Formatting an email so it gets read

Most people read your newsletter on a phone, one thumb scrolling. Format for that reader first.

Short paragraphs

On a narrow screen, a five-line paragraph on a monitor becomes ten lines or more. Aim for two to four sentences per paragraph, and let single ideas have a paragraph to themselves when they matter.

Comfortable text

- **Size:** around 16 pixels for body text, larger for headings.
- **Line height:** about one and a half times the text size.
- **Width:** one column, so lines are never too long to follow.
- **Contrast:** dark text on a light background, or the reverse, never grey on grey.

Fonts with a fallback

Many email apps ignore custom fonts. Set a web font if you like, but always follow it with a system font that looks similar, so the issue still reads well when the custom one is not shown.

Links that look like links

Underline links in body text, or give them a clear colour. Make the linked words describe the destination: “read the full test results” is better than “click here”.

Buttons that work with a thumb

A button should be large enough to tap without zooming and have space around it. Build it as coded text on a coloured background, not as an image, so it still shows when images are blocked.

Lists for steps and options

When you list three or more things, use a list. It is faster to scan than a sentence with commas, and readers can see at once how many items there are.

Whitespace is part of the design

Space between sections tells the reader where one idea ends and the next begins. Crowded issues feel longer than they are.

Read it on your phone

Before every send, open the test on a phone. Formatting problems that are invisible on a monitor show up within the first scroll.