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A practical way to investigate email rendering problems

By Gyata Tabiri · Revised November 2, 2026

"It breaks in Outlook" is a starting report, not yet a diagnosis. I need to know which environment, which version of the message, and what specifically changed before deciding where to intervene.

Keep the evidence attached to the environment

A screenshot helps describe the symptom. The received message and the HTML that produced it help investigate the cause. I would record the client and version where available, device, relevant settings, and whether the example came through the sending platform. A browser preview answers a different question from a delivered email.

Make one uncertainty smaller

Suppose a gap appears beneath an image. It might relate to cell spacing, line height, image display, or surrounding markup. A reduced copy lets one explanation be tested at a time. Changing several values can produce a good screenshot while leaving the cause unresolved.

Decide whether the fix affects the design

If the remedy changes a background treatment, button, or mobile arrangement, the designer needs to see the consequence. I have used screenshots and explanations for those conversations. A workaround deserves review when it changes the message's hierarchy, even if the original problem was technical.

Retest what the adjustment could disturb

The affected section needs checking alongside adjacent content and other agreed environments. I would keep the reason for an unusual rule close to the source. Otherwise a later cleanup may remove the exact detail that made the message work.

I want the investigation to end with something more specific than a new rule: a reproducible problem, an explanation of the change, and a record of where it was checked.

Read alongside: Why apparently redundant email code can matter · Bringing a rendering issue back to design.

Reference: Email feature-support reference.

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