

# TEMPLATE 5: THIS JUST HAPPENED

I've left this template to last because it's the most difficult to describe because it's so flexible. But because of that flexibility it can give you an almost infinite source of ideas.

Put simply, what you're going to do is reflect on something that happened in your life very recently (typically the last day or so) and draw a lesson from it that will be valuable to your readers.

That's why it's rather difficult to describe or create a template for, because your potential experiences over the last day or so cover a vast range of possibilities. It could be anything from somewhere you visited, something you did at work, a book you read, something you saw on TV, something you witnessed happening near to you, etc. Whatever experience you use, cultivating the ability to turn these fresh experiences into fresh emails is a hugely valuable skill to build.

One of the additional bonuses of this type of email is that they feel very fresh and friendly to your readers. Like you're having a coffee with them just telling them about your day. It doesn't feel scripted or planned - just a quick brain dump - which really helps to create a feeling of a personal relationship. And it also means that you don't have to have stunning or deep insights every time - no one expects that if you're just relaying what happened recently - anything useful is appreciated. It doesn't even have to be 100% related to your field of expertise - an occasional tip outside is fine.

The email can also provide a nice change of pace and format. It's usually shorter, and it's mainly the story rather than a list or bullet points.

You can come at it from two directions. You can either note down - in the moment - interesting things that happen that you think might be relatable to something in your field you could write about. Or you can come up with ideas by reflecting back on your experiences over the last day or so. Either way works and it's mostly a matter of which approach clicks for you.

Once you've identified something interesting that happened you need to connect it to a lesson your audience would find useful. That'll take a few moments of thought. Sometimes you'll spot something straight away. Sometimes it'll take longer. And sometimes you'll draw a blank and have to move on to another recent experience.

**Subject Line:** This is very dependent on the experience and the lesson, but as a fallback you can use something like "This just happened" or "A weird thing happened yesterday" or similar.

## **Hook:**

My general experience is that if something interesting happened then just beginning to tell the story will create enough curiosity to get people to read the email..

"Something a bit strange happened yesterday.

I got a phone call out of the blue from Barclay's bank asking if I was looking for a new business account.

That's not the weird bit.

The weird bit is that I said no and hung up - despite the fact that I actually was looking for a new business bank account.”

### **Transition:**

A good transition here is just to say you think there’s a useful lesson in your experience. For example “I think there’s a bit of a marketing lesson in here for all of us...”

Or you could just lead in to the rest of the story: “Here’s what happened...”

### **Valuable Content:**

In your valuable content section you’re going to tell the rest of the story and use it to get across your lesson. It doesn’t have to be a life-changing epiphany - people aren’t expecting when they know you’re just telling them about something recent. It just has to be useful and interesting.

### **Call to Action:**

If you can make a link to one of your products and services then great. If you can’t, you could still mention one anyway half jokingly:

“I thought that experience was really interesting and potentially useful too.

Of course, it’s not really related to my services, but I’m going to shoehorn a mention of them in anyway :)”

### **Example:**

Subj: Surely this can't be why I open James Clear's emails? (And don't call me Shirley)

A weird thing happened today.

Minor weird rather than outrageous weird. But worth commenting on.

I was looking at my “secret” email account where I subscribe to gazillions of newsletters to keep my main email relatively clear. I vaguely recalled something I’d heard James Clear say in one of his emails and I searched around to find it.

That would be James Clear of the 2 million email subscribers and 15 million book sales by the way.

Anyway, when a list of his newsletters came up dating back for years I noticed something: I had read a lot more of his recent emails than his older ones.



That's not the usual pattern at all.

Normally you get excited by all the new ideas when you first subscribe to someone's emails and then over time you open fewer and fewer as your interests change or you just get familiar with what they have to say.

But in this case, I suddenly started reading pretty much every single one of his emails as of a few months ago.

I couldn't remember why. So I went back to the first email where I started reading more regularly. Had he shared some earth-shattering new idea that got me hooked? Had the newsletter changed direction and started focusing on something new that was more interesting to me?

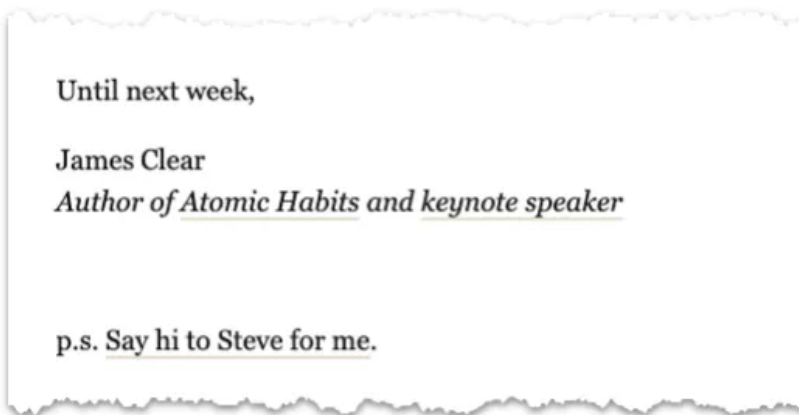
Nope and nope.

It was only when I scrolled to the very bottom of the email I remembered what had happened. I chuckled as it all came flooding back.

James calls his newsletter 3-2-1 as he shares "3 short ideas from me, 2 quotes from others, and 1 question for you to ponder".

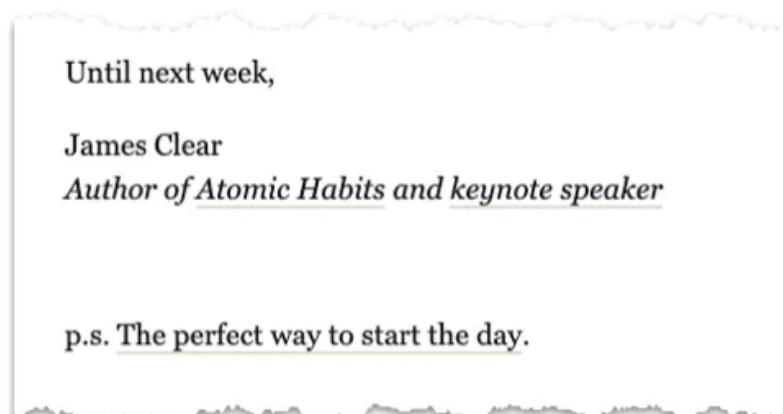
But it turns out that's a lie.

He actually shares something else in every email too. Right down at the bottom. Like this:

A screenshot of an email signature with a white background and a grey border. The text is as follows:

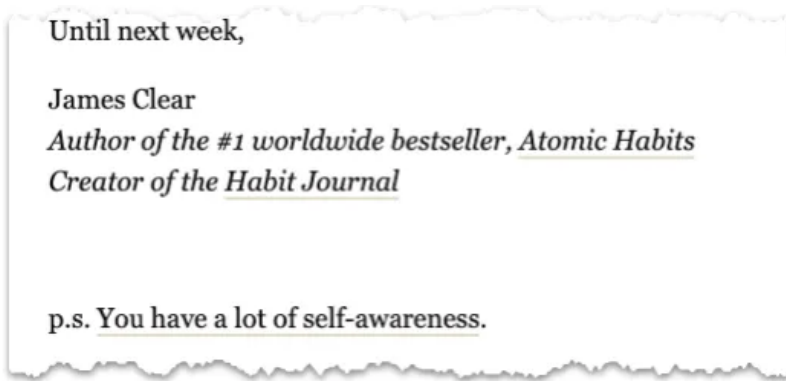
Until next week,  
  
James Clear  
*Author of Atomic Habits and keynote speaker*  
  
p.s. Say hi to Steve for me.

Or this:

A screenshot of an email signature with a white background and a grey border. The text is as follows:

Until next week,  
  
James Clear  
*Author of Atomic Habits and keynote speaker*  
  
p.s. The perfect way to start the day.

Or this older one:



Each PS is a link to a funny tweet. Or I guess these days we should call it a funny X.

For years I read his emails without noticing that link to the funny tweet. I say “read his emails” but what actually happened was I read about 30% of them.

But after noticing there was a link to a funny tweet in each one my open rate shot up to about 90%. James’ newsletter hasn’t got better or worse. It’s still very good (imo) tips on productivity, habits and getting stuff done.

But my inbox is full of newsletters with lots of good stuff in them. In a busy day, good stuff is not enough to get me to read.

But it turns out a link to a funny tweet is.

As I said, it’s a minor weird thing. But a bit of an eye-opener.

I’m willing to bet that your subscribers and my subscribers are a lot like me. They get a lot of good stuff in their inbox they just don’t read.

If you want to get that open and read rate up, you need to do that little bit extra. And it turns out that having something fun and interesting in your email is the kind of “little bit extra” that works.

Maybe that means you illustrate a point with a story where you come off badly. Maybe you sneak a cartoon or an Airplane reference in there. Maybe even a link to something funny you saw recently.

Lots of ways of doing it: the point is that fun and interesting isn’t just a nice to have.

And not surprisingly, it’s one of the big things I teach in my Email Genius course. [Click here for details.](#)

- Ian

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Footnote:

You'll notice that I used quite a few images in this email. A lot of deliverability experts will tell you to minimise images to avoid ending up in the spam folder but I've found that 3 or 4 doesn't do any harm. Try for yourself as they can add a lot of character to an email.