

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL E-MAIL

Common sense for this common form
of communication



DO!

- Respond promptly and check your e-mail at least once per day
- Use caution when forwarding
- Check before attaching
- Review before sending
- Include an accurate subject line
- Be polite
- Be brief
- Practice good grammar
- Look for cues from the other person

Respond Promptly

If you do not have time for a complete response to the sender, e-mail a short message acknowledging receipt of the sender's message and giving an estimate of how long it will take you to reply fully.

Example (without greeting/closing):

“Thank you for the information about the meeting. I'll let you know by Thursday afternoon whether or not I'll be able to do a presentation.”

Use Caution When Forwarding

The original sender of a message may not want individuals other than the original recipients to read this message. If you have *any* doubts, check with the original sender.

Check Before Attaching

- Would the recipient prefer a hard copy? Will it possibly be inconvenient for him or her to print out the attachment?
- If the attached file is very large, check with the recipient to ensure that his or her e-mail program can accommodate it.
- If the recipient is not expecting an attachment, alert him or her to it in the e-mail subject line.

Review Before Sending

- Messages cannot be “unsent” after being sent. Therefore, review your message carefully before clicking “send.”
- You may want to have a native speaker read it for you as well, especially if it is an important e-mail and/or one being sent to someone you do not know well.
- Check for any acronyms or abbreviations with which your recipient may not be familiar. Write them out fully or explain them.
- In your first message to someone, be sure to include your full name (in English order) in your closing.

Include an Accurate Subject Line

Consider:

- What are the key subject words for my message?
- What words will best communicate my subject to my recipient?
- Can I abbreviate any words or leave some words out?

Be Polite

- Using polite terms and/or apologizing does *not* guarantee a polite tone; therefore, until you have some experience with writing e-mails in English, have a native speaker review yours for you.
- Use a salutation (for example, “Dear Prof. Smith,”) and a polite closing (for example, “Best regards,” “Regards,” “Sincerely,”) in your first message to someone.
- Try to model the language used by native speakers in their e-mails to you.

Be Brief

- Leave out personal details
- Evaluate the relevancy of other details

Practice Good Grammar

Even though e-mail is a less formal way of communicating, continue to use good grammar and proper punctuation.

Look for Cues from Others

- How to address the other person (first name versus last name, title, etc.)
- Level of formality
- Available time of the other person

DON'T!

- Be overly “conversational”
- Use a first name alone *with* a title OR a last name alone *without* a title
- Overuse capitalization
- Use unnecessary symbols and “emoticons”
- Ask for information that you can easily obtain yourself or from a subordinate source (such as a classmate or administrative assistant)
- Use a very informal or “cute” e-mail name for academic/professional correspondence

Being Overly “Conversational”

Example (e-mail to your professor):

Hi Bill!

How are you? My homework is late because I have a cold and have been in bed sick. Since I'm feeling better, I'll try to hand it in ASAP.

Bye--have a fab weekend!

Inappropriately Using Names with and without Titles

Examples:

- Dear Prof. Bill
- Dear Mr. Bill
- Dear Smith

Overusing Capitalization

Example:

DEAR PROFESSOR SMITH,
I COULD NOT COME TO CLASS TODAY
BECAUSE I WAS SICK. MAY I MAKE UP
THE QUIZ?
THANK YOU,

Using Unnecessary Symbols and “Emoticons”

Example:

Dear Professor Smith,
I'm sorry, but I need to miss tomorrow's class
because I have a doctor's appointment ☹️.
Because of this, I'd also like to ask for an
extension on the paper that's due by class
tomorrow ;-) I will have it finished by
Wednesday 😊!
Thank you,

Inappropriately Asking for Information

Example:

Dear Professor Smith,
I'm sorry, but I need to drop your class. Can you please explain to me all the rules about dropping a class?
Thank you,


Informal E-mail Name

Examples:

- smart_guy@xxx.com
- Girl_power@xxx.com
- genius@xxx.com
- iluvduke@xxx.com
- prettyflower@xxx.com

Sample E-mails

Dear Prof. Bill,
Sorry to bother you. Right now, I am working on my master's prospectus. I'm really stressed because it's due in two days and my English is so bad. Could you please read it and give me your comments by tomorrow? Thanks a lot!!



Hi Bill,

I am sorry I missed class. I was too tired to attend, so I went back and had a sound sleep to recharge myself. Is it possible for you to copy any handouts and bring them with you to class next time? Also, let me know when you will be available tomorrow, so that I can pick up my papers.

➤ Sorry for sending my homework late, but my internet was not working yesterday. It's fixed now.

➤ Dear Professor Bill Smith,
I called you several times today and left you a voice messages. Yesterday I went to the bookstore in the Bryan Center but I could not find the course material. Could you please let me know where I can find it?

➤ Dear Professor,

I have something to do so I cannot come to see you. Sorry for telling you that.

➤ Dear Bill,

I am sorry to bother you. My professor insists that I see you to improve my paper. I would like to have English assistance either tomorrow or Thursday morning. Please let me know what is a good time for you.

➤ Dear Smith,

Thank you so much for your e-mail! I apologize sincerely for my behavior! I wanna meet you on Monday at 8:30-9:00. Please let me know your phone number!

➤ Dear Bill,

I took part in the graduate student campout this weekend and come back this weekend. I felt so tired. Though I am trying my best, I am still afraid that my homework will not be finished. So I want to know if I can hand it in tomorrow? Thank you.

➤ Dear Professor Bill,
I am very sorry but I plan to drop your class. I do not know whether it is okay. Could you please tell me the rules about this ASAP? Thank you very much!

➤ Hi Bill,
How are you doing? Here is my homework for Monday's class. It's attached to this email. BTW, I caught a terrible cold: coughing and feeling feverish. I'll try to go to class, but if you don't see me, I am in bed.

Cheers,

Dear Bill Smit,

I am _____, a new graduate student in the Master of Engineering Management Program. I am interested in taking your English course. I heard from my advisor that I do not need to take it, but I would like to improve my English. Now I have some questions. If I take one of your courses, should I take it in the fall or spring? Is it true that “Academic Writing II” does not focus on writing general English sentences and paragraphs, but on writing academic papers and research for publication? I would appreciate your answering those questions. Your prompt attention to the above would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Hello Bill,

I signed up for an appointment with you tomorrow at 9am. However, today I was asked to attend a lab meeting tomorrow morning at 8:30 am. I am not sure if I can get out of the meeting by 9. Therefore, I might not be able to make our appointment at 9. I'm sorry for canceling so late but did not expect that I would need to go to the lab meeting this week until this afternoon. My supervisor doesn't usually expect me to do that, but she wants me to talk to my advisor regarding the experiemnt I'm doing and it is very important for my graduation . Therefore, I must go. If I do not show up at your office at 9, that means I could not make it. Please take my apology and I hope that this cancellation does not disturb your work too much. In addition, I hope that I can still come to you next week.

Sincerely,

Professor Smith,

I am very sorry to say, but I am afraid that I lost the assignment distributed yesterday. I tried to find it very hard, but in vain. Could you kindly give me the paper again? If yes, how can I obtain it? Shall I go to your office? Would it be possible to send it by email? Please assign whatever convenient for you. Finally, I would like to repeat my apology for the mistake.

References

Swales, John M., and Feak, Christine B. (2007). *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

Maceda, Janet. (2008). “Academic and Professional Email.” Unpublished class materials, Duke University.