

The Importance of Using

EARNEST

E

Were you *expecting* this email message?

Expected

If not, you should be suspicious. Even if yes, this doesn't mean it is legitimate.

A

Does the message ask you to open an ATTACHMENT, click or copy & paste a LINK, for more information because the body of the message remains ambiguous?

Ambiguous

If yes, this is cause for suspicion. If no, this does not mean it is legitimate.

R

Do you have a prior **relationship** with the sender and previous legitimate contact via email?

RELATIONSHIP

If not, this is cause for suspicion. Even if yes, this doesn't mean it is legitimate.

N

Are the **context, syntax, spelling, and grammar** consistent with what you would normally expect from this person or organization?

Normal

If it looks odd, this is cause for suspicion. If not, this does not mean it is legitimate.

E

Are links fully **exposed** so the real destination is clearly shown? Or are they hidden — embedded in text or made to appear like a URL?

Exposed

If not, this is cause for suspicion. If yes, this does not mean it is legitimate.

S

Does it make sense for this sender or organization to provide you with an ATTACHMENT or LINK, especially in the manner given?

Sense

If not, this is cause for suspicion. If yes, review how you answered the factors about relationship (sender) and normalcy (content).

T

Does the message have a time factor, such that if you don't respond or take quick action something may or may not happen?

Time

If yes, this is cause for suspicion. If no, review how you answered the other factors and take it slow.

Expected

Ambiguous

Relationship

Normal

Exposed

Sense

Time

EARNEST is a mnemonic that provides a checklist for self-questioning the validity of any **email** message. Using EARNEST might help you question clicking or opening attachments in any unexpected or odd email messages.

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