necessitates a set of etiquette and standards to enable respectful and successful communication. A set of norms and etiquette for email communication are particularly important for secretaries and administrative personnel who serve as the organization's communication channels.

The secretarial department at STARKI is committed to providing its students with the skills and information required for success in professional communication in the current digital era because it realizes that secretaries hold the key to effective communication in a company. Therefore, students are taught how to utilize email and have proper netiquette when communicating via email. STARKI always tries to comply with the needs of industry, so the curriculum is designed in such a way that assist the student to perform well in their job later. In term of assisting students to be able to write the letter in a professional and acceptable manner, Business Writing subject is given for four semesters: Business Writing 1 until Business Writing 4.

This study aims to portray the Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Komunikasi dan Sekretari Tarakanita (STARKI) students' behaviour in sending email to their lecturers. This issue is important to see since the lecturers found there are quite many students who cannot write a proper email. Proper here means the students mistakenly put the information and even cannot compose a good sentence. Their emails were analysed using the theory of a professional email composition. This study also wants to support the idea that netiquette is an important skill in this digital era to improve secretary's professionalism in working world.

## **B. Theoretical Framework**

### **The importance of having skill in secretary profession**

There is a different between job and profession. The term "profession" is usually used to refer to a person's position or occupation. However, not all positions or occupations are considered professions because they require specific competencies from the practitioners. Therefore, not everyone can fulfil the requirements of a particular profession due to the need for specialized education and training.

The general understanding of society is that a profession is a job, but not all jobs are professions. A profession is a job that requires knowledge, skills, and ethics. Ethics is often related to morality; it is because ethics refers to the theory of morality. Etymologically, ethics comes from the Greek word *ethos* which means a place of dwelling, location, but also habit, custom, and convention. In the same sense, ethics can be defined as a set of custom that lead someone to behave in accordance with a good moral value (Bartneck, Lütge, Wagner, & Welsh, 2021).

A code of ethics consists of rules or guidelines that serve as a practice framework for members of a specific profession. A professional group can establish a code of ethics because its members share the same educational background, specific knowledge, and unique skills compared to others. Therefore, professions in this societal context have their own authority and influence. For the secretary profession, the Indonesian Association of Secretaries and Administrative Professionals has agreed upon the following code of ethics to regulate the behavior of its members (Siambaton, 2015):

1. Uphold the honor, dignity, and reputation of the secretary profession.

2. Act honestly and politely in every behavior, both in performing tasks and serving outside the workplace and society.
3. Maintain the confidentiality of all information for personal interests.
4. Enhance the quality of the profession through education or collaboration with fellow professionals, both nationally and internationally.
5. Respect and appreciate the reputation of fellow professionals, both within and outside the workplace.

Upon searching for secretary code of ethics, many company and organisations posted the code of ethics for the secretary there. Inyang and Aniekan did research on 2022 and found out that politeness influences job performance. Based on the result of their study, politeness is closely related to maintaining a good interactional relation. The actions that can be performed by the secretary such as showing a good manner and respect for others (Inyang & Aniekan, 2022, pp. 52-53).

### **How to compose an email professionally**

In order to look professional in composing an email, a secretary must pay attention to the following:

1. Always remember to include a subject heading.
2. Put CC to those who really need the message
3. Always begin your email with greeting and close with an appropriate closing
4. Try to be creative in using the expression "Regards"
5. Always remember to set an automatic signature
6. Put the standard disclaimer at the end of the email message
7. Check the attachment especially if you mention that there is a document attached (Taylor, 2017, p. 53)

A subject line should be also written well. Taylor explained the SMART rule to write a good subject. **SMART** stands for specific, meaning, appropriate, relevant, and thoughtful. The subject must be **specific** in order to give information to the recipient the content of the message. Subject must be **meaningful**. In relation with being specific, the information must be clear; what the email is about. The clarity in subject line is also in line with **appropriateness**. The subject line must be written fitting with the purpose of sending the email. It is expected that the reader already knows the purpose of the email only by reading the subject line; thus, it should be **relevant**. Writing a good subject line shows that the secretary is **thoughtful**. It is because the recipient may get many emails a day and the recipient take lesser time to relate the email. Being thoughtful can also be shown by writing it short: no more than 50 characters and about 5-7 words. (Taylor, 2017, pp. 55-57).

### **Language used in professional business email**

Language is one of crucial skills to show professionalism. Based on the research done by Batan, Ashari, and Soedjarwo, English skill is needed in the office. The multinational office often

corresponds with it foreign colleagues. A secretary is the first person who reads the letter or email and gives the responds. If a secretary is not be able to perform an adequate language skill, the communication will be difficult. Moreover, since English is regarded as lingua franca, showing a good English skill supports the secretary finishing her works more efficiently (Batan, Ashari, & Soedjarwo, 2023). Being able to finish her job efficiently shows that the secretary is professional in her workplace.

Actually, there is no fix guideline about what kind of expression is considered the professional ones. However, in most sources, they agree that *Dear* for salutation is more formal compared to say *Hi* or just mention the name (Richards, 2022, pp. 4-7). The email must contain introduction, body, and closing. The introduction part gives information the reason of correspondence; it can be the new one or refer to the previous message. The body of the email tells the message of the email. In the body, it is better to write in complete sentence which means the sentence must have subject and verb and object whenever necessary as well as adverb. The email must be closed with a polite closing and the most common expressions being used are *Best regards* or *regards*. In formal email, try to avoid using expression, such as, *see ya* or *thanks a bunch* in the closing.

Tone is also important to be considered in writing an email. The email should focus on the reader; in order to do that, the tone must be reader-centred and talk more about what the sender does for the reader. The positive language is necessarily be used throughout the email. The sentences must be simple; please have in mind that being simple does not mean being short. Simple here means using the simple and easily-understood sentence. The sender needs to avoid using *There is* or *There are* in the beginning of the sentence. The abbreviation is not suggested to use and even try to minimise the use of construction such as *I'm* or *I'll* or *you're* because contraction can be the indicator of less formal style in writing (Richards, 2022, pp. 83-94).

Seeing not many researches on netiquette specifically analysing email composition, it is expected that this study can enrich the discussion on the portrayal of netiquette on secretarial students. There have been many researches finding out that the language use reflects the behaviour of the speaker. A well-structured speech reflects the speaker's logical thinking. On the other hand, if the speakers cannot use the language in appropriate manner, the hearer will regard the speaker as someone who does not have a good language proficiency. The same thing happens in written communication. As it has been discussed on previous study conducted by Batan, Ashari, and Soedjarwo that a good language proficiency is important in supporting a secretary finishing her jobs well, a good language used by a secretary in composing an email can also help the secretary maintaining the good relationship with the business colleagues and at the same time proofing her professionalism in written communication.

Each email was analysed on three part: the subject formulation, the sentence composition on the email body, and the time. The subject formulation was analysed using the SMART formulation proposed by Taylor. The sentence composition was analysed using grammatical rule and the characteristics of formal business language explained by Richard. Lastly, the analysis of the time of sending the email gave the insight on the professional behaviour of the students.

## C. Methodology

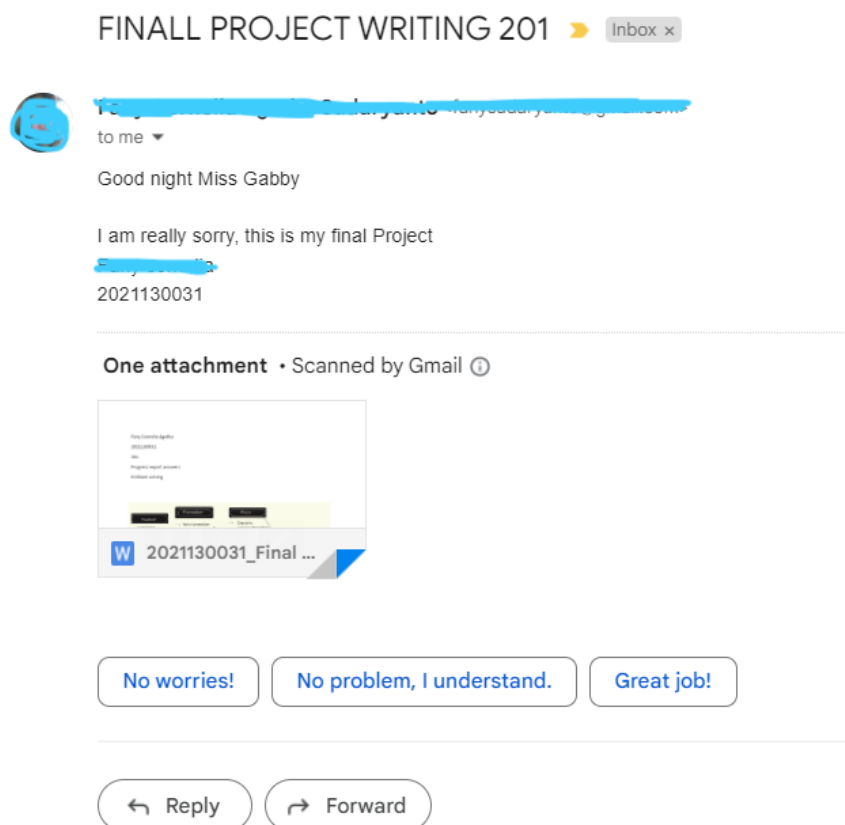
This study applied document analysis. Bowen explained document analysis is used to review and analyse the data. The data taken from the email received by the authors (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). The data were analysed by using the elements of a professional email proposed by Taylor. Furthermore, the analysis became the basis in seeing how importance the material of secretary professionalism, especially in correspondence, to the secretarial students because they are trained to be a professional secretary.

## D. DISCUSSION

### The email structure and language sent by the students

This section presents the findings from the email received from the students. The emails were analysed its subject formulation, content structure, and language based on the theory explained above.

Picture 1: Sample email 1

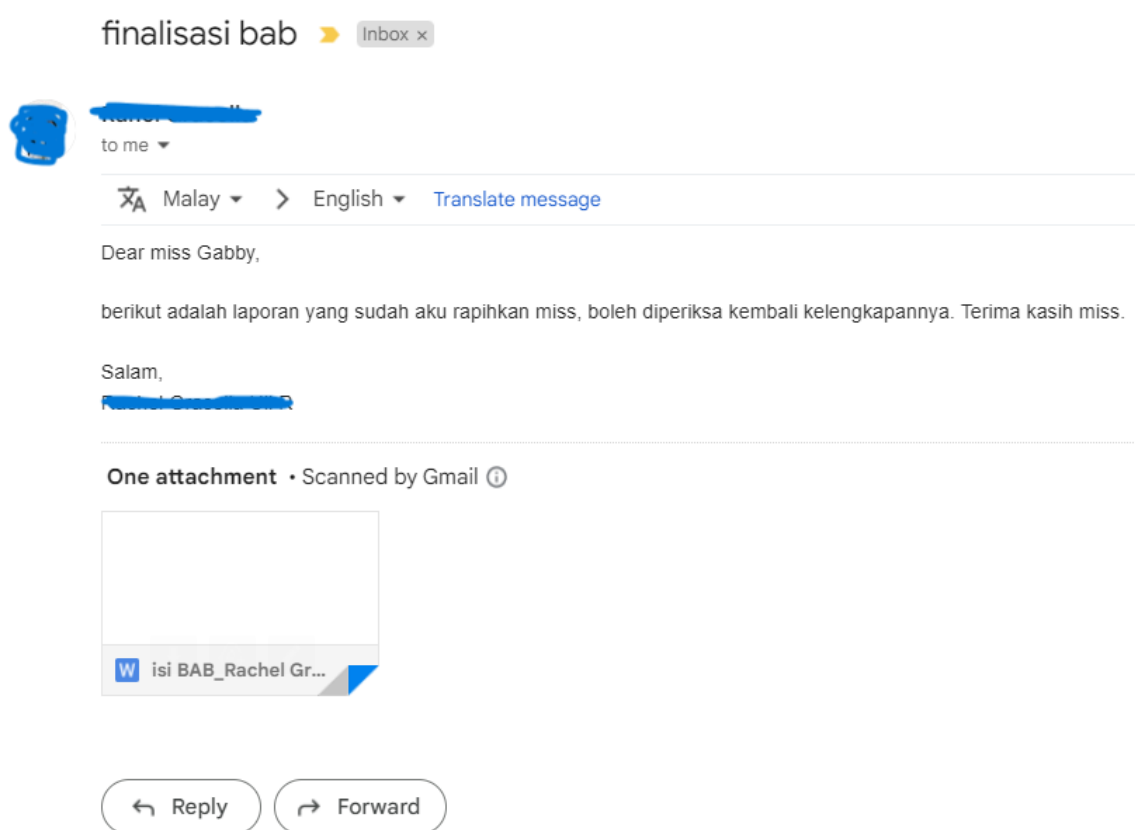


Source: personal document

The subject is pretty-well written based on SMART formula. The subject has been clearly stated that the email was sent to submit her final project. The formulation of the subject will be clear if the student mentions the subject because it is plausible that the lecturer teaches both classes.

Although the formulation of the subject is pretty good, the message was not well-constructed. The context is not clear why the student needed to say sorry. If the student sent the project later than the deadline; and obviously the lecturer knew when the deadline was, it is still better to mention that she felt sorry for being late. The structure is incomplete as well. A good and professional email must have introduction which tells the purpose of the email. Greeting is a part of introduction but it is not enough. The student should have mentioned why she needed to send the email. She also forgot to deliver a salutation. The closing is improper too; closing part must be stated using *Regards* or *Best Regards* or *Hormat Saya* in Bahasa Indonesia.

Picture 2: Sample email 2



Source: personal document

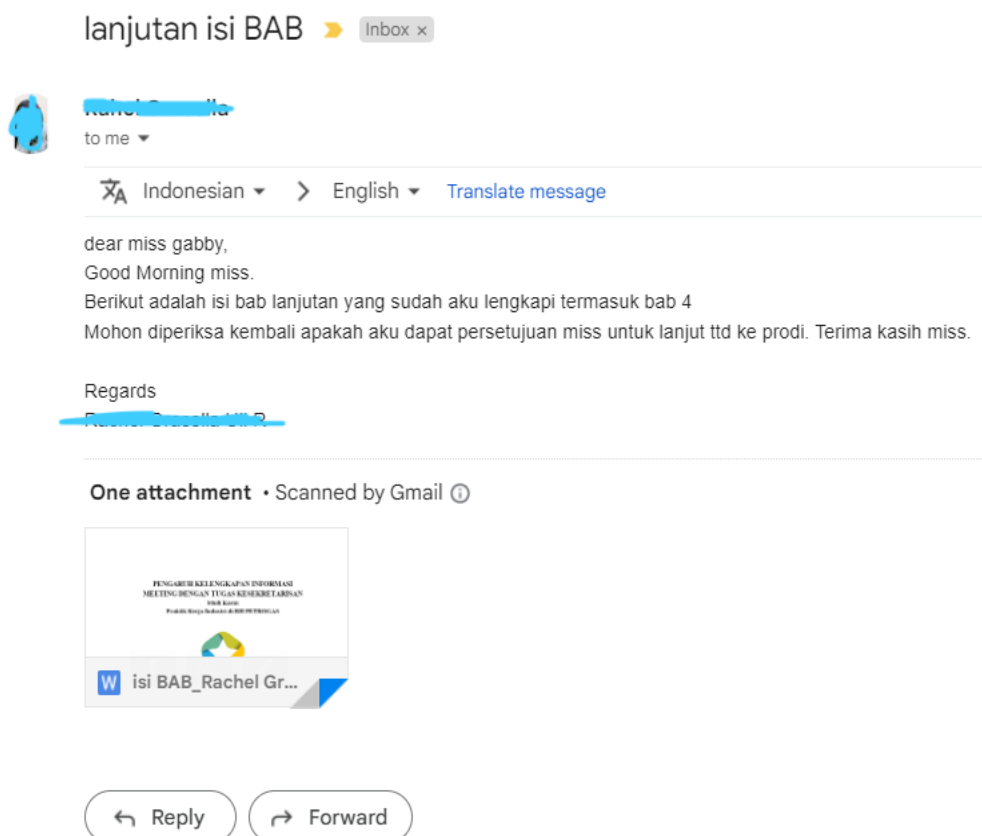
This student sent an email to submit her internship report. The report consists of five chapters. Referring to SMART formula for writing an email subject, her subject does not comply the specific and meaningful aspect. Surely the lecturer recognizes her as one of the lecturer's tutelages in finishing the report. However, it is better if the student mentions what *bab* or chapter she referred to. This lack of aspect makes the subject formulation less meaningful because it cannot give a complete understanding what chapter he referred to.

The structure of the email is already good in term of she wrote the email in complete aspect. She wrote Dear miss Gaby in which she used the honorific *miss* to refer to her lecturer and *Dear*



is considered as a professional expression. The problem happened in the way she used capitalization. The rule of capitalization is the same in Bahasa Indonesia and in English: the capital letter must be used in the beginning of the sentence and the personal title as well. When the word miss is followed by a name, it becomes personal title, so it needs to be written in capital letters. Miss Gabby is the correct writing. Using the correct spelling is also an important thing to do in writing a business email. In Bahasa Indonesia, the spelling of *rapi* (neat) is R-A-P-I not R-A-P-I-H.

Picture 3: Sample email 3



Source: personal document

Shirley Taylor highlights the purpose of writing a subject line SMART-ly because it is better to make the recipient knows the content of the email only by reading its subject line. The subject line such as *lanjutan isi BAB*, it is translated as the *continuation of a chapter*, was not clearly formulated. In term of being specific, this subject line is not specific because the sender did not mention what chapter she had finished writing or sending it and what chapter she referred to. This formulation is also not thoughtful enough in giving a clear understanding what the purpose of this email is; in this email, the sender did not mention what chapter she sent.

Another problem with the subject line of this email is the use of capital letter. *Bab* or chapter is written using all capital letter if only as the title on a book or academic report such as

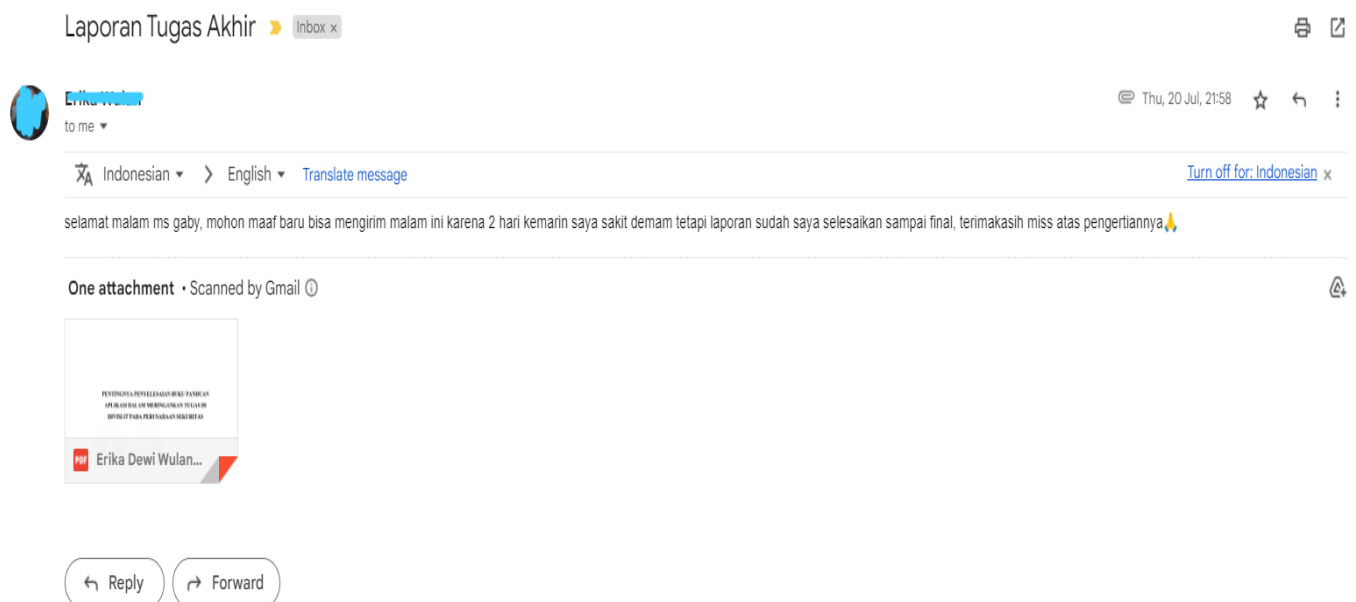


thesis. In this email chapter or *bab* is written as the subject of an email. Professionally, using all uppercase font is not suggested in formal business email unless it is necessary to do so.

The introduction presents in this email; however, the use of capital letter is problematic. Letter *d* in *dear* should have been written in capital letter. Letters *m* and *g* should have been in capital letter because they show honorific and name of a person. The construction of the sentence in the body can be improved to be more professional. The expression *isi bab lanjutan*, the continuation of a chapter that have been completed, is redundant. It was unclear whether she sent the continuation of same chapter as her previous email or the next chapter of her report. The message would be clearer if she wrote Through this email, I send chapter 2 of my report. By doing this, the lecturer would understand that she had finished chapter one and asked the lecturer to check her chapter two.

As it has been explained earlier, the use of uncommon abbreviation should be avoided. *Ttd* is the abbreviation of *tertanda*. *Ttd* is usually placed in the space for signature; which means it is not meant to replace the signature or as a word being able to stand alone.

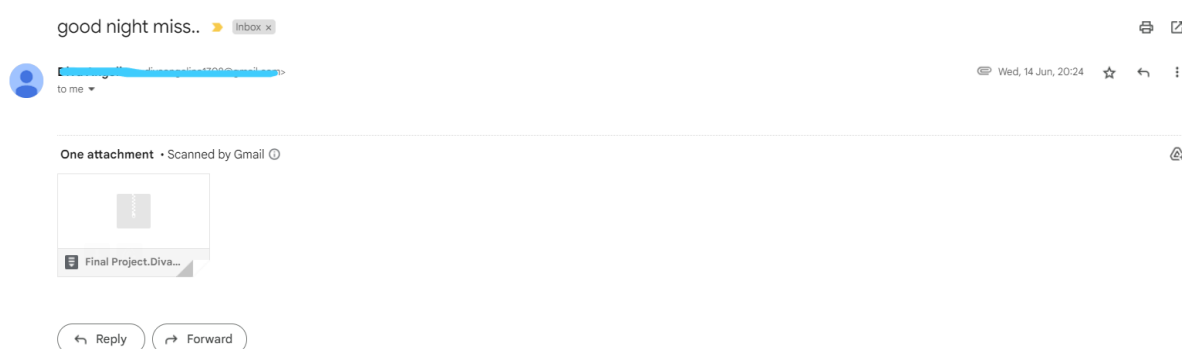
Picture 4: Sample email 4



Source: Personal document

This email even has more problems than the previous ones. This email misses the introduction and closing parts. The capitalisation is also missing here: the capital letter should have been used in the beginning of sentence. Since email has different performance compared to phone call or message related to notification, but it does not mean one can send the email outside the working hour. If we take a look at the timestamp, this student sent the email at 21.58; although she has said sorry, but it is still not professional to send an email at night unless there is other consideration such as with permission from the recipient or the email is an urgent matter.

Picture 5: Sample email 5

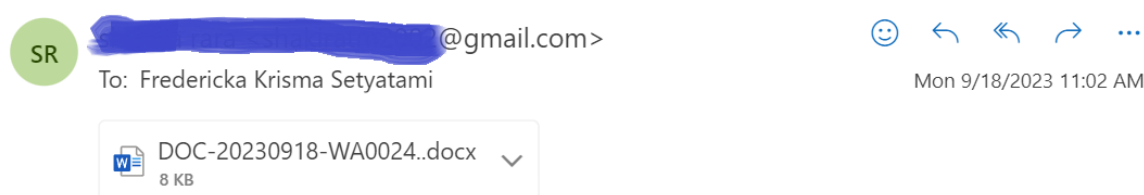


Source: Personal document

The worst email exists is an email without the body. A secretary needs to know where to place the message; the message of the email must be written on the body not in the subject. The menu subject is used to write the identity of the email (what email it is). The message must be written in the text body of the email. Here the secretary must begin the message with introduction, the body, and close the email with a proper closing.

*Good night* is an expression of greeting. Greeting must be placed in the introduction. Using the proper punctuation is necessary; it is not formal and professional to use double full stop. Sending file in zip is still a problematic matter. Silla in her report wrote that zip can be problematic because not all computers support the extract process of the zip file (Silla, 2022). Tschabitscher added it will be better not to waste the recipient time by attaching huge file; in other words, it is better to compress the file so the recipient can download it more easily (Tschabitscher, 2021).

Picture 6: Sample email 6



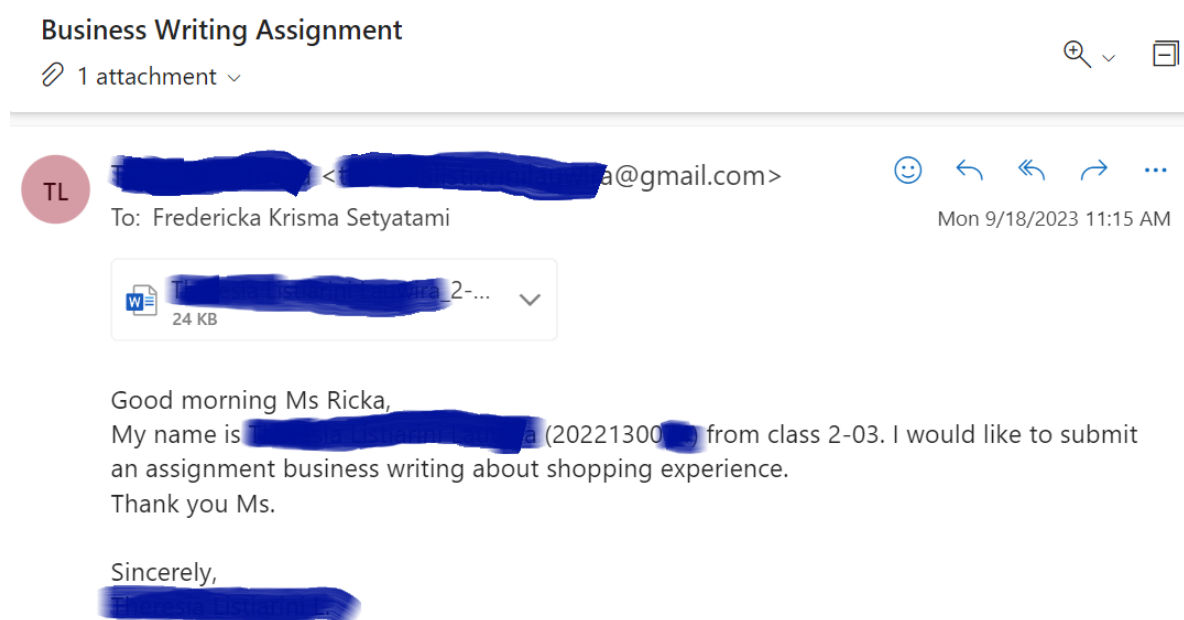
Selamat Siang, Miss Ricka. Berikut adalah hasil dari tugas saya di Pertemuan Pertama kelas Writing.

Source: Personal document

Similar to the previous examples, this student did not write an opening or closing greeting in the body of the email. In writing sentences in the body of emails, many capital letters are used inappropriately; for example, the use of capital letters on the initial letter of the word *siang* in *Selamat Siang* and *Pertemuan Pertama* in the second sentence. Furthermore, the title of the attached document is unrelated to the contents. This may confuse email recipient and prevent her

from recognizing the downloaded document. The email appears unprofessional when the attached document has an improper title.

Picture 7: Sample email 7



Source: Personal document

This student submitted a Business Writing course assignment. In accordance with the SMART guideline, the subject of this email is specific because it specifically explains its contents. Because this assignment is provided at the first lecture, both students who send the email and lecturers who receive it are aware that there are no other tasks for this course yet. This makes the subject line of the email meaningful.

Regarding aspect completion, the email's body's structure is appropriate. Before introducing herself and explaining the email's purpose, students write an opening greeting. An appropriate sign-off and the sender's name are written at the end of the email.

### The evolution of the secretarial curriculum

As many other studies have suggested that the work of secretary has evolved. In the past, secretary only dealt with phone calling and paper-based letter. In the digital era, correspondence is done through email. Surely the etiquette needed in paper-based correspondence is different from email.

In term of showing professionalism, it is difficult for secretary nowadays to delete her digital performance since the email cannot be unsent (after certain period of time); thus, the secretary needs to be careful before click *send*. In paper-based correspondence, the behaviour in performing professionalism can be "controlled" since the latter can be destroyed if the secretary mistakenly says something before send it to the recipient.

The fact that digital device such as computer and mobile phone makes people neglect the necessity to behave because they think that the communication happens in virtual world, it does

not mean politeness is not needed anymore. Although this claim needs to be researched further, it is common to see that people tend to behave less politely in online realm.

Curriculum as the design to make the students be capable in perform well after they graduate needs to accommodate this change. The discussion in business writing subject has included the etiquette in online realm; the term for it is netiquette which is the blending word from net (internet) and etiquette. It is clear that netiquette refers to the polite behaviour during online communication.

The path to form professionalism among the secretarial students seems to be a long way to go. They still find it difficult in expression the formal and professional language to compose an email. They also find the difficulty not only in language, but also in email composition. There are still many emails which were composed without using the professional and formal structure for business email.

As the secretarial academy, STARKI needs to put the netiquette as the material in their curriculum. In Business Writing subject, it is important to include this material so that the students can show professionalism by showing their ability in using appropriate and formal language expression, placing the information in the correct menu in the email, and sending the email during working hours.

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