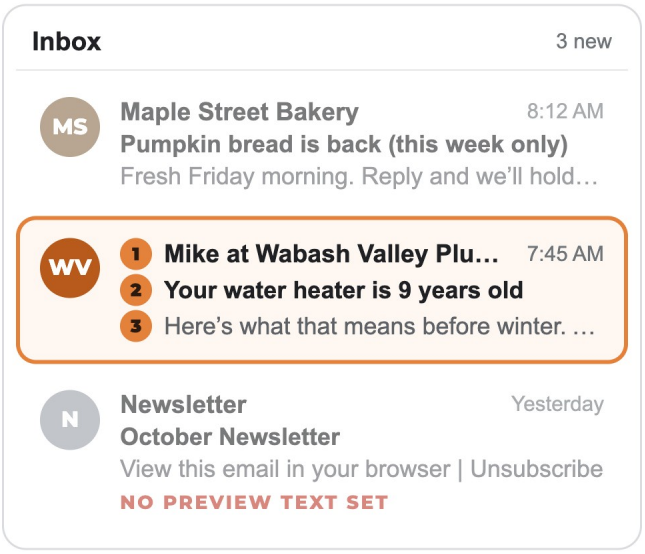
FREE PLAYBOOK EMAIL MARKETING FOR SMALL BUSINESS

The Subject Line & Preview Text Swipe File

Fill-in-the-blank formulas sorted by goal, preview text that finishes the job, and the simple rules that keep your emails opened and out of the spam folder.



THREE LINES EARN THE OPEN

All anyone sees before they decide.

1. **From name**
   Who it's from. People open email from names they know.
2. **Subject line**
   The headline. A phone may show only 33–48 characters.
3. **Preview text**
   The second headline. Leave it blank and the inbox fills it for you.

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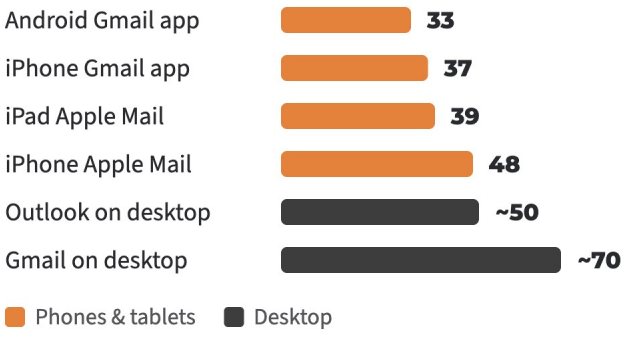
01 WHAT THE INBOX SHOWS

Your email gets one quick glance. Make it count.

Before anyone reads a word, they decide from three short lines: who it's from, the subject line and the preview text. On a phone, much of your subject line gets cut off — so the first few words do most of the work.

HOW MUCH OF YOUR SUBJECT SHOWS

Approximate characters before the cut-off.



Counts vary with screen size and text settings. Source: ActiveCampaign.

LEAD WITH THE GOOD PART

Same idea, cut off at 33 characters on an Android phone.

WEAK The point is past the cut

Full: Fall maintenance tips and a special offer for water heater owners

Fall maintenance tips and a speci…

STRONG Still makes sense when cut

Full: Your water heater is 9 years old — check this before winter

Your water heater is 9 years old…

THE 30–50 RULE Aim for 30 to 50 characters. If it has to run longer, make sure the first 30 or so make sense on their own.

GET THE FROM LINE RIGHT

Use a name they know

A person plus your business works well: "Mike at Wabash Valley Plumbing."

Keep it the same

Changing it every send makes people stop recognizing you.

Skip "no-reply"

Use an address that takes replies. Replies are a good sign to inbox providers.

A NOTE ON OPEN RATES

Apple Mail's Mail Privacy Protection can load your email in the background, and that counts as an "open" even if nobody read it. Treat open rates as a rough signal. **Clicks, replies and sales** tell you which subject lines really work.

02 SUBJECT LINE RULES

Eight rules for subject lines that get opened

1. **Be specific**
   Specific beats clever. “Your roof after Tuesday’s hail” beats “Important update.”
2. **Lead with the good part**
   Put the words that matter in the first 30 characters.
3. **One email, one idea**
   If the subject needs two “ands,” you’re writing two emails.
4. **Match what’s inside**
   The law says your subject must reflect the email. Tricked readers unsubscribe.
5. **Sound like a person**
   Write it the way you’d say it to a customer at the counter.
6. **Use real numbers**
   Numbers catch the eye, but only true ones: real prices, dates and counts.
7. **Easy on the urgency**
   “Last chance” only works when it is. Cry wolf once and they stop believing.
8. **Check it on your phone**
   Send yourself a test. If the cut-off version makes no sense, rewrite it.

BEFORE & AFTER

Same emails, rewritten to say something.

BEFORE		AFTER
~~October Newsletter~~	→	**3 things to do before your first freeze**
~~Important information inside~~	→	**Your service visit moved to Thursday**
~~SALE!!! DON’T MISS OUT!!!~~	→	**20% off gutter cleaning through Friday**
~~Checking in~~	→	**Did the new contact form fix the missed calls?**
~~We have some exciting news to share~~	→	**We now deliver to West Terre Haute**
~~Re: our conversation~~	→	**Following up on your kitchen quote**

NEVER FAKE A “RE:” OR “FWD:”
Making an email look like a reply to a conversation that never happened is a deceptive subject line. It burns trust fast and can break the CAN-SPAM Act (more on page 7).

THE TEST Would you open it if it landed in your inbox from a business you barely know? If not, it isn’t done yet.

03 SWIPE FILE · GET THE OPEN

Formulas that get the open

Swap your own details into the highlighted brackets. Treat the examples as a starting point, not a script — your customers should hear you, not a template.

A Curiosity

When you have a story, a surprise or a common mistake to share.

`The [thing] most [customers] get wrong`

- The furnace filter mistake most homeowners make
- Why we turned down a big job last week
- What your gutters are trying to tell you

B Benefit

When the payoff is clear and easy to say.

`[Result they want] without [hassle they hate]`

- A spotless kitchen without harsh chemicals
- Book your appointment in 30 seconds
- A faster website without a full rebuild

C How-to

When you're teaching something useful.

`How to [get result] in [time]`

- How to winterize outdoor faucets in 10 minutes
- How to pick the right paint finish
- How to tell if your website is losing calls

D Number or list

When you have tips, steps or a checklist.

`[Number] [things] to [do] before [date or event]`

- 5 things to check before you list your house
- 3 questions to ask any contractor
- 7 photos every Google profile needs

E Question

When you want them to stop and think about their own situation.

`Is your [thing] [problem]? / Ready for [season]?`

- Is your website scaring off customers?
- Ready for the first snow?
- Still using the same password everywhere?

PAY IT OFF A curiosity or question subject line is a promise. Answer it in the first two lines of the email, or readers learn to ignore you.

04 SWIPE FILE · GET THE CLICK

Formulas that move people to act

For emails with a job to do: announce, sell, remind or start a conversation. Only say it if it's true.

F Announcement

When something is actually new.

`Now [new thing] / New: [thing] for [who]`

- Now booking Saturday appointments
- New: online ordering for pickup
- We moved — here's the new address

G Offer

When there's a real deal with real terms.

`[Amount] off [specific thing] through [day]`

- $25 off drain cleaning through Friday
- Free delivery on orders over $50
- Your first lawn treatment is on us

H Deadline

When the clock is real. Never invent one.

`[Offer] ends [day] / Last day for [offer]`

- Holiday orders close Monday
- Last day for early-bird pricing
- Only 4 spots left in November

I Proof or story

When a customer's result says it better than you can.

`How [customer type] [got result]`

- How a local bakery stopped missing phone orders
- What Jan said after her first week
- Before and after: the Miller kitchen

J Personal

When you want a reply, not a click.

`Quick question about [topic]`

- Quick question about your website
- Can I get your opinion on something?
- A quick thank you

WIN-BACK LINES

For subscribers who've gone quiet.

- Should we keep sending these?
- It's been a while, [First name]
- Still want [topic] tips from us?

MERGE TAG SAFETY

If you use a first-name tag, set a fallback like "there." Otherwise a missing name sends **"Quick question, ,"** to half your list. Send a test to an address with no name on file.

05 PREVIEW TEXT

Preview text: your second subject line

Preview text (also called a **preheader**) is the short line that shows next to or under your subject. Most email tools have a box for it, right by the subject line. Leave it empty and the inbox grabs the first text it finds — often "View this email in your browser."

SAME EMAIL, TWO WAYS

LEFT BLANK

MS **Maple Street Bakery** 9:02 AM
Holiday hours
View this email in your browser | Unsubscribe | Maple Street…

WRITTEN ON PURPOSE

MS **Maple Street Bakery** 9:02 AM
Holiday hours
Closed Thanksgiving Day, open Friday 7 to 3.

The second one answers the question before the email is even opened — and that's fine. Being useful in the inbox builds the habit of opening.

HOW MUCH SHOWS

Characters of preview text, roughly.

Phones typical average	**35–50**
Webmail on wide screens	**up to ~120**
Your target best words first	**40–90**

Some apps show it beside the subject, some below it. Shorter subjects leave more room.

Source: Email on Acid.

FIVE PREVIEW TEXT RULES

1. **Don't repeat the subject.** You get two lines. Saying the same thing twice wastes one.
2. **Finish the thought.** Subject is the hook. Preview is the payoff, the detail or the reason to open now.
3. **Best words first.** Phones cut it short, so put the important part at the front.
4. **Fill the space.** If it's very short, some apps tack on the next text in your email. Many tools pad it for you — send a test and look.
5. **Keep it honest.** Same rule as subjects: the preview has to match what's inside.

THE AI SUMMARY TWIST

On iPhones and Macs with Apple Intelligence turned on, Apple Mail can show an AI-written summary in the inbox **in place of** your preview text. Gmail's Gemini can summarize an email too, after it's opened. You can't control either one — but you can feed them: **make the first two lines of your email say what the email is about.**

06 PAIRS THAT WORK & SPAM TRAPS

Subject + preview pairs you can swipe

PATTERN	SUBJECT LINE	PREVIEW TEXT
Finish the thought	**The furnace filter mistake**	Most homeowners make it every winter. Here's the 2-minute fix.
Answer the question	**Ready for the first snow?**	Book a plow spot by Nov. 15 and skip the waitlist.
Add the detail	**Now booking Saturdays**	8 a.m. to noon. Reply to this email to grab a time.
Add the deadline	**$25 off drain cleaning**	Through Friday only. Mention this email when you call.
Add the proof	**How a local bakery stopped missing orders**	One small website change. Before and after inside.
Lower the guard	**Quick question about your website**	No sales pitch. I just want your honest opinion.
Set expectations	**Your November checklist**	5 quick jobs, about 20 minutes total.

THE PAIR TEST Read them together out loud. Do they sound like one thought? Does the preview add something new? Would they still work if the subject got cut off?

SPAM-FOLDER FAST TRACKS

The fastest ways to lose the inbox — or break the law.

- **Fake "Re:" or "Fwd:" and bait-and-switch subjects**
  The FTC says your subject line must accurately reflect the email. Each violating email can cost up to $53,088.
- **ALL CAPS, piles of !!! and $$$**
  Looks like spam to people and filters alike. Let the words do the work.
- **No working unsubscribe**
  CAN-SPAM requires a clear opt-out, honored within 10 business days. Gmail and Yahoo want one-click unsubscribe from bulk senders.
- **Sending from an unprotected domain**
  Gmail, Yahoo and Outlook.com require SPF, DKIM and DMARC from bulk senders (around 5,000+ emails a day). Set them up no matter your size.
- **Too many spam complaints**
  Gmail asks bulk senders to keep reported spam under 0.1% and never reach 0.3%. Only email people who asked to hear from you.
- **One big image and no text**
  Nothing for the preview, nothing for screen readers, and an empty inbox line.

QUICK CHECK Don't know whether your domain has SPF, DKIM and DMARC set up? It's a quick check, and the fix is usually a few DNS records. My contact info is on the last page.

07 CHECKLIST & FOLLOW-UP RULES

Before you hit send

SUBJECT LINE

- [ ] Specific and honest
- [ ] Key words in the first 30 characters
- [ ] 30–50 characters, or the front stands alone
- [ ] No fake Re:/Fwd:, no ALL CAPS
- [ ] Only real numbers and real deadlines

PREVIEW TEXT

- [ ] Filled in, not left blank
- [ ] Adds something the subject didn't
- [ ] About 40–90 characters
- [ ] First lines of the email say the point
- [ ] Pair passes the read-aloud test

BEFORE SENDING

- [ ] From name people recognize
- [ ] Reply-to that takes replies
- [ ] Unsubscribe link works
- [ ] Test sent to your phone and desktop
- [ ] Name tags have a fallback

BONUS · FOLLOW-UP SERIES RULES

For quotes, inquiries and abandoned carts

1. **New subject every time.** Never resend the same subject. Each email needs its own reason to open.
2. **Add something new.** A new detail, an answered question, a customer story. "Just checking in" isn't new.
3. **Give it room.** A few days between emails. Too many too fast feels like pressure.
4. **Stop when they act.** Anyone who buys or replies should drop out of the series automatically.
5. **Set the end first.** Decide how many emails before you write them. Make the last one a polite close.
6. **Read the subjects in a row.** As a set, they should tell a story — not repeat the same pitch.

A FOUR-EMAIL QUOTE FOLLOW-UP, AS A SET

EMAIL 1	→	EMAIL 2	→	EMAIL 3	→	EMAIL 4
Your quote is ready		**The question we get most about new roofs**		**What the Hendersons said after theirs**		**Should I close out your quote?**

Checked October 2026. Email apps change how they show subjects and previews often, and character counts vary by device. Not legal advice — see the FTC's CAN-SPAM guide for the full rules.

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