

COLD EMAIL

101 Cold Email Subject Lines

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Cold Email Subject Lines: 101 Examples Sorted by Goal (2026)

Short answer: The best cold email subject lines are short (roughly two to five words), written like a colleague's note rather than an ad, specific to the prospect's company, trigger or problem, and honest about what the email contains. Pick the line by goal, make sure your first sentence delivers on it, and test variants on reply rate, not open rate.

Key takeaways

- Keep it short: **two to five words** reads like an internal note and survives phone screens.
- Every subject line is a promise. Write the **first sentence that keeps it** before you choose the line; misleading subject lines also break US CAN-SPAM rules.
- Personalize with something you **actually researched** (a trigger, a hire, a product), not only the first name.
- Test on **replies, not opens**: Apple Mail Privacy Protection preloads tracking pixels, so open rates are inflated and unreliable.

The rules, in one table

Rule	Do	Avoid	Why
Length	Two to five words	Full sentences, stacked clauses	Reply.io's study of 712,000+ first-step emails found lines of up to four words performed best; phones also cut long lines
Case	Lowercase or sentence case, whichever reads naturally	Title Case Like An Ad, ALL CAPS	Looks like a colleague, not a campaign; studies disagree on lowercase, so test it
Personalization	A company, trigger, hire or product you researched	Only {{first_name}}	Hunter found a custom attribute raised open rates in its users' campaigns; real research also earns the reply
Honesty	A promise your first sentence keeps	Fake "re:" or "fwd:", false urgency	US CAN-SPAM prohibits deceptive subject lines; it also burns trust on line one
Spam signals	Plain words, no symbols	"free", "guaranteed", "\$\$\$", "!!!", emojis in a first email	Reads as marketing to filters and to people
Generic openers	Something only this prospect would get	"quick question", "following up", "touching base"	Reply.io found "quick question" lines drew fewer replies than average

Trigger and timing: 12 subject lines (template: copy and adapt)

1. {{company}}'s series b → Congrats on the round. Usually the next hard part is {{problem}}.
2. new {{role}} at {{company}} → Saw you brought in a new {{role}} last month.
3. {{number}} sdr roles → Noticed {{company}} has {{number}} SDR roles open on your careers page.
4. the {{city}} office → Congrats on opening in {{city}}. New markets usually mean {{problem}}.
5. after the {{product}} launch → Saw the {{product}} launch on {{date}}. Who is selling it to {{segment}}?
6. your first 90 days → Congrats on the new role, {{first_name}}. The first 90 days usually come with {{priority}}.
7. {{company}} + {{acquired_company}} → Saw the {{acquired_company}} deal. Merging two sales teams is rarely tidy.
8. {{regulation}} deadline → {{regulation}} applies to {{segment}} from {{date}}, which likely lands on your desk.
9. hiring in {{region}} → You are hiring in {{region}}; are you also selling there yet?
10. your post on {{topic}} → Your post on {{topic}} last week made a point I rarely hear: {{point}}.
11. {{company}} at {{event}} → Saw {{company}} is exhibiting at {{event}}. What happens to the leads after the show?
12. q4 at {{company}} → With Q4 starting, most {{role}}s I talk to are looking at {{problem}}.

Mutual connection and referral: 8 subject lines (template: copy and adapt)

13. {{mutual_name}} suggested I ask you → {{mutual_name}} said you are the right person for {{topic}} at {{company}}.
14. via {{mutual_name}} → {{mutual_name}} and I worked together at {{company_x}}; they mentioned you are working on {{topic}}.
15. {{colleague_name}} pointed me to you → I asked {{colleague_name}} who owns {{topic}}, and they named you.
16. fellow {{alma_mater}} alum → We both went to {{alma_mater}}, which is the only reason I am bold enough to write cold.
17. from the {{group}} group → We are both in {{group}}; your question there about {{topic}} is why I am writing.
18. {{mutual_name}} and {{topic}} → {{mutual_name}} mentioned {{company}} is looking at {{topic}} this year.
19. ex-{{company_x}} → We both spent time at {{company_x}}, so you will know the {{problem}} I am about to describe.
20. who owns {{topic}}? → Hoping you can point me to whoever owns {{topic}} at {{company}}.

Questions about their process: 12 subject lines (template: copy and adapt)

21. how {{company}} books meetings → How does {{company}} book first meetings today: SDRs, agency or founders?
22. who owns outbound? → Is outbound owned by sales or marketing at {{company}}?
23. sdr ramp time at {{company}} → How long does a new SDR take to book their first meeting at {{company}}?
24. {{tool}} or something else? → Are you still running outbound on {{tool}}, or did you move?
25. your crm and replies → When a prospect replies to a campaign, how does it reach your CRM?
26. inbound or outbound? → Is most of {{company}}'s pipeline inbound right now, or outbound?
27. leads after {{event}}? → What happens to the badge scans after {{event}}?
28. handling {{region}} buyers → Who covers {{region}} buyers at {{company}} today?
29. {{company}}'s q1 pipeline → Is Q1 pipeline already covered, or still a gap?
30. one-person sales team? → Are you still the main person selling at {{company}}?
31. testing new channels? → Are you testing any new channels this quarter?
32. how you measure {{metric}} → How do you measure {{metric}} today, and is it the number your board asks for?

Problem-first: 12 subject lines (template: copy and adapt)

33. replies going nowhere → Many teams get replies but lose them between the inbox and the CRM.
34. meetings that do not show → No-shows usually mean the meeting was booked, not wanted.
35. pipeline after {{season}} → {{season}} usually leaves a hole in pipeline 60 days later.
36. spam folder at {{company}} → A few of {{company}}'s emails seem to fail DMARC checks.
37. sdrs vs quota → Most SDR teams I meet spend more time on research than on conversations.
38. {{segment}} buyers ghosting → {{segment}} buyers tend to go quiet after the first call for one reason.
39. too many tools → Most outbound stacks I audit have three tools doing one job.
40. the {{region}} gap → {{company}} sells in {{region_a}} but has no one prospecting {{region_b}}.
41. cost per meeting → Do you know what one booked meeting costs {{company}} today?
42. founder-led sales ceiling → Founder-led sales usually stalls when the founder's calendar fills.
43. {{competitor}} customers → Teams leaving {{competitor}} usually say the same two things.
44. renewals vs new logos → Most of {{company}}'s growth this year seems to come from existing clients.

Peers and competitors: 8 subject lines (template: copy and adapt)

- 45. how {{peer_company}} does it → {{peer_company}} changed how they {{process}} last year; here is what they did.
- 46. {{industry}} teams this year → Most {{industry}} sales teams I speak to are moving budget from {{a}} to {{b}}.
- 47. what {{peer_type}} do differently → The {{peer_type}} we work with all do one thing before a campaign starts.
- 48. {{competitor}} is hiring sdrs → {{competitor}} posted {{number}} SDR roles this month.
- 49. like {{peer_company}} → We helped a company like {{peer_company}} with {{problem}}; it may fit {{company}} too.
- 50. {{industry}} benchmark → I put together what {{industry}} teams track for outbound; one number surprised me.
- 51. your peers in {{region}} → {{industry}} companies in {{region}} have a different buying cycle from the US.
- 52. vs {{competitor}} → I noticed {{competitor}} is targeting your customers in {{segment}}.

Give first: 10 subject lines (template: copy and adapt)

- 53. idea for {{company}} → One idea for {{company}}'s {{area}}, no pitch attached.
- 54. 3 notes on your outbound → I read your last three outbound emails (I was on the list); three notes below.
- 55. {{company}}'s dns check → I ran {{domain}} through a DNS check; one record looks off.
- 56. {{number}} accounts for you → I found {{number}} companies that match your best customers; list attached.
- 57. your landing page → One change on your {{page}} page that might lift demo requests.
- 58. teardown: your welcome email → I signed up for {{product}}; a few thoughts on the welcome sequence.
- 59. for your {{event}} prep → A one-page checklist for getting meetings before {{event}}.
- 60. {{topic}} template → Here is the {{topic}} template we use; it is yours to keep.
- 61. saw this and thought of you → This {{article}} on {{topic}} reminded me of your post last week.
- 62. free {{region}} list → I pulled the {{role}}s at {{segment}} companies in {{region}}; want it?

Direct meeting request: 8 subject lines (template: copy and adapt)

- 63. 20 minutes on {{topic}}? → Would 20 minutes on {{topic}} be useful next week?
- 64. {{company}} / {{your_company}} → Short version: we help {{segment}} {{outcome}}, and {{company}} fits.
- 65. thursday at {{time}}? → Could we speak on Thursday at {{time}} your time about {{topic}}?
- 66. intro call: {{topic}} → Asking for a short intro call about {{topic}}; here is why now.
- 67. worth a conversation? → If {{problem}} is on your list this quarter, this is worth a conversation.
- 68. while you are in {{city}} → I see you will be in {{city}} for {{event}}; coffee on the {{date}}?
- 69. {{first_name}}, a short call → {{first_name}}, I will keep this short: {{one_line_reason}}.
- 70. next step on {{topic}} → You downloaded our {{resource}}; would a walkthrough help?

Follow-ups: 10 subject lines (template: copy and adapt)

- 71. one more thing on {{topic}} → One thing I left out of my last note: {{new_point}}.
- 72. a different angle → Last time I wrote about {{a}}; this one is about {{b}}.
- 73. the {{resource}} I mentioned → Here is the {{resource}} I promised.
- 74. wrong person? → If {{topic}} is not yours, who should I ask?
- 75. still relevant? → Is {{problem}} still a priority, or has it been solved?
- 76. after {{news}} → Saw {{news}} since I last wrote; it makes {{topic}} more urgent.
- 77. short version → Short version of my last email: {{one_sentence}}.
- 78. for {{colleague_name}} too? → Would it make sense to include {{colleague_name}} on this?
- 79. example from {{industry}} → Here is how a {{industry}} team handled {{problem}}.
- 80. better timing? → Would {{month}} be better timing for {{topic}}?

Breakup and close the loop: 6 subject lines (template: copy and adapt)

- 81. close the loop? → I will stop here so I do not crowd your inbox.
- 82. should I stop? → Should I stop writing about {{topic}}? A one-word answer is fine.
- 83. last note on {{topic}} → This is my last note on {{topic}}.
- 84. not a priority? → I am guessing {{topic}} is not a priority right now, which is fine.
- 85. leaving this here → Leaving this here in case {{topic}} comes up later this year.
- 86. right person, wrong time? → If this is the right person but the wrong time, tell me when to check back.

Events and re-engagement: 8 subject lines (template: copy and adapt)

- 87. before {{event}} → Are you going to {{event}}? We will be there on {{dates}}.
- 88. after {{event}} → Missed you at {{event}}; here is the one idea from the {{session}} session worth stealing.
- 89. your talk at {{event}} → Your point at {{event}} about {{point}} stuck with me.
- 90. {{event}} follow-up → Good to meet at {{event}}; here is the {{resource}} we discussed.
- 91. picking this back up → We spoke in {{month}} about {{topic}}; is it back on the table?
- 92. what changed since {{month}} → A lot has changed since we last spoke in {{month}}; one thing relevant to you.
- 93. you asked me to check back → You asked me to check back in {{month}}, so here I am.
- 94. new at {{your_company}} → Since we last spoke we added {{feature}}, which was your main question.

Founders and CEOs: 7 subject lines (template: copy and adapt)

- 95. {{company}}'s next {{number}} clients → Where do {{company}}'s next {{number}} clients come from?
- 96. founder to founder → Founder to founder: one thing that changed our pipeline.
- 97. your calendar → Are you still the one booking most of {{company}}'s sales calls?
- 98. {{company}} in {{region}} → Is {{region}} on the plan for {{company}} next year?
- 99. your board deck → Pipeline is usually the slide that gets the most questions.
- 100. the {{metric}} number → Your {{metric}} looks strong; is pipeline keeping up?
- 101. 2 lines for you → Two lines, because I know your inbox: {{line_1}} {{line_2}}

What not to do (and what to do instead)

Mistake	Example	Do this instead
Fake reply or forward	"re: our call"	A real trigger: "new vp sales at {{company}}"
Clickbait that the email does not keep	"bad news"	A problem you can actually name in line one (block 4)
Your company in the subject	"{{your_company}} partnership opportunity"	Their company or their problem
Generic "check-in"	"just following up"	A follow-up with new information (block 8)
Ad language	"Boost Your Sales By 300%!!!"	Plain words, no claims you cannot back
Personalization that is only a token	"{{first_name}}, quick question"	A detail only this person would recognize

Subject line test log (copy into a spreadsheet) (template: copy and adapt)

Test name:

Segment (title, industry, region):

Body version: Send window:

Variant	Subject line	First sentence	Sends	Replies	Positive	Meetings
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A

B

Decision rule: a winner needs more positive replies AND at least a few hundred sends per variant.

Result:

Next test:

Quick answers

What is a good subject line for a cold email?

A good cold email subject line is short, specific and honest. Two to five words, often in lowercase, that refer to something real about the prospect, such as a hire, a launch, a problem or a mutual connection. It should read like a note from a colleague and match the first sentence of the email.

How long should a cold email subject line be?

Short. Reply.io's analysis of more than 700,000 first-step emails found that subject lines of up to four words performed best, and phone screens cut off long lines anyway. As a working rule, aim for two to five words and keep the key word at the start.

Should cold email subject lines be lowercase?

Many senders use lowercase because it looks like an internal note, but the evidence is mixed: some vendor studies favor lowercase and others found no advantage. Use whichever reads more naturally for your buyers, avoid all caps, and test both on your own list using reply rate.

Should I personalize cold email subject lines?

Yes, when the personalization is real. Hunter found that subject lines with at least one custom attribute had higher open rates in its users' campaigns. A company name, a recent hire or a specific trigger works better than a first name alone, which every tool can insert automatically.

What words should I avoid in a cold email subject line?

Avoid anything that looks like an ad or a trick: all caps, exclamation marks, "free", "guaranteed", "act now", fake "re:" or "fwd:" prefixes, and emojis in a first email. Fake reply prefixes are also deceptive, which US CAN-SPAM rules prohibit for subject lines.

How do I test cold email subject lines?

Test one change at a time, send each variant to similar prospects, and compare reply rates (or positive reply rates) rather than open rates. Open tracking is unreliable because Apple Mail Privacy Protection preloads tracking pixels. Wait for a few hundred sends per variant before you trust a difference.

Should follow-up emails have a new subject line?

Usually not. Keeping the same thread with the original subject keeps the context in one place, and many teams see better results that way. Use a new subject only when you start a genuinely new angle, such as a new trigger or a different person at the company.

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