

E-mail Basics

Content Area: Communication

Overview:

This lesson shares different methods for communicating using digital technologies. Digital communication is important for all populations. However, it specifically shows a more promising future for adults in providing information, conducting business, and even reducing isolation.

Objectives:

After participating in this lesson, adult learners will be able to:

- Identify key digital communication platforms
- Explain the steps that must be completed, in order to send an e-mail
- Protect oneself from e-mail malware

Materials & Supplies:

The following materials and supplies are needed for this lesson:

- Digital devices: computers, tablets, smartphones (activity 1, activity 2)
- Access to the Internet (activity 1, activity 2)
- Flip Chart & Markers (activity 1, activity 3)

Preparation:

In preparation for this lesson, facilitators should:

- Review lesson plan
- Ensure Internet connectivity and check website links

Terminology:

The following terms will be discussed during the lesson:

- **E-mail:** messages distributed by electronic means from one computer user to one or more recipients via a network
- **Malware:** software that is specifically designed to disrupt, damage, or gain unauthorized access to a computer system
- **Password:** a combination of keyboard letters, numbers, and characteristics that must be entered to gain admission into many online services (e-mail, social media accounts, online shopping accounts, etc.)
- **Security Question:** form of shared secret used as an authenticator for accessing digital platforms and information

Background Information:

E-mail is one of the most fundamental internet communication tools. E-mail is an electronic message that is sent from one person to another through digital messaging systems. E-mail saves both time and money compared to regular mail. An e-mail message takes no more than a few minutes to reach the receiver. While sending an e-mail can be efficient and cost-effective, it is important to consider digital safety and security.

Activity 1: E-mail Basics

NOTE: Remind participants to not share their password (even as an example) during this lesson.

E-mail is an electronic message that is sent from one person to another through digital messaging systems. E-mail travels via the Internet from one computer to another. When we click on the send button, in an email program, the client connects to the Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) server which then connects to the Mail Transfer Agent (MTA). The SMTP server is like a mail carrier. It picks up the e-mail from your device and drops it off to the MTA. The MTA is like the post office. It deposits the email in your post office box. In order for the MTA to deposit the mail, it must ask the Domain Name System (DNS), which is like a global address book, for the path of the domain name. The server at the domain name will then deposit the mail into the user inbox. All of this happens in less than a couple of minutes!

Facilitators should write an example of an e-mail address on a flip chart. At the most fundamental level, e-mail addresses consist of three or four parts (1) **username**, (2) **separator**, (3) **domain name**, and the optional (4) **top-level name**.

sarahstephens@outlook.com

1. **Username (yellow)**: this is the 'name' of the e-mail account that is created by the owner. Many times, people use their name, parts of their name, and/or a combination of numbers to create their account name.
2. **Separator (green)**: this is the "at" sign or symbol (@). When reading aloud, it's spoken as "at."
3. **Domain Name (blue)**: this name identifies the server where the email messages are sent and stored.

sarahstephens@outlook.com.uk

4. **Top-level Name (purple)**: this identified a country associated with the address. Sometimes this information is not included in an e-mail address.

There are two ways that people can be provided with e-mail services. E-mail can be provided by an Internet Service Provider (ISP). People usually pay a monthly fee for internet connections, and many times, a free e-mail account can be provided. For example, BellSouth is an ISP and customers would have a domain name associated with this company, such as example@bellsouth.net. There are also free web-based e-mail service providers. Usually advertisements are associated with this site, so these companies pay for the advertisement which allows the user to have the service for free. For example, Hotmail provides free e-mail services and users have a @hotmail.com domain name.

There are two ways for people to check e-mail. Web-based e-mail, such as Hotmail, allows the user to login to a website to access the account. The e-mail messages stay on the mail server and can be accessed from any computer with Internet connection. E-mail software, such as Outlook, allows the user to login to the e-mail software application. The application retrieves your messages from the mail

server and saves them to your computer's hard drive. There are some services (like Outlook) that also have web-based access, which allows users to be able to log in from any device to access their messages. However, these messages do not download to the computer's hard drive. To access e-mail, people will have to submit a password. Sometimes, an additional layer of security may be added. Participants may also have to answer a security question. Sometimes, these security questions are also used when participants need to reset their password. This is usually a result from forgetting their password.

***NOTE:** Facilitators may choose to include some information from the Strong Passwords lesson plan.*

Facilitators should allow time for participants to explore their current e-mail account. If participants do not have an e-mail account, facilitators may choose to help them sign-up for an account. Remember that no participant should feel pressured to use an e-mail messaging system. Facilitators should also not learn personal information about the participants – password, security questions/answers, etc.

Activity 2: Using E-mail to Communicate

There are a variety of things you can do with an e-mail account:

- Compose & send messages: write a message and send to someone else
- Reply: respond back to an e-mail someone else sent to you
- Forward: pass along an e-mail you received from others
- Attach: send a file (such as a document or photo) to someone else by attaching it to a message

***NOTE:** It is recommended to explain each of these different actions and then have facilitators work one-on-one with participants to show how to do these skills on their devices.*

Composing a Message: When composing a new e-mail, most services have a "compose" or "new" button. After clicking that button, the blank e-mail message appears. You will have to type in the e-mail address to the person who is receiving the message (just like you would write an address on an envelope). You will also have the ability to type the subject of the e-mail. The subject should be kept short, but also be specific. For example, "hello" is a confusing subject while "lunch on Tuesday?" is more specific. The e-mail program will automatically include the date/time sent as well as your e-mail address as the "sender" of the message.

In the body of the e-mail, you will have the ability to type the message. You don't necessarily have to write as if the e-mail is a formal letter. However, most people do include a greeting, body/text, a closing, and their name. People may also choose to include their contact information, such as a physical address or phone number. Usually, this is associated with a business or work e-mail account. In the body of the e-mail, it is expected that you use correct grammar, syntax, spelling, mechanics, etc. Many programs offer a free spell/grammar check program. When you are ready to send the message, click the 'send' button.

***NOTE:** Facilitators may choose to include some information from the Responsible Behavior Guidelines for the Internet lesson plan.*

Replying to a Message: If you receive an e-mail message from someone, chances are, you will want to reply. This is like having a conversation. After reading the e-mail, you will click the 'reply' button and write a message back. When you are ready to send the message, click the 'send' button.

***NOTE:** Facilitators should choose to explain the difference between the 'reply' feature (where the reply e-mail is only delivered to the original sender and the 'reply all' feature (where the reply e-mail is delivered to anyone who was sent the original e-mail).*

Forwarding to a Message: If you receive an e-mail message from someone and want to pass it along to someone else, you will want to click the 'forward' button and type in the e-mail address to the person who is going to receive the new e-mail.

Attaching an Item: If you want to send a file to someone (document, video clip, photo, etc.), the file must be attached to the e-mail. In order to attach a file, you must click the 'attach' button; sometimes it looks like a paper clip. After you click this button, you must find where the file is saved on your computer (My Documents, My Photos, Desktop, etc.) and click on the file's name to attach it. You can still send a message in the body of the e-mail with the attachment. When you send a physical letter in the mail, you can also include a photo in the envelope. Think of the original e-mail as a letter and the attached item as the photograph.

Folders: Your e-mail account will have virtual folders. These folders help you organize your messages. Your inbox is where your incoming messages are stored. After reading them, you can choose to create your own folders (example – bills, banking, vacation, etc.), in order to file your e-mails. Any e-mail you send is saved in your 'sent' folder. After you delete an e-mail, it is in your 'deleted items' or 'trash' folder. To permanently delete the message, you must open this folder and delete the message again. This is to prevent you from accidentally deleting a message. Most e-mail services will also have a 'junk' or 'SPAM' folder. Usually the e-mail service can filter out unwanted/junk e-mails. (Some of these e-mails could be phishing attempts.) You should periodically check your junk folder to make sure any e-mails, which are not actually junk, are not accidentally there.

Saving a Draft: If you have started writing a message and need to stop, you can save the message in your 'drafts' folder. When opening your e-mail again, look in this folder and you will find your partially complete message.

***NOTE:** It is recommended for facilitators to project an e-mail account and demonstrate these features live. You could also have facilitators work one-on-one with participants to show each of these actions (composing a message, replying to a message, etc.) within their own e-mail program.*

Recognizing Malware: Malware is software that is specifically designed to disrupt, damage, or gain unauthorized access to a computer system. Malware e-mails are typical, although many of today's e-mail systems help filter these e-mails using 'junk' or 'SPAM' folders.

***NOTE:** Facilitators may choose to include some information from the Phishing lesson plan.*

Activity 3: Pros and Cons of E-mail Communication

Facilitators should lead a discussion about the pros and cons of using e-mail for communication. These can be listed on the flip chart. Facilitators may choose to share personal examples of how e-mail has been beneficial for them, as well as any examples of how they have had negative experiences with e-mail. (The intent is to show how having an e-mail account is beneficial, so be cautious when sharing any 'cons'.)

Examples of pros of using e-mail include

- Being fast – Messages are delivered in a short amount of time and can literally travel around the world.
- Response – You can think through a response and make any changes. When having a conversation (either in-person or on the phone), you don't have a chance to change your words.
- Time – The senders/receivers of the message don't have to be working at the same time or location. Unlike a scheduled meeting, people can respond to e-mails as their schedule allows.
- Record – You have saved copies of the e-mails you send. It's a great way to keep records of your communication.
- Multiple People – If you need send a message to a lot of people at once, e-mail makes that easy to do.

Examples of cons of using e-mail include:

- Junk – Sometimes, you can get junk/unwanted e-mails.
- Ads – Sometimes, advertisements can be included in messages.
- Misinterpretation – Sometimes, it is hard to infer tone/feelings through an e-mail.
- Forwards – E-mail messages can be passed on to others. You should always count on the possibility of your message ending up in the inbox of someone it wasn't intended for.

Don't use e-mail for:

- long or complicated messages
- questions that require a lot of clarification
- delivering indiscreet, sensitive, or private information
- angry messages
- things you should say in person

Reflection:

While the intent is for the activity to build privacy and security skills related to technology, it is important for the facilitator to lead a debrief discussion at the end of the lesson. Potential debrief questions could include:

- Why is it important to have strong passwords?
- What are some tips for having strong passwords?
- What is one change you can make to your passwords as a result of this lesson?

Resources:

- <https://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/uploads/pdfs/k-5-familytip-effectiveemailcommunication.pdf>