

When entering into academic and professional contexts, email tends to be the go-to form of communication. Many instructors or even supervisors may not give out their personal cell phones and will require your communications to be completed through email. Email is a very different genre from texting and has its own set of rules that students need to be aware of. Unlike texting, the goal of email is to maintain a professional, academic tone that shows respect in your correspondence. This handout is meant to be a guide so that you can write in an academic context appropriately. On this handout, we review the essential parts of an email: the **subject line**, **greeting**, **body**, and **signature and attachments**.

Subject Line

Your subject line identifies the subject of your email to the receiver of your email. You will want to make the subject line relevant and clearly expressive of what your purpose is, and when starting a new question or line of communication, begin a new email with a new subject line. Some instructors will have specific guidelines for the subject line in the syllabus, so check course syllabi for details. Below are some examples of appropriate and inappropriate subject lines. The inappropriate subject lines may not contain enough information or are too vague to infer the purpose of the email.

Appropriate Subject Lines

- ECON 432 Question for Assignment 4
- ENG 101 H Materials for class on 9/3
- Question about grades for ART 501
- Absence for Math 094 on 9/4

Inappropriate Subject Lines

- Help!
- (a blank subject line)
- Grades
- Gone

TIP!

Although it is not required, consider adding the course number and section number since professors often teach more than one section of a course.

Greeting

The greeting of the email is often overlooked in this age of texting. Especially if you are writing to ask for a favor or request information, you will want to open your email with a respectful greeting. This will show your instructor that you have taken the time to thoughtfully write to them. Below are a few examples of appropriate greetings ranging from the formal to the more casual. No matter which greeting you use, make sure you spell the instructor’s name correctly!

Appropriate Greetings

- Dear Dr. Moberg
- Good morning/afternoon/evening Professor Donnelly,
- Hi/Hello Professor Snook,
- Hey Dr. Matej,

TIP!

If an instructor has a PhD, you should refer to them as “Dr.” If they do not have a PhD, it would be inappropriate to address them as “Dr.” If you are unsure if they have a PhD, it’s safer to address them as “professor.”

Inappropriate Greetings

- Mr. Moberg,
- (no greeting)
- Yo prof!
- Hi Alice,
- To whom it may concern:

Body of the Email

The body of your email is the space to make the best impression possible. To do this, be sure your message has the following traits:

- Your message should be as specific as possible with regard to what you are writing about. If you are asking a question about a certain assignment or part of the syllabus, specify what it is you are looking at and what prompted that question.
- Specify what you have done to problem solve on your own. If you have a question about an assignment or a policy, check the assignment sheet and syllabus before making your inquiry. Show that you are taking responsibility and that you're not just emailing a question you could have answered on your own.
- Provide as many appropriate details as possible. For example, if you will be missing class, you can specify that you will not be present due to illness, but you do not need to provide photographic proof or explicit detail for what you are ill with.
- Be polite and kind even if you are frustrated with that person.
- Especially when you are asking for something, try not to sound like you are demanding it. Phrases like "please," "thank you," and "at your earliest convenience" are crucial for setting the right tone.
- Avoid inappropriate language, insults, reaction gifs, images, jokes, or political solicitations in your emails even if you are on more familiar terms with your instructor.

TIP!

If you are angry (it does happen), step away from writing the email. You do not want to say something to that professor that will paint you in an immature or negative light.

Signature and Attachments

At the end of an email, be sure to finish with an expression of gratitude and your name. Your email will take time and effort for your instructor to respond to it, and it helps to show that you recognize that they are making an effort to help. Once you have finished your email, **be sure to read it over and proofread before you hit the send button!**

- You can sign the email with phrases like "Respectfully," "Thank you," or even something positive like "Have a great day."
- Be sure to include your name at the end since your email may not always display your name properly.
- If you are attaching something, be sure you have successfully attached the correct file. Avoid spamming your instructor with multiple emails because you forgot to add the correct file.