

# Subject Lines That Get Emails Opened

Quick tips for crafting effective email subject lines

The subject line is the first thing people see when your email hits their inbox. It's all they have to go on when they decide whether to open your email, ignore it, or even mark it as spam. That makes coming up with a great subject line arguably just as important as the content of your email.

But creating an effective subject line can be tricky. You may worry about what secret "gotcha" words will send your emails straight to the junk folder, how long your subject line should be, and how to come up with ideas quickly.

This checklist provides quick tips for crafting subject lines that your prospects will want to click.

## Begin with one of these winning approaches

Sometimes, writing an email subject line can feel harder than writing the email copy itself. Rather than agonizing, we suggest you quickly generate several possible subject lines without giving it too much thought.

If you're not sure where to begin, consider one of these proven approaches:

- **Educate:** Your subject line could promise to teach your audience something. For example: "7 things content marketers can learn from fiction writers."
- **Ask a question:** Your subject line could ask a question that makes your audience think. For example: "Did you miss this?"
- **Announce an offer or new product:** Your subject line could focus on a time-limited offer or a new product. For example: "Get a 1-month free trial if you sign up today."
- **Offer a solution to a problem:** Your subject line could propose a solution to a common problem. For example: "Reduce the TCO of your HR platform."
- **Jump on a popular topic:** Your subject line could highlight a trending topic. For example: "Google's new algorithm: dos & don'ts for preserving your search rank."

## Consider different lengths

Marketers can have strikingly different opinions about whether short subject lines or long subject lines are most effective. Spoiler alert: Both short and long subject lines can work.

### Pros and cons of short subject lines

Short subject lines—typically defined as between 30 and 50 characters long—ensure that readers can see your entire subject line in virtually any email client. This is especially true for mobile inboxes, which often cut off subject lines with an ellipsis rather than wrapping them.

On the other hand, short subject lines by nature provide less information—and less room for you to make your case. And they can sometimes seem vague, which can make clicking on them feel less urgent.

## Pros and cons of long subject lines

The major benefit of longer subject lines is that you can give readers more information about the value of your email content. In fact, research from Alchemy Worx, a UK-based marketing agency, suggests that emails with longer subject lines have higher click-to-open rates. (The click-to-open rate is the number of unique clicks divided by the number of unique opens. It reflects how interested readers are in your email content overall.)



Of course, as noted above, the biggest drawback of longer subject lines is that they can be cut off by email clients and leave the reader hanging—or confused. For example, see what happens if you cut off this subject line after 50 characters: *“Add a digital web store to your profit-making arsenal.”*

## Define preheaders—and make sure they work with your subject line

A preheader is a short blurb that follows the subject line when viewing an email from the inbox. Many email clients display preheaders right under email subject lines to help viewers get a better idea of what each email message contains. These can be especially useful for mobile displays, in which your subject lines may be cut off at 30-50 characters or so.

Warning: If you don’t define a preheader, email clients will use the first 50 or so characters of your email by default. Also, you should make sure your preheader and subject line work well together and don’t repeat the same information.

## Don’t be afraid of FREE

For years, it has been a truism that using “free” in your email subject line is a one-way ticket to the spam folder. However, spam-catching algorithms have gotten smarter over the years—and they’ve also been tweaked to recognize that people often *want* to hear about free offers. A quick search of your email inbox

for “free” should reveal that the term—both capitalized and not—is alive and well.

## Test, test, test

Of course, the best way to understand which kinds of email subject lines work for you is to A/B test subject lines through your marketing automation solution and track the results. Ideally, you should develop at least two distinct subject lines for each email you create—especially if you are unsure which approaches work best for your audience.

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