Tips for answering email

COOPERATING PARTNERS IN *WAGEINDICATOR* ARE:

BE	HIVA; ACV-CSC;	Leuven; Brussels	www.loonwijzer.be www.votresalaire.be
BR	DIEESE; all trade unions in Brazil;	Sao Paulo	
DE	WSI; Verdi, DGB and other trade unions in Germany;	Dusseldorf; Berlin	www.lohnspiegel.de
DK	NewInsight; SID;	Copenhagen	www.lontjek.dk www.lontjek.com
ES	University of Salamanca; CC.OO; UGT; Comfia; Infojobs.net;	Madrid; Salamanca	www.tusalario.es
FI	Ttopalvelu Käyttötieto Oy; SAK, Akava, STTK;	Helsinki	www.palkkalaskuri.fi
HU	MSZOSZ; SZGTI; ESZT; V2 Excelsior Bt; Nők a Holnapért Alapítvány;	Budapest	
IN	ITPF India, IIM Ahmedabad; NIIT; Naukri; Institute of Public Enterprise Hyderabad; ICFAI Channai; Indian Institute of Science Bangalore;	Ahmedabad; Bangalore; Chennai; Hyderabad	
IT	CHILD/ U Torino; Cgil;	Rome; Torino	www.iltuosalario.it
KR	KLSI; all trade unions in South Korea;	Seoul	
NL	Stichting Loonwijzer/WageIndicator Foundation; University of Amsterdam AIAS; FNV; Monsterbaord.nl;	Amsterdam	www.loonwijzer.nl
PL	University of Economics Poznan; Solidarnosc; Gazeta.pl/Gazeta Wyborczej;	Poznan; Warsaw	www.twojezarobki.pl
UK	IDS; TUC;	London	www.paywizard.co.uk
US	Worklife Program of Harvard Law School;	Boston	
ZA	Naledi; Cosatu and all trade unions in South Africa;	Johannesburg; Capetown	

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SME'S WORKING FOR THE *WAGEINDICATOR* PROJECT:

NL	Webword (Project & Web management)	Bussum	www.webword.nl
NL	Wyldebeast & Wunderliebe (Web programming)	Groningen	www.wyldebeast-wunderliebe.com
NL	IfThen (Web design)	Buren	www.ifthen.nl
NL	Datamatch (Data management)	Utrecht	www.datamatch.org
NL	Zodra (Web journalism)	Rhenen	www.zodra.nl

WAGEINDICATOR WEBSITE:

WWW			www.wageindicator.org

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the Netherlands we experienced that wage indicator email can be subdivided into a handful categories. These are:

- mentioning a technical problem in the questionnaire or the salary check

- questions about the way the salary check works

- questions about wages, contracts, collective agreements, fair/unfair pay

- questions about leave

- questions about taxes

- questions about education and career planning

2. HOW TO DEAL WITH QUESTIONS IN GENERAL

1.   Answer the same day if you can. Fast, friendly and adequate handling is good for your image! Can you think of one organization which does so? Yes, the wage indicator group!

2.   In the Netherlands we automatically generate a time saving auto-text with our reply. It reads:

> *This answer has been given to you by the Wage Indicator for free.*
>
> *You may want to return this gesture.*
>
> *You do so by filling in the questionnaire on www…...*
>
> *Your data contribute to science.*
>
> *Your data improve fringe benefits.*
>
> *They help to make your colleague's salary more transparent.*
>
> *And you compete for a nice trip!*
>
> *More questions? Please do mail us again!*
>
> *Thanks a lot.*
>
> *Name of web master*
>
> *Name of national wage indicator*
>
> *EMAIL ADDRESS*

3.   Should a question be phrased in an ambiguous way, ask for clarification first.

4.   If you cannot provide an adequate answer, say so.

5.   Make sure your website contains pretty exhaustive content regarding FAQ's. These relate to wages, contracts, leave and taxes. Don't forget to explain the inner workings of the salary check. In your reply mail you may insert a direct link to the proper pages in your website. Saves time and the trouble of rewriting the same thing time and again.

6. Don't ever make assessments of wages. So don't go into questions like: is my pay too low, too high, correct? Rather refer back to content on how wages are calculated, how to negotiate a pay rise and the like. Judging wages is the stuff of legal departments within a trade union or of lawyers. Be aware that any advice you might give can also be used against you in a law suit. Should you nevertheless feel like an advice, you must explicitly state that this is your personal opinion and not the official stance of the Wage Indicator!

7. End with your name/email address. This makes it personal and more reliable. A web visitor can trace you back.

3. HOW TO DEAL WITH QUESTIONS OF A TECHNICAL NATURE

- The Dutch supporting team can see the questions you get! That may be a relief. We usually grasp the meaning of what is going on – except for Finland that is.

- Much you can sort out by yourself, but the technique of both salary check and questionnaire are provided and supported by the Dutch team. In case you feel that a question is technical by nature and relates to one of the applications, get some feedback first. The more so, as it is quite conceivable that the problem mentioned is not limited to your country, but appears in all wage indicator websites simultaneously! In any case the Dutch team tries to solve any technical problem within 4 hours, 7 days a week.

4. A MATTER OF STYLE: VERY FRIENDLY

- Should you begin your reply in a personalized way, f.e. mentioning the addressee's name, dear Mr. and Mrs. so-and-so? You may find that very time consuming. You might as well write: thanks for your question and start answering right away.

- Must it be formal or informal? We act as we see fit or feel. No guideline here.

- But: be as friendly and as precise as you can. There is a lot of misinterpretation in email.

5. WE WANT MAIL

- Each mail is another proof that your product has reached your audience and leads to involvement!

- Each mail is feedback for free. Test teams let loose on the web cost a fortune!

- Mail leads to innovation. In the Netherlands f.e. it prompted us to create a separate wage indicator for young workers, entering the labour market for the first time. Also we developed a gross-net calculator, as we found many people are confused over this issue.

6. STICK TO YOUR CORE BUSINESS – YOU ARE NOT

YOUR VISITOR'S SHRINK

Be aware that the web visitor regards you as an advisor of the Wage Indicator in your country or of your union's website. Web visitors address you precisely because you belong to these organizations, who are authorities when it comes to wages. Don't try to act like a doctor or psychiatrist. Stick to your core: wages.

- Keep a polite distance.

- If you don't know someone, don't tell them what they should do.

- Avoid direct advice by asking new questions.

- Know the internet environment of your visitors. This means that you know the competition too. But also it allows you to refer back to other sources on the web. Prepare a national list of reference websites relates to labour market, wages, jobs, career planning.

- Create a database with the best answers to the most frequently asked questions. A time saving device!

- Don't lead your visitor astray.

7. EXTRA TIPS FOR WRITING

- Active language

- Simple words

- One meaning/message per sentence only

- Avoid composite sentences en subordinate clauses

- Talk with your readers, don't make speeches

- Identify yourself with your reader, not with your organisation

- Use bullets and write figures as 1,2,3

8. WRITING AND LAYOUT OF EMAIL

- Do not assume that the recipient of your mail can decipher all your type settings, i.e. not everybody sees that you used bald, italic or a particular colour. Therefore: USE CAPITAL LETTERS for a SUBHEADER. Use *** to mark the end of an item. Use blank spacing. Keep your text short.

- Entire paragraphs set in CAPITAL LETTERS are found to be AGGRESSIVE, so don't do it.

- Pay attention when creating a link. Preferably links are short, a link needing two lines may break at the receiving end. If you cannot avoid a long link, apply fragmenting: wageindicator.org → researchlab → projectnews.

- Check when linking if you posted the link on the proper frame op the intended page. After creating the link, check if it works.

9. REMINDER SCREEN READING

- Web visitors scan a text, as different from reading line after line.
- Users 'hook' their eyes on the left upper and right lower corners of a text.
- Users map the structure quickly (numbers, bullets, headers).
- Users cannot divide their interest between many items of equal importance – some things are more equal than others! Assist, by choosing for your visitor (important, not so important, only important for a few).
- Users are best served by black letters on a white field. Variety is fun, but if you want to be read and understood, opt for black on white.
- The preferred typeface for online reading is Verdana or Arial.

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