Email Etiquette

Most professors prefer using email to communicate with students, so whenever you have a question or need help, it's good to know how to write an appropriate message. This can also be helpful for professional emails or for writing to someone you don't know.

Getting Started

The subject line is your first impression! Make sure it describes the course and the content (for example, WRIT 399 Response Paper Instruction Clarification).

Always include a greeting at the beginning of your email (Dear Prof. Jones,) to ensure that your message is personal and does not seem demanding.

- Double check that the recipient's name is spelled correctly.
- Be sure to include the appropriate title for the email recipient, such as Professor or Dr. for academic emails and Mr./Mrs./Ms./Dr. for professional ones.

It may be a good idea to introduce yourself in the first line, especially if this is the first time you have communicated with the professor or the class is large. For professional emails this is especially crucial, as you often do not have a relationship with the email recipient.

Content

Keep the email as *concise* as possible. If the message is more than three full-length paragraphs, it may be best to address the question in person or via phone.

The tone of the message should be polite and fairly *formal*.

- Contractions are okay in this instance to keep the tone from being too stiff.
- Refrain from using texting abbreviations (lol, btw, etc.) and emoticons.
- Keep exclamation points to a minimum; one or two would be okay.

Don't beat around the bush — be direct in asking your question or stating your idea.

Final Steps

Sign your email with a closing (Sincerely, Thanks, etc.) and include your full name on the first email.

Proofread the message to check for mistakes in grammar and spelling to ensure professionalism. This is especially important if you are writing the message on a cell phone. Autocorrect does not always catch mistakes.

- Make sure to attach relevant documents before sending the message.
- Check that the email address is correct and send!

Before you click send, check for:

1. Correct spelling of the recipient's name
2. A clear statement of your question or idea
3. Tone, grammar, and spelling
4. Attachments if applicable
5. Correct email address