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Winning at Work Best-selling author Connie Glaser is one of the country's leading experts on gender communication and women's leadership issues. Her recently-published book, *GenderTalk Works*, provides an upbeat guide for bridging the gender gap at work. A popular speaker at corporate and business events, she can be reached at www.connieglaser.com

Let't talk about e-mail

Connie Glaser

Just as men and women have different communication styles when negotiating and decision-making, there are gender differences when it comes to communicating via e-mail.

Part of the problem is that e-mail communication doesn't have much history. There was no official Internet before 1983. Yet today, trillions of e-mails are sent every week, and it's estimated that office workers spend at least 25 percent of their day sending or reading e-mail.

Many people think that e-mail confusion -- including gender differences -- exists primarily because the whole technique is so new. But in fact, e-mail's unique characteristics, not just its newness, contribute to a large portion of the difficulty. For example, the very speed of e-mail makes it easier for us to "lose our cool." That's why some

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co-workers' correspondence seems angrier, less sympathetic and more gossipy than might be expected in an office environment.

How males and females

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communicate, in general, adds to the potential land mines of business e-mail. Even as children, gender differences are obvious: girls tend to be collaboration-oriented; while boys tend to be competition-oriented. What this means is that girls (and later, women) tend to use language to create rapport, closeness and friendship. While boys (and later, men) tend to use language as a way to establish status or authority among themselves.

At the office, these differences can result in e-mails that have a distinct gender bias, as men and women use language for different purposes. One distinction is that men's e-mails tend to be terse and laconic, while women's tend to be voluble and detailed. Another telling difference between the genders is that female friends tend to read e-mail and reply as soon as they receive it.

It's no surprise that researchers have found that when online, men tend to provide information or an answer, and end the conversation quickly. Women tend to provide more details and often make things more complex by adding questions and/or information. Men tend to be more direct; women tend to be more concerned with people's feelings.

Here are some examples of e-mail differences culled from actual workplace correspondence:

Man: Why haven't you finished that report yet? Female: I hate to bring this up but have you finished that report yet?

Male: As far as I'm concerned, it's a no go. Female: I hope you'll understand that we can't proceed with the project at this time.

Male: Is that the best you can do? Female: After reading your report, I think we might work together to improve it.

Clearly, social conditioning affects our writing in the same way it affects our speech patterns.

Here's some advice on how to send messages that may help win the "battle of the genders" and

reduce misunderstandings at work.

He-Mail

Acknowledge e-mail response with at least one complete sentence. Otherwise, you risk coming across as brusque or too busy to listen. Answer e-mails promptly. If you don't, people may assume that they are low on your priority list. Skip the sarcasm. Even when you're just joking around, a person who can't read your body language may take offense.

She-Mail

Use a professional tone in your e-mail and avoid getting too personal. Tentative language or online lingo ("lol" for instance) can make you appear cute or unsure of yourself. Cut to the chase, particularly when e-mailing men. Make your message direct and to the point. Avoid using smiley faces and excessive exclamation marks (!!!) that can prevent you from being taken seriously.

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