Email Etiquette: Tips for Using Email as a Student

Why do I need email tips?

• You probably use email all the time to correspond with family, friends, and coworkers.
• As a student, it is important to remember that your relationship with teachers, course assistants, and administrators is a professional one.

This handout will give you tips for communicating professionally over email while you are a student. Following these tips will help you maintain credibility in your online communication.

5 Easy Steps for Writing Email

1. Include a specific subject.
2. Write a salutation.
3. Identify yourself in relation to the person to whom you’re writing.
4. Explain your reason for writing fully.
5. Sign your name.

1. Include a specific subject.

• Every email you send gives you the opportunity to write something in the subject line.
• Don’t leave the subject line blank—your recipient won’t know what the message is about and may not open it.
• Make the subject specific.

2. Write a salutation.

• Start every email with the name of the person you’re writing to.
• You can write Dear or Hello before the name, but you don’t have to.
  Dear Dr. Smith,
  Hello Professor Jones,
  Professor Adams,
Don’t just start the email with your message.

3. Identify yourself in relation to the person to whom you’re writing.

If you’re writing to a teacher for the first time, identify who you are and how you know the teacher.
  Professor Adams,
My name is Sally Smith, and I am a student in your Intro to Research class this semester. Once you get to know a teacher, you won’t need to identify yourself again in every message. However, you should still identify the class you’re in, since teachers teach multiple classes.

Wrong:

Dear Dr. Smith,
I would like to ask you some questions about your feedback on my last paper. Could we set up a time to talk by phone about the paper?

Thank you,
Bob Reyers

Right:

Dear Dr. Smith,
I would like to ask you some questions about your feedback on my last paper in Intro to Nursing Administration. Could we set up a time to talk by phone about the paper?

Thank you,
Bob Reyers

4. Explain your reason for writing fully.

- Remember that the person to whom you are writing is pressed for time—just like you are when you’re reading emails from other people.
- Take the time to explain your reason for writing fully.
- You want your recipient to take your message seriously and to understand why you are writing.

Example: Sally has been assigned to work on a course project with two other students, Bob and Jane. She has been communicating regularly with Bob, but she hasn’t been able to reach Jane. She decides to write an email to her instructor to ask what she should do.

Wrong:
Hello Professor Jones,

Jane hasn’t returned my calls.

-Sally

In this example, Sally’s reference to Jane is out of context.

Right:
Hello Professor Jones,
I am working on the group project for Nursing Theory with Bob Reyers and Jane Johnson. Bob and I have been trying to get in touch with Jane, but she hasn’t returned calls or email. In the meantime, Bob and I have been moving ahead on the project. Do you have any suggestions about what we should do?

Thanks,
Sally Smith

Now Sally’s teacher has the full name of all three students involved, the name of the course, and an explanation of the issue.

5. Sign your name.

- Finally, always end an email with your name.
- Unless you know the recipient well, use your full name.
- It never hurts to use a closing like “Thank you” either!

Wrong:
Professor Jones,
After receiving your suggestion, I sent Bob an email and let him know that he and I would be working on the project without Jane.

Students sometimes leave off their name and assume the recipient will look to the email address to find out who the message is from. Don’t do this! It isn’t professional.

Right:
Professor Jones,
After receiving your suggestion, I sent Bob and email and let him know that he and I would be working on the project without Jane.
Thank you,
Sally Smith

Your reputation is at stake!

- Remember that your online communication is a reflection of you.
- As a student, you want to show your teachers and anyone else at the university with whom you communicate that you are approaching your studies professionally.
- Take the time to include all the necessary parts of every email you write. The recipients of your messages will appreciate it!